

THE LOS ANGELES CITY COLLEGE  
DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

# “DEAD END”

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## DEAD END?

Juvenile delinquency is fast becoming America's No. 1 social problem! Every day that passes thousands of American boys and girls are picked up by our local police officers because of misbehavior. Right now it is estimated that the police come in contact with about a million boys and girls each year on charges of delinquency.

It is a common observation that "slums breed crime" and that in the deteriorated neighborhoods with the greatest amount of social ills—poverty, disease, neglect, family strife, desertions, mental disorders—juvenile delinquency and crime flourish. These social swamps, or "delinquency areas," are characterized by physical deterioration, social disorganization and other unfavorable factors. The buildings are dilapidated, the housing conditions deplorable. As one might expect, these are inhabited, for the most part, by families too poor to live elsewhere. These families move into better neighborhoods as soon as they are financially able to do so.

The traditions and patterns of delinquency are handed down from one generation to another through group contacts. Such activities as stealing fruit, lifting brass from empty buildings, and "rolling drunks," are neighborhood sports that the children in gangs learn early in the course of their every day experiences. They become educated in crime. Their heroes are the underworld "big shots"; their ambition is to advance from petty thieving to daylight robbery. They know about the inside workings of the organized and powerful criminal gangs and their "rackets"; they become wise in the ways of political corruption and smirk at the alliance between politics and crime. (More than half the inmates of our prisons for adults were once juvenile delinquents.)

The task of preventing delinquency cannot be delegated solely to experts. It takes the united effort of everyone in the community. As citizens we must take vigilant interest in the community life that affects our children. We can join with other citizens in community groups, whether they be parent-teacher associations, church groups, service clubs, women's clubs, or labor unions, to study local conditions, plan for their improvements, and translate plans to action... Only as all citizens develop a sense of civic responsibility and participate with others for the common good can we hope to achieve the kind of community life in which delinquency will have small chance to flourish.

*The above information is directly quoted from publications No. 300 and No. 341, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Children's Bureau.*