

TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS
Office of the High Commissioner
Saipan, Mariana Islands 96950

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

The problem of increasing juvenile ^{delinquency} has for sometime been recognized by Administration as well as the Micronesian community. Until very recently, however, the community's own response to the problem has been to invoke repressive legislation. Thus, for example, curfews for young people have been in existence in several districts for six or more years without any perceptible effect on the juvenile crime rate.

In the most recent session of the Congress of Micronesia, the High Commissioner was "memorialized" by Senate Joint Resolution No. 15 to establish a central institution of correction for juveniles. This recommendation was studied in some depth by each district administration in turn and with one exception (Yap), rejected as both an undesirable and costly answer to a problem which requires a more comprehensive solution "closer to home".

Causes of juvenile delinquency in Micronesia are several, of which the following have been identified as the most important contributors:

1. Recent, unplanned urbanization with a resulting close juxtaposition of families and single individuals who lack kinship or traditional political ties either with their neighbors or their new locality of residence. The diversions of the city, the freedom from the constraints and tedium of traditional village life, and the greater range of services and employment opportunities available all act as inducements to population movement.
2. The decline of traditional sanctions which formerly helped to control the behavior of young people. This stems from:
 - a. competing new values introduced directly or indirectly through the educational system and contact with other western institutions.
 - b. the growing ideational gap between generations, with older non-English speaking parents and village elders expressing the feeling that they are being excluded from the lives of their children as well as from leadership roles in the new society. This in turn engenders a feeling of helplessness and the self-consoling belief that present juvenile delinquency problems are wholly an imposition from the West, not of their own making.

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and that primary responsibility for correcting the problem consequently rests with the agencies of the government. This attitude is reflected in the reluctance of Micronesian judges to take punitive action against parents for the misdemeanors of their children.

- c. new patterns of jurisprudence which, in the eyes of Micronesians over forty, are much too permissive. Raised in their own highly authoritarian societies and the punitive traditions of imperial Germany and Japan, older citizens are almost unanimous in their conviction that American administration of justice, while undermining traditional village and familial sources of authority, has thus far proved unable to supply an acceptable substitute control over conduct.

3. The dissatisfactions of Micronesian youth developing out of:

- a. a high aspiration level for material wealth and status, which has been encouraged in the schools but not fulfilled in the island economy.
- b. the low level of financial return from agriculture, with the consequent rejection of traditional economic pursuits and the migration of young men to urban centers where job opportunities are few for the unskilled but where wages are comparatively high.
- c. the inability of many elementary and secondary school graduates to qualify either for higher educational opportunities or for vocational positions requiring any substantial measure of skill.
- d. the absence of any generally agreed upon role for young people. By tradition, an adolescent Micronesian is not expected to be a fully productive member of the labor force. He is not expected to assert initiative nor seek positions of leadership; on the other hand, neither is he held primarily accountable for his misconduct. This is in sharp contrast to the Western view which expects a young man to set forth on his own early to achieve financial independence, but expects him to answer for his mistakes. Viewing the under-employed, restless youth of Micronesia, the westerner is appalled at the waste of human resources. The Micronesian parent is more concerned with his son's lack of respect, not his alleged reluctance to apply himself. The two views are similar, but the basic disagreement is that an ideal Micronesian youth is not expected to be a fully productive member of the labor force.

4. Ineffective law enforcement.

In most areas of the Territory the constabulary has been understaffed, over-worked and in comparison to other government departments, under-paid. As a result, policemen recruited in the past have tended to be untrained, older men. While age might appear to strengthen their position as authority figures in the community, it must be remembered that these individuals are much more subject to the traditional pressures of clan and class. Children of aristocratic families are rarely arrested, no matter how notorious their misconduct, and even more rarely are they convicted. This fact is not lost on the general citizenry, particularly the young.

The Trust Territory Administration currently seeks to address itself to distinct aspects of this problem:

1. Correction:

Programs have been initiated in the Public Safety departments of most districts to train police officers in the handling of juvenile problems and the necessity for close follow-up of probationary cases. Ironically, though perhaps as a result of this fact, those districts with the best trained, most alert juvenile police patrols (Palau and the Marianas) have the highest rates for juvenile arrest. Hence statistics in this area can be misleading.

As in the past, convicted juvenile offenders are, to the greatest extent possible, confined apart from adult convicts and assigned to separate labor details. Small jail staffs and limited prison space do not always permit total segregation of juveniles, however.

To improve the caliber and capability of the existing Constabulary force, a budgetary program has been submitted which would permit increase in complement size, as well as higher salaries for better trained personnel.

2. Prevention:

For all the local publicity given to youthful law-breaking, the number of confirmed juvenile delinquents is still small. Hence the Administration is placing its primary emphasis on preventive measures.

To date these have concentrated on individual re-educational programs for young people convicted in all districts.

as an example, have both initiated a "mass media" attack on the problem using press articles and regularly broadcasting panel discussions of the problem by parents, young people, and leaders of the community.

Nearly every district has a small scouting organization. The Girl Scouts of U.S.A. has contributed the services of an advisor specialist for a two year period, and there are already twenty-one Girl Scout troops in the Territory. In each of the six districts centers and where there is at least one Peace Corps volunteer whose full time assignment is the organization and conduct of recreational and other youth oriented programs.

Since all Micronesian societies place heavy importance on the idea of community service, several successful attempts have been made to involve young men in purposeful, community directed youth programs. Best publicized of these is the "Youth Corps" being organized on Ujae. Similar groups exist in Pohnpei and the Marianas.

Each of the six districts is currently engaged in forming Community Action Agencies, which are private, non-profit organizations created for the purpose of enlisting public participation in a concerted attack on the causes of poverty. These agencies in turn are applying to the Office of Economic Opportunity in Washington for financial assistance in launching community action programs. Two universally endorsed programs with far-reaching implications for youth are the proposals for the creation of multi-purpose community centers and for vocational and remedial educational training projects for young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five years. In this connection, Washington has indicated the likelihood that selected youth from the Territory will be trained at Job Corps Training Center in Hawaii. With this added assistance and impetus provided through the Anti-Poverty Program, it is hoped that we can now successfully attack the third major factor creating delinquency, the absence of employment making skills.

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