



# DELINQUENT

*The Juvenile  
Offender  
in America  
Today*

# DELINQUENCY

*The Juvenile Offender  
in America Today*

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*Random House • New York*

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Published in New York by Random House, Inc., and simultaneously in Toronto,  
Canada, by Random House of Canada, Limited. Designed by Peter Oldenburg  
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 55-8174  
Manufactured in the United States of America*

*Fourth Printing*

## *Foreword*

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THERE IS NO royal road to an understanding of the problems of delinquency, its causes and its treatment. Those who expect ready-made answers, simple formulas, and easy clichés may as well prepare themselves for disappointment. Our knowledge of human nature, particularly in its wayward expressions, is still meager and scanty despite notable progress in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, sociology, and social work during the past three decades. The best we can hope for is to put together what information we have and proceed to plan and develop our policies on the basis of the best tested evidence available. But let us not be deluded by false hopes and false illusions, expecting more than our limited knowledge for the present can provide.

It has been stated in another connection that anybody who has ever planted an ear of corn or a row of petunias fancies himself a horticultural expert. By the same token, all those who come into contact with children (and who among us does not?)—whether as parents, teachers, ministers, jurists, or police officials—frequently feel themselves especially qualified to speak with considerable authority on the problems of the waywardness of our youth. But let us exercise here a proper note of caution and restraint, and above all, let us not underestimate the role of the expert. The so-called common sense of the well-intentioned police official and the “good gray judge” is frequently little more than the cumulative bias and restrained cynicism developed over years of frustrating contacts with children who appear difficult, cantankerous, and unchangeable.

Nevertheless, during a period when constant "excursions and alarms" are being raised concerning the presumed rapid demoralization of our youth, it becomes important to exercise perhaps *more* than a reasonable restraint and to use only the tested knowledge that we have for the determination of intelligent public policy. In this field, possibly more than any other, we are exposed to hysterical points of view which all too often have little basis in fact. We have too long been exposed to the rabid outcries of aroused citizens and officials, abetted by a sensational press, which do little more than to distort further a picture which is already widely out of focus. The kaleidoscopic shifting of public attention from one scapegoat to another, whether it be the schools, the home, television or the comic books, may serve as a temporary catharsis for pent-up public feelings but it does not shed much light on the complex and deeply rooted disturbances which actually lie at the base of American delinquency.

The problems of youthful maladjustment and delinquency are largely a reflective phase of certain broad dislocations in the American social structure. In this field, since it concerns our youth, it behooves us, in Matthew Arnold's words, "to see life clearly and *to see it whole.*" As with the variety of other social disturbances that periodically appear on the American scene, we must recognize with Lawrence Frank that society, in effect, and not the individual himself, is the patient. Family life, in its profound effects in fashioning our young, serves as the vehicle through which these wider social tendencies are transmitted.

Despite the difficulties involved in assessing the enormous amount of diversified information, tested and untested hypotheses, truths and half-truths which abound in the field of delinquency investigation, some realistic and rational appraisal must be made if we are ever to move forward. For it is only in this way that a progressive and enlightened public policy in dealing with our wayward youth can be developed. Our public and private agencies dealing with maladjusted youth have a dual responsibility: to educate an impatient public to the subtle complexities of the problems of delinquency, and to establish public practices and goals in close conformity to the best facts we have. In this way, the wastefulness and futility of the perennial panaceas, ranging from excessive dependence upon recreational programs to curfews for minors and punishment for parents, may be placed in realistic focus.

Any public agency which attempts to set a course on the chartless seas of human motivation and the complexities of human misconduct must be intrepid and forward-looking. Yet, such undertakings must be launched. For it is only by attempting to assess in some *positive* fashion the varied discoveries made in research areas impinging upon the field of delinquency that we can hope to develop positive and progressive policies in delinquency treatment, prevention, and control. In this respect, our position is analogous to that of a physician who, though lacking complete certainty of the nature of a patient's illness, will nevertheless proceed to treat the patient on the basis of his best evidence, his best intuitions, and his best judgment.

It is heartening to note how much positive information has already been amassed—information which will afford us firmer ground upon which to launch policies of effective action. There are still many profound disagreements about the precise operation of the causal factors in delinquency, but there is a surprising amount of general agreement about the operation of certain broad causal processes. In this book we have tried to describe these areas of basic agreement, at the same time indicating the numerous dilemmas and unanswered questions with which the field of delinquency research still abounds. Serious consideration has also been paid to the inseminating pioneer researches which are enlarging our horizons and opening up new approaches in the study and treatment of delinquency. Particularly significant, it appears, are the recent disclosures in the typology of delinquency, indicating the correlations between delinquent types and specific socio-cultural and familial conditions, which the reader will find discussed in Chapter Seven and summarized in a coordinated chart in Chapter Eight. Further, since the pressing nature of the delinquency problem does not permit academic evasion, we have attempted to indicate clearly and forthrightly, in the concluding sections, those policies and procedures which are more likely to bring success in the diminution of delinquency.

Considerable care has been exercised in selecting whenever possible only those findings based on acceptable criteria of proof and confirmation. We have deliberately attempted to skirt opinion, regardless of how well-intentioned, unless it was based on evidence conforming to the requirements of recognized research procedures. This may not have been possible in every instance, but we were always mindful of these

questions: (1) Did the research finding arise from a sufficient sample? (2) Did it tend to exclude subjective impressions and special biases of the investigator? (3) Was it representative of the individuals whom it attempted to study? (4) Could the results be compared with findings and observations obtained by independent investigators? The extensive, though necessarily selective, bibliography at the end of this volume will give some indication of the scope of the ground covered here. In addition, annotated lists of recommended further readings have been placed at the close of each chapter.

We have been distinctly mindful of that valiant band of men and women who have pioneered in this difficult area of human relations, as well as of those who, in the face of a frequently misunderstanding public opinion, are attempting to bring light upon an urgent problem—the innumerable researchers in public and private agencies, jurists, youth workers, institutional administrators, child psychiatrists, probation and social caseworkers. To this often-assailed group, we wish to pay particular tribute. We acknowledge with gratitude the kindness of all who helped in the arduous task of bringing this manuscript to completion. Special appreciation is expressed to Adeline Bloch for her unremitting cheerfulness and her tireless efforts in typing parts of the manuscript and in performing many bibliographical duties; to Susan Del Bloch for her splendid assistance in compiling special bibliographical materials on the meaning, extent, and causes of delinquency; and to Miriam Yudkowsky for her capable typing of a large part of the manuscript and her faithful performance of many other duties.

HERBERT A. BLOCH

FRANK T. FLYNN

Just two days before the galleys for this book were delivered, the shocking news of Frank Flynn's tragic and sudden death was received. To those of us who knew Frank Flynn and revered him as an associate and friend, his brilliant and perceptive mind, his warmth and great human compassion, and his dedicated devotion to the truth as he saw it will always be outstanding. The broad field of human relations in which he labored so strenuously, wisely, and well has lost a dedicated social worker, the impact of whose work will long be felt, a great teacher, and a brilliant social scientist.

Frank Flynn eagerly awaited the publication of this manuscript. The sections he wrote very likely represent the last distillate of his incisive thinking on one of the most pressing problems of our day. A book is never in itself a monument to a great and full life. In a small way nevertheless, this book may perhaps be considered a final landmark in a life replete with devotion to the service and good of others.

H. A. B.

January 29th, 1956.



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*Part One*

THE MEANING  
AND SCOPE OF  
DELINQUENCY





# Chapter 1

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## WHAT IS DELINQUENCY?\*

Few problems on the American scene cause so much concern and widespread public interest as does the problem of youthful misbehavior and delinquency. The very fact of this widespread public concern reflects the rapidly changing character of American life and the confusion such a change betokens in social, moral, and legal standards. The American people have become increasingly restive concerning the problems of their youth, but what the nature of their dissatisfaction is, what has brought it about, what can be done about it, and how much they themselves are responsible for it, are questions the public is not quite so ready to face. The fact is that during a period of widespread social and economic change, particularly in such a complex social order as ours, the necessity of seeking new adjustments to the constant problems of the day becomes overwhelming.

All aspects of the American social structure have been affected by the tumultuous changes of the past half-century, but the emergent problems have become particularly acute in certain critical areas. Two

\* The footnotes appearing in this and all subsequent chapters are stated, for the convenience of the reader, in abbreviated form. In the bibliographical index at the end of the volume, the complete source of reference material is given. At the end of each chapter, an annotated and descriptive listing of selected bibliographical materials, with complete reference to each source, is also provided.