

Address of  
**Hon. John Edgar Hoover**

Director Division of Investigation  
United States Department  
of Justice

+

Before the Chamber of Commerce  
of the State of New York

February 7, 1935



75  
44 80  
34  
-----  
153.80

United States  
Government Printing Office  
Washington : 1935

## ADDRESS

---

I am here today to talk of matters vital to the peace and happiness of the law-abiding citizen. It is true that part of my discourse will concern the vast fingerprinting and identification activities of the Division of Investigation of the Department of Justice. However, in order to approach this subject, it is necessary to tell of the tremendous maze of criminal activities which are tangled with the fabric of our social order.

We look upon great industrial enterprises as big business. The biggest business in the United States is that of stealing, robbing, thieving, kidnaping, and murdering. The figures which have been compiled showing \$15,000,000,000 as the cost of the criminal industry each year are not fanciful ones. They are absurd minimums based upon the belief that every criminal costs no more than \$1,000 a year. When you look upon the records of such cases as the Urschel kidnaping, in which "Machine-Gun" Kelly was chased 20,000 miles before he was captured; when you see the trial of Frank Nash, whose activities, with those of his associates, meant a trail of destruction, murder, kidnaping, suicide, and gangster killings, plus, of course, the countless banks which were robbed, you will find a cost running well into the millions, if pursuit, incarceration of prisoners, capture of hangers-on, and other items are to be considered. I could go on endlessly with examples of this type. It is only necessary, I believe, to you as intelligent citizens, to understand that it would be mere repetition.

This all sums up into one conclusion. This is your expense. This is the bill you must pay. The fate of robbery, kidnaping, or murder can come to any of you. Thus, there is no way of estimating the cost either in money or in sorrow. There is no means of determining or estimating the loss of happiness. There is no way of learning the mental agony of those who must protect themselves against the activities of gangs; against the shadow of the kidnapers which constantly creeps across the household of thousands upon thousands of American citizens. All these are items of expense which must be paid out of the hearts, the pocketbooks, and the minds of the good American people.

There is something which is even more deadly, even more insidious, even more viciously criminal than the activities of such persons as I have mentioned. It is the power, the influence, and the constant interference with the course of justice pursued by those persons who make crime possible—the criminally minded attorney and the criminally minded politician.

We have allowed to be built up in this country a system which runs from the cheap office-holding panderer and the vote-getting activities of a local wardheeler in a small country town to the controlling influence of vast cities where that power is a greater one, in many instances, than the power of the courts in which we impose our trust and faith. It is greater than that of many police forces. It is more powerful than prosecuting attorneys. It is a dishonest power which, unless checked, threatens to become greater than the honesty of our American citizenry. This is the influence which politics plays in the hampering, the hamstringing, and the garroting of the honest officer who would reach out and drag the criminal from his lair.

You may say that these are general terms. That is true. They are general terms, because this activity is a general activity. It is something which permeates the fabric of our daily life. A person who has no pull, no drag, no "in" as they call it, who is not wired in to the places of power, must stand craven and trembling and take his punishment. But the stronger and more influential a man is through his political affiliations, the greater crimes he can commit and laugh at the law. It is interesting to watch the progress of the politically protected criminal. I have in mind case after case where young men have started in reformatories and been released from them, gone to sentences in other reformatories or penitentiaries, and then suddenly become, on their release, persons of influence in their communities. They control districts. They deliver votes, and after this is done, you see a sudden change in the treatment accorded them by law-enforcement agencies.

You find arrest after arrest by honest police officers and you find acquittal after acquittal where cases have been dismissed or nolle prossed or the indictment quashed. Who does this? The police who arrest this man? The officers who have risked their lives to take into custody some vicious criminal, who perhaps is carrying a gun and has a permit to do so, given him through political affiliations? Or is it some power which is greater than that of other law-enforcement agencies? I give you this to think over and, I hope, to act upon.

It is a habit of politicians to start the insinuation that because a city or a community has an excess of criminality, there must be

something wrong with the police. This is a red herring drawn across the trail to lead good citizens astray. The hardest job that a law-enforcement officer faces is not that of chasing the criminal, but of keeping his job in the face of a tremendous political barrage of influence and propaganda. If some slight thing goes wrong in a police department, there is always someone, and often with an ulterior motive, to demand an investigation, thus throwing the police department into a perfect turmoil of explanations in an effort to survive.

After all, law-enforcement officers are human beings. They have their homes. They have loved ones. They have their debts. They have the burdens and the tribulations which beset any of us in the usual course of life. Therefore, like the human being, they must think of their job; they must fight and defend it and when a law-enforcement officer must spend the greater part of his time defending himself from ulterior influences instead of chasing criminals, then a situation is created which is dangerous to our country's peace, its security, and happiness.

It has been my good fortune to be placed in a position where the entanglements of politics are barred from the pursuit of the criminal. When in 1924 the Division of Investigation was formed under Justice Harlan F. Stone, then the Attorney General of the United States, one of the pillars supporting its structure was that there should be no interference from any and all political forces. This has been adhered to strictly, and under the Honorable Homer Cummings, present Attorney General of the United States, leader in the present determined drive against American crime, the policy of "hands off" has been pursued to the highest possible point.

It is the belief of the Department of Justice that there should be some organization to point a way out of the morass of crime which has in the past bogged down our country, menacing its safety and security and impeding its material progress. This job has been given to the Division of Investigation headed by myself under the direction of the Attorney General, and through his fearless attitude in the promulgation of new laws, a relentless, sustained, and determined movement has been begun. The word "campaign" to describe this movement is an inadequate one, because it indicates a duration of time. There shall be no end of this crusade until the criminal element, as concerns Federal crimes, has been made to know the power, the majesty, and the never-ending vigilance of the Government's ability to outlaw and punish offenses against its statutes.

May I direct your attention to the results of such cases as the Urschel kidnaping, in which 16 persons already have been sentenced

to prison and fully half a score more await trial? Let us take the Dillinger case. This man was the flag bearer for the underworld. He had protection in more ways than one. He had friends, criminals though they were, and he possessed stolen machine guns sold to him by persons who had bought them under the guise of legitimate purchases. John Dillinger is dead, sent to his grave by the bullets of the Division of Investigation. His chief lieutenants are dead. There is not today one living major member of the Dillinger gang. More than 40 persons who harbored and aided and abetted him have been sentenced to the penitentiary or are awaiting trial. Special agents of the Division of Investigation are on the trail of others, and they will get them.

There is one more instance which I must mention in connection with this most reprehensible crew; it is of a man whose name, I hope, forever will stand disgraced—the cowardly slayer of Special Agent W. Carter Baum. And in contrast to this craven spirit of murder, I desire also to salute in reverent memory two sterling officers who gave their lives that American homes and American possessions might be made and kept safe. I am proud to say that in the face of death, with a cowardly killer spattering forth missiles from his machine gun, they did not falter but fired straight and got their man. “Baby Face” Nelson is dead. May the memory of him be a short one, except as it reminds us of the heroism of Inspector Samuel P. Cowley and Special Agent Herman E. Hollis, representatives of the Division of Investigation, whose sacrifice will be honored in the records of the Department of Justice.

Again, in the examples of fearless pursuit, may I cite the case of Clyde Barrow and his murderous woman, Bonnie Parker. After a trail of death and robbery extending through many States, they finally were killed in the State of Louisiana some 8 months ago. They deserved to be killed. Only a week ago, after the same painstaking inquiry by which the Division of Investigation wins 93.81 percent of all cases it takes to court, 23 persons were indicted in Texas for their share in the harboring and aiding of these outlaws. I hope it is not repetitious to say that the shrewdest, most desperate gang of outlaws within recent years, the Barker-Karpis kidnaping gang, has lost three of its members through death at the hands of special agents of the Division of Investigation.

The Barker-Karpis gang did not operate solely through its own efforts. It was necessary for them to have aid in a dozen different forms. The Division of Investigation is striking at that aid through 22 indictments returned by a Federal grand jury at St. Paul, and I can promise more. All of this has been brought about through the capability of new laws sponsored by Attorney General Cummings

and enacted by the Seventy-third Congress. At last the Division of Investigation has the legal backing with which to proceed. It may amaze you to know that, until about a year ago, it was not a Federal offense to kill or assault a Division of Investigation officer. Nor was it even a Federal offense to rob a depository of United States funds as long as it was done with a machine gun or other deadly weapon; if a man merely embezzled, he could be sent to a Federal penitentiary, but if he endangered the lives of bank officers and bank customers and took their money by force, only State officers could pursue him. Those in fear of kidnaping were not sufficiently protected. Special agents did not have the power of arrest within the full meaning of the law. They did not even have the right to carry arms with which to protect themselves.

All that has now been changed. The Division of Investigation of the Department of Justice within 8 months of the date of the time of the passage of these laws became a militant law-enforcement agency. Every special agent is a crack shot with rifle, machine gun, pistol, shotgun, and tear-gas weapon. But because he knows how to use all these implements of legitimate warfare is no reason to believe that the Division of Investigation is an organization of killers running wild and shooting at random. In all instances we make every effort to bring about a peaceable arrest. As an example of that, residents of New York need only recall the arrest of one of the most desperate gangs known within recent years, the notorious tri-State gang, which included two men who had escaped from the death cell while awaiting execution, who were captured recently in New York City without the firing of a shot. However, I take this occasion to serve notice upon the criminal underworld that any resistance of arrest with recourse to firearms will be met with the high courage and coolness of intelligent officers who can face death and shoot straight.

May I say a word about these special agents? More than 83 percent of them are college graduates or certified public accountants. They have been trained diligently over a long course in all forms of scientific deduction, detection, and apprehension. They are masters of interrogation. They are experts in persistence and they are specialists in the belief that once upon the trail of an offender against Federal laws they must never cease until their man is captured and proven innocent or guilty. In this connection it would perhaps be desirable for me to compare the Division of Investigation with the far-famed Scotland Yard of London.

Such remarks as I may make must not be taken as derogatory to this fine old police organization. We have heard many times that a much-desired object would be to transfer Scotland Yard to the

United States. With all necessary obeisance to that great organization, I must say that we have something better than Scotland Yard in our own Division of Investigation. Our men are more highly educated. They are more highly trained. They are experts in trailing men and women of criminality from one end of the possessions of the United States to the other. Scotland Yard, when all is said and done, is merely the municipal police force of the city of London, with an area of 700 square miles. It has 19,769 officers. The Division of Investigation has a maximum of 598 field officers, less than one-thirtieth the force of Scotland Yard. Within the last year more desperate criminals have been caught, convicted, or killed while resisting arrest than in an entire decade of Scotland Yard's history, and this over a combined area of more than 3,000,000 square miles.

It is true that Scotland Yard gave to law-enforcement agencies the Henry system, by which fingerprinting became a tremendous force in the apprehension of criminals. Today Scotland Yard has 500,000 fingerprints in its criminal files. The Division of Investigation has 4,800,000 sets of fingerprints in its files, while every day there rolls in an additional 2,800, meaning that at least six times every minute during the working hours the fingerprint card of some arrested man goes into the permanent files, from which it never can escape. This is the biggest repository of criminal information in the world. Through its facilities of more than 7,300 contributing agencies it acts as a constant protector for the American people. Day by day the old alibi of mistaken identity is ending. It no longer assists the criminal to say that his name is John Jones, while the wanted man is known as Henry Smith, because when the 10 prints of his fingers go into the Identification Unit of the Division of Investigation the infallible record is there in the marks of his digits which say that this is the wanted man, and there is no possible manner in which the identity can be denied. Upon many of these cards as they rest in the fingerprint files are pink slips with heavy black print which denotes that these men are wanted at some part of the country for anything from mere thievery to murder. Thirteen times or more every day, 365 times a month, and for the last fiscal year 4,356 times these cards were matched with the newly arrived prints from some law-enforcement agency perhaps 3,000 miles from the place of the crime, thus enabling fugitives to be apprehended and punished when otherwise they might have escaped.

However, the item which I am sure will interest all of you is the power which the science of fingerprinting possesses in civil life and about which, in particular, I have been asked to speak this afternoon. The entire purpose of fingerprinting is the protection of the honest citizen. It will be recalled that several years ago

there were numerous mail robberies occurring in the post office at New York. During the investigation which followed 460 persons in the Registry Division were fingerprinted in an effort to afford leads helpful in the solution of the robberies. Of the persons fingerprinted 49, or more than 10 percent, were found to have previous criminal records. Of these 49, 7 admitted that they had obtained their positions in order to rob the mails.

There is no reason, to my mind, why every person who is an applicant for a position of public trust should not be willing to be fingerprinted. There are today vast numbers of public workers in cities, States, and counties about whom little is known. It should be compulsory that their fingerprints be taken before they be employed as servants of the people. To such a course there no doubt would be many objections. That is all the more reason it should be done. One crook can raise more noise against progress than a hundred honest men can make for it. Let me cite some figures.

About 6 years ago the United States Civil Service Commission began routing its fingerprints through the Identification Unit. During the fiscal year ending June 30, 1929, 1 person in every 13 was found to have a criminal record. The next year 1 in 14 was discovered to be a criminal, and these, as well as those of the previous years, had run the entire range of crime from disorderly conduct to bigamy, counterfeiting, arson, burglary, and murder.

After the publicity given to these searches, the word passed to some extent through the underworld that it was unsafe for persons with criminal records to take a civil-service examination. Thereupon, the ratio dropped to 1 out of every 22. It now has fallen to the extent where only 1 person out of every 42 who applies for a civil-service job has a criminal record. The same rooting out of criminal elements in public office could be promised for the various States if fingerprints of applicants could be routed through this unit.

The lawless element seems especially desirous of getting into positions of trust. In July 1929 the fingerprints of 81 applicants for positions in the Los Angeles, Calif., police department were searched and 7 were revealed as having previous records, including 1 manslaughter case, 1 hold-up, and 1 grand theft.

Less than 3 years ago the police department at Mount Vernon, N. Y., referred the fingerprint cards of 299 applicants to the division. Seven of these were found to have criminal records. During December of 1933, 280 prints were received in the Identification Unit from the police department of Miami Beach, Fla., in the cases of persons who had applied for positions at the various resort hotels and establishments. Eighteen of these individuals had previous records; they included the passing of bad checks, contributing to the delinquency of a minor, breaking and entering, and assault to kill.

Thus, the work goes on endlessly, protecting a winter resort from persons of bad reputation, keeping a police force clean, establishing the past of a criminal who seeks to plead a previously unsullied record—these fingerprints are silent policemen, on guard 24 hours of the day. What they do to strike fear into the heart of a criminal they also can do to give peace of mind to the honest citizen.

A fingerprint is nothing more nor less than a signature which cannot be forged. When the stigma which criminal work has attached to the science has been removed, its potential uses in commercial, civil, and private life are enormous. If every important document bore the fingerprint of its signer, there would be no long, expensive civil suits with forgery as the basis; the fingerprint would be there as an unchangeable seal to mark the authenticity of the document. It can be used in all matters which may be contested, and it should be used. It is my personal opinion that the time will come when every honest man will be glad to have his fingerprints on file in the noncriminal or citizens' section of the Identification Unit in Washington.

This civil section is becoming a matter of importance. Only a week ago a request was received from a large corporation dealing in explosives asking for 1,400 fingerprint cards, so that the prints of every employee might be placed on file in case of some catastrophe in which identification might be difficult. The fingerprints of hundreds of school children are being placed in this civil identification file for their protection. At intervals we read of train wrecks, casualties at sea, and other disasters where the list of known dead is followed by an even longer enumeration of the unidentified. Again were the fingerprints of these persons on file there would not be the long, horrible days of waiting on the part of relatives while the body of their loved one lay on a morgue slab unidentified. In hundreds of murder cases every year it is necessary to use fallible means of identification because the one infallible one has not been provided.

The threat of kidnaping hangs over many families. The fingerprints of those who fear abduction should be on file in Washington. Wherever persons fear accident or death, or even illness which may strike away from home, their guardians should rest in the Identification Unit in Washington the fingerprints which can almost immediately establish identification. Persons of prominence suffer constantly through the activities of impersonators, who often run up bills, pass bad checks, and create difficulties. It is sometimes difficult for the real person to establish his true identity against that of the impersonator. But it could be done easily if fingerprints were on file. Thus the possibilities for use in civil, business, and private life extend endlessly. And there is even a more important angle—that of safety after death.

To illustrate, I first must cite a criminal case. Eleven years ago—August 21, 1924, to be exact—a murder was committed in Roanoke, Va. An individual known as Andrew Hansbrough was reported to be wanted for this crime, and a copy of the wanted circular, containing fingerprints, went forward to the Identification Unit to be filed for later reference. There it remained for 9 years.

On December 7, 1933, the police department at Columbia, Mo., was called to investigate a murder. A dead man had been found in an abandoned house in the southern part of Boone County, Mo. There was no evidence pointing to the slayer, nor was there anything by which the police could gain a clue as to the identity of the murdered man.

Some time passed between the time of the murder and that of finding of the slain man. By the time the police reached this out-of-the-way abandoned shack nearly 6 days had elapsed since the killing. Yet the lines and ridges and other marks which form the fingerprints of a human being are so tenacious that even at this late date it was possible to gain a set of impressions. These were taken and forwarded to the Division of Investigation. With their arrival the 9-year-old search for Hansbrough, wanted for the Roanoke murder, was ended. These fingerprints of a dead man, forwarded from Columbia, Mo., corresponded exactly.

It is to be assumed, of course, that Hansbrough had relatives and persons who cared sufficiently about him to send for his body and to see that he received burial. Even if this were not the fact in this particular case, the opportunity was provided, the man's identity was learned, the mystery of his disappearance cleared up, and a manner provided in which relatives or other interested persons could procure his body, knowing it to be the one they sought.

Now, let us change this into a hypothetical case, and one which, in some form or another, happens all too often. We will suppose, for instance, that Hansbrough, instead of being a murderer, was a highly beloved man. We will say that he had been a professor, kindly, thoughtful; a person who had guided countless young men and women from adolescence into manhood and womanhood. Thousands of persons in all parts of the country loved him—any of them would have been willing and eager to come to his aid in time of trouble.

We will say that excessive study and mental effort had caused an attack of amnesia and the kindly old man had wandered away, to be lost to his searchers. Years passed. The thousands of dollars which had been spent upon the search for him had been in vain. At last, ill, weakened, still stricken with the malady which had destroyed his memory, he was found and taken to some public

institution. The officials there strove to learn his identity and failed. In a final effort before he died, they took his fingerprints and forwarded them to Washington. Back came the answer, "No record."

The criminal, because he was a criminal, had a record of identity on file in Washington. But the kindly professor had none; penniless, he was buried in the potter's field—because he was an honest man.

If that sort of thing means anything to you, it is only necessary to write the Division of Investigation, and a specially prepared, non-criminal fingerprint card, plus necessary instructions, will be forwarded. The same facilities are available for all the angles of fingerprinting which I have outlined, whether for cities and States for the protection of their personnel, or for the private citizen wishing to guard himself against accident, abduction, or amnesia.

This is a service of the people and for the people. It is compulsory in only one aspect; the criminal must give his fingerprints; the honest citizen has the right to choose. There is no connection between the two—the Department of Justice holds fine distinctions between the honest persons it wants to protect and the dishonest ones it seeks to run down and properly punish.

So now we come to a summation of the citizen's place in this determination to end the defiance of the criminal world. I have said before that the Department of Justice feels its duty to be that of pointing the way. Once this way has been pointed, the only method by which crime can be eradicated is by the absolute cooperation of every law-enforcement officer plus the power of every good citizen in America. Law enforcement can only be as good in a community as the desire of that community's population demands that it be good. It is a matter which demands constant vigilance. It demands that the police be freed from the political fetters which hamper them.

It demands that when enforcement becomes lax, committees of forward-looking citizens be formed at once to learn why this laxity has been allowed to develop. It is foolish to say that a police department is failing to do its work—a law-enforcement agency only fails when there is some excellent reason for it. It stands to reason that men who must risk their lives to apprehend dangerous, murderous criminals are not going to fail when that failure means danger to themselves. Therefore, it is a citizen's duty to look behind these matters. It is the citizen's duty to see that criminal attorneys or "lawyers criminal", as the Attorney General calls them, are forced out of their alliances with the underworld and are properly punished. It is the citizen's duty to see to it that

the prisoner is not coddled nor allowed to be freed through easy and sometimes, I regret to say, financially reachable persons with powers of clemency.

Parole today is becoming one of the major menaces of America. Through its misapplication, convicts are being freed with little or no supervision, and often with no sound reason for release. The records of certain States in this matter are a disgrace to America. To my mind, there can only be one reason why thousands upon thousands of men who have repeatedly committed crimes are set free to commit other and often more dangerous offenses against the law. This is the failure of public officials to faithfully carry out their public trust, placing paramount the welfare and interests of society.

It is your duty to see that something is done about this. It is your duty also to see that laws, apparently innocent upon the surface, are not passed which give the criminal an advantage over the honest citizen in the trial of his case. Certainly, there should be justice, and unfailing justice, for anyone who is brought face to face with a criminal charge. But, certainly also, the prosecution of an offender should not be reduced to an absurd travesty in which justice does not depend upon the facts of the case but upon the antics, the tricks, the unscrupulous methods of crooked attorneys, and the loopholes provided by loosely framed laws which permit the criminal element to laugh at our statutes.

A great part of the tremendous crime problem which exists today is due to the fact that otherwise upright persons condoned certain acts during recent years and allowed a condition of laxity to spread until it has infiltrated every portion of our Commonwealth. So I say to you now that the Division of Investigation hopes that it can point the way by the giving of its scientific training, of its tremendous crime laboratory, of its great fingerprint system, built up through years of arduous effort, and, plus all this, the courage and nobility of highly educated hard-working men whose offering in this cause includes even that of their lives. The Department of Justice hopes to enlist the interest and the active support of the American people in their respective communities in a sustained national movement to deal with the criminal menace. But a beacon light cannot shine in a fog. May you, as persons of standing, of reputation, of high-minded citizenship, assist us to clear this murky atmosphere and bring to the American people the peace, the freedom, and security to which they are so justly entitled.

The first part of the paper is devoted to a general survey of the history of the subject. It begins with a brief account of the early attempts to explain the phenomena of life, and then proceeds to a more detailed consideration of the various theories which have been advanced from time to time. The author then turns to a discussion of the modern views on the subject, and finally concludes with a summary of the principal points which have been established by the researches of recent years.

The second part of the paper is devoted to a more detailed consideration of the various theories which have been advanced from time to time. It begins with a brief account of the early attempts to explain the phenomena of life, and then proceeds to a more detailed consideration of the various theories which have been advanced from time to time. The author then turns to a discussion of the modern views on the subject, and finally concludes with a summary of the principal points which have been established by the researches of recent years.

The third part of the paper is devoted to a more detailed consideration of the various theories which have been advanced from time to time. It begins with a brief account of the early attempts to explain the phenomena of life, and then proceeds to a more detailed consideration of the various theories which have been advanced from time to time. The author then turns to a discussion of the modern views on the subject, and finally concludes with a summary of the principal points which have been established by the researches of recent years.

The fourth part of the paper is devoted to a more detailed consideration of the various theories which have been advanced from time to time. It begins with a brief account of the early attempts to explain the phenomena of life, and then proceeds to a more detailed consideration of the various theories which have been advanced from time to time. The author then turns to a discussion of the modern views on the subject, and finally concludes with a summary of the principal points which have been established by the researches of recent years.

The fifth part of the paper is devoted to a more detailed consideration of the various theories which have been advanced from time to time. It begins with a brief account of the early attempts to explain the phenomena of life, and then proceeds to a more detailed consideration of the various theories which have been advanced from time to time. The author then turns to a discussion of the modern views on the subject, and finally concludes with a summary of the principal points which have been established by the researches of recent years.

1

