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EDITORIAL

J. EDGAR HOOVER

Criminals are not just criminals. They are: "Scum from the boiling pot of the underworld," "public rats," "lowest dregs of society," "scuttling rats in the ship of politics," "vermin in human form," "the slimy crew who feed upon crime," "desperadoes," "vermin spewed out of prison cells to continue their slaughter," "the octopus of the underworld." These "post graduates of outlawry" and "professors of crime" thrive "in the great fog of crime," and the "swamp and morasses of suffering," amidst the "appalling scourge of perjury" and the "oleaginous connivings of venal politicians," aided and abetted by "sentimental yammerheads," "moronic adults" of "asinine behavior," "maudlin sentiment," and "inherent criminal worship." Away with these "moo-cow sentimentalities" with their "hashish dreams," "crime coddlers," "convict indulging theorists" with "their idiotic idolatry of cowardly outlaws;" "these sentimental theorists who dominate present day child guidance" with their "mealy mouthings" and their "whining pleas for sympathy"; these "hoity-toity professors"————!

This mosaic is from the speeches of J. Edgar Hoover of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice. He has announced a hearty contempt for "the cream-puff school of criminology whose daily efforts turn loose upon us the robber, the burglar, the arsonist, the killer, and the sex-degenerate." He condemns "these self-appointed ambassadors of the open cell-block." He is horrified by the "ignorant blatherings of either ill-informed or selfishly-motivated persons" with their "blatant outcries."

Well, what of it? Why should we take issue with a gallant crime fighter? We hate "slimy" things, too, and would never want to obstruct the efforts of an honest and efficient law enforcement agent. The point is this—Mr. Hoover's public utterances, which served a useful purpose in debunking the "Robin Hood" type of outlaw, are working real harm to his own department and to friends of ours. We would like to point out why this is so.

Mr. Hoover's language is too general. To him, one must belong to the machine gun school of criminology or the cream-puff school.

There is no middle ground. And, in his pungent attacks upon the cream-puffers, he makes such sweeping statements as:

"But under our mal-administered system, we find that often the probation officer is ignorant; that he sometimes is himself a criminal; or that he is merely a political panderer, willing to debauch the most sacred of tasks—that of the protection of our youth—merely to keep a job."

"I refer to that filth-encrusted scandal, the parole problem."

"The cause of our more heinous crime, murders, attacks by degenerates, slayings by perversion, and other horrible crimes are all too often found lying at the slimy doorway of inconsiderate parole."

As an admirer of the work of the National Probation Association we are hurt by the stab at the character of probation officers. Mr. Hoover may speak truly as to some, but he implies that a *great many* are tainted. The effect of his generalization is to condemn the whole group.

Again, in his remarks about parole, although he declares that he believes in the principle of parole, one would assume that he thinks that parole is just another handicap which a Federal policeman must endure.

J. Edgar Hoover, enjoying the National spot-light, has become the chief exponent of the "Catch 'Em and Hang 'Em" method of dealing with criminals. Where does he get his authority to speak to the Nation as a criminologist?

(1) His career has been limited to the Federal Bureau of Investigation—at first, red baiting, then police work, apprehension, and identification. Admittedly he shows great skill in his work as director of his Bureau, but so far as we know he has never worked in the penal branch of criminology. In contrast, the *professional penologists* at the 67th Congress of the American Prison Association, October, 1937, passed this resolution:

"Be It Resolved, That the American Prison Association deplors the indiscriminate attacks which are now being made on parole as tending to inflame and confuse the public mind;

That it recognizes the weaknesses to be found in parole programs in many States, resulting largely from inadequate personnel and financial support;

That it nevertheless reaffirms its belief in parole as the method of releasing offenders which most effectively protects society."

(2) Mr. Hoover, as a policeman, directs only one of the Federal police units, and his force is composed of 674 investigators.

When we compare Mr. Hoover's band of crime fighters with the 150,000 peace officers operating in the United States, it becomes only a "drop-in-the-bucket." His group has been magnified by publicity until popular imagination places it as the "firing line" among crime fighters. Of course, this is absurd. Mr. Hoover is in no position to, and does not, speak for the police of this country.

(3) Mr. Hoover's domain is the investigation of *Federal* offenses and not all of those by any means. He is chiefly concerned with interstate kidnapping and motor vehicle theft, but has little to do with murder, arson, rape, robbery, burglary, larceny, and other common crimes. However, in his addresses he assumes to deal with all offenses, whether his department has jurisdiction or not. Any chief-of-police of a large city is better equipped to utter criminological profundities.

(4) If it were not so well known that Mr. Hoover honestly and sincerely hates crime, the sardonic reader of his speeches might plausibly declare that they are concocted with the idea of scattering a lot of smoke so that he could get a handsome appropriation from Congress for his department. We doubt that, but must admit that the general tenor of his public statements runs like this: (a) I hate slimy criminals; (b) I believe in long prison terms as the only means of punishment; (c) I abhor rehabilitation; (d) Everybody else is either sentimental or crooked; (e) My outfit is the only one which is worth anything.

This has bad results. We find widespread resentment among prison men, probation and parole officers, and local police units, everywhere, largely because of Mr. Hoover's unnecessary exaggerations. "He takes too much credit to himself and never gives credit to any other organization."

Of course, Mr. Hoover is trying to arouse the public to combat a "crime wave." And at first we admired his spunk and thought that he was properly using the vast fund of publicity suddenly given to him. But as he became more and more famous and his statements became wider and wilder we found that we could not listen to him with respect.

If he would stick to his own field he would give no offense to other less publicized "workers in the Vineyard." But so often success induces a man to spread out beyond all proportions—to his own detriment and to the injury of everyone else.

NEWMAN F. BAKER.