

Ramsey Clark's Solution: Abandon Prisons Entirely

By Carolyn Anspacher

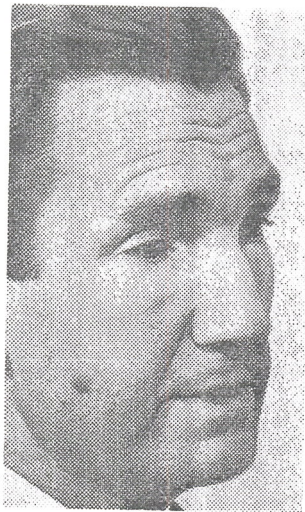
Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, whose view of the future is becoming increasingly apocalyptic, told a youthful audience yesterday at the University of San Francisco that the United States must rid itself of prisons and get down to the business of meeting the human needs of society's offenders.

He forecast intensifying waves of prison violence unless there is total commitment to the concept of "common humanity."

Clark quietly rejected the entire notion of "prison reform."

RIGHTS

The changes that must be made to avert future Atticas, he said, go far beyond mere "reform" and involve emergence of a new humanism. The changes, he said, must



RAMSEY CLARK
Reform isn't enough

be so basic that anti-social offenders are treated as "one human being at a time rather than as columns of dehumanized statistics."

In his soft Texas drawl,

Clark spoke passionately of the rights denied the hundreds of thousands committed to this country's "factories of crime" — rights to health, education, decent family lives, rights of fair trial and free speech.

It is Clark's conviction that more crime is coming out of prison than is entering it.

"We are using violence and segregation in an effort to solve our social ills," he said, "and what we are doing is conditioning and creating new brutality."

"The most important statistic we have to face today is that 80 per cent of all crime is committed by people who travel through our (penal) system."

PROBLEMS

Admittedly, Clark said, the problems involved in reversing this trend are "difficult" and "defy over-simplification."

But, he said, they can be

met once it is recognized that big prisons and little prisons are both wrong and ineffective.

Tens of thousands, he said, are being harshly detained who should never be in prison — particularly alcoholics and narcotics addicts needing detoxification rather than confinement.

The ideal spot for "curtailment" of offenders, Clark said, might be a section of an urban apartment house, or the "wing of a Y" where remedial help is provided, rather than ostracism.

TALENT

Clark, his sad face lighting for just a moment, said this country is so rich in talent, that a way can be found to bring its disparate elements together.

"There are not yet nearly enough professionals," he said, "but we have human resources available."

The cost of replacing prisons with a network of such

facilities might be "out of sight," Clark acknowledged, but he added "Doomsday is out of sight too."

"If we spend a small fraction of what goes into space on the human needs of offenders, we could reduce crime materially," he said. "Is it more important to have submarines armed with nuclear weapons floating around the oceans than, for instance, to eliminate dependency on heroin?"

Clark described the present bill for all prisons —

federal, state and county — as a "poor boy operation,"

costing not more than \$1 billion.

The latest figures show that of every \$1 spent, 95 cents is used for pure custody, he said.

"And there is more violence ahead," he said. "The simple fact is that prisoners are using it to try to solve their problems."

He described as an "emerging phenomenon" the new political activism of black inmates. "The black prisoner can be radicalized from poverty and the awareness of social injustice," he said.