

Jurist Scorns Idea Bill of Rights Is for 'Nice People' Only

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Judge J. Skelly Wright of the U.S. Court of Appeals said yesterday that the Bill of Rights must protect "all of us or none of us," and "the sooner the 'nice people' realize this, the sooner the police will also."

Defending the courts from charges that they coddle criminals and attacking procedures used by the police, Judge Wright said that in the eyes of the law "there is no such thing in this country as 'nice people' who enjoy the protections of the Bill of Rights and the so-called criminal element who don't."

"Our system of criminal justice is based on the criminal act, of which the accused is presumed innocent," he said in a Law Day speech, "not on association, condition or prior record."

Judge Wright said that police procedures "merely reflect the community consensus," and that "when the community wants law enforcement according to law, it will have it."

For its own protection, he said, "the community should remember that today's 'nice people' may be tomorrow's 'criminal element,' or vice versa, depending on who is calling names."

"For example," said the jurist, a New Orleans native, "in some parts of this country today the civil rights workers who are trying to assist the Negro in registering to vote

seem to be the 'criminal element' and their murderers the 'nice people.'"

Judge Wright told an audience of attorneys and jurists at the National Lawyers Club that police investigators may indeed be handicapped because of provisions in the Bill of Rights protecting the accused.

But, he said, "ours is an accusatorial, not an inquisitorial, system of criminal justice. And police investigations should be focused on obtaining evidence from sources other than the accused himself."