Law and order: a farce

By Mike McNamara

The changing nature of American society from a "consensual" to a "conflict-oriented" society has led to a misperception of the term "law and order" and self-defeating efforts to stop crime, according to a recent Compton Lecture speaker.

Dr. Jerome H. Skolnick, chairman of the Center for the Study of Law and Society at the University of California at Berkeley, told an audience of about 100 MIT students and faculty that "the simple, straightforward solutions advocated for crime control result in contradictory effects on the crime that is supposedly being controlled."

Increasing concern with "law and order," caused by the social conflicts of the 1960's, have led to demands for "hard-line, often punitive policies that have more bad effects than good," Skolnick explained. Citing higher taxes, prisons that don't rehabilitate, and a spiral of increased demand for more crime-control as results of these harsh policies, Skolnick stressed that the public "should be made to understand how these factors contribute to the crime rate, in order to formulate better policies for dealing with crime."

Skolnick expressed these remarks in a paper which he delivered at the final lecture in the 1973-74 Karl Taylor Compton Lecture Series on Monday. The program was entitled "Changing Visions of Crime and Criminal Justice."

Complacency shattered

The social conflicts of the '60s, Skolnick said, shattered an American society that had been strongly consensus in nature since the defeat of an absolute order under a universally popular president" in the Second World War. This society was replaced with one that, due to the civil rights movement and the protest caused by the Vietnam War, seemed to be divided and in conflict.

"During the 1960's, America became an anguished society for many people," the speaker said. This, in turn, led to an instability in American life that heightened the emphasis on "law and order" and public safety. "The criminal justice system was challenged for providing neither order nor justice," Skolnick said.

The civil rights and protest movements led to confusion and disillusionment with the law as a means for social change. Skolnick said: "While the civil rights

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