

“WE’RE BLOCKING YOUTH’S PATH TO CRIME”

The Los Angeles Coordinating Councils during the Great Depression

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Everywhere Americans turned in the early 1930s, they heard alarming reports about the “crime wave” sweeping the country. Much of the blame for the crisis fell on teenage boys. In response, civic leaders in hundreds of U.S. cities formed crime prevention groups that sought to slash the rate of juvenile delinquency. The Los Angeles Coordinating Councils (LACC), the largest and best-known of these groups, pioneered the community approach to crime control, which entailed extensive experiments in social engineering. Because it championed social work and environmental explanations of criminal behavior, the community approach differed sharply from the contemporaneous federal “war on crime.” During the 1940s, the LACC suffered a series of blows, including a significant loss of funding. Nevertheless, the LACC and the community approach represent a cohesive attempt by middle-class urban Americans during the Great Depression to create a safe and meaningful civic life.

Keywords: juvenile delinquency; crime prevention; Los Angeles; Great Depression

One early morning in 1934, prizefighter Bert Colima and several policemen surreptitiously entered the streets surrounding the outdoor produce market in downtown Los Angeles. The police watched with approval as Colima ducked inside an empty warehouse. To their relief, no one else noticed him, even though the marketplace teemed with activity: dozens of boys, most of them Mexican Americans from the adjacent neighborhood of Belvedere, raced around, dodging produce trucks and getting in the way of vendors setting up tables. As usual, the vendors kept a wary eye on the boys, whom they blamed for petty thefts costing them an aggregate of \$40,000 a year. The thefts were the reason that Colima, a former middleweight boxing champion of Mexico, concealed himself in the warehouse; he had agreed to take a leading part in an experimental program sponsored by a crime prevention group, the Los Angeles Coordinating Councils (LACC). The experiment required him to put to use his vast popularity. Known in the local Spanish-language press as *El Idolo* (The Idol), Colima represented the ultimate in manhood to young

AUTHOR’S NOTE: I gratefully acknowledge the invaluable advice of Bruce Wheeler, Clarice Feinman, Van Perkins, and the anonymous reviewers for the Journal of Urban History, who read and commented on earlier versions of this article.

JOURNAL OF URBAN HISTORY, Vol. 31 No. 2, January 2005 190-218

DOI: 10.1177/0096144204270750

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Mexican Americans in Southern California. Seeking to capitalize on his celebrity, LACC members asked Colima to lend his name and expertise to youth boxing clubs that they wanted to start downtown. They thought that if Colima were involved with the clubs, then the boys would spend their free time there, rather than at the market, which might greatly reduce the number of thefts.¹

After Colima slipped inside the warehouse, the police and a few LACC members rounded up the boys and herded them toward the spot where Colima hid, promising them that someone important wanted to talk to them. The boys kept a cautious distance until Colima dramatically stepped out of the shadows and began speaking in Spanish. The boys cheered wildly. Over the next few weeks, Colima and a social worker walked together through Belvedere, visiting the homes of 256 boys. While Colima talked about the clubs, the social worker made arrangements for hungry families to receive food. A year later, journalist Katharine Glover pronounced the experiment a success: "Where two hundred boys were brought into court each week on charges of stealing in the market, the number of cases has dwindled to practically none."²

LACC programs to reduce juvenile delinquency, such as youth boxing clubs, exemplify the work of crime prevention groups known as coordinating councils. These groups took root in hundreds of U.S. cities during the Great Depression, largely in response to widespread fears that crime and juvenile delinquency were on the rise. Although no scholarly consensus exists today regarding whether these fears had a factual basis, during the late 1920s and 1930s, sensational stories about armed robberies and "gangland" murders often dominated the news, effectively creating the impression that a tidal wave of lawlessness threatened America.³ Doomsayers claimed that if the president did not declare martial law soon, criminal psychopaths would take over the country. (The term *criminal psychopath* usually referred to young men, some still in their teens, who allegedly roved freely across the landscape, robbing and killing without conscience or mercy.) Most criminologists discounted the dire warnings, asserting that no significant rise in lawlessness was taking place, but few people paid attention. Even Homer S. Cummings, newly appointed U.S. attorney general in 1933, ignored scholars' findings. Eager to unify a worried nation under the banner of "law and order," Cummings declared war on crime: "It is a real war which confronts us all," he announced, "a war that must be successfully fought if life and property are to be secure in our country."⁴ Cummings's bellicose words galvanized Congress into passing much new crime legislation; in 1934 alone, it passed the National Firearms Act, the Fugitive Felon Act, and the Interstate Theft Act.⁵ But even as Cummings orchestrated the crime war from Washington, elsewhere in the nation, civic leaders were pursuing a completely different strategy: they established coordinating councils to reduce drastically juvenile delinquency. From early 1932 to mid-1936, more than 250 coordinating councils formed in twenty states; by late 1939, they numbered 598 in twenty-four states. Composed largely of social workers and members of white Euro-American civic

groups, such as the Kiwanis, coordinating councils worked closely with the police and juvenile courts. On a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis, they tried to remedy the social conditions that allegedly impelled some children and teenagers to break the law. In 1935, Samuel R. Blake, an LACC founding member and the sole judge of the Los Angeles Juvenile Court, raved about the effectiveness of coordinating councils, claiming that they slashed his court's caseload by 25 percent between 1932 and 1935. Never one for modesty, Blake bragged, "We're blocking youth's path to crime!"⁶

Although nearly forgotten today, coordinating councils merit study because they force a reevaluation of crime-fighting efforts during the 1930s. To date, historical scholarship on this topic has centered on the war on crime, especially the rise to power of the FBI under its crafty director, J. Edgar Hoover. Drawing on a wide range of sources, historians have linked the war on crime to major national developments in politics, law enforcement, and mass culture, such as the expansion of the state under the New Deal, the birth of the crime-control model of police work, and the emergence of bandits, gangsters, and "G-men" (FBI agents) as popular heroes.⁷ But a full understanding of crime-fighting efforts in the 1930s requires going beyond the crime war to examine coordinating councils, for they reveal the sharp differences between how cities and the federal government responded to the perceived crisis in law and order. Specifically, a study of coordinating councils uncovers their so-called "community approach" to crime, which did not conceptualize the city as a battlefield of war but rather as a network of social agencies that could foster a safe and satisfying civic life.

In its simplest formulation, the community approach held that the provision of well-equipped public playgrounds, social casework services, and organized recreation for city youths would discourage most juvenile delinquency, which in turn would eventually curtail most adult criminality. This line of thinking reflected the conventional wisdom that the "delinquents of today become the criminals of tomorrow."⁸ It also reflected the influence of sociologists Clifford R. Shaw, Ernest W. Burgess, and Joseph D. Lohman of the Illinois Institute for Juvenile Research, who argued that urban neighborhoods decisively shape—for good or ill—the conduct and character of residents. According to them, criminals are made, not born, but the criminalization process begins early, especially in poverty-stricken neighborhoods in which "social conditions are such that the child can, as a normal, healthy individual, become delinquent."⁹ Coordinating councils interpreted this idea to mean that every community had a positive duty to muster all its resources in an ongoing, concerted effort to eradicate bad social conditions through civic improvements and timely social intervention. Moreover, coordinating councils claimed that unless communities carried out this duty, the dreary cycle of delinquency and crime would continue forever.¹⁰

The LACC provides an excellent window to the community approach and coordinating councils, in part because it was the acknowledged leader of the

coordinating council movement. Established in early 1932 with a membership of approximately twenty, the LACC grew swiftly; by 1939, it reputedly had fifty thousand members who represented 5,800 local agencies and organizations.¹¹ Not surprisingly, its rapid growth inspired a lot of discussion among scholars, social workers, and public officials. This body of commentary, together with extant LACC records, shed light on the origins, evolution, and leadership role of the LACC, as well as the scope and nature of LACC activities.

The LACC also provides insight into coordinating councils because its wildly optimistic experiments in social engineering illuminate significant differences between the community approach and the war on crime. During the second week of January 1935, for example, while the LACC sponsored its first drive to collect toys for the Toy Loan Library (discussed below), the FBI fired tear gas and fifteen hundred rounds of ammunition into a house in Ocala, Florida, where two members of the infamous Barker-Karpis gang hid, killing them both.¹² When compared side by side, these two events may appear at first simply to represent opposite ends of the crime-fighting spectrum, with the toy collection drive for poor children at the social intervention end and the legalized double homicide of serious offenders at the law enforcement end. From this perspective, the LACC and the FBI complemented each other. However, close analysis of the LACC reveals that the gulf in tactics and strategy that separated it from the FBI encompasses more than the chasm between the mostly minor infractions that brought boys and girls into juvenile court and the major offenses of adult criminals; it encompasses fundamental differences in purpose and philosophy.

At heart, the LACC sought to reduce juvenile delinquency because its members wanted to exert control over civic life. Specifically, the LACC undertook an ambitious agenda of moral reforms, civic improvements, and social welfare programs in the name of crime prevention but with the explicit purpose of sculpting a new Los Angeles out of the old. In 1934, Katharine Lenroot, chief of the U.S. Children's Bureau, recognized this aspect of the LACC in a speech to the American Prison Association. After describing the LACC's work, she observed, "The primary objective of the Los Angeles program, however, is not to reduce delinquency but to enrich the possibilities for satisfying living in the areas served." Martin H. Neumeyer, a sociologist at the University of Southern California, reached the same conclusion. He asserted, "Coordinating councils attempt to form a united front among agencies and institutions of a locality to make the community a better place in which to live." LACC founder Kenyon J. Scudder phrased the matter somewhat differently. He claimed that a reduction in crime and delinquency was the intended by-product of LACC activities: "These Councils are awakening a new 'social consciousness' on the part of the community. Endeavoring to clean up their local situations, *they are gradually but steadily making the community a better place in which to live.* When they do that, crime and delinquency will be pushed out of the picture." On their part,

LACC members fully expected the new Los Angeles to reflect their vision of a cohesive and, to use one of their favorite words, “wholesome” city. They expressed complete confidence in their ability to transform civic life. “This is our community,” they declared in 1936. “We can make of it what we will.”¹³

Angelenos’ efforts to “clean up their local situations” and thereby reduce delinquency started long before the formation of the LACC in 1932. Indeed, throughout the 1910s and 1920s, Los Angeles enjoyed a reputation for national leadership in “crime prevention,” a shorthand term for public policies and social reforms explicitly aimed at keeping children from becoming involved in crime. Angelenos can trace the roots of their city’s leadership to the local election of 1909, when the reform-minded Good Government League, supported by middle-class women’s clubs and civic-minded businessmen, promised to sever the close ties between local government and organized commercial vice (gambling, prostitution, and illegal liquor sales). After the league swept all city offices, some of its supporters organized the Juvenile Protective Association. In the name of crime prevention, this group zealously investigated parks and commercial amusement places, looking for evidence of vice. It then used the evidence to lobby for the passage of many local ordinances, such as the closing of downtown dance halls and restrictions on the admittance of children to movie theaters.¹⁴ Its actions mirror those of reform groups in other cities during the Progressive Era. As historian Paul Boyer has noted, urban reformers tried to “re-create in the city the cohesive moral order of the village.”¹⁵ In particular, they sought to regulate the leisure time of the working class, especially working-class youths.

The Juvenile Protective Association realized its biggest victory in late 1909, when it successfully pressured local law enforcement agencies to create juvenile bureaus to take over the surveillance of parks and commercial amusements. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department were the first police forces in the nation to have juvenile details. In 1910, women’s groups achieved a related police reform: the appointment of Alice Stebbins Wells, an assistant pastor and social worker, to the LAPD’s new Juvenile Bureau. Almost overnight, Wells gained worldwide fame as the first U.S. policewoman. During the first half of her thirty-year career with the LAPD, she led the nationwide movement for women police, which attempted to carve out a place for women on the police force as crime prevention specialists.¹⁶

Meanwhile, crime prevention continued to be major focus of local reform. In 1914, the LAPD created a separate unit of policewomen, the City Mother’s Bureau, which specialized in “saving girls” from white slavery, venereal disease, and any behavior that might lead to their arrest for “sex delinquency.” This charge nearly always referred to premarital sex that was construed by authorities as consensual but not commercial. The City Mother’s Bureau was the first division of policewomen in the country and one of the longest lived, operating continuously until 1964. During its early years, it received much

positive publicity; in 1927, for example, Scotland Yard called it “the first effective [crime] preventive department established by any police department” in the world. In 1916, under pressure from black women’s groups, the LAPD hired Georgia Ann Robinson to work juvenile detail; she was the nation’s first African American policewoman.¹⁷

Angelenos’ willingness to experiment with the local criminal justice system reflected their expansive mood during the relatively prosperous Progressive Era, when many middle-class reformers across the nation—both male and female but predominantly female—looked first to the government to cure social ills and correct social injustices.¹⁸ In Los Angeles, reformers did not achieve all their aims; the Juvenile Protective Association never succeeded in persuading the city council to close down dance halls, for example. But in the realm of crime prevention, they made significant inroads on public policies and criminal justice agencies. Through their success in lobbying for the passage of local ordinances and the creation of specialized police units, reformers laid the institutional foundations for crime prevention as a legitimate function of local government. Reformers’ success in this regard helps explain why, in the 1930s, when middle-class Angelenos once again took up the cause of crime prevention, the most significant innovation, the LACC, enjoyed wide support from local officials. In fact, the LACC’s founder was a man well placed in the local criminal justice system, the first full-time chief probation officer, Kenyon J. Scudder.

Trained as a psychologist, Scudder joined the probation department in July 1931. Prior to his appointment, he served for four years (1927-1931) as superintendent of the Whittier State School for Boys, a reformatory located about twenty miles east of downtown Los Angeles.¹⁹ During his first few weeks in the probation department, Scudder prevailed on Judge Blake of the juvenile court to hold a one-day conference on crime. Held in late autumn and attended by approximately six hundred educators, police officers, social workers, and members of the clergy, the conference showcased Scudder’s plan to reduce juvenile delinquency in Los Angeles. As Scudder candidly explained to his audience, he based his ideas on the operations of the Berkeley (California) Coordinating Council, which he had visited two years earlier. In Berkeley, officials from schools, the police force, and welfare agencies had been meeting regularly for years to discuss which course of remedial action they should take with respect to individual children who seemed on the verge of getting into trouble with the law or who had already done so in minor ways. In the jargon of the day, these children and teenagers were *predelinquents* and *unadjusted youths*.²⁰

In theory, the terms *predelinquents* and *unadjusted youths* applied to both sexes. However, in Berkeley, Los Angeles, and elsewhere, too, coordinating councils in the 1930s concerned themselves much more with boys than girls because boys ran afoul of the law in much greater numbers than girls did. In 1927, 1928, and 1929, for example, more than four-fifths of all juvenile court

cases in the United States that were reported to the U.S. Children's Bureau concerned allegations against boys. Juvenile arrest statistics paint a similar picture. For instance, *LAPD Annual Reports* from 1926 through 1939 reveal that boys' arrests comprised slightly more than three-quarters of all juvenile arrests.²¹

Numbers alone do not tell the whole story, however, because boys and girls usually found themselves in juvenile court or under arrest for different types of offenses. For example, LAPD officers typically arrested boys for offenses against property, such as petty theft and grand theft auto, but they arrested girls for status offenses, most often sex delinquency and dependent person. (Adhering to the double sexual standard, the police arrested relatively few boys for sex delinquency.²²) The distinction between types of arrest is important because in the 1930s, public discourse on crime centered on offenses against persons and property, not status offenses.²³ Coordinating councils accordingly geared their work primarily toward boys, who seemed far more likely than girls to rob a bank someday or commit a murder.

At the one-day conference, Scudder asserted that the rate of juvenile crime in Los Angeles was rising but that if everyone worked together, they could reverse the trend. Conference participants responded enthusiastically. Dividing themselves into ten groups, they brainstormed for hours; some of them subsequently devoted years of service to the LACC.²⁴ Their intense interest in juvenile delinquency may seem odd at first, given the number and severity of social and economic problems plaguing Los Angeles and the nation as a whole during the Great Depression, such as mass unemployment, widespread business failures, and overwhelmed local charities.²⁵ An understanding of why, at a time of multiple crises, crime prevention commanded a great deal of attention requires placing the issue of juvenile delinquency into the broad context of Americans' worries about crime, morality, and youthful rebellion.

As historians have amply documented, youthful rebellion became a hot topic of discussion nationwide during the 1920s, largely because of the emergence in major cities of a new middle-class ethic of personal pleasure. This ethic, which put a high value on leisure, consumerism, and sexual liberalism, contrasted sharply with fading (but still powerful) middle-class Victorian moral standards, which prized thrift, hard work, and sexual restraint. The transition from middle-class Victorian moral standards to the ethic of personal pleasure entailed much long-term confusion and conflict. The emergence and widespread use of the terms *predelinquents* and *unadjusted youths* signify one site of the conflict, for public discourse over crime in the late 1920s and 1930s transformed some of the general hand-wringing about what Frederick Lewis Allen famously called the "revolution in morals and manners" of the 1920s into a pseudoscience of juvenile delinquency. According to experts of the day, the "new morality" led unwary adolescents to become hedonists who had no self-control. As hedonists, young people would allegedly stop at nothing,

including violent criminal acts, to satisfy their cravings for pleasure. Experts gloomily predicted that the new morality presaged a future filled with chaos.²⁶

In the early 1930s, the economic crises gripping the nation further darkened this dim view of young people's morality and the future. To Americans who felt, in historian Richard Gid Power's words, "oppressed by a sense that prohibition and the depression were draining American society of discipline and order," a sharp rise in juvenile delinquency must have seemed inevitable.²⁷ In their eyes, an entire generation was growing up in a disorderly world where none of the old rules about hard work and clean living seemed to apply. How long, worried Americans must have wondered, would children raised in such an environment remain law abiding? To some, the answer seemed frighteningly clear. Pessimists claimed that mass unemployment was undermining traditional family life by transforming bread-winning fathers into rail-riding vagrants. Experts on juvenile delinquency took an equally bleak view, especially of urban youths. According to them, urban living greatly increased the likelihood that a child would grow up to become a criminal. In rural areas, experts believed, boys and girls performed farm chores, which supposedly taught them habits of industry even during lean times. But in cities during the 1930s, employment opportunities for teenagers scarcely existed. As a result, experts warned, boys restlessly wandered city streets, formed gangs, read pornography, and frequented pool halls; sooner or later, some of these boys would slide almost imperceptibly into lives of crime. Some girls would fare no better.²⁸

Some of Americans' deepest anxieties about juvenile delinquency centered on the tens of thousands of children who ran away from home during the Great Depression, some temporarily, others permanently. Most allegedly headed toward cities. *American City* and other magazines published worrisome articles about the "exodus of children," estimated to number more than 250,000, of whom one in twenty was female. Experts in various fields predicted that the presence of "drifting boys" on the nation's roads meant an imminent rise in crime unless strong measures were taken. For example, in 1934, B. L. Coulter, president of the National Conference of Juvenile Agencies, urged that the "large youthful, floating population" of children be immediately placed in institutions. "Otherwise," he warned, they will surely "become the racketeers and gangsters of tomorrow."²⁹ In the early 1930s, this kind of talk demonized runaway children. No matter their characters or circumstances, they should be institutionalized because their families were not keeping watch over them. They epitomized the unadjusted youths who seemed destined for criminal careers unless social agencies intervened.

Among psychologists and criminologists, theories about whether and how juvenile delinquency led to adult criminality took on new life in the late 1920s and 1930s, fueled by a spate of published studies of wayward youths and sensational news stories about the antisocial childhoods of some famous

criminals.³⁰ Some scholars claimed that children only six years old were sliding into lives of crime. For example, J. Harold Williams of the University of California, Los Angeles, pointed out that “if conservative estimates of the extent of juvenile delinquency are to be relied upon, there may be today in the United States as many as twenty thousand children embarking on delinquent careers before contemplating the second grade of school.” Moreover, most of the blame for the crime wave fell on teenage boys and young men barely out of their teens. “Boys of nineteen, according to the United States Department of Justice, make up the largest single group of criminals in America,” Katherine Glover informed readers of the *Woman’s Home Companion*. “Ranking almost as high are youngsters at the ages of eighteen and of twenty. These are indeed appalling figures—a cold statistical reminder of familiar headlines and pictures of young gangster faces prematurely hardened to theft and murder.” O. H. Close, the superintendent of the Preston (California) School of Industry, a boys’ reformatory, stated the matter more bluntly: “Eighty percent of the crime committed in this country is traceable to boys and young men in their twenties.”³¹

Given these grim pronouncements, no wonder hundreds of U.S. cities established coordinating councils. In Los Angeles, Scudder wasted little time in implementing the recommendations given to him by the participants of the conference on crime. From the start, he and virtually everyone else recognized that the sheer size of Los Angeles meant that more than one council was needed. The plans accordingly provided for one council in each high school district, named after the district itself, such as the Glendale Coordinating Council. Councils at the district level were known generically as “local councils” to distinguish them from the parent organization, the LACC.³²

By using high school districts as the organizing units, LACC founders tried to ensure that the crusade against delinquency would take place at the neighborhood level. The emphasis on neighborhood reflects the community approach, which held that Americans must stop relying solely on the police and the courts to eradicate crime and delinquency. According to this line of thinking, neither of these agencies can, singly or in combination, remedy the complex social conditions that encourage lawlessness and disorder. Americans must therefore realize that the eradication of crime and delinquency in every neighborhood was the collective responsibility of every community. As Scudder proclaimed in 1935, “Delinquency and crime will never be reduced until the people in the Community go into action.”³³

In January 1932, Scudder organized the first local council in Whittier, where he was well known for his superintendency of the boys’ reformatory.³⁴ By March, the Whittier Council seemed to be thriving, so over the next two months, Scudder, with Blake’s help, organized fourteen more local councils, locating each in a neighborhood that police records showed had high rates of juvenile crime, such as Belvedere. In all likelihood, these neighborhoods were in working-class sections of Los Angeles because the children of the working

class, especially those with African or Latin American ancestry, got arrested at much higher rates than the children of the middle class.³⁵ It should be noted that working-class children's relatively high arrest rate does not necessarily mean that they broke the law more often or in greater numbers than middle-class children did. Rather, as scholars of the police have documented, arrest practices reflect and incorporate complex interactions of race, class, gender, culture, and urban geography. For example, juvenile court records show that many working-class Angelenos went to the police for help in reinforcing parental authority over their children, sometimes even asking officers to arrest their children. As sociologist Egon Bittner has observed, poor people have long used the police as problem solvers in domestic matters because they cannot afford lawyers or other middle-class service providers. The class bias of police work, especially in patrol assignments, affected arrest rates, too. For example, officers routinely patrolled commercial amusement places, which brought them daily into working-class districts. The frequent presence of officers in these neighborhoods kept the arrest rate of working-class children higher than the arrest rate of middle-class children, for the police did not regularly patrol middle-class neighborhoods and so had far fewer opportunities to arrest the children who lived there. Finally, with respect to dynamics of race, the LAPD was, in the words of historian Joseph Gerald Woods, "a cauldron of racial and religious prejudice." His statement matches the recollections of Frances Feldman, who headed a social welfare agency in Belvedere during the 1930s. She recalls that some police officers viewed all boys of Mexican descent as potential thieves, an attitude that surely influenced arrest practices.³⁶

Although, with the exception of Whittier, the LACC began in neighborhoods with high rates of juvenile arrests, it quickly spread throughout the county. Between mid-1932 and late 1933, the number of local councils rose from fifteen to forty-six; by October 1934, fifty-two local councils had formed, many of them in middle-class districts to the west and north of downtown, such as Pasadena.³⁷ The LACC's presence in middle-class neighborhoods accorded with Scudder's view that although most delinquents came from poverty-stricken backgrounds, delinquency itself could arise in any setting where children encountered moral hazards or lacked wholesome recreation. An LACC pamphlet from 1934 titled "Who Is Delinquent?" addressed this point. Written by Scudder and his assistant, Kenneth S. Beam, the pamphlet cites an LACC-sponsored study of fourteen thousand wards of the Los Angeles Juvenile Court. Based on information from the court's case files, the study found that 5,440 (38.86 percent) of the wards came from "moderate or well-to-do homes." To Scudder and Beam, the fact that large numbers of middle-class youths got into trouble with the law proved that the cause of delinquency primarily lay in the community's neglect of children's moral and social welfare. Referring to the wards, they asserted, "More than half are normal,

healthy, vigorous youngsters who might have kept out of trouble if the Community had done something about it."³⁸

In analyzing the rapid proliferation of local councils in Los Angeles, one factor stands out: sometime in late 1932, most of the original fifteen local councils loosened their criteria for membership. Originally, local councils followed the lead of the Berkeley Coordinating Council, which restricted membership to educators, social workers, police officers, and probation officers. This restriction meant that local councils had five to ten members each.³⁹ However, shortly after their founding, most of the original local councils jettisoned the Berkeley prototype by opening council membership to a variety of people from middle-class occupations and organizations. Other local councils quickly followed suit. Typically, local councils asked clubwomen, librarians, the clergy, public nurses, recreation directors, and scout troop leaders to become members. They also asked civic, fraternal, and veterans' organizations to send representatives, as well as Big Brothers, Big Sisters, and Parent-Teacher Associations.⁴⁰ Significantly, they did not ask working-class groups, such as labor unions, to send representatives, nor did they open council membership to residents of their districts on the basis of residency alone. As a result, few, if any, people of color or working-class white Euro-Americans belonged to the LACC in the 1930s.

According to Scudder, local councils decided to expand their membership because they realized that they needed powerful allies in the community. As he explained, the reduction of juvenile delinquency "was too big an undertaking for the small groups composing the original councils, but organizations and individuals ideally fitted for this work were ready to undertake it if the need and the program were made clear." In December 1933, Scudder reported that the LACC had a collective membership of "more than one thousand prominent people interested in social work and in the betterment of community conditions."⁴¹

The expansion of membership not only facilitated the LACC's growth, but it also changed the structure of local councils and their scope of activities. Most important, it split local councils into three committees: adjustment, environment, and character building. The adjustment committee carried on the original work of the council. Typically, it met once or twice a month to decide how to handle individual cases of children who were referred to it by the police (the source of most referrals) or another member agency. Regardless of the source of referral, all participating agencies shared their records on the children. Because it handled confidential matters, this committee met separately from the other two, and it restricted its membership to nurses, psychologists, social workers, police, and probation officers.⁴² However, it regularly called on other committees for help. For example, it often alerted the environment committee to conditions in the council district that allegedly posed a threat to the moral safety of children.

The environment committee had a much broader base of membership than the adjustment committee, and it had a broader scope of action. Schools, churches, civic groups, service clubs, fraternal lodges, and veterans' organizations had representation on environment committees. For the most part, the committee investigated businesses in and near its district that were associated with liquor, leisure, and the commercialization of sex. When it concluded its investigation, the committee gave a written report to LACC member agencies, including the police, so that the agencies could take any necessary remedial action.⁴³ For example, one environment committee blew the whistle on saloons that sold liquor to minors, while another assisted the police with undercover investigations of news stands located near schools that allegedly sold pornographic literature. Environment committees also rated movies on a "wholesomeness" scale. All these activities gave environment committees a reputation as "purity squads," a label that Beam, Scudder's assistant, vehemently rejected. However, the evidence indicates that the label was accurate. For example, when the Long Beach Coordinating Council, through the work of its environment committee, prevailed on the city council to prohibit dancing in certain types of establishments, such as beer halls, it gave as a reason the need to uphold standards of decency.⁴⁴

Although environment committees deserved their reputation as purity squads, they sometimes investigated conditions that had little to do with sex or liquor. For example, the environment committee of the Echo Park Coordinating Council enlisted the help of sociologist Walter Hertzog of California Christian College to discover why youth gangs in one part of their district "ran rampant through the streets." Hertzog and the committee concluded that poverty, "a discouraged adult population," and a lack of playgrounds forced children and teenagers to spend their leisure time in destructive ways. To remedy the situation, the committee arranged for its member agencies to repair an old, abandoned church in the heart of the district's worst "delinquency area." The Rotary Club converted the main auditorium into a gymnasium, the Kiwanis converted the back room into a craft shop and boys' shower room, and several women's clubs converted the parsonage next door into a clubhouse for girls. "Gangs no longer race the streets," Scudder and Beam reported in 1934. "The old church now known as 'Sunset Center' is indeed a hive of activity. . . . In place of street gangs and dodging Cops, now five thousand are in attendance every thirty days."⁴⁵

In converting the abandoned church into a youth center, the Echo Park environment committee performed the kind of work that character-building committees usually did. Like the environment committee, the character-building committee had fairly loose membership criteria. Teachers, librarians, the clergy, recreation directors, and adult leaders of scout troops served on it, but members of other middle-class groups joined it, too. This committee had two major tasks: to convince individual boys and girls to join a particular youth

organization, such as Woodcraft Rangers, and to make sure that all school-age children and teenagers who lived in the council district had ample opportunities to engage in “wholesome” recreational activities, such as hikes, team sports, chaperoned dances, and overnight camping trips.⁴⁶ In at least some council districts, character-building committees attempted to tailor recreational activities to the interests of specific groups of children, such as the boxing clubs for the boys of Belvedere.

The emphasis on approved recreational activity reflected the theory that urban children got into trouble with the law because they had time on their hands and nothing better to do. Sociologist Frederick M. Thrasher, a renowned expert on criminal gangs of boys, summarized the theory in 1936: “One of the most potent causes of crime operating in the beginnings of criminal careers is the unwholesome use of leisure.”⁴⁷ LAPD officials concurred. As part of their participation in the LACC, officers of the Hollenbeck Division took 570 boys on an overnight camping trip in 1934 at no expense to the boys’ families.⁴⁸ (The Hollenbeck Division was in Boyle Heights, a working-class neighborhood of Jews, Mexican Americans, and Japanese Americans.) Not to be outdone, officers of the 77th Street Division in south-central Los Angeles established the first police-sponsored Boy Scout troop in the city. As the LAPD explained, “Great progress has been made with this troop, for which funds were raised by a community dance. Complete equipment, including uniforms, sleeping bags and cooking utensils, has been supplied to each of the thirty-two Scouts.”⁴⁹

Unfortunately, evidence is sparse regarding how character-building committees made arrangements for a boy or girl to join a youth organization or take part in approved recreational activities. It seems likely that some children gladly took part but that others needed to be coaxed or bullied. Teachers, the clergy, and the police probably used their influence. In addition, local councils assigned workers from federally funded Delinquency Prevention and Recreation Projects (discussed below) to visit children in their homes and encourage them to participate in what the LACC described as “interesting activities that are available in their neighborhood.”⁵⁰ Bert Colima was a project worker whose home visits in Belvedere reportedly worked especially well; according to the LACC, not one boy turned down his invitation to join a boxing club.⁵¹

With a few exceptions, such as Blake, Beam, and Scudder, most LACC members volunteered their time. In 1932, its first year of operation, the paucity of public funds meant that whenever the LACC incurred costs, member agencies raised money or solicited donations of materials and labor. But in spring 1933, with the advent of the New Deal, local councils’ heavy dependence on private and voluntary donations ended. Starting in April, the LACC obtained hundreds of workers paid initially by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, then successively by the Civil Works Administration, the State Emergency Relief Administration, and the Works Progress Administration (WPA).⁵² The influx of these workers greatly expanded the scope of the LACC by allowing it

to undertake simultaneously a wide range of activities. From 1933 until 1941, when the WPA ended and federal subsidies for the LACC dried up, relief workers performed the lion's share of LACC's day-to-day activities.

From the start, the LACC assigned relief workers to an array of Delinquency Prevention and Recreation Projects, each created by the LACC or a member agency. Between July 10 and September 10, 1933, for example, the LACC assigned 1,542 project workers to 353 playgrounds in Los Angeles County. Some workers supervised children's play, while others repaired playground equipment or coached boys in various sports.⁵³ Over the next few years, the number and scope of LACC projects grew. In 1936, for example, project workers led hikes, built community centers and athletic fields, tended community gardens, ran summer camps for boys, chaperoned dances for teenagers, and took a total of sixty thousand children on free excursions to local places of interest, such as zoos. In addition, they compiled statistics on juvenile crime; worked on the LACC newsletter, the *Coordinating Council Bulletin* (published six to twelve times a year from 1933 to 1939); and performed clerical duties for local councils. They also worked for the administrative and research arms of the LACC, known respectively as the Central Council and Juvenile Research Council.⁵⁴

The above list of Delinquency Prevention and Recreation Projects is not exhaustive, nor does it convey the impact and enthusiasm of project workers. For example, in 1934, a project worker assigned to the Southwest Coordinating Council proposed that it establish a Toy Loan Library. He thought that broken toys should be repaired and disinfected by project workers and then loaned out, like library books, to poor children. Local council members liked the idea, and with the cooperation of the owner of a local movie theater, they arranged for a special children's matinee to be shown on January 19, 1935; the charge for admission was one toy per child. The theater owner collected nine hundred toys that day and hundreds more during the following weeks. The Toy Loan Library became such a success that within three years, fifteen other local councils had organized their own libraries. Not surprisingly, children loved to borrow toys; between December 1936 and July 1937, for example, 4,054 children borrowed 61,374 toys. To handle the volume of work, the LACC Central Council appointed a Toy Loan Advisory Board, which set up a central repair facility downtown known as the Toy Shop. The Toy Shop employed project workers for years.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the LACC had caught the eye of scholars, journalists, and professionals in the fields of education, social work, and criminal justice. Starting in 1935, popular magazines published articles on the LACC, praising it lavishly. For example, in 1936, Katherine Glover, writing for the *Woman's Home Companion*, asserted, "Los Angeles accepts the theory that ultimate responsibility for juvenile crime rests with the community. . . . All that is necessary [to reduce delinquency] is that any village, town, city or state be sufficiently aroused to discover its own consciences. Means are always at hand with which

to act for the protection of youth.” Other writers extolled the democratic spirit of coordinating councils. In 1937, sociologist Norman Fenton claimed that the LACC promoted grassroots democracy. “No attempt has been made to standardize the organization,” he stated. “Rather the policy in Los Angeles County has been to encourage local initiative and to foster individuality and freedom of action.” He concluded that “the coordinating council is helping to strengthen the foundation of American democracy.” Lawrence Riggs of Johns Hopkins University agreed. In 1940, he wrote, “The coordinating council idea provides opportunity for the kind of democratic participation in community affairs that is needed in America today.” The strongest words of praise came from Sanford Bates, the director of federal prisons. According to him, the rapid proliferation of coordinating councils constituted a social movement that “must succeed because there is nothing left to try if this fails. . . . It’s the only movement today that is consistent with a democratic government, and the Lord knows we need things today that are consistent with democracy.”⁵⁶

The perceived link between coordinating councils and democracy enhanced the LACC’s reputation, but all the fine words belied the fact that the LACC was not democratic. It did not allow members to elect the Central Council or vote on general policies, and it restricted council membership to certain occupations and recognized groups in the community, which kept it overwhelmingly white Euro-American and middle class. In addition, local councils did not ask residents for a mandate to carry out LACC activities.⁵⁷ It probably would not have occurred to them that a mandate was needed because most LACC members worked in the “helping professions” or represented civic-minded groups that gave them a self-identity as agents of positive change on behalf of other people. And finally, contrary to Norman Fenton’s statements quoted above about local initiative and independence, the LACC did not give much leeway to local councils. Instead, it imposed a rigid organizational structure (the three committees), as well as uniform procedures. The Central Council even went so far as to publish a calendar of topics for local councils and their committees to discuss. In February 1936, all adjustment committees were supposed to discuss “The Effects of Economic Stress on Youth” and in July 1936, “Youth and the Automobile Problem.”⁵⁸

Local councils’ middle-class membership and lack of autonomy constituted a fundamental difference between the LACC and the Chicago Area Project, a crime prevention organization founded in 1934 by Clifford Shaw and his associates at the Institute for Juvenile Research. From the start, they emphasized the need for the people who lived in so-called “delinquency areas” (neighborhoods with high rates of crime) to improve bad social conditions. It accordingly encouraged residents to form self-help committees to study local problems, elect leaders, formulate goals, and raise funds for their activities. Typically, the committees used the funds they raised to hire people from their own neighborhoods, including former members of criminal gangs, to carry out various programs, such as organized team sports for youths. As sociologists

Neil Betten and Michael J. Austin point out, “The Project represented an early effort to depart from the traditional middle-class social agency model of service.”⁵⁹ Although Betten and Austin do not mention the LACC, they could have used it as an example of the traditional model of service. In sum, in the 1930s, both the LACC and the Project emphasized social and environmental causes of crime, but they had different strategies regarding community-based crime prevention.

In Los Angeles, LACC proponents frequently claimed that their strategy of crime prevention worked wonderfully well. For example, LAPD lieutenant C. W. Lester, head of the Juvenile Welfare Bureau, asserted in 1934 that over the course of a single month, one of his officers, working in conjunction with the LACC, greatly reduced the number of boys arrested for theft downtown. Every day for a month, this officer and two project workers sat in an office belonging to a downtown merchant, interviewing boys whom patrol officers brought in on suspicion of theft. No arrests were made; instead, the police officer and the two project workers took down all pertinent information about the boys. Next, they made “home investigations” to determine if the boys’ families were short of food or other necessities, and finally, through the LACC, they arranged for a social work agency to take over the case. “On the first day the plan was in operation,” Lester reported, “thirty boys were brought in; on the first Saturday, one hundred and two. In the first and only month this plan was handled by the police, two hundred twenty-five boys were brought in—but no boy was brought in twice. At the end of the month, there were days when no boys at all came in.”⁶⁰

Scudder, too, made numerous claims about the effectiveness of the LACC. In 1934, he asserted that two years earlier, the juvenile court had processed 129 petitions for delinquency from just one small section of the city. To remedy the problem, concerned citizens formed a local council and saw immediate results. “Only eight children from that section were brought into court [in 1933],” Scudder stated. “The coordinating council accepted its responsibility and early adjustments were made.” In a similar vein, journalist J. P. McEvoy reported that in 1931, approximately six thousand children passed through the Los Angeles Juvenile Court, but that in 1937, the number was only 3,700, thanks entirely to the LACC. As McEvoy explained, “The decrease closely corresponds to the number of children who went through the adjustment committees of the Coordinating Councils.” Karl Holton, Scudder’s successor as chief probation officer, also credited the LACC with slashing the court’s caseload. In 1940, he cited statistics showing a 35 percent drop in the number of cases between 1931 and 1939, despite a concurrent rise in the county’s population.⁶¹

As the above examples illustrate, proponents often measured the LACC’s success by pointing to the juvenile court’s shrinking caseload. In their eyes, a substantially slimmer caseload meant, in Blake’s memorable phrase, that the

LACC was “blocking youth’s path to crime.” Reaching this conclusion required some mental gymnastics, however. First, it required equating a reduction in the court’s caseload with a reduction in the actual incidence of juvenile crime. This equation wrongly presumes that the actual incidence of juvenile crime more or less matches the officially recorded incidence. However, the actual incidence is always unknown because some crimes go undetected or unreported to authorities, and adults sometimes get falsely blamed for crimes committed by children (and vice versa). Second, it required overlooking factors unrelated to the LACC that could help explain the declining number of delinquency cases, such as changes in police patrol assignments. None of the LACC leaders mentioned other possible factors in discussions of this issue. Finally and most important, it required glossing over the fact that the LACC often took the place of the juvenile court. As mentioned earlier, police departments and other LACC member agencies referred boys and girls to adjustment committees of local councils, often in lieu of arrest or filing petitions for delinquency. In one nine-month period (November 1, 1934 to July 31, 1935), the adjustment committees of thirty-five local councils collectively handled 923 cases, of which the LAPD referred 539, other police agencies 87, and schools 116.⁶² Had the LACC not existed, many of these youths would have probably found themselves in juvenile court. This conclusion finds support in the observation of J. P. McEvoy, quoted above, regarding the close correspondence between the number of children’s cases handled by adjustment committees in 1937 and the decrease in juvenile court cases that same year. A cynic might argue that the LACC saved children from the juvenile court rather than from lives of crime. No doubt LACC members would have answered the cynic by saying that the LACC’s intervention in the lives of “predelinquents” and “unadjusted youths” steered many of them away from pursuing illegal activities that would have otherwise eventually landed them in court. From the LACC’s viewpoint, the court’s shrinking caseload proved that ever fewer children were getting into serious trouble with the law, which in turn proved that the community approach worked.

Some people may have disputed the LACC’s claims to effectiveness, but no record of their criticism survives. Remarkably, the entire body of commentary from the 1930s about coordinating councils contains no overt criticism from anyone outside the councils, and only a few negative remarks from council members themselves. For example, a transcript of a panel discussion held in 1936 at the California State Conference of Coordinating Councils refers to the possibility that councils “coddled” juvenile delinquents. The transcript features eleven questions and answers; most of the questions concern the nuts and bolts of how to run a local council, but one question asks, “Is there a danger of coddling: too much guidance and recreation for juvenile delinquents?” John R. Lyons of the San Diego County Probation Department supplied the answer, which summarizes the premise of the community approach: “Juvenile

delinquents are in no danger of coddling; too much guidance and recreation have never been given them. On the contrary, delinquents are usually neglected, unguided, and without adequate recreational facilities.”⁶³

Insufficient evidence exists to explore how often coordinating councils faced the coddling charge or any other charge. The historical record is silent in this respect, probably because the prevention of juvenile delinquency was a cause that attracted a lot of lip service. Saul Alinsky, a pioneer in community organizing, said as much in 1946. “Everyone is agin [*sic*] sin and everyone is agin [*sic*] delinquency. The Republicans, the Democrats, the Socialists, the Communists, the Catholics, the Protestants, the Jews, the Negroes and the whites, the Big Business Men, and the bosses of big criminal gangs all stand united and agreed in their opposition to juvenile delinquency.”⁶⁴ Alinsky’s remarks serve as a tart reminder not to interpret the lack of overt criticism about coordinating councils as signifying universal approval, for virtually everyone talked a good game about the need to reduce juvenile delinquency. Therefore, uncovering voices of dissent or opposition to coordinating councils requires paying attention to the absence of support from prominent public officials in criminal justice, notably the chief architects of the war on crime, Attorney General Cummings and FBI Director Hoover. It also requires paying attention to their articulation of policies in the 1930s that contradicted environmental theories of crime or made no provision for community-based crime prevention. The historical record in this respect is voluminous.

In 1936, for example, Hoover participated in a roundtable discussion in New York on “crime and youth today.” While other participants in the discussion, including District Attorney Samuel J. Foley of the Bronx and Warden Lewis E. Lawes of Sing-Sing, pointed to bad social conditions and a lack of organized youth recreation as major causes of juvenile delinquency, Hoover blamed delinquency solely on lax parents. In his words, “We of law enforcement find these children stealing automobiles, committing almost 1,000 murders every year; we find that there are tens of thousands of burglaries and larcenies perpetrated by boys and girls who in any other generation would have been under the discipline of vigilant parents. This is an undeniable indictment of the American parent today.” Similarly, while other participants recommended the construction of public playgrounds as a remedy, Hoover recommended universal fingerprinting.⁶⁵

Hoover’s response probably came as no surprise to those who worked with him in the 1930s, such as Justin Miller, former dean of Duke University Law School and a proponent of the community approach. In a memorandum to Cummings in December 1935, Miller complained that Hoover repeatedly revealed “an intolerance and ignorance” of crime prevention.⁶⁶ According to historian Claire Bond Potter, Cummings appointed Miller in July 1934 as a special assistant in the Justice Department simply to placate supporters of community-based crime prevention programs, who were increasingly

unhappy with the department's single-minded focus on repressive law enforcement measures.⁶⁷

Notwithstanding his opinion that juvenile delinquency arose from bad child-rearing practices, Hoover flatly rejected social and environmental theories of crime. As he told a convention of police chiefs in 1935, "Here at this meeting, a criminal is understood to be a criminal, with a gun in his hand and murder in his heart. It is not necessary here, in discussing what shall be done with that human rat, to persuade some altruistic soul that he [the criminal] is not a victim of environment or circumstances." In Hoover's view, the well-spring of criminality in each lawbreaker lay in "that peculiar twist in his nature that sent him steadily into new fields of viciousness."⁶⁸

The idea that criminality arose from a twisted nature, rather than flawed nurturing, served to justify the government's war on crime at the expense of the community approach. Specifically, it made social intervention and civic improvements appear useless as crime-fighting strategies, for what good would it do to provide wholesome recreational opportunities to children whose twisted natures would impel them to commit increasingly vicious crimes, no matter their circumstances or environment? The idea that criminals are born, not made, also justified tracking down, cornering, and perhaps even killing a "human rat." Indeed, the theory of the "born criminal" provided much of the philosophical undergirding for the war on crime, especially with respect to what historian Claire Bond Potter calls the FBI's "moral and legal right to shoot first, and shoot to kill."⁶⁹ As she persuasively argues, the FBI first established its right to kill someone without warning during its highly publicized hunt for John Dillinger, whom Cummings, Hoover, and the press portrayed as the penultimate "born criminal." The *New York Daily Mirror*, for example, called Dillinger "a freak . . . a cross between a mad dog and a cobra."⁷⁰ This characterization served to justify, at least for the FBI, Cummings's famous directive to lawmen hunting for Dillinger, "Shoot first—then count to ten."⁷¹

Cummings's deliberately provocative words illustrate the melodramatic urgency that he and his public relations team injected into speeches and press releases to make the strong-arm measures of the government seem vitally necessary. At the start of the crime war in 1933, for example, Cummings warned Americans that they were "confronted with real warfare which an armed underground is waging upon organized society."⁷² This pronouncement painted the crime problem in broad strokes as a national crisis requiring immediate, defensive, and retributive action, primarily the establishment of a national police force cum army, the FBI. In contrast, proponents of the community approach conceptualized the crime problem and its solution in local terms. Instead of identifying the source of the problem as a subversive group on the outside of American society (the "armed underground"), they said crime arose from bad but curable social conditions inside American society, specifically in neighborhoods with high rates of juvenile delinquency and in

communities that paid insufficient attention to children's welfare. Bellicose imagery did not serve their interests, for their avowed goal was to improve civic life, not turn their cities into battlefields.

Hoover and his public relations team used slightly different language from Cummings to rally support for the crime war. As historians have documented, Hoover frequently employed metaphors of dirt, disease, and vermin. "Crime is sordid, filthy and dirty," he told an audience of college students in 1936. "It is a dangerous, cancerous condition which, if not curbed and beaten down, will soon eat at the very vitals of the country." Warming to his theme, he asked the students to refrain from referring to lawbreakers as "public enemies" on the grounds that it made the lawbreakers feel important. "Criminals like to bask in the sunshine as 'big shots,'" he explained. "Well, to me they are just public rats." In speech after speech, Hoover's vituperative language drove home the point that criminals were less than human. They were "yellow rats," "the spawn of hell," and "vermin of the worst type."⁷³

Hoover's characterization of criminals as subhuman fiends conveyed two closely-related messages: first, that a state of war, whether formally declared or not, always exists between criminals and everyone else, and second, that to ensure its own survival, the nation needs soldiers willing to sacrifice their lives for the public good. A case in point for Hoover was the FBI's hunt for Lester Willis, also known as "Baby Face" Nelson. Describing the end of the hunt, Hoover reported, "The career of 'Baby Face' Nelson is over; he died of seventeen bullet wounds while two of the finest men I ever knew gave their own clean lives that they might serve society by ending his filthy one. . . . That is progress."⁷⁴

Proponents of the community approach had a different idea of what constituted progress. They thought that they could make communities so strong, cohesive, and morally vigilant; so filled with wholesome recreational opportunities for youths; and so generous with social casework services, that the children of the communities would have no inclination to break the law, either before or after they reached adulthood. In this context, progress meant the creation of a network of social agencies that would first identify predelinquents and unadjusted youths and then intervene in their lives, purportedly for their own good and the good of society. In Los Angeles, social intervention took many forms: hikes, team sports, camping trips, chaperoned dances, community gardens, toy loan libraries, referrals to social welfare agencies, and—of equal importance—the removal of social conditions deemed morally hazardous to children. The LACC also effected civic improvements, notably the repair, construction, and maintenance of playgrounds, athletic fields, and community centers. All these activities were as much a part of the crime-fighting efforts of the Great Depression as the war on crime.

According to historians of the FBI, the war on crime lasted only from 1933 to 1936, but in that short span, it launched the cultural transformation of

Hoover into a national hero and the near-enshrinement of his ideas about crime and its control. During that same period, the coordinating council movement swept across the nation, sparking the interest of journalists and politicians, as well as professionals in the fields of education, sociology, social work, and criminal justice. However, during the 1940s, the movement sputtered and died, even though juvenile delinquency remained a hot topic of debate, especially during World War II. From 1942 through 1945, numerous experts on juvenile delinquency warned the public (and each other) of the expected deleterious impact of the war on American youth. They often disagreed over what could be done to remedy the situation, but very few mentioned coordinating councils. Moreover, many experts gloomily repeated the old chestnut that the employment of mothers outside the home would inevitably lead to a rise in lawlessness among children.⁷⁵ By blaming working mothers, experts echoed and thereby endorsed Hoover's theory that bad child-rearing practices caused juvenile delinquency.

In Los Angeles, coordinating councils weakened during the 1940s but did not die. A number of factors, both local and national, contributed to their decline. The single sharpest blow came in 1941, when the WPA ended and federal subsidies for Delinquency Prevention and Recreation Projects ceased. Some LACC programs, notably the Toy Loan Library, survived, but most of LACC's recreational activities—hikes, chaperoned dances, overnight camping trips, and the like—were rarely or never offered again. The loss of New Deal funds permanently shrank the number and scope of LACC activities.

At roughly the same time, the LACC suffered another serious blow, the withdrawal of the LAPD from participation in local councils. Because the LAPD had annually referred hundreds of children to adjustment committees in lieu of arresting them, its departure significantly affected the committees' work. No one at the LAPD explained the reason for the change in policy; however, as historians of the police have documented, during the late 1930s and the early 1940s, the LAPD gradually adopted the crime-control model of police work, which entailed the repudiation of crime prevention as a police function. Based on the philosophy and tactics of the FBI, the crime-control model defined the police as soldiers in an unending war on crime. The LAPD was among the first police forces in the country to adopt the crime-control model, and it swiftly became well-known for its combative style, which it called "professional."⁷⁶

The LAPD began moving toward the crime-control model in 1939. Late that year, newly appointed chief Arthur S. Hohmann restructured the department along military lines of command and instructed officers not to engage in any activity that smacked of social work. For example, he told the officer in charge of the juvenile detail, "The Commander of this division . . . must maintain constant surveillance over the activities of his entire personnel to obviate any tendency toward retrogression into . . . the particular field of social welfare

work.” In 1942, the LAPD changed the official name of the juvenile detail from the Juvenile Welfare Bureau to the Juvenile Control Division.⁷⁷ The substitution of *control* for *welfare* speaks volumes about the LAPD’s redefinition of its relationship to children.

Perhaps nothing better illustrates the weakened status of the LACC than its failure to respond adequately to the deteriorating social conditions of Mexican American neighborhoods. Starting in the late 1930s, large numbers of Mexicans and Mexican Americans migrated to Los Angeles, looking for work. Their migration created extremely congested living conditions in Belvedere and other Mexican American neighborhoods, which led to tensions between the teenage sons of newly arrived families and the sons of longtime residents. These tensions sometimes erupted into turf fights that attracted the attention of authorities. According to one group of scholars, the fights were part of the process that transformed some of the nondelinquent youth gangs of the 1920s and 1930s into the truly criminal gangs of the late 1940s and beyond.⁷⁸

It is unknown whether the LACC tried to improve conditions, but if it did, it failed. However, Karl Holton, chief probation officer since 1939, did not lose faith in the community approach. He began a series of meetings with Mexican American community leaders, notably Edward Quevedo and Manuel Ruiz Jr. Together, they and a dozen or so other public officials, including Mayor Fletcher Bowron, established in 1941 a new organization, not affiliated with the LACC: the Coordinating Council for Latin American Youth (CCLAY). This organization, which had a Mexican American leadership, largely took the place of local councils in all Mexican American neighborhoods in the county.⁷⁹

The creation of the CCLAY helps explain the LACC’s silence and inaction during the most famous incident involving juvenile delinquency in Los Angeles, the zoot suit riots of 1943. These riots occurred over a ten-day period in early June, when thousands of white Euro-American servicemen and civilians brutally attacked teenage boys and young men, nearly all of them Mexican Americans, who wore the distinctive clothing style known internationally as zoot suits. Most local newspapers cheered the attacks, portraying the victims as teenage gangsters. The hostility of the press toward Mexican American boys was nothing new, for over the preceding year, local newspapers had printed story after story about what they called the “Mexican juvenile crime wave.” For example, one newspaper article claimed that Mexican American youth gangs were “responsible for a reign of terror” in the city.⁸⁰ Holton repeatedly denied that Mexican American boys committed more crimes than other boys, but his words did not sway public opinion. Rumors flew around the city that Mexican American teenagers favored zoot suits because the voluminous cut of the style allowed them to hide knives easily. As a result of the racist rumors and newspaper reports, Frances Feldman recalls, most Angelenos viewed the victims of the zoot suit riots as hoodlums who richly deserved the beatings they received.⁸¹ Aside from Holton, did LACC members think differently? No evidence exists that indicates the answer to that question. Moreover,

no evidence survives regarding any actions taken by the LACC vis-à-vis Mexican American youths after the riots. In contrast, during summer 1943, the CCLAY, the probation department, the Community Chest, and the Council of Social Agencies each devised and implemented new social programs aimed at Mexican American teenagers.⁸²

As the foregoing discussion reveals, the heyday of coordinating councils in Los Angeles came to an end in the early 1940s. However, the LACC continued to operate for many years. Starting in 1944, it once again enjoyed a steady, albeit thin, stream of public funding, this time from the newly established California Youth Authority; luckily for the LACC and other coordinating councils in the state, Governor Earl Warren handpicked Holton to head the new agency. This source of funding, together with a few other minor sources, kept the LACC alive. Then, in 1955, the probation department, under a new chief, relinquished its sponsorship of the LACC to the county recreation department, which gave the LACC a new name: the Federation of Community Coordinating Councils (FCCC). The FCCC still exists, although in greatly altered and shrunken form, as an independent organization.⁸³

Several questions remain to be explored about the history of coordinating councils and the community approach. For example, to what extent did the rise to power of the FBI and the widespread veneration of Hoover and his ideas contribute to the death of the coordinating council movement in the 1940s? Claire Bond Potter, in her insightful study of the social, cultural, and political dynamics of the war on crime, argues that the 1930s marked a “formative moment for twentieth-century United States, in which federal anticrime agendas prioritized criminalization and enforcement over social intervention.”⁸⁴ She is referring to the outcome of battles within the Justice Department over the character of federal crime-fighting efforts, but how does her multifaceted analysis apply to urban anticrime efforts across the United States?

Another question that needs further investigation concerns the degree of citizen involvement in coordinating councils throughout the country and the practical applications of the community approach outside Los Angeles. In the case of Los Angeles, coordinating councils gave middle-class white Euro-Americans ample opportunity to try to exert control over civic life, especially with respect to decisions they made regarding how to deploy project workers. Thus, for LACC members, the community approach served the interests of community building in that it funneled the expenditure of both time and money into activities that implemented local solutions to the problem of crime.

Finally, the history of coordinating councils and the community approach opens lines of inquiry into the relationship between the intervention of the state into the lives of citizens and Americans' heightened worries in the 1930s about crime and the breakdown of family and social discipline, of order, of respect for law, and of public and private morality. This issue involves urban history as much as it involves the history of the nation-state. As this study reveals, the LACC expanded the power of public and quasi-public local

agencies to intercede (some people might say meddle) in neighborhood affairs and the lives of children who had done nothing illegal but who in the eyes of LACC members seemed likely to do something illegal someday. Bluntly stated, the LACC based a good deal of its intervention into children's lives (and by extension, the lives of parents) on conjecture; that is, on the presumption of knowledge about the probable future behavior of children whom LACC member agencies labeled *predelinquents* and *unadjusted youths*. These labels justified the LACC's subsequent intervention in much the same way that the label *human rat* justified the retributive justice carried out by the FBI against John Dillinger and "Baby Face" Nelson, among others. Therefore, the LACC and the FBI, despite their sharp differences in philosophy and tactics, extended the authority of the state.⁸⁵

Although the LACC was born in 1932 amid dire warnings about the crime wave, fear and anxiety do not adequately explain why thousands of Angelenos volunteered their time on local councils, year after year. A full explanation for the LACC's appeal must include Angelenos' boundless confidence in their ability to transform their community through crime prevention. Angelenos first exhibited this confidence in the Progressive Era, when through reform efforts, they imbued local criminal justice agencies with the goals and philosophy of crime prevention. During the 1930s, the LACC built on Progressive reforms. In their boldness and optimism, LACC members anticipated and embodied at the urban level the interventionist spirit of the New Deal because they delivered at the neighborhood level the direct and vigorous action that Franklin D. Roosevelt promised the American people in his inaugural speech of March 1933. And rather than place the blame for the crime problem on a criminal class allegedly composed of subhuman fiends, LACC members took seriously the words of Scudder and Beam. "Who Is Delinquent?" Scudder and Beam asked the community. Their answer: "Each one of us. . . . We have been delinquent and have failed to do all that we might have done."⁸⁶

NOTES

1. Frank H. Toby and C. C. Owen, "A Special Report Prepared for the Bureau of Research, State of California, Emergency Relief Administration, Project I-E4-15, a Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Program Sponsored by the Juvenile Court and Probation Department," December 1, 1934 (Archives of the Federation of Community Coordinating Councils of the County of Los Angeles, Long Beach, California; hereafter FCCC Archives); and Katharine Glover, "Project I-E4-15A: How Unemployed Men and Women Met Juvenile Delinquency on Its Own Ground," *Survey* December 1935: 362-63. On Bert Colima, see Douglas Monro, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 56, 59-61.

2. Glover, "Project I-E4-15A," 363; and Toby and Owen, "Special Report," n.p. Neither account mentions the mass deportation ("repatriation") of Mexicans and Mexican Americans by Los Angeles County in 1931 and 1932. The deportations probably made many residents of Belvedere wary of public agencies. On repatriation, see George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), chap. 10.

3. Did a sharp and prolonged rise in the national rate of crime—the so-called “crime wave”—really take place in the late 1920s and 1930s? Although the question and its range of possible answers lie outside the scope of this essay, scholars and journalists have long debated the issue. See, for example, William Searle, “The American National Police,” *Harper’s Monthly Magazine* 169 (1934): 751-61, cited in Samuel Walker, *A Critical History of Police Reform: The Emergence of Professionalism* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, D. C. Heath, 1977), 154; Frederick Lewis Allen, *Since Yesterday: The Nineteen Thirties in America, September 3, 1939-September 3, 1939* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939; New York: Bantam Books, 1961), 145; Richard Gid Powers, *G-Men: Hoover’s FBI in Popular Culture* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983); and Claire Bond Potter, *War on Crime Bandits, G-Men, and the Politics of Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998). Of related interest, see Estelle B. Freedman, “Uncontrolled Desires’: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960,” *Journal of American History* 74 (1987): 83-106.
4. “Government, to Survive, Must Crush Menace of Armed Underworld,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1933, 3, quoted in Powers, *G-Men*, 40. On criminal psychopaths, see Potter, *War on Crime*, 60-66.
5. Walker, *Critical History*, 153-54.
6. Samuel R. Blake, “We’re Blocking Youth’s Path to Crime,” *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*, February 3, 1935, n.p., FCCC Archives. On the coordinating council movement, see Kenneth S. Beam, “Community Coordination for Prevention of Delinquency,” in *National Probation Association Yearbook* (New York: National Probation Association, 1936), 89-90 (hereafter *NPA Yearbook*); Kenneth S. Beam, “Community Coordination: Report of a National Survey of Coordinating and Neighborhood Councils,” in *NPA Yearbook*, 1937, 47; and “The First Eighteen Months of Coordinating Councils, Inc.,” *Coordinating Council Bulletin* 3, no. 4 (April 1935): 4 (hereafter *CC Bulletin*).
7. Walker, *Critical History*; Powers, *G-Men*; Potter, *War on Crime*; and David E. Ruth, *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
8. Virgil E. Dickson, “The Coordinating Council Plan,” *The Commonwealth—Part Two, Transactions of the Commonwealth Club of California* 24 (1934): 116. Experts on crime and delinquency sometimes conceded that they did not understand the links between delinquency and adult criminality. See Frederick P. Cabot et al., *The Delinquent Child: Report of the Committee on Socially Handicapped-Delinquency* (New York: Century, 1932), 242-43.
9. Ernest W. Burgess, Joseph D. Lohman, and Clifford R. Shaw, “The Chicago Area Project,” in *NPA Yearbook*, 1937, 21. Much has been written about the Chicago school of sociology. For an overview, see Robert E. L. Faris, *Chicago Sociology: 1920-1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
10. Most speeches and articles about coordinating councils discussed the community approach, but see especially Katharine F. Lenroot, “The Responsibility of the Community for Crime Prevention,” in *Proceedings of the Sixty-Fourth Annual Congress of the American Prison Association* (New York: American Prison Association, 1934), 23 (hereafter *APA Proceedings*).
11. Karl Holton, “Coordinating Community Forces,” in *APA Proceedings*, 1940, 76.
12. For description and analysis of the FBI’s six-hour siege, see Potter, *War on Crime*, 180-81.
13. Lenroot, “Responsibility of the Community,” 25; Martin H. Neumeyer, *Juvenile Delinquency in Modern Society* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1949), 400; Kenyon J. Scudder, untitled editorial, *CC Bulletin* 3, no. 7 (July 1935): 4; and Glover, “Stopping Crime,” 36.
14. Joseph Gerald Woods, “The Progressives and the Police: Urban Reform and the Professionalization of the Los Angeles Police” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1973), chap. 1; and Dorothy Frances Allen, “The Changing Emphasis in Protective Services to Children, with an Account of the Children’s Protective Association of Los Angeles” (M.S.W. thesis, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Southern California, 1943), 84-85. On criminal justice reform in Los Angeles during the Progressive Era, see also Marlou Belyea, “The Joy Ride and the Silver Screen: Commercial Leisure, Delinquency, and Play Reform in Los Angeles, 1900-1980” (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University Graduate School, 1983) 23; Janis Appier, *Policing Women: The Sexual Politics of Law Enforcement and the LAPD* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); and Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
15. Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 280.
16. Appier, *Policing Women*, chaps. 1, 2.
17. Lee Shippey, “The Lee Side of LA,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1927; and Appier, *Policing Women*, chaps. 3, 4.

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19. Kenyon J. Scudder, "Between the Dark and the Daylight," (Tms. Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1971).
20. Christopher G. Ruess, "The Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency in Los Angeles County through Coordinating Councils," California Association for Social Welfare, *Bulletin* 16 (November 1932): 28-29; Norman Fenton, "Child Guidance in California Communities," *Journal of Juvenile Research* 21 (January 1937): 22-23; and Vierling Kersey, "Unadjusted Youth," *Journal of Juvenile Research* 20 (July 1936): 125-37.
21. Cabot et al., *Delinquent Child*, 234, note 2; and Los Angeles Police Department, *Annual Report, Police Department, City of Los Angeles, California, 1919-1920 to 1940* (hereafter *LAPD Annual Reports*). Until 1939, *LAPD Annual Reports* covered the fiscal year from July 1 through June 30.
22. *LAPD Annual Reports*, 1919-1920 through 1940.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Ruess, "Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency," 28.
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26. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931; New York: Bantam Books, 1959), chap. 5. On the rise of new middle-class values in the 1920s, see William R. Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Warren I. Sussman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); and John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988). Potter, *War on Crime*, chap. 3, offers an insightful discussion of crime and morality in the 1920s.
27. Powers, *G-Men*, 3.
28. Frederic M. Thrasher, "The Problem of Crime Prevention," *NPA Yearbook*, 1934, 6-22; and Ellen C. Potter, "The Family in Relation to Its Responsibility for Crime," *APA Proceedings*, 1931, 30-35.
29. B. L. Coulter, "An Institutional Encomium, and a Brief Discussion and Analysis of a Few Social Forces and Their Potential Possibilities for the Prevention of Delinquency," *APA Proceedings*, 1934, 51. See also "How Shall We Deal with Delinquent Adolescents and Wandering Youth?" *American City* 48 (March 1933): 70; Thomas Minehan, "'I Don't Want to Be a Bum': What Future for America's 250,000 Boy and Girl Vagabonds?" *Senior Scholastic* 25 (October 6, 1934): 11-12, 27; and C. R. Frazier, "Why Pay the Fiddler? WPA Recreation Programs Are Costly," *Parents* 12 (February 1937): 20-21, 70-73.
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32. Martin H. Neumeyer, "The Los Angeles County Plan of Coordinating Councils," *Sociology and Social Research* 19 (May-June 1935): 461-62.
33. Kenyon J. Scudder and Kenneth S. Beam, "Who Is Delinquent?" (Los Angeles: Rotary Club of Los Angeles, 1934), 54.
34. "Gang Prevention," *Survey* (June 1933): 227.
35. Virgil D. Dahl, "The Geographical Concentration of Juvenile Delinquency in Los Angeles County," (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, 1932). *LAPD Annual Reports* from 1924-1925 through 1927-1928 feature charts showing occupations of parents of the juveniles arrested. Although the socio-economic status of the listed occupations are open to interpretation, parents who worked as "laborers" and "servants" far outnumbered parents who worked as "professionals" and "clerks."

36. Egon Bittner, *Aspects of Police Work* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), chap. 7; Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*; Appier, *Policing Women*, chaps. 3, 4; Woods, "Progressives and the Police," 196; and Frances Feldman, interview by author, Pasadena, California, April 18, 1988. Although racism influenced arrest practices, Edward Escobar has persuasively argued that the LAPD did not develop an institutionalized belief in the inherent criminality of people of color until the end of World War II. Edward Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 3, 130.
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38. Scudder and Beam, "Who Is Delinquent?" 9, 11. See also, Kenyon J. Scudder and Kenneth S. Beam, *Twenty Billion Dollar Challenge: A National Program for Delinquency Prevention* (New York: Putnam, 1961), chaps. 1, 2.
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40. Scudder and Beam, "Who Is Delinquent?" 15-16.
41. Kenyon J. Scudder, "A Community Organizes to Prevent Delinquency," *Probation* 12 (December 1933): 9, 13.
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43. Neumeyer, "Los Angeles County Plan," 463.
44. Kenyon Scudder, "Perverted Children" *CC Bulletin* 3, no. 6 (July 1935): 1-3; Kenneth S. Beam, "Report to Third Annual Conference" *CC Bulletin* 2, no. 6 (November-December 1934): 3; and "Resolutions of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Los Angeles Coordinating Councils" *CC Bulletin* 3, no. 10 (November 1935): 1.
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49. *Ibid.*
50. "Delinquency Prevention and Recreation Project," *CC Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (May-June 1933): 1; and "Delinquency Prevention and Recreation Project Makes Progress," *CC Bulletin* 1, no. 5 (July-August 1933): 1.
51. Toby and Owen, "Special Report," n.p.
52. Neumeyer, "Los Angeles County Plan," 464.
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67. Potter, *War on Crime*, 171, 184-185.
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72. "Government, to Survive Must Crush Menace of Armed Underworld," *New York Times*, September 12, 1933, 3, quoted in Powers, *G-Men*, 40.
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84. Potter, *War on Crime*, 8.

85. Powers, *G-Men*; Potter, *War on Crime*; and Walker, *Critical History*.

86. Scudder and Beam, "Who Is Delinquent?" 4 (bold in original).

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