Lafayette's Sordid Crime Record Challenges Us All

Lafayette is a progressive and growing city, but she must solve the sordid crime problem that continues to fester here or else she will never attain the greatness that is her real potential.

Some communities get to be big in size because of geography and natural resources and cultural attractions and aggressive civic leadership. But too often as material gain is achieved the morality of the community is ignored. Once the seeds of neglect are planted because of public apathy and indifference to law and order the harvest is armed robbery, murder, assault, dope peddling, prostitution, and all the other crimes that are the stock in trade of the felon and his accomplices.

A climate is created that attracts more criminals. Operating in this kind of haven they enter legitimate businesses, attempt to corrupt public officials and proceed to expand their illicit operations as they get bolder.

The young people get contaminated in this kind of environment and some turn to crime because of the thrills or the ill-gotten gain they realize.

What's the story in Lafayette? Unfortunately, it is not good. In fact, there are signs that unless an aroused community rises up to curb the trend and reverse it the situation will get worse to the detriment of the public well-being.

Prostitution, pandering, robberies and shootings were in Lafayette's criminal firmament in 1967. There are ever-increasing signs that there is dope dealing in Lafayette with our young people being the main users. We must remember that we have a tempting target in our midst—a university with over 9,000 students.

The dynamiter also entered the Lafayette picture. Service stations, tractors, trucks and other equipment had been bombed in 1966. Lafayette had become sort of a focal point for industrial violence against general contractors and the oil industry. Acadiana as a whole sustained some 24 bombings in the short period of 22 months.

J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, revealed in his uniform crime report of 1966 issued in August, 1967, that Lafayette led all cities in crime in Louisiana in the 25,000 to 100,000 population range. This included 1,028 cases of theft and grand larceny, 546 cases of robbery and burglaries, 84 cases of assault, six cases of rape and forcible rape and five cases of murder and criminal homicide. This coupled with the dynamiting, narcotics cases and prostitution has given Lafayette an unsavory image among law-abiding people everywhere.

The first concrete sign of citizen revulsion at what is taking place in Lafayette came in the formation of the Association For Industrial Improvement. "Let's Build South Louisiana, Not Blow It Up!" became the slogan of this group of activists. Law enforcement in Lafayette has become a political campaign issue. These are modest yet important signs that the community is stirring from its lethargy. But it is not enough.

To permanently solve the problem of crime in Lafayette will require community-wide involvement. This does not mean that every citizen should organize himself into a vigilante committee of some kind, but it does mean that he must commit himself to a much stronger program of law enforcement in Lafayette. More specifically, it means that the time has arrived for Lafayette residents to place the law enforcement personnel on a par with the top career people in the nation.

The policeman of Lafayette, as well as the deputy sheriff and the state trooper, deserve a fair better shake than received in the past in recognition, in numbers, in pay and in modern crime-solving equipment. Of course, a program of this scope will require money. We must be prepared to help our elected officials obtain the additional funds.

Assistance must come from public and private agencies, universities and civic groups, clergymen and educators, housewives and students. And it must be more than moral support.

Lafayette is on trial, placed there, ironically enough, by the criminal element of the community and the vast majority of good, law-abiding citizens ducking responsibility. A city that can house the state's second largest university, build auditoriums and oil centers, and lay claim to many firsts in many fields is faced with a new and challenging test. Before he can avail himself of the better things a better community has to offer, the citizen must first make his homes and his stores and his streets safe.

The Daily Advertiser recommends to the men and women of goodwill in Lafayette a full-fledged crusade to rid this city of crime and permanently help restore peace and good order. This newspaper pledges its unqualified support.

(Tomorrow: Support of USL)