

SELECTED QUOTES BY RAMSEY CLARK

PURPOSE: To provide selected quotes from Ramsey Clark for use in preparation of correspondence, text materials, briefings, and proposals.

1. "We have to change human attitudes. How do you do that? We have to condition violence from the people's character. It can be done. It has to be done, because we are all up against it. When there are violent people, others will be affected by it."

Ramsey Clark, *CRIME IN AMERICA*, New York, 1970 p. 9. [From the Introduction by Tom Wicker referring to an address, by Ramsey Clark, to the Congressional Conference on Justice in May 1970]

2. "In every major city in the United States you will find that two-thirds of the arrests take place among only about two per cent of the population. Where is that area in every city? Well, it's in the same place where infant mortality is four times higher than in the city as a whole; where the death rate is 25 per cent higher; where life expectancy is ten years shorter; where common communicable diseases with the potential of physical and mental damage are six and eight and ten times more frequent; where alcoholism and drug addiction are prevalent to a degree far transcending that of the rest of the city; where education is poorest - the old school buildings, the most crowded and turbulent classrooms, the fewest certified teachers, the highest rate of dropouts, where the average formal schooling is four to six years less than the city as a whole. Sixty per cent of the children in Watts in 1965 lived with only one, or neither, of their parents."

Clark, p. 11.

3. "However effective government may be in its effort to control crime, while its citizens have the will to violate the law, society is in a contest it can never finally win."

Clark, p. 16

4. "Crime reflects more than the character of the pitiful few who commit it. It reflects the character of the entire society."

Clark, p. 17.

5. "We are cruelly afflicted with crime because we have failed to care for ourselves and for our character. We are guilty of immense neglect. Neglect, not permissiveness, is the culprit."

Clark, p. 18.

6. "The crucial test of American Character will be our reaction to the vastness of crime and turbulence in which we live. It will not be an easy test. The obvious and instinctive reaction is repressiveness. It will not work. You cannot discipline this turbulent, independent, young mass society as if it were a child. Repression is the one clear course toward irreconcilable division and revolution in America. The essential action is to create a wholesome environment. Healthy people in a just and concerned society will not commit significant crime."

Clark, pp. 18,19.

7. "When Society seeks vengeance, when it cheapens one life, it demeans all life."

Clark, p. 20.

8. "But in America, we have cultivated crime and hence have reaped a bountiful crop. Crime is the ultimate human degradation. A civilized people have no higher duty than to do everything within their power to seek its reduction. We can prevent nearly all of the crime now suffered in America - if we care. Our character is at stake."

Clark, p. 21.

9. "The motives of most crimes are economic. Seven of eight known serious crimes involve property. Many crimes against persons, such as robbery, mugging, kidnapping and sometimes assault and murder, are incidental to a property crime. Their main purpose is to obtain money or property."

Clark, p. 39

10. "Technology has advanced at an ever increasing pace while emotional development is still in the last century.

11. "The reason for terrorism is that people with justified complaints are not being heard. A guest on Ted Koppell Nightline about the bombing of Libya."

12. "When the record of rehabilitation by correctional agencies is considered, the failure of the criminal justice system is compounded. While there may be only one conviction for every fifty or more serious crimes, only one in four will go to prison, and most who are imprisoned will commit subsequent crimes. Thus from among the very small portion of all the people who commit serious crimes and are ultimately imprisoned, the system fails to rehabilitate the

majority. Rehabilitation is the major chance the criminal justice system has to reduce crime, yet even here it fails."

Clark, p. 119.

13. "Finally, if corrections fails to rehabilitate, then all efforts of police, prosecutors and judges can only speed the cycle of crime. Longer sentences usually only harden people who spend years waiting to be released. The long sentence does not deter others on the outside and impedes rehabilitation of the persons sentenced. On the average the same number of prisoners will be released every day as are incarcerated, whether their sentences are for one year or ten. The question is not how long were they in jail, but what they will do when they are released. Public safety depends not on the length of the sentence but on rehabilitation."

Clark, p. 121.

14. "The criminal justice system has been tragically neglected in America for generations. It is a system in theory only. At a time when our major domestic concern is crime and violence, the nation spends more on household pets than on police. For all police, prosecutors, courts and corrections - the entire criminal justice process, federal, state and local - our annual expenditure by 1970 was barely \$5 billion. This compares with \$9 billion spent on tobacco and 12.5 on alcoholic beverages.

Clark, p. 123.

15. "The need to establish priorities based on successful experience, on clear needs, on newly developed technology, on a comprehensive evaluation of the whole system. In a society so complex, with governments so fragmented, with existing isolations and conflicts and overriding ignorance of the nature, causes and cures for crime, this is no easy task. A high level of public commitment and an organized approach are essential."

Clark, pp. 123-124.

16. "Corrections, like other government activities, grew through history to meet needs or fill inters that usually have completely disappeared or drastically changed. Most city and county jails, often situated across the street from each other, offer no hope for programming rehabilitation. They manufacture criminals."

Clark, p.130.

17. "To combat crime amid the prevailing social unrest that changes constantly in its form and content, we dispatch the police, who are under manned, under trained and usually from backgrounds and with attitudes that are not sympathetic to or understanding of the people or issues they confront. To be disciplined, cool and even-handed under such circumstances is exceedingly difficult, but these traits are essential to effective performance - and to justice.

18. "Law enforcement was once a relatively simple task, but today no activity in our society is more complex or requires a greater bundle of professional skills for effective performance."

Clark, pp. 138-139.

19. Lengthy article on training domestic disturbance officers in family intervention

Clark, pp. 141-145

20. "Disregarding the human and social price, the economic cost of crime is in the tens of billions annually."

Clark, p. 149.

21. "Jails and prisons in the United States today are more often than not manufacturers of crime. Of those who come to jail undecided, capable either of criminal conduct or of lives free of crime, most are turned to crime. Prisons are usually little more than places to keep people - warehouses of human degradation. Ninety-five per cent of all expenditure in the entire corrections effort of the nation is for custody - iron bars, stone walls, guards. Five per cent is for hope - health services, education, developing employment skills."

Clark, p. 213

22. "The opportunity for treating the mentally ill in prison is virtually non-existent. Most prisoners suffered from some mental disturbance at the time they committed the crime. More have mental health problems on leaving prison than entering."

Clark, p. 214.

23. "In the light of existing conditions, knowledgeable observers find it incredible to hear those less knowing say that we coddle prisoners - that penitentiary life should be harsher. Such people do not know the facts. Much of our crime is caused by the inhumanity of our prisons and by our failure to rehabilitate those we send to them."

Clark, p. 215.

24. "It is one of the larger ironies of our time that, concerned as we are about crime, the one area within the whole system of criminal justice that offers the best opportunity to prevent crime is the most neglected. In fact, neglect in the criminal justice system reaches its zenith in the neglect of corrections. There may be no comparable neglect within the whole range of government service. Yet, until the underlying causes of crime are relieved, corrections is by far the best chance we have to significantly and permanently reduce crime in America."

Clark, p. 215.

25. "We know further, indeed we have demonstrated, that recidivism - the repetition of crime by individuals - can be cut in half. It can be cut far more than that. But if only one-half of the repeated crime we now suffer could be eliminated, society would be free of 40 per cent of all serious crime. If we are really concerned about crime, if we really care about our own character, how can we fail to make a massive effort?"

Clark, p. 215.

26. "Punishment as an end in itself is itself a crime in our times. The crime of punishment, as Karl Menninger has shown through his works, is suffered by all society because punishment has regularly given rise to subsequent criminal acts inflicted on the public. The use of prisons to punish only causes crime."

Clark, p. 219.

27. "Rehabilitation must be the goal of modern corrections. Every other consideration should be subordinate to it. To rehabilitate is to give health, freedom from drugs and alcohol, to provide education, vocational training, understanding and the ability to contribute to society."

Clark, p. 220.

28. "Rehabilitated, an individual will not have the capacity - cannot bring himself - to injure another or take or destroy property."

Clark, p. 220.

29. "The end sought by rehabilitation is a stable individual returned to community life, capable of constructive participation and incapable of crime. From the very beginning, the direction of the correctional process must be back toward the community. It is in the community that crime will be committed or a useful life lived."

Clark, p. 220.

30. "Indeterminate sentencing affords the public the protection of long confinement without the necessity that long sentences be served. It gives the best of both worlds - long protection for the public yet a fully flexible opportunity for the convict's rehabilitation. It provides the chance constantly to adapt correctional programs to personal needs even as individuals develop."

Clark, p. 224.

31. "Throughout the history of federal corrections most prisoners have been faced with two alternatives - the total custody of a prison or release to the community with insignificant parole supervision."

Clark, p. 228.

32. "In 1965, in what seemed to be a bold step at the time, supervision of prisoners in normal community employment situations was first attempted..... Fewer than one in twenty failed to comply with all the conditions of work release. Alcohol was the cause of failure in nearly two-thirds of the cases.... Since we know that better than one-half of all the people who leave prisons return convicted of a subsequent crime, it is clearly worth risking six months on work release after a convict has spent many months or years in prison Among the 95 per cent who did not fail in the work release program, perhaps only a third will return to prison.

As to the 5 per cent who failed to meet the conditions of release and sought to escape, all were caught and returned to prison, where they served more time. People do not really escape from prison successfully. In the history of the Federal Bureau hundreds of thousands have been imprisoned and thousands have escaped, but fewer than twenty have not been recaptured or otherwise accounted for. It is only a matter of time - usually not very long."

Clark, pp. 228-230 (A summation)

33. "Work release, halfway houses, pre release guidance centers - these are only the beginning. Community supervision is the future of corrections."

Clark, p. 231.

34. "As soon as their condition indicates that it is consistent with safety and rehabilitation, prisoners should be moved from conventional prisons to community facilities such as a floor of a YMCA, a wing in an apartment building, or a house."

Clark, p. 231.

35. "In the years to come millions of boys and hundreds of thousands of girls throughout the United States will be confined in prisons. They will be the youngest offenders, representatives of the American child in trouble. They will come, in main, from poor families and broken homes. They will be school drop-outs. So little loved are they that in the federal system, 70 per cent will never have a visitor - relative or friend - while they wait in prison. No one cares. Most will be afflicted with mental and physical illnesses, and many will be addicted to drugs."

Clark, pp. 232-233.

36. "We know that corrections can rehabilitate. We know that the younger the offender the better are society's chance. We know that when we fail it is all of us who suffer."

Clark, p. 233.

37. " To youth corrections we must bring the most advanced research and best techniques. We must provide ample resources to implement both."

Clark, p. 234.

38. "When a prisoner is released on parole after prison confinement of perhaps many years' duration, he needs help desperately. He may not know it, and he may not want it, but he needs help, careful supervision, a steady hand, a voice with his employer and fellow workers, a friend to eat dinner with once in a while, a visit with a family. The early months are the hardest; once he gets through them, his chances for making it all the way are much higher. But instead of help most of his supervision now takes on the form of routine office visits, spot phone checks, pointless report writing, all of it often surrounded with an aura of mistrust.'

Clark, p. 237.

39. "There is no effort within the criminal justice system that holds a fraction of the potential to reduce crime by a vigorous, thoughtful corrections program.... If all of our research and learning about human behavior, if all the teaching of our great universities about medical science, mental health, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, hereditary and environmental influences has any applicability to real life, here in corrections it has an immense and critically important role. Yet divorcement of all those lessons and skills from the people who need them is almost total.

If America cares for its character, it must revolutionize its approach to corrections."

Clark, p. 238. (summarized)

40. "Our senior generation grew up in a world of trees, farm lands, and neighbors they knew. Communication was people talking to one another. Young America, however, has grown up with the bomb and the television set."

Clark, p. 239.

41. "There has always been a difference between generations, but the difference has increased more in the last generation than in all the preceding ones."

Clark, p. 244.

42. "Powerless people live by their wits. For them, rules of society are alien in spirit and fact. The law is irrelevant except when it comes after them or their loved ones. The law and government pretend to give men rights. Hospitals are built, but the poor and powerless cannot get to them. The law protects citizens against assault and reverses the sanctity of property, but it works for the wealthy, not the poor. The law says you can sue the used-car salesman if the motor block was cracked when you bought the car, but the poor cannot afford a lawyer. It says the landlord must provide a fire escape and only one family may occupy a flat. And when

you get food poisoning you can sue the grocer who sold you the week-old egg custard pie - the law says. And you can call the police and run off the addicts and prostitutes and bookies - the law says. Only you cannot. Because you have no rights and you have no power. You have only what you can get away with and take care of by yourself."

Clark, p. 248.

43. "If the suburban dweller really knew the facts of life in the ghettos that seem so strange, hostile and dirty to him, he would be aroused to action."

Clark, p. 249