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THE EFFECT OF "GETTING CAUGHT": APPREHENSION OF THE JUVENILE OFFENDER AS A CAUSE OF SUBSEQUENT DELINQUENCIES

Editorial Preface

The problem of juvenile delinquency has reached critical proportions—in 1968, more than one-half of all persons arrested for serious crimes were under eighteen years of age and one-fourth were fifteen years old or younger. This series of articles is an experiment in bringing together the thoughts, efforts and experiences of those in the field of the social sciences concerned with juvenile delinquency and those with similar concerns in the legal profession. Beliefs and opinions about juvenile delinquency are manifold; facts concerning the subject are more difficult to obtain. The national study conducted by Dr. Gold and Dr. Williams is one attempt to meet the need for empirical information in this area. Their study raises intriguing and critical questions about the nature of the treatment accorded delinquent youths who have been apprehended and offers the conclusion that those juveniles who have been apprehended may be more prone to subsequent delinquent activity than those juveniles whose delinquent behavior goes unapprehended. The study's results were then submitted to a family lawyer, a juvenile court judge, and a social worker who were asked to "respond from your vantage point."

Those responses follow the Gold-Williams study. Dr. Stuart indicates the methodological difficulties inherent in obtaining statistical information of this type and then suggests organizational and procedural alternatives as possible solutions. Judge Steketee centers his attention more on the delinquent youth himself, suggesting that the rehabilitative ideal may have continued vitality but only if implemented by new concepts, such as adaptations of the stimulus-response approach of the field of psychology. Dean

Drinan reacts with a novel and provocative proposal challenging accepted notions of youth-family relationships. He then suggests a two-fold attack focusing on the family's role as well as the need to clarify the discretion and scope of authority of law enforcement officials.

The problems posed by youthful deviant behavior will not be solved by one study or one series of articles. However, whatever effective reforms are to be made, as they must be made, will be possible only through an interchange of information and ideas, as exemplified here.