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Victor H. Evjen

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# DELINQUENCY AND CRIME IN WARTIME

Victor H. Evjen<sup>1</sup>

As individuals engaged in the prevention and treatment of delinquency and crime we are especially concerned at this time about the criminological implications of war. We are interested in learning to what extent delinquency and crime are by-products of war, how war produces crime, what types of crimes are on the increase and decrease, what steps we can take to prevent delinquency and crime, and what to expect in the postwar period of reconstruction. We must know these things in order that we may deal effectively with delinquency and crime not only during wartime, but also in the aftermath.

Today we hear and read a great deal about the effect of war on delinquency and crime in the United States, but most of these generalizations are nothing more than popular notions without the support of reliable research and statistical data. Even in England it is much too soon to make anything but tentative statements as to the effect of war on delinquency and crime, warns Hermann Mannheim,<sup>2</sup> London criminologist. Dr. Mannheim, who has made a number of revealing studies of war and crime, points out that previous studies of war and crime have demonstrated clearly that any generalizations about the criminological implications of war are likely to be misleading, especially since each war has its own characteristics in so far as crime-producing factors are concerned. The by-products of mechanized war certainly differ from those of World War I, and the crime-producing factors resulting from the impact of the present type of warfare are likely to be different. In the last war England did not have to meet with air raids, bomb destruction, shelter life, blackouts, evacuations, and population movements on such vast scales as characterizes war today. Consequently, Mannheim concludes that our traditional concepts about the effect of war on crime either will have to be modified considerably or abandoned entirely.

Our country may be spared from large-scale bombings with their attendant harrowing experiences and resulting conditions, but even if we do have to undergo these experiences it does not necessarily

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Chief of Probation, Administrative Office of the U. S. Courts, Washington, D. C.

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Mannheim, "Crime in Wartime England," *The Annals*, September, 1941. pp. 128-137.

Dr. Mannheim is also author of *Social Aspects of Crime in England Between the Wars* (1940), and *War and Crime* (1941).

follow that changes in delinquency and crime rates will correspond with the pattern in England. In the first place, the crime-producing factors in England in periods of peace are not necessarily the same as those in our country. Secondly, although such popularly ascribed peacetime causes of delinquency and crime as poverty, bad housing, lack of parental control, broken homes, etc., are greatly accentuated and intensified in wartime England, we must bear in mind that these causes are not the primary causes of crime; they are merely direct or inciting causes.

### *Considerations in Studying Influence of War on Crime*

Criminologists tell us that delinquency and crime arise from an attempt on the part of the individual to satisfy one or a combination of his fundamental wants and needs; that an individual who does not acquire satisfactions through socially acceptable behavior, seeks and finds gratification of his needs through conduct which is against the established mores of the community. Delinquency and crime have meaning to him; they represent an attempt on his part to solve his problems; they seem to promise certain satisfactions which he is unable to find in socially approved behavior; they are ways out from states of dissatisfaction and inner stresses resulting from such disorganizing experiences as poor health, broken homes, school dissatisfactions, inability to get a job.

Such basic wants and needs as a desire for status and recognition; a sense of belongingness, personal adequacy, and security; a need for protection and shelter; a yearning for adventure and escape from monotony and routine, are common to all humans, and must be satisfied either through socially acceptable conduct, or behavior which is socially disapproved. When wartime conditions and experiences thwart attempts to satisfy these basic human needs, the individual's dissatisfactions and discomforts may eventually lead to aggressive behavior, hostilities, discouragements, anxieties, and a distorted outlook. Therefore, in any study of the effects of war on delinquency and crime we should consider how wartime conditions and situations influence the offender's attitudes and feelings about himself and others, and the way he responds to situations and circumstances which confront him.

It has been said that delinquency and crime will not be as serious a problem in the United States as in England unless we are victims of bombings and have to resort to family dislocations, evacuations, blackouts, and shelter life. This is not a sound conclusion, for we must remember that the impact of war doubtless will affect our social institutions—perhaps in a different way from which the institutions and social and economic life of England are affected—

and from these changes will come pressures which are sufficient to force individuals to find substitute satisfactions for their fundamental wants and needs in delinquent conduct because they were unable to find satisfactions in socially approved activities.

### *Delinquency and Crime in Wartime England*

A critical survey of current comments on juvenile delinquency and the war, compiled by the British Child Guidance Council<sup>3</sup> suggests that "in surveying the present problem (of delinquency) it has to be borne in mind that juvenile delinquency was increasing year by year for about 10 years up to 1937." Following 1937, the survey reports, there was a decrease in delinquency rates, to be followed by a sudden increase with the outbreak of war. The following Home Office figures compare the rate of increase in the first year of the war with the previous year.

Children under 14.....	41 per cent increase
Age group 14 to 17.....	22 per cent increase
Age group 17 to 21.....	5 per cent increase

All children under 14 years of age were eligible for evacuation. It is believed that the marked increase in delinquency rates for this group is the result of the disorganizing experiences associated with removal from evacuation to reception areas. In considering the 5 per cent increase for the 17 to 21 age group it must be remembered that many of them probably had entered the fighting services or had found employment on the production front.

In contrast to these increases in delinquency rates is the *decrease* of 12 per cent in the crime rate for those over 21 years of age. These figures, if reliable, support the general contention that war increases delinquency and crime rates among juveniles and lowers the rates of adult crime.

Although the Home Office statistics on delinquency are most interesting and enlightening, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that they are at the most tentative and of only limited value because of the fluctuations in child population due to evacuation, and other social factors which may not have been properly considered in the compilation and interpretation of the data.

### *Delinquency and Crime Statistics in Wartime United States*

As previously indicated we have heard from any number of sources about astounding increases in delinquency and crime rates, with some reports as high as 50 per cent. The reliability of many of these local reports should be questioned, and it is suggested that no comparisons be made, nor final conclusions drawn, until the 1941 and 1942 delinquency and crime statistics of the Federal Bureau of

<sup>3</sup> Abridged from *Mental Health*, July, 1941, and released by The British Library of Information, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

Investigation, the Bureau of the Census, the Children's Bureau, the Bureau of Prisons, and the Administrative Office of the U. S. Courts have been compiled.

At the present time we have but little nation-wide statistics which will throw light on the subject. The Children's Bureau, which compiles annual reports from approximately 500 juvenile courts through its Juvenile Court Statistics Project, has not as yet collected nor compiled its data for the calendar year 1941. The Bureau of the Census is now in the process of compiling its statistics for 1941 on cases disposed by State criminal courts, prison intake, prison population, and discharges.<sup>4</sup> Current figures for the total number of Federal probationers under supervision, and the number of probationers received for supervision, as compiled by the Administrative Office of the U. S. Courts, show no appreciable change from corresponding figures for the fiscal year 1941. The Statistical Division of the Bureau of Prisons reports a Federal prison population of 22,810 as of May 8, 1942, in comparison with 23,638 for the corresponding week in 1941, or a decrease of 829 (3.6 per cent). Figures on the Federal juvenile offender for the fiscal year 1942 will not be compiled until after July 1, 1942.

According to the *Uniform Crime Reports*<sup>5</sup> "the estimated number of major crimes in the United States during 1941 was 1,531,272, an increase of 14,246 (0.9 per cent) over 1940." This increase does not make any allowance for the growth of the general population during the year which was at least .7 per cent. Thus, the estimated increase in the amount of crime was largely or entirely balanced by the increase in the general population.

Until such time as we have complete nation-wide statistics from these governmental agencies, we shall be unable to make exact statistical comparisons of rates in delinquency and crime, and we should be cautious in our use and interpretation of criminal statistics. Some of our more reliable reports from local jurisdictions, it is true, may give us some light as to the trend; however, there are many reports floating about the country which are prepared by persons untrained in the collection, compilation, and interpretation of statistics. Too often, no consideration has been given to population fluctuations, population increases, and other social phenomena which may influence delinquency and crime rates.

<sup>4</sup> In August, 1942, the Bureau of the Census released the following preliminary figures on prisoners in Federal and State prisons (including reformatories): On January 1, 1942, there were 156,742 persons in the custody of prisons as compared with 165,827 on January 1, 1941, a decrease of 5.5 per cent. During 1941, 81,368 persons were admitted to prisons as against 84,450 in 1940, representing a 3.6 per cent decrease. A total of 69,279 prisoners were received from the courts in 1941 as compared with 73,456 in 1940, or a 5.7 per cent decrease. Discharges from prison show a decrease of 3.2 per cent in 1941.

Since Georgia and Mississippi did not report, these States are excluded both for 1940 and 1941.

<sup>5</sup> Fourth Quarterly Bulletin, Vol. XII, No. 4, released January, 1942.

*Crime-Producing Factors in Wartime England*

The following recital of what are generally ascribed as some of the crime-producing factors in wartime England, and the influence of these factors on delinquency and crime, is largely based on reports of the Home Office and Board of Education released by The British Library of Information.

1. *Population Movements, Evacuations, Broken Homes:* Homes have been broken and family and social life disrupted through widespread evacuation of children under 14 to reception areas, and the absence of either or both parents on production or war fronts. Separation of the father and mother often resulted in matrimonial difficulties. Those children and parents who made their exodus from the evacuation areas were confronted with difficult adjustments to new areas where they had little in common with the social and cultural life, habits, attitudes, and social values of the new community. It was observed that leaving home created insecurity and a feeling of being unjustly punished. Living with complete strangers often gave the child a feeling of being unwanted. This was all the more in evidence in the case of children who had been evacuated repeatedly to different reception areas or assigned to other homes in the same area.

2. *Shelter Life:* Millions of air raid victims had to spend their nights in public and private shelters, often as much as 15 hours out of 24. Before shelters were effectively controlled some lost courage and self-restraint under the strain of danger, discomforts, and crowding. Children suffered from broken sleep and were difficult to manage. Because of lack of sleep schools and parents relaxed on discipline and school attendance. There was a tendency to condone minor offenses. The shelter was a refuge for those who wanted to run away; many escaped parental control by seeking shelters other than those frequented by their parents. Inability to keep tab on them gave many children the opportunity to engage in bicycle thefts, shopbreaking, and other delinquent activities for long periods without being apprehended. Shelter life, also, was the haven for prostitutes and sexual offenders of all types.

3. *Blackouts:* The blackout is alleged to be responsible for many delinquencies and crimes. Blackouts have sheltered those engaged in nefarious activities. Assaults on policemen, air raid wardens, burglaries, wilfully giving wrong change, were common.

4. *Increased Demand for Labor:* The great demand for help on the production front left young boys and girls entirely on their own resources. Delinquency in many instances resulted from inadequate parental control in the home. Youth between 15 and 19, prompted by relatively high wages and also the country's need for help in war production, left the controlled school environment for

the less-restrained atmosphere of industry. Some had no conception of how to spend or save their money, and even though receiving relatively high wages, often were brought to court on charges of petty thefts. Led astray by adult workers, many became involved in drinking, gambling, and other illegal activities. Many of these young wage earners are likely to end up as behavior problems in the aftermath when they have to readjust to peacetime earnings and, in some instances, to unemployment. Those withdrawing from school prematurely, without completing their education or acquiring vocational skills, will meet heavy competition for employment in the reconstruction period.

5. *Closing of Schools, Recreation Clubs, Playgrounds, and Non-occupation of Time:* Schools and recreational centers were closed for want of air raid shelters, army quarters, lack of schoolmasters and recreational leaders (some schools lost as high as 40 per cent of their schoolmasters), etc. In the evacuation areas a majority of clubs, hostels and Sunday Schools were closed. Playgrounds were commandeered for allotments.

Competent observers are of the opinion that the increase of juvenile delinquency in evacuation areas was due largely to the free-lance activities of children with nothing to occupy their leisure time. Calling attention to the ever-increasing desire for pleasure and adventure in wartime, and the need for social and recreational activities to meet the needs of youth, the Home Office and Office of Education concludes:<sup>6</sup>

. . . that one of the best means of checking delinquency in wartime, as in peace, is to provide more, and more varied, social and recreative facilities to meet the needs and tastes of all sections of the youthful community and to challenge youthful exuberance to interest itself in useful service.

With the curtailment and closing of recreational facilities and school activities, very few opportunities for constructive leisure remained. Youth were unable, in many instances, to make proper use of their leisure. Thefts were reported in order to secure money to pay for amusements where monotony and routine prevailed. Without guidance in leisure, children sought adventure in playing games among the ruins. Many have been prosecuted, it is reported, for having picked up useless articles which may have been lying in the ruins for months. Such temptations do not occur in normal times, and it is doubtful whether the child fully realized he was doing wrong. It would be interesting to know to what extent these apparently harmless and meaningless activities had a bearing on England's climb in delinquency rates.

*Prospect for Delinquency and Crime in the United States*

Our country may be spared many of the wartime experiences and

<sup>6</sup> *Juvenile Offences*. Published by His Majesty's Stationery Office (London: 1941), p. 9.

conditions which confronted England, but we must not forget that the impact of the war is now being felt by our institutions and social life in numerous and diverse ways. Heads of households are leaving their families and home areas for military service or employment in wartime industries. Mothers are helping to supply the demand for labor, often leaving children without proper guidance. Boys and girls are withdrawing from school contrary to compulsory school attendance regulations to accept employment. Without proper direction, youth in the United States may be confronted with the same temptations as youth in England. Families are moving to production or camp areas where schools and recreational facilities are inadequate, and where children will find difficulty in making adjustments to the boom town pattern of living. Bad housing and crowding prevail in these overpopulated areas; building cannot keep pace with population increases. Our camp towns are attractive spots for operations of the prostitute and confidence men.

War also may bring new temptations to youth such as gas siphoning; bootlegging of sugar, tires, and other rationed and priority items; theft of autos, parts, and accessories. Only time will tell to what extent and in what way war produces and influences crime in the United States.

Why is it that there seems to be no substantial change in adult crime during wartime? It might be explained that some of our trouble makers who formerly were found in our police courts, jails, prisons, have been successful in obtaining employment, and the less serious offenders are now serving in the armed forces. In both employment and military service they find security, a feeling of personal adequacy, and a sense of participation in a nation-wide effort toward a common goal. Doubtless many have achieved a sense of pride in wearing a uniform and having an important part in the war effort. Morale is high. In both the armed forces and industry they have gained a sense of acceptance and equality. For many, the army or employment is the first really satisfying experience in their lives—the first time, perhaps, that they ever had a sense of personal worth. Large numbers will respond favorably to the regimentation and restraints which are a part of army life. These stabilizing influences and experiences perhaps explain in part the little or no change in adult crime during wartime.

If we may judge delinquency and crime trends on the basis of England's experience in the two wars, and our experience in the last war, the crime rate of adults may remain relatively constant, or even show a downward trend. Our juvenile courts, on the other hand, should anticipate increasing rates of delinquency.

But we must look beyond the present day. At this time we also should be thinking in terms of what our task will be in the aftermath of the war. With careful planning and preparation today we can in

measure check and control these inevitable by-products of war, delinquency and crime.

*The Outlook for Probation and Parole During Wartime*

It has been said that social work is a luxury in wartime; but judging from the experience of the Home Office and Board of Education in London, any curtailment of social welfare programs is false economy. Commenting on social services in wartime, The British Library of Information, in its April 29, 1942, issue of *Bulletins from Britain*, concludes:

The outbreak of war has made the maintenance of these services even more essential. The framework of the social service system remains unimpaired, while at the same time, many extra services have had to be undertaken by the Government, for the people to meet the special needs of war. In some cases these services will remain in existence after the war.

In wartime all social welfare programs should be reenforced; not weakened. There is no justification for any retrenchment of public welfare programs nor backsliding of social legislation. If this be our course, we will have to pay a high price in the postwar reconstruction period, for the home front is just as profoundly significant as is the production front or the battle front.

Some probation and parole jurisdictions doubtless will face reduced budgets. Staffs and facilities may not be adjusted to meet fluctuations in delinquency and crime rates. Many of our public and private agencies, upon whom we are so dependent for assistance in our investigative and supervisory work, may be forced to limit the scope of their programs. With increased case loads, reduced staffs, a larger number and greater variety of problems, and only limited services from cooperating agencies, probation and parole cannot be expected to function efficiently.

Probation and parole services also are experiencing a progressive loss of personnel who have entered military service. To date approximately 10 per cent of the probation officers in the United States Probation System have been called to the colors.

Apart from the widening scope of their work and their intensified effort, probation and parole officers are carrying additional responsibilities directly related to war effort.

*Cooperation with Selective Service Boards*

Probation and parole officers are cooperating with local boards and recruiting offices in their consideration of felons who seek enlistment, voluntary induction, or are about to be inducted through the regular channels. Doubtless a large proportion of probationers and parolees, guilty of felonies, today are making excellent records in military service. Knowing intimately the personal and social background and past history of the candidate for the armed forces the probation and parole officer is in a position to render invaluable service to recruiting offices and local boards.

It is now generally known that a probationer or parolee, who has a good reputation in his current civilian life, may be inducted into the armed forces provided civil custody is terminated at the time of induction, or the parole board or court relinquishes its jurisdiction during the period of military service. It is the probation and parole officer's responsibility to see to it that only suitable persons are recommended to recruiting centers and local boards; induction and enlistment are not channels through which he may rid his case load of undesirable persons. It is as much the probation and parole officer's responsibility to oppose as it is to recommend induction or enlistment.

The United States Board of Parole, as well as a large number of State parole boards, will parole a prisoner when it has been determined by a local board that he will meet the requirements for induction. The Federal Parole Board also has established a practice of giving minor parole violators an opportunity to volunteer for induction rather than returning to a penal institution to complete their sentence.

In their considerations of parolees for the armed forces or the production front, parole boards should be alert at all times to the dangers attached to premature paroles.

It is estimated by James V. Bennett, Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, that there are 50,000 young men of draft age from 18 to 35 in American prisons today who are physically fit to fight and clearly are not disqualified by mental or moral deficiencies. Our parole boards and other parole authorities have a real challenge in seeing to it that these prisoners are given due consideration for induction through Selective Service.

It is interesting to note Sanford Bates' recent comment about parolees volunteering for military service:

The willingness of prisoners to serve their country in time of emergency is well attested by the fact that approximately 600 parolees in the New York City offices of the State Parole Board have applied for induction, and the Division of Parole has agreed to suspend supervision during their service. . . . More than half of them have been accepted. . . . This is even more of a test of patriotism than the offer of men *in prison* who are willing to seek their release on condition that they will be inducted. . . . This is an *all-out* war and we should *all* be in it. If it offers some of our erring citizens a chance to "square themselves," why should we deny them that opportunity?

#### *Cooperation with War Production Industries*

Probation and parole officers also render assistance in placing in war production industries those responsible persons under their jurisdiction who possess desired qualifications and skills. From time to time probation and parole officers are told by uninformed employers that industries fulfilling Federal construction contracts are prohibited from employing persons on probation and parole. For

their information, the stipulation in each Government contract with reference to persons undergoing a "sentence of imprisonment at hard labor" applies only to contracting and hiring out of the labor of prisoners—not to probationers and parolees.

#### *Cooperation with the Civil Service Commission*

Ten years ago the U. S. Civil Service Commission adopted a general regulation which prohibited the acceptance of an application from a person convicted of a felony until at least two years had elapsed since his release from prison, parole, or probation. But in view of the critical shortage of persons qualified for various Government positions essential to the war effort, the Commission has waived this general prohibition in the case of *Federal* prisoners, parolees, and probationers, who, apart from their felony charge, meet the requirements for a position.<sup>7</sup> Applications are now being accepted conditionally by the Commission but are not certified until a favorable report is received from the warden of the Federal penal or correctional institution or the Federal probation officer of the district in which the applicant resides. This report includes a statement as to background, conduct, education and experience, special job skills, together with definite recommendations as to whether the prisoner, parolee, and probationer should be considered for Government employment. On the basis of these reports and recommendations the District Managers of the Commission are authorized to accept or cancel the application.

As in his relations with the Selective Service boards and war production industries, to the probation officer is entrusted the responsibility for selecting and recommending only competent, skilled, and reliable persons.

#### *Cooperation with the War Department*

Probation and parole officers throughout the Nation also are cooperating with the War Department in providing information about the past arrest records of inductees whose fingerprint records have revealed felony charges. Reports received from Federal, State, and local jurisdictions are helpful to the War Department in determining whether the selectee is to remain in the armed forces.

#### *Contribution of Prisons and Prisoners to the War Effort*

Ninety-five per cent of all production in the Federal prison industries is directly related to the war effort. Eleven of the 30 Federal penal institutions are presently engaged in the production of the following war materials for the armed forces: metal fins for aerial bombs, cast noses for incendiary bombs, metal bomb racks, beds and mattresses, tents and water tanks, tarpaulins and stretchers, shell covers, truck covers, duffle bags, furniture, shoes, work gloves, food trays, brooms and brushes. Several of the insti-

<sup>7</sup> Circular Letter No. 3711, June 8, 1942, to District Managers.

tutions are providing laundry service, canned goods, and dairy products for nearby camps. The industries are being stepped up to manufacture a greater number and larger variety of defense materials. In their war production effort prisoners display enthusiasm, loyalty, and patriotism, many of them volunteering for longer hours and night shifts to increase production.

Until a recent decision of the Attorney General, State prisons were not permitted to produce goods for the Federal Government, although many of them had been engaged in the manufacture of materials for defense activities within their respective States. On May 22, 1942, the Department of Justice announced that the Attorney General, in a formal opinion to the President, held there is no legal barrier to utilization by the Federal Government of goods produced by convict labor in the State prisons. It was pointed out by the Department of Justice that more than 100,000 inmates in State prisons throughout the country could be used for war production; and it is estimated by Mr. Bennett of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, that these prisoners, many of whom are now idle, would be capable of producing a \$100,000,000 annual output, most, if not all, of which could be diverted to war use. The decision of the Attorney General now makes it possible for State prisons and reformatories to gear their vast resources to the Nation's production offensive.

It is needless to review here the significant contribution made by prisoners to the war effort through donations to blood bank projects and the purchase of defense bonds and stamps.

### *Conclusion*

Probation and parole officers and correctional institutions are playing an important part in work directly related to the war effort, but let us not minimize the significant role in preventing, checking, and treating delinquency and crime in the present crisis. Any retrenchment at this time in the work of probation and parole, and institutional programs would be most futile and disastrous.

These are days for conserving the best we have against the inroads of war and its by-product—delinquency and crime. This is not the time for retrogression; we must maintain and strengthen what we already have achieved. In these troublous days, when human values are darkened by war, disillusion, and adversity, probation and parole—especially with the younger offender—will be confronted with a progressively greater number and variety of difficult but not insoluble problems. There will be need for extended service, more intensified effort, and a closer coordination of their work with other socially significant and essential activities on the home front. The measure of probation's and parole's contribution to the defense of the home front is the measure of its continuing strength in the years ahead.