

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION



National Crime Prevention Council

To forge a nationwide commitment by people acting individually and together to prevent crime and build safer, more caring communities.

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1 Advisory Director

January 3, 2000

Bruce N. Reed

Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy
Executive Office of the President
West Wing, 2nd Floor
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Reed:

The President debuted our ads on youth violence with the Attorney General and the Vice President six years ago. Last year our *Invest in Youth* campaign set a record — \$126 million in *donated* public service advertising, the single most successful year in public advertising history.

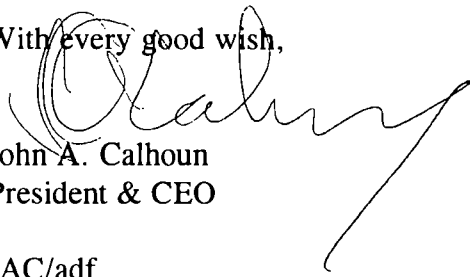
The Ad Council has called the enclosed ads "...simply the most exciting print ads we have ever done." (Please note that these are draft ads, not yet fully approved, and that we send them to you in confidence.)

We want to debut them at NCPC's Annual Youth Crime Prevention Conference (our 11th) to be held this year in Atlanta, the debut occurring on Monday, March 26. We cordially invite the President to "cut the ribbon" on these ads.

We know of your office's beliefs and commitments and thought you'd simply find the enclosed ads as wonderful as we found them. The undergirding thesis: nothing will change unless kids roll up their sleeves, partnering with us to create safer and better schools and communities, and we want youth to feel the label of participant or volunteer to be as natural as the clothes they wear.

Please let us hear from you as soon as possible.

With every good wish,


John A. Calhoun
President & CEO

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Eric L. -
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cc Ann O'L
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PEER COUNSELOR PEER COUNSELOR

What do you
want to be
labeled as?

Get involved.



U.S. Department of Justice
Crime Prevention Coalition

800-722-teens
weprevent.org

EUZ-OR

What do you
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labeled as?

Get involved.

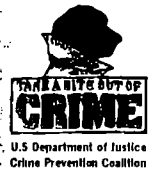


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Crime Prevention Coalition

800-722-teens
weprevent.org



A
Court

Floyd's effects linger as N.C. schools reopen

Teachers try for
normalcy, but
'you' can't get
away from it'

By Elizabeth A. Davis
The Associated Press

TARBORO, N.C. — Nearly three weeks after Hurricane Floyd, thousands of students returned to class Monday in North Carolina's hardest-hit county. At one school, students came even though more than 100 evacuees were still living in their gym.

The gym at Tarboro High was one of the last shelters still open in Edgecombe County.

"You can't get away from it anywhere in Tarboro," said senior Jonathan Kirkland, whose home was spared by the floodwaters. "I have so much, and these people have nothing."

Monday was the first day Edgecombe County's 8,000 students had set foot in a classroom since Sept. 15, the day before Floyd came ashore and

drenched eastern North Carolina with more than 20 inches of rain, causing the worst flooding in state history.

Floyd has been blamed for at least 48 deaths in North Carolina. The high water drove more than 10,000 people into shelters and destroyed 3,680 homes.

Floyd is expected to surpass Hurricane Fran, which caused \$6 billion in damage in 1996, as the state's costliest natural disaster.

Two of the county's 14 schools did not reopen at all; they were destroyed by floodwaters. Their 550 students will attend classes in trailers at other schools.

While teachers and administrators tried to restore a sense of normalcy, the flooding was the dominant theme. In one class, students were asked to summarize their experience in one word. Among the responses: "wet," "lucky," "sad," "relieved" — and "blessed."

Jeff Squires, a Tarboro High senior, was upset that he had to attend school. He said his family needs his help recovering



By Bob Jordan, AP

First day back: Jonathan Kirkland, center, a senior at Tarboro High School, leaves for lunch Monday in Tarboro, N.C.

from the flooding.

"I lost everything," he said. "I don't see why we're here."

Brad Cox was happy to see his friends from Princeville, the town of 1,900 across the Tar River from Tarboro that remains uninhabitable. The flood scattered people from Princeville into shelters and, later, into the homes of friends and relatives.

"It's nice to know they can meet here at school," he said.

Businesses are reopening one by one, and the Tar and Neuse rivers are expected to drop below flood stage this week for the first time since the storm. Many people who were in shelters have been able to go

home or find other places to stay.

But the misery is far from over. The Salvation Army said its disaster recovery center in Greenville ran short on food and volunteers and could open for only a half-day Monday. The relief organization said it has dispensed \$4.5 million in meals, goods and services in Floyd's aftermath.

Federal Emergency Management Agency officials said nearly 50,000 North Carolinians have applied for disaster assistance. Some complained of delays, but spokeswoman Buffy Gilfoil said FEMA is doing the best it can, with 400 inspectors in the field and more expected.

Kids repeat violence seen in life, not on TV

Parental monitoring
'crucial' to behavior

By Marilyn Elias
USA TODAY

TV viewing habits don't promote children's aggressive behavior nearly as much as frequent exposure to real violence and parents' failure to monitor their kids' activities, suggests a study out Monday.

There is a small link between children's getting a heavy dose of violent programs and their attacking others, says Mark Singer of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. But TV's influence is far outweighed by the extent of parental supervision and a child's own experiences of violence, shows the report in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Singer's survey of 2,245 third- to eighth-graders is one of the largest on the link between exposure to violence and violent behavior among elementary and middle school children.

The study found "disturbingly high" levels of violence among the youngsters, who were raised in working-class to upper-middle-class homes, Singer says. More than

two out of five boys said they'd been slapped, hit or punched at home or school in the past year. About one in three girls reported such attacks. Half to three-quarters of children said they had witnessed beatings at school in the past year.

Witnessing or being the target of violence — at home, in the neighborhood or at school — in the past year correlated strongly with a child behaving violently toward others, Singer says. The No. 2 factor was a lack of parental monitoring. TV was the least influential of the three.

"The monitoring is something crucial that parents can control," Singer says. The more closely kids said they were monitored, the less likely they were to report slapping, hitting or beating up others.

Well-supervised children said parents insisted on knowing their whereabouts and who their friends were. Those youngsters also were expected to come home at a specific time and were punished if they broke family rules.

In addition to monitoring their children's behavior and activities, Singer says, parents should report school aggression to officials and should not resort to physical aggression in front of their children.

Singer's study "should put media's role in proper perspective," Los Angeles psychologist Stuart Fischhoff says.

"We have an atmosphere like Salem here, with politicians taking out after the media, wanting to scapegoat it, as though parents and the peer group have no influence here, which they certainly do."

Text 1102-
Media

Another 'dark shadow' falls on LAPD

Department tries to recover, again, after officers are accused of lying to send innocent man to prison

By Carol Morello and Martin Kasindorf
USA TODAY

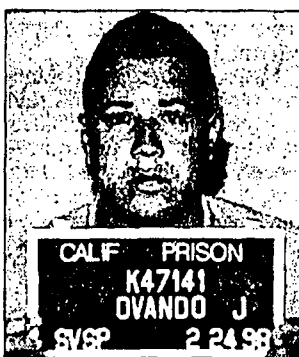
LOS ANGELES — In an immigrant neighborhood once besieged by gangs and drug dealers, it is now the police who are being investigated for criminal behavior. This time, the details are as chilling as anything dreamed up for the movie *L.A. Confidential*.

A policeman caught stealing 8 pounds of cocaine from an evidence room has admitted shooting an unarmed gang member who already was restrained by handcuffs. Next, the policeman said, he and his partner planted a gun on him. Then they lied about it under oath and kept their silence as an innocent man in a wheelchair was sentenced to 23 years in prison.

The ethical lapses of the arresting officers — members of the Los Angeles Police Department's anti-gang unit CRASH, an acronym for Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums — could cost taxpayers big-time.

Still in a wheelchair, the victim, Javier Francisco Ovando, has been released from prison and has retained a lawyer. Lawyers for his 2-year-old daughter, born while he was in custody, already have filed a \$20 million claim against the city.

Police are reviewing other arrests by the CRASH unit. A court has suspended a much-acclaimed anti-gang injunction prohibiting Ovando's 18th



Calif. Department of Corrections via AP

Ovando: Gang member was shot, then framed

Street Gang members from associating with one another. More lawsuits are expected.

The snowballing police scandal is rocking a department that has resisted decades of reform efforts. Mayor Richard Riordan has spoken of a "dark shadow" over the LAPD. In a warning remarkable for having to state the obvious, Police Chief Bernard Parks urged recent graduates of the police academy to resist being lured into perjury.

Residents are waiting to see whether this will be the case that reins in the nation's second-largest police department, already discredited by the Rodney King beating and the botched investigation of O.J. Simpson.

It will not be easy to rein in LAPD, says James Fyfe, a former New York City policeman who teaches at Temple University in Philadelphia and who has testified against the department in several brutality suits.

"It's a humongous culture," Fyfe says. "Almost everybody in the department is loyal to a system that's dysfunctional."

Though the LAPD has been relatively free of financial corruption, it has a long history of what retired LAPD assistant police chief David Dotson calls "expediency corruption." By

that he means that officers consider it permissible to use illegal tactics against criminal suspects, then cover them up.

"There is still a very strong part of the police culture that says you don't tell on your fellow officers, and you resist the attempts of outside agencies to dig beneath the surface of your organization," Dotson says.

Most experts on the LAPD trace the police culture here to attempts to insulate the department from corruption.

In the 1920s, a police reformer from the University of California at Berkeley was recruited to become chief. August Vollmer lasted one year but left behind a recommendation that the police chief be independent

of a then-corrupt City Hall and be appointed for life.

The "Joe Friday" image of the LAPD (made famous in *Dragnet*) was ushered in with William Parker, who became police chief in 1950, when he got the life appointment Vollmer had proposed. Parker recruited veterans from World War II and Korea, and made them answerable only to him.

And that's the way it was in the LAPD until the beating of Rodney King in 1991. When a jury acquitted the officers in 1992, setting off riots in Los Angeles, Chief Daryl Gates was at a fundraiser opposing a referendum to remove the lifetime tenure provision.

Since then, attempts to impose more civilian control over the LAPD have met with difficulty.

In 1991, the Christopher Commission, which was set up after the King beating, recommended that a civilian, a so-called inspector general, be in charge of reviewing police shootings and abuses, overseeing the work of the internal affairs division.

The first inspector, former prosecutor Katherine Mader, was not appointed until five years later. She resigned early this year, citing her frustration at trying to investigate police abuse.

Some critics have suggested that the LAPD scandal reflects nothing more than a few cops going overboard, forced by circumstances to act tough in a violent arena of gangs and drug dealers.

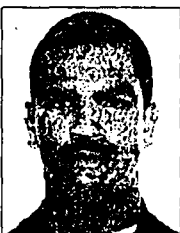
Officer Rafael Perez, who admitted shooting Ovando, is cooperating with investigators as part of a plea bargain. He has agreed to plead guilty to a charge of stealing cocaine from an LAPD evidence room.

Perez told the *Los Angeles Times* that officers start out "trying to do the right thing, thinking they're doing the right thing, trying to impress supervisors ... and stopping at nothing to do that."

In the neighborhood around Rampart Division, an area west of downtown, the crackdown by the CRASH unit is credited with slashing the homicide rate and making streets safe again for business owners and residents. Many still view the police as their protectors, not their tormenters.

But in City Hall and the police headquarters named after Chief Parker, the toll is mounting. So far, 11 officers have been relieved of duty pending investigation, and one has been fired.

Investigators and prosecutors are reviewing at least 15 arrests of gang members. They expect to look at hundreds more arrests that were dependent on the testimony of officers tainted by the scandal.



Perez: Cop admits stealing cocaine

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WASHINGTON Congress is aiming to overturn Oregon's law allowing physician-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients and to make it a federal crime for doctors everywhere to prescribe narcotics to help those patients end their lives.

The measure could send a physician to prison for 20 years for prescribing a drug such as morphine to help patients kill themselves, according to lawyers in Oregon and California who have analyzed the bill.

A House committee is expected to approve the bill Tuesday, and it could go before the full House this month and the Senate before the end of the year. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., has promised a filibuster on the Senate floor; a White House aide, asked if President Clinton would sign such a measure if one reached him, called the issue particularly delicate and said no decision had been made.

Several other states, mostly in the West, have begun considering proposals similar to Oregon's law.

The Oregon law took effect in 1997 after the state's voters approved an assisted suicide ballot initiative and then decisively rejected an initiative to repeal it. In contrast to opponents' fears, only 23 people requested lethal prescriptions in 1998, the law's first full year in effect, and 15 used them, according to Oregon Health Department physicians.

Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber, an emergency medicine physician, strongly believes that persons with terminal illnesses "should have the ability to control their own death to the extent that that is possible," said Mark Gibson, the governor's health policy adviser. "He doesn't believe the federal government needs to be telling Oregonians how to manage the last several days of their lives."

But in the nation's capital, the bill's Republican sponsors have abandoned their traditional support for states' rights.

"The federal government is not going to sanction the use of controlled substances for the purpose of killing people," said Rep. Charles Canady, R-Fla., a member of the House Judiciary Committee who sponsored the bill. "If that's controversial, let the controversy go on."

The Oregon assisted suicide law specifically permits doctors, at a patient's request and after a waiting period, to prescribe a lethal dose of drugs. Attorney General Janet Reno said last year that Oregon had a right to waive the federal Controlled Substance Act for drugs prescribed for assisted suicide an opinion that the proposed new federal law would nullify.

Concern Over Media's Handling of Violence Resurfaces By Josh Getlin

Los Angeles Times

NEW YORK Once again, a gunman's rampage has scarred the United States, and as America tries to make sense of the violence, the news media are under fire.

Lamenting the voyeuristic coverage of another attack that shocked the nation's conscience, some critics blasted journalists for turning yet another gun-wielding psychopath into a household name.

"These persons yearn for publicity," wrote one, "and the press, while reporting the essential facts, has a responsibility to deny them the gratification of instant celebrity."

The complaint may sound familiar but the year was 1975 and a New York Times columnist was angered that the Time and Newsweek covers featured Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, who had tried to assassinate President Ford. From the White House and Congress came denunciations of a violence-prone media that was out of control.

It's an old concern, yet one that has taken on new urgency in an age of 24-hour "crisis television." While few doubt the obligation of journalists to cover breaking news, such as the recent shootings at a Jewish community center in Los Angeles, many believe today's voracious media pander to tabloid news values and spread fear instead of providing a context for violent crimes by reporting why something frightening happened or how unusual it may be.

Journalists, critics say, are adept at pointing fingers when violence shocks America at gun manufacturers, at Hollywood entertainment, at the Internet and video games. But they are not so eager to examine their own back yard, even as social science offers evidence that too much exposure to violent news images can lead to cynicism, a numbness to crime and even paranoia in some viewers.

"When you bombard people with frightening pictures, it creates a sense that things are out of control a contagion of violence in the mind of people that is at odds with the reality of the world, which is that violent crime has been dropping in America," said Robert Lifton, professor of psychology at the John Jay College of Criminal

Law in New York. "People should feel safer. But you really wouldn't know it from the news."

News media violence takes up more hours than ever before: Beginning with the Persian Gulf War, all-news cable channels the three networks have inaugurated marathon coverage of breaking news, including crimes, that stretch sometimes for days at a time. During the recent day-trader shootings in Atlanta, for example, CNN ran live, commercial-free coverage for five straight hours.

Some defend the obligations of journalists to tell people the truth, no matter how jarring. "Much of the criticism of violence in the news is a red herring because it's the responsibility of the news media to tell us what's happening in the world, whether we find the news pleasant or not," said Barbara Cochran, president of the Radio and Television News Directors Association.

Yet others say too much coverage is dominated by an "if it bleeds, it leads" philosophy. They suggest that news directors, believing viewers are drawn to crime stories, cater to them for purely economic reasons.

Amid the debate, there is little expectation that media managers will make any sustained effort to reduce the amount of crime stories they cover. Reform proposals surface from time to time, most recently when Brill's Content, a magazine that covers the media, proposed a code of decency for reporters interviewing crime victims. Yet most local news broadcasts have enjoyed ratings success with their traditional approach, and coverage of blockbuster crime stories generally helps cable ratings too. The competitive environment makes unilateral restraint difficult.

There are, however, a handful of TV stations and newspapers trying to moderate the tone and content of their coverage. Newspapers such as the Chicago Sun-Times have kept stories of high school shootings off their front pages to avoid alarming children. At KVUE-TV in Austin, Texas, news officials are in the fourth year of a program that requires crime stories to meet guidelines of relevance before they can be aired.

For the most part, though, crime news continues to dominate the media. A recent survey by the Center for Media and Public Policy in Washington showed that while homicides declined by 13 percent in America from 1990 to 1995, the number of crime stories on the three network evening news shows skyrocketed by 336 percent a figure that excludes all stories related to the O.J. Simpson case. Surveys by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Rocky Mountain Media Watch suggest that the average dose of mayhem and violence on any given night of a local TV news show ranges from 22 percent to 41 percent.

While there is no direct correlation between watching crime stories on TV and the commission of a violent act, social scientists have compiled hundreds of studies over the last 40 years showing that prolonged exposure to TV violence, whether fictional or through news, can create dangerous attitudes.

"The exposure to TV violence from infancy on leads not so much to imitation as intimidation," said George Gerbner, a professor of behavioral psychology at the Annenberg School of Communications in Philadelphia. "It leads to what we call a 'mean world syndrome,' a feeling of vulnerability and insecurity among people whose fears may not be justified."

Others point to data that people who are already disturbed, have poor impulse control or are angry may be inspired to mimic what they see on TV programs.

In today's superheated news marketplace, reporters often pile on at the scene of a violent crime, lending the live coverage, in particular, a grotesque, circus-like quality. At times, the media's behavior has provoked angry reactions. In Littleton, Colo., school district leaders who were dismayed by coverage of the April massacre imposed strict guidelines on reporters gathering to cover the students' return to Columbine High School last month including requirements that the media not show footage of injured students, and that victims' families be treated with compassion and respect.

"There's a potential certainly in the news media's coverage of stories to strike fear into folks who should not be so fearful, due to situations that are, in many cases, isolated incidents," said Eason Jordan, CNN's president of news gathering and international networks. "If people sit around and watch violent news coverage for many hours or days on end, they won't necessarily get an accurate picture of what's going on in society."

Smashing the Gen-X Stereotype: The Polls Are Taxing Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES One arena where Gen-X has reinforced negative stereotypes, however, is in the voting booth. While most age groups experienced voting declines in the last presidential election, the 18

...bers believe the cells ultimately could be used for
...antation to heal various disorders, and also will help
...sts better understand the process of human development.
...ically what goes wrong to cause birth defects, cancer and
...r debilitating ailments.

U.S. Charges Iraq With Razing Villages to Punish Protesters

By Robin Wright

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON In a sweeping report on conditions inside Iraq, the United States charged Monday that President Saddam Hussein has razed villages in response to the most sustained resistance he has faced since the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

The State Department, which prepared the report, revealed newly declassified satellite photos showing villages that were recently leveled after small uprisings.

In the southern Iraq town of Al Masha, about 160 homes were bulldozed or gutted, the photos showed. In addition, tank columns attacked the towns of Rumaitha and Khudur after protests over food shortages, while homes and fields in the southern marsh areas were burned, local tribes expelled and the marshes drained and poisoned to prevent residents from returning, the report said.

"The scale and severity of Iraqi attacks on Shiite civilians in the south have been increasing steadily," the report charged.

Resistance among Shiites has increased since the assassination in February of Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadeq Sadr. "This is the longest period in which they have continuously resisted (Hussein's) efforts to suppress them," Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk told reporters.

The regime's campaign follows "a real range of demonstrations and dissent throughout the south, even stretching up into Baghdad over the past six to nine months," Indyk said. The sporadic but ongoing Shiite revolt "has clearly manifested in ways that the regime has had great difficulty in getting control of," he said.

In Iraq's northern Kurd-populated region, the report alleges, the regime has razed civilian areas and forced families and even entire villages to move south, resulting in at least 900,000 displaced people.

The report was released in advance of a critical, and potentially contentious, meeting Wednesday in London among representatives of the five permanent members of the U.N. General Assembly. Of the five, Russia, France and China oppose U.S. attempts to maintain complete sanctions until Baghdad complies with its previous agreements on weapons of mass destruction.

In addition to the direct attacks cited, the report says Baghdad has sold thousands of tons of food and humanitarian supplies and withheld hundreds of millions of dollars in imported goods. Hussein's goal, the report states, is to use public suffering to pressure the international community to lift economic sanctions.

In 1996, Baghdad accepted a U.N. plan that allows Iraq to sell oil to pay for humanitarian goods. Iraq's food imports are now at pre-Gulf War levels, so the problem is not availability of food, but distribution, U.S. officials say.

The regime has withheld 50 percent of medicines, 60 percent of supplies for clean water and agriculture, and 40 percent of educational supplies that were legally imported as part of the U.N. deal, the report contends.

Of the \$25 million set aside by the United Nations for nutritional supplements for children and pregnant and nursing mothers, Iraq has spent less than \$2 million since 1996 and nothing in the past 18 months, it says.

Meanwhile, baby milk sold to Iraq through the U.N. program has shown up in shops throughout the Persian Gulf as part of a scheme to convert goods into funds for illicit purposes, according to the report.

While the Iraqi people suffer, the regime has managed to divert enough resources to build a sprawling vacation resort city named Saddamiyat al Tharthar 85 miles west of the capital. It includes an amusement park complete with a Ferris wheel, a lake, two stadiums, hospitals and 625 homes for Iraq's elite. It opened in April as part of celebrations marking Hussein's birthday.

"There is no clearer example of the government's lack of concern for the needs of its people than Saddamiyat al Tharthar," the report says.

WASHINGTON Seeking to refute charges of a cover-up in the Waco, Texas, case, a ranking Democrat released documents Monday showing that Congress had information as far back as 1995 on the FBI's use of military munitions on the final day of the Branch Davidian siege.

Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., launching an aggressive counterattack in defense of the Clinton administration's handling of the Waco controversy, said GOP lawmakers are distorting the facts of the tragedy to bludgeon Attorney General Janet Reno.

But even as Waxman urged politicians to avoid a rush to judgment, new evidence released Monday in Texas threatened to further muddy the waters surrounding the Waco controversy. A review by the Texas Rangers of evidence found at the scene raised new questions about the FBI's insistence that its agents did not fire any shots during the 51-day standoff with the Davidians in 1993. But federal officials said the evidence cited by the Rangers is inconclusive.

Republicans on Capitol Hill have charged in recent days that Reno and the Justice Department may have intentionally misled members of Congress about the Waco disaster, omitting an incriminating page of an FBI crime report and withholding other evidence. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., and other key Republicans are calling for Reno's resignation as a result.

But a handful of documents released by Waxman show that the committee now headed by one of Reno's chief critics Rep. Dan Burton, R-Ind. has had information since 1995 on the FBI's use of military tear gas canisters to penetrate a concrete bunker near the Davidian compound.

"Contrary to the allegations of cover-up, substantial evidence of the use of military tear gas rounds was, in fact, provided to Congress in 1995," Waxman wrote in a letter Monday to former Sen. John C. Danforth, named last week as a special counsel in the Waco matter.

In a June 1993 FBI interview that was provided to Congress two years later, an agent recalled hearing internal radio traffic regarding the use of "some sort of military round to be used on a concrete bunker."

And handwritten notes a few months later recounted an interview with another agent who saw smoke coming from the bunker after military rounds were used to penetrate it.

Federal authorities denied for more than six years that any military munitions were used at the Davidian compound, a position they were forced to reverse last month in the face of new evidence from Texas. Authorities continue to insist, however, that the FBI's use of pyrotechnic tear gas canisters had nothing to do with the fire that broke out about four hours later at cult leader David Koresh's main dwelling.

Republicans said Waxman's charges were groundless.

Kevin Binger, chief of staff for Burton's House Government Reform Committee, said that in numerous congressional briefings, Justice Department officials "never once mentioned" the use of pyrotechnics. And he said information to the contrary cited by Waxman was "buried among 100,000 pages of documents that were dumped on the committee at the last minute" before the committee held hearings in 1995 on the issue.

But Waxman said the Republicans' failure to find the documents in their own records and their rush to charge a cover-up calls into question their competence and integrity.

"If anyone should resign for having this information and not making it public, it's Sen. Lott and Congressman Burton," Waxman said in an interview. "I think (Reno's Republican critics) are just very partisan, and they're angry that she didn't appoint an independent counsel to investigate the president and the vice president over campaign-finance issues, and they are willing to say things for which they don't have a factual basis."

The Republicans have shown a desire to "accuse first and investigate later," and Burton's conduct in particular has been "embarrassing to Congress and, more importantly, profoundly unfair to the attorney general," Waxman wrote in his letter to Danforth.

Waxman acknowledged, however, that it was "peculiar" that Reno apparently did not know for six years that pyrotechnics were used at Waco, even though the Justice Department's own files acknowledged as much.

Waxman Says Documents Show GOP Rush to Judgment on Waco

By Eric Lichtblau

Los Angeles Times

House Panel to Consider Plan to Stop Assisted Suicides

By Alissa J. Rubin

Los Angeles Times

'Disgusted' advertisers buy their own TV scripts

They'll develop 'family fare' for Warner

By David Bauder
ASSOCIATED PRESS

A1

NEW YORK — A group of major television advertisers, disgusted by sex-soaked and violent programs, said yesterday they will pay to have writers develop family-friendly shows for consideration by the WB network.

The advertisers, including Procter & Gamble, General Motors, IBM and Sears, say they are taking the steps after finding fewer and fewer prime-time programs

on which they want to sell their products.

"We want to encourage responsible entertainment, and the programming that is available between the hours of 8 and 10 p.m. is not as family friendly as we would like it to be," said Kaki Hinton, director of advertising services at the drug and consumer products maker Warner-Lambert Co.

The advertisers won't say how much money they are committing. But it generally costs between \$60,000 and \$90,000 to come up with a script, and they have agreed to bankroll at least eight. The WB network will supervise the development and decide which scripts, if any, will go into production.

These advertisers have approached all of the broadcast networks with their concerns, but the WB came up with the most specific

idea, said Andrea Alstrup, vice president of advertising at Johnson & Johnson.

Many of Hollywood's creative people recoil from the idea of family-friendly shows, conceded Jordan Levin, executive vice president of programming for the WB. But such firm support from a group of advertisers will make more writers interested, he said.

The WB's highest-rated show is "7th Heaven," about a minister

raising a family. But the network's stock in trade is teen-oriented, sex-obsessed dramas like "Dawson's Creek," whose success has encouraged other networks to relentlessly go after young viewers.

While "7th Heaven" draws many teen viewers, most television executives say family-oriented shows usually appeal to older viewers that the bulk of advertisers don't desire.

"I'm confused as a viewer as to what the advertisers really want," said Dorothy Swanson, founder of Viewers for Quality Television.

The advertising group funding the new programs says it wants a better balance of programming.

"We're not saying the other stuff should go away," said Gretchen

Briscoe, a spokeswoman for Procter & Gamble. "We're just saying we need more options."

Although television networks frequently take their cues from major advertisers about what programs are acceptable, Mrs. Swanson said she was concerned that the WB may be giving away too much of its authority as programmers.

"I don't believe they're going to be intrusive," Mr. Levin said. "We don't tell them how to do their jobs, and they don't tell us how to do our jobs."

Miss Alstrup said the advertisers "don't plan to become production arms for the networks. What we are really trying to do is raise the level of awareness and encourage the writers."

Ameritech, AT&T, Nationwide Insurance, Pfizer and Wendy's International are also contributing to the scripts.

For the WB, the deal gives financial help to what is often the least cost-effective functions of a network. Networks routinely pay millions of dollars to write and produce prospective shows that never get on the air or are quickly canceled.

Mr. Levin said he expected one or two of the scripts will make it on the air, although not until next fall.

The advertisers are coming up with other ways to advance their agenda, including sponsoring a page in TV Guide each week to steer viewers to family programming. They will also host an awards luncheon in Los Angeles next month for family-friendly shows.

"We didn't feel there were enough programs out there to warrant a dinner," Miss Alstrup said.

The Washington Times

THURSDAY, AUGUST 12, 1999

you're not -
Media

Clinton honors Ford with Medal of Freedom

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Twenty-five years to the week after he was thrust into the presidency by Watergate, Gerald Ford returned to the White House yesterday to be praised as the steady hand that helped America heal.

Presidents Clinton and Ford strode side by side into the East Room, where Mr. Ford and seven other people received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

"Steady, trustworthy, Gerald Ford ended a long national nightmare," Mr. Clinton said, referring to the Watergate scandal and President Nixon's resignation on Aug. 9, 1974. Mr. Ford then became president and served out what would have been Mr. Nixon's second term.

"When he left the White House after 895 days, America was stronger, calmer and more self confident," Mr. Clinton said. "America was, in other words, more like President Ford himself."

The medal is the nation's highest civilian honor. Mr. Clinton awarded it to former President Jimmy Carter in Atlanta on Monday, making George Bush the only living former president who has not received the award.

Established by President Truman as a wartime honor, the medal was reintroduced by President Kennedy as way to honor civilian service. Mr. Clinton has awarded the medal to civil rights leaders, philanthropists, entertainers and statesmen.

"In honoring them, we honor also the values and principles of our nation's founding and our nation's future," Mr. Clinton said of yesterday's honorees. The recipients did not speak inside the White House, but Mr. Ford paused outside to reflect on the events of a quarter-century ago.

"I couldn't avoid those reminiscences. It was a monumental

day," he said. "It was a unique situation as far as the country is concerned, and I hope it never happens again."

In addition to Mr. Ford, the honorees were:

- Lloyd M. Bentsen, Mr. Clinton's first Treasury secretary, who served 22 years in the Senate and six years in the House. He was the Democratic Party's vice presidential nominee in 1988.

- Edgar M. Bronfman Sr., president of the World Jewish Congress. He has "worked to ensure basic rights for Jews around the world and to fight anti-Semitism and has spearheaded the effort to retrieve the assets of Holocaust victims and their families," according to the

White House tribute.

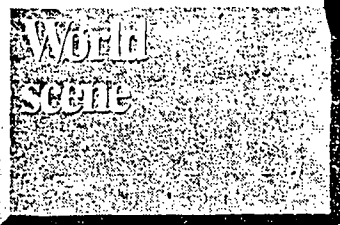
- Evy Dubrow, an advocate for more than 50 years of laws to improve domestic labor conditions. "She has been influential in numerous causes, including broadening laws against discrimination and protecting American industry from unfair foreign competition," the tribute said.

- Sister M. Isolina Ferre, founder of community service centers, clinics and programs to empower the poor in Puerto Rico, New York and Appalachia. She gained international recognition in the late 1950s and 1960s for her mediation efforts with youth gangs in Brooklyn.

- Oliver White Hill, civil rights lawyer. He is best known for litigating one of the school desegregation cases that became the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* case.

- Max Kampelman, lawyer, diplomat and negotiator in Democratic and Republican administrations. "In those roles, he emphasized human rights in East-West diplomacy and prepared the foundation for long-term arms reductions between the United States and the Soviet Union," the tribute said.

- Edgar Wayburn, five-time president and a member of the board of directors of the Sierra Club for almost 40 years.



Six Westerners feared kidnapped

LONDON — Britain said yesterday it had received reports that six Western aid workers, including four Britons, had been kidnapped in Liberia.

"We understand that they were taken by an armed gang. We are investigating the situation and exploring all options," a Foreign Office spokesman said. Liberian President Charles Taylor said dissidents operating from neighboring Guinea had invaded his West African country and occupied a border town.

U.N. appoints new prosecutor

NEW YORK — The U.N. Security Council yesterday appointed Switzerland's crusading federal prosecutor, Carla del Ponte, to head U.N. war crimes tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

The council unanimously backed Mrs. del Ponte, Secretary-General Kofi Annan's choice to replace Louise Arbour, who is joining Canada's Supreme Court. Mrs. Del Ponte will start her new job Sept. 15.

Mrs. Del Ponte made international headlines with her money-laundering investigation against the brother of former Mexican President Carlos Salinas.

Clinton and Barak discuss Albright trip

President Clinton discussed prospects for Mideast peacemaking with Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel amid signs the United States may have to help fix a timetable for an Israeli pullback on the West Bank, the White House said yesterday.

Mr. Barak telephoned Mr. Clinton Tuesday evening, and they spoke for about 20 minutes about ways to make Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright's upcoming trip to the region productive, White House spokesman Barry Toiv said.

Cattle thieves kill scores of people

KAMPALA, Uganda — Karamojong cattle rustlers in Uganda massacred at least 140 people in an attack two weeks ago in northeast Uganda bordering Kenya, the state-owned New Vision newspaper reported yesterday.

The paper quoted northeastern Uganda's army commander, Lt. Col. Geoffrey Kakama, as saying his forces had visited the scene where Karamojong warriors attacked two villages, killing at least 140 people, including 70 children.

From wire dispatches and staff reports

TORTURE NOC - Media

WASHINGTON Congress is aiming to overturn Oregon's law allowing physician-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients and to make it a federal crime for doctors everywhere to prescribe narcotics to help those patients end their lives.

The measure could send a physician to prison for 20 years for prescribing a drug such as morphine to help patients kill themselves, according to lawyers in Oregon and California who have analyzed the bill.

A House committee is expected to approve the bill Tuesday, and it could go before the full House this month and the Senate before the end of the year. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., has promised a filibuster on the Senate floor; a White House aide, asked if President Clinton would sign such a measure if one reached him, called the issue particularly delicate and said no decision had been made.

Several other states, mostly in the West, have begun considering proposals similar to Oregon's law.

The Oregon law took effect in 1997 after the state's voters approved an assisted suicide ballot initiative and then decisively rejected an initiative to repeal it. In contrast to opponents' fears, only 23 people requested lethal prescriptions in 1998, the law's first full year in effect, and 15 used them, according to Oregon Health Department physicians.

Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber, an emergency medicine physician, strongly believes that persons with terminal illnesses "should have the ability to control their own death to the extent that that is possible," said Mark Gibson, the governor's health policy adviser. "He doesn't believe the federal government needs to be telling Oregonians how to manage the last several days of their lives."

But in the nation's capital, the bill's Republican sponsors have abandoned their traditional support for states' rights.

"The federal government is not going to sanction the use of controlled substances for the purpose of killing people," said Rep. Charles Canady, R-Fla., a member of the House Judiciary Committee who sponsored the bill. "If that's controversial, let the controversy go on."

The Oregon assisted suicide law specifically permits doctors, at a patient's request and after a waiting period, to prescribe a lethal dose of drugs. Attorney General Janet Reno said last year that Oregon had a right to waive the federal Controlled Substance Act for drugs prescribed for assisted suicide—an opinion that the proposed new federal law would nullify.

Concern Over Media's Handling of Violence Resurfaces By Josh Gettlin Los Angeles Times

NEW YORK Once again, a gunman's rampage has scarred the United States, and as America tries to make sense of the violence, the news media are under fire.

Lamenting the voyeuristic coverage of another attack that shocked the nation's conscience, some critics blasted journalists for turning yet another gun-wielding psychopath into a household name. "These persons yearn for publicity," wrote one, "and the press, while reporting the essential facts, has a responsibility to deny them the gratification of instant celebrity."

The complaint may sound familiar but the year was 1975 and a New York Times columnist was angered that the Time and Newsweek covers featured Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, who had tried to assassinate President Ford. From the White House and Congress came denunciations of a violence-prone media that was out of control.

It's an old concern, yet one that has taken on new urgency in an age of 24-hour "crisis television." While few doubt the obligation of journalists to cover breaking news, such as the recent shootings at a Jewish community center in Los Angeles, many believe today's voracious media pander to tabloid news values and spread fear instead of providing a context for violent crimes by reporting why something frightening happened or how unusual it may be.

Journalists, critics say, are adept at pointing fingers when violence shocks America at gun manufacturers, at Hollywood entertainment, at the Internet and video games. But they are not so eager to examine their own back yard, even as social science offers evidence that too much exposure to violent news images can lead to cynicism, a numbness to crime and even paranoia in some viewers.

"When you bombard people with frightening pictures, it creates a sense that things are out of control—a contagion of violence in the mind of people that is at odds with the reality of the world, which is that violent crime has been dropping in America," said Robert Lifton, professor of psychology at the John Jay College of Criminal

Law in New York. "People should feel safer. But you really wouldn't know it from the news."

News media violence takes up more hours than ever before. Beginning with the Persian Gulf War, all-news cable channels and the three networks have inaugurated marathon coverage of breaking news, including crimes, that stretch sometimes for days at a time. During the recent day-trader shootings in Atlanta, for example, CNN ran live, commercial-free coverage for five straight hours.

Some defend the obligations of journalists to tell people the truth, no matter how jarring. "Much of the criticism of violence in the news is a red herring because it's the responsibility of the news media to tell us what's happening in the world, whether we find the news pleasant or not," said Barbara Cochran, president of the Radio and Television News Directors Association.

Yet others say too much coverage is dominated by an "if it bleeds, it leads" philosophy. They suggest that news directors, believing viewers are drawn to crime stories, cater to them for purely economic reasons.

Amid the debate, there is little expectation that media managers will make any sustained effort to reduce the amount of crime stories they cover. Reform proposals surface from time to time, most recently when Brill's Content, a magazine that covers the media, proposed a code of decency for reporters interviewing crime victims. Yet most local news broadcasts have enjoyed ratings success with their traditional approach, and coverage of blockbuster crime stories generally helps cable ratings too. The competitive environment makes unilateral restraint difficult.

There are, however, a handful of TV stations and newspapers trying to moderate the tone and content of their coverage. Newspapers such as the Chicago Sun-Times have kept stories of high school shootings off their front pages to avoid alarming children. At KVUE-TV in Austin, Texas, news officials are in the fourth year of a program that requires crime stories to meet guidelines of relevance before they can be aired.

For the most part, though, crime news continues to dominate the media. A recent survey by the Center for Media and Public Policy in Washington showed that while homicides declined by 13 percent in America from 1990 to 1995, the number of crime stories on the three network evening news shows skyrocketed by 336 percent, a figure that excludes all stories related to the O.J. Simpson case. Surveys by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Rocky Mountain Media Watch suggest that the average dose of mayhem and violence on any given night of a local TV news show ranges from 22 percent to 41 percent.

While there is no direct correlation between watching crime stories on TV and the commission of a violent act, social scientists have compiled hundreds of studies over the last 40 years showing that prolonged exposure to TV violence, whether fictional or through news, can create dangerous attitudes.

"The exposure to TV violence from infancy on leads not so much to imitation as intimidation," said George Gerbner, a professor of behavioral psychology at the Annenberg School of Communications in Philadelphia. "It leads to what we call a 'mean world syndrome,' a feeling of vulnerability and insecurity among people whose fears may not be justified."

Others point to data that people who are already disturbed, have poor impulse control or are angry may be inspired to mimic what they see on TV programs.

In today's superheated news marketplace, reporters often pile on at the scene of a violent crime, lending the live coverage, in particular, a grotesque, circus-like quality. At times, the media's behavior has provoked angry reactions. In Littleton, Colo., school district leaders who were dismayed by coverage of the April massacre imposed strict guidelines on reporters gathering to cover the students' return to Columbine High School last month including requirements that the media not show footage of injured students, and that victims' families be treated with compassion and respect.

"There's a potential certainly in the news media's coverage of stories to strike fear into folks who should not be so fearful, due to situations that are, in many cases, isolated incidents," said Eason Jordan, CNN's president of news gathering and international networks. "If people sit around and watch violent news coverage for many hours or days on end, they won't necessarily get an accurate picture of what's going on in society."

Smashing the Gen-X Stereotype: The Polls Are Taxing Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES One arena where Gen-X has reinforced negative stereotypes, however, is in the voting booth. While most age groups experienced voting declines in the last presidential election, the 18

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STATISTICS SAY THAT VIOLENT CRIME IS DECLINING, YET MANY AMERICANS STILL FEEL
THREATENED. THE ANXIETIES ARE STOKED BY POLITICIANS, THE POLICE, THE SECURITY
BUSINESS AND THE MEDIA. A LOOK AT WHY WE ARE . . . ;
LIVING IN FEAR

BYLINE: BETH SHUSTER, TIMES STAFF WRITER

BODY:

They are on the news almost nightly: carjackers, sexual predators, workplace
gunmen, follow-home, takeover and home invasion robbers, killers enraged on the
road.

By the numbers, there are fewer and fewer of them. Yet fear of them has held
steady. That fear has overwhelmed reality, causing many Americans to feel more
threatened by crime even as the nation has become a safer place in which to
live.

The reasons for that disparity are complex, and sometimes shockingly
deliberate. Police stoke fear in part because they take crime seriously, but
also to prime their budgets; politicians feel deeply about the issue, but also
manipulate it to win votes. News organizations amplify fear by ratcheting up
their crime coverage, even as crime declines, because it helps ratings. Security
companies, theft detection manufacturers and others tap into deeply held fears
and end up turning a profit.

In some respects, the merger of profit and political advantage has turned the
crime business into the domestic equivalent of what President Dwight Eisenhower
once described as the "military-industrial complex." In that incarnation, the
fear of Soviet adventurism was real and the enemy a dangerous one. But in their
desire to combat it, military contractors, politicians and Pentagon brass
congealed into a self-sustaining system.

In the new version, prison guard unions, burglar alarm companies and others,
in effect, cooperate with politicians and police to perpetuate public fear of a
domestic enemy, in this case crime. It too presents real dangers, but even as

CRIME FOR A
PROFIT

those dangers have waned, fear has persisted.

Competition for bigger and better weapons against crime proceeds at a frantic pace. Burglar- and car-alarm sales are rising. Security services are in hot demand. Gated communities spring up across the country. Self-defense classes are jammed. Pepper spray canisters hang from key chains.

Crime rates notwithstanding, who today feels safer?

"The fear of crime is highly irrational and reflects a very deep culture of ignorance of risk factors and safety," said Eric Sterling, president of the Criminal Justice Policy Foundation in Washington. "We're a nation of 230 million people. Much of the country is perfectly safe. Crime, particularly violent crime, is very highly concentrated . . . and yet that feeling of fear lasts."

The effect of such persistent fear is subtle but profound. It can color political choices, favoring the efforts of politicians who promise to fight crime and hurting those who argue for social solutions. It can contribute to vigilance, and to tighter community links through such programs as Neighborhood Watch. But it can also lead to empty streets, barred doors and suspicion.

Where the fear of crime has ebbed perceptibly, such as in New York City, the sense of newfound freedom of movement has helped spark an urban renaissance. But elsewhere, where fear persists out of proportion to crime, the potential benefits of that kind of turnaround are elusive.

Crime Continues Its Statewide Decline

There is no single reason for declining crime rates. Theories abound as to whether stiffer penalties and more aggressive policing have led to the drop or whether sociological and demographic forces should get more credit. Some argue that soaring prison populations have taken criminals off the streets and that drugs and violence have killed many more. Others point to a drop in the number of young people, traditionally the most crime-prone group, and shifting drug preferences.

Whatever the reason, violent crime--defined by the FBI as murder, manslaughter, rape, robbery and aggravated assault--fell more than 5% last year in the U.S., from 1.68 million offenses to 1.59 million. That drop was the latest of the 1990s, during which crime has steadily tapered off, particularly in the largest cities.

Statewide, the statistics show similar reductions. Last year's crime decline marked the culmination of the biggest sustained four-year drop in state history. Today, crime in California is at its lowest level since 1967.

And, locally, violent crime also made marked declines. In the first half of 1998, according to newly released Los Angeles Police Department data, homicides were down 34% in the city--from 271 to 180. Overall violent crime dropped 13% in the first half of this year.

Homicides last year dropped to the lowest level in 20 years. In 1997, there were 590 slayings in the city; at the beginning of the decade, more than 1,000

Los Angeles residents' lives each year ended at the hands of killers.

But at the same time, Gallup polls have begun to discern a marked increase in concerns about violence.

Tallying responses to the question, "What is the most important problem facing the country today?" the Gallup Organization found several years ago that crime and violence had begun to surpass such other critical issues as international tensions, unemployment and high taxes.

To be sure, the poll's crime responses could also reflect the diminution in this decade of some of the nation's more troubling crises, such as the Cold War and the recession. People who are jobless, for example, could be more inclined to rate unemployment as their most pressing concern until they find jobs, when crime becomes a higher priority.

But a Los Angeles Times poll taken last year also found high numbers of people whose sense of security had been sorely shaken. The poll found that nearly three-fourths of residents surveyed believed crime in their neighborhoods to be about the same as it was five years ago or worse. Seventy-seven percent said they felt less safe or about as safe as they did five years ago.

Nationally, an ABC News poll conducted last year found that 51% of respondents were more afraid of crime than they were five years ago; only 7% were less worried about crime. And the Justice Department, in its regular reports, has found no decline whatsoever in the fear expressed by Americans throughout the 1990s.

Violence Lingers in Public's Mind

Criminologists note that, to some extent, a sense of security will lag behind reality because fear preys on memory.

Even long after crimes occur, the names, even faces, of victims linger. Twelve-year-old Polly Klaas is kidnapped from her Petaluma bedroom, then raped and murdered. Three-year-old Stephanie Kuhen is shot to death in a Cypress Park alley. South-Central teacher Alfredo Perez is shot in the head in a school library by a gangster's stray bullet. Six-year-old beauty queen JonBenet Ramsey dies of strangulation, and her parents are not ruled out as suspects in the crime, which occurs in the tidy town of Boulder, Colo.

"While memory fades over time, it gets kicked up every time you hear about a new crime that allows you to identify with the victim," said Alfred Blumstein, a criminology professor at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz School of Public Policy and Management. "Polly Klaas could have been any of our daughters, and that murder stirs up all of our concerns for our daughters."

Police Keep Sense of Threat Alive

And those memories allow the institutions invested in crime to benefit from fear.

For example, although police departments often take credit for falling crime, they rarely serve to calm the public. Indeed, they often take the opposite tack,

warning of danger even as crime subsides.

"Our business is crime," said former LAPD acting Police Chief Bayan Lewis. "Our business is not to go to Neighborhood Watch meetings and say, 'Don't worry about it anymore.' Our business is to maintain a strong Neighborhood Watch, encourage people to get to know their local community police officers."

Although that may serve the political interests of police, it also helps to distort the reality of declining crime.

"It's a two-edged sword," Lewis said. "We have convinced the public to support three-strikes laws lengthening prison sentences, to make judges tough on criminals. . . . Now we can't say, 'OK, great, we don't need all that now.' You have to be cautious about that."

Los Angeles Police Chief Bernard C. Parks, who has boasted about crime declines and asked to be judged on his ability to fight crime, surprised top city officials last month when he announced that he will need at least 1,000 more officers over the next five years. The reason: an ever-present threat of crime.

In addition, police officials such as Parks and Lewis say it's not prudent to cut back on tough sentencing or a national police buildup, because law enforcement authorities believe they are largely responsible for declining crime. If police told people they could relax about crime, the argument goes, violence would rebound, and the public would increasingly be in real danger.

If playing on fears is what it took to convince the public to invest in more police, then it has not been without a return. Experts generally agree that the increase in police has made some impact on crime, particularly in cities such as New York.

In that city, where overall crime dropped nearly half from levels of five years ago, business and tourism are booming--in large part because there is a perception that the city is safer.

"The reduction in crime has improved New York's quality of life, bolstered job growth and increased investment throughout the city," said Bernadette O'Leary, a spokeswoman for the New York City Economic Development Corp. "I think the crime decline has been very significant in the city's revival."

Tourism in the city has set records each year for the last several, and investors are sinking money into developments and businesses. Earlier this month, developers announced plans for a \$ 66-million retail and entertainment complex. Not in Times Square. In Harlem.

"Big business isn't afraid to invest in the city anymore," said Colleen Roche, New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's spokeswoman. "It's not just that crime is down, but that the whole quality of life is better."

Giuliani's emphasis, a tougher version of a program touted by Mayor Richard Riordan for Los Angeles, has been to rid the city of aggressive panhandlers, even the so-called squeegee-men who would run up to cars and begin washing windshields for change.

"The extra dollars for the increased police presence and the no-nonsense attitude on prosecution has made people feel safer and made more people want to come to the city," said Mark Jaffe, executive director of the Greater New York Chamber of Commerce. "That's the word on the street."

Public Is Still a Hard Sell

In New York as well as Los Angeles, some say declining drug sales in neighborhoods have led to fewer violent confrontations on city streets. Gang members are receiving stiffer penalties, as are other criminals, taking them off the streets and reducing their opportunities to claim new victims.

Los Angeles City Atty. James K. Hahn points to those efforts and others as part of the reasons for the declining crime rates. But he also sees a "skeptical public" that is hard-pressed to believe these efforts are working.

"Trying to sell this big drop in crime is not an easy task," Hahn said. "That message seems to be in direct conflict with everything else they're hearing."

Although prosecutors and police believe they are helping to improve communities and allay fears, some observers warn that anti-crime efforts can actually breed fear even as they thwart crime.

"There are constantly new categories of violence," said Barry Glassner, a USC sociology professor who is writing a book about the culture of fear. "For a while, it was carjacking. . . . Now, it's road rage. . . . The effect of it is that the public hears a lot about what they think is this new pressing problem. You wouldn't have panicked three months ago, but there's more of a reason to panic now."

Crime Always Safe as a Campaign Issue

If police and prosecutors heighten fear for their own reasons, politicians bring another level of anxiety.

Crime frequently becomes a campaign issue as politicians routinely tap into the public's fear. In 1993, Riordan won the mayor's office in part based on his slogan, "Tough enough to turn L.A. around," and his campaign's vivid imagery of a decaying, dangerous Hollywood. Riordan's literature did not mention that the city already was experiencing a drop in crime.

Similar techniques are used nationally by both Democrats and Republicans. In 1988, George Bush hammered Michael Dukakis for releasing criminals into the community. In 1992, Bill Clinton won office in part based on his pledge to put 100,000 more police officers on the nation's streets.

"Crime is always safe," said Joe Cerrell, a Los Angeles political consultant. "It's good for the political routine, for the political roadshow. I put this right up there with motherhood and apple pie: the fear of crime. Who's going to say we don't need a few damn more cops?"

Sterling, of the Criminal Justice Policy Foundation, agreed, saying that politicians who pronounce their tough attitude toward crime are rarely attacked

by opponents or, more important, voters.

"This is one area where they will offend no constituents, no special interest," Sterling said. "If I'm running for office and I want to show how tough I am, I point to crime. The rhetoric simply serves political objectives."

But why not let a candidate boast about crime drops, about increasing numbers of officers on the streets? About safer neighborhoods and schools?

The answer: That message is not as sexy and has much less impact.

And that is nowhere more true than on television, where the adage "If it bleeds, it leads" has become the catch phrase for national and local news.

* TV News: The Murder du Jour *

Indeed, some experts and media critics point to television as the main reason for the public's rising fear of crime. To be sure, they also criticize tabloids for sensationalizing crime--such as the JonBenet case and others--but they say television appears to have broader impact.

On national and local TV news broadcasts, crime stories have soared. From 1990 to 1995--a period when the FBI reported a 13% drop in the homicide rate--network news coverage of murder increased a whopping 336%, and that did not even include coverage of the O.J. Simpson case, according to the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a Washington-based nonpartisan, nonprofit group that monitors the media. Nat'l +
Local
News

"I think this is the best example I've seen of media images driving public perception in the face of contradictory facts," said Bob Lichter, president of the group. "The reality is going one way, the media images are going another and the public perception follows the images rather than the reality."

Lichter's study of crime stories on the news found some other startling results: Crime was the leading television news topic in the 1990s, far outpacing international and national news--even presidential campaign coverage. During 1995, for example, the three networks aired 2,574 crime stories, more than triple the total three years earlier. Crime
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"It's one thing to see an interview with an unemployed worker and another to see a blood-splattered crime scene," Lichter said. "That holds your attention."

Television news executives, who are somewhat weary of the criticism and defensive about their crime coverage, say the current trend is to add more balance to their broadcasts. But they readily acknowledge that a "good" crime story with video does grab viewers, and that means higher ratings. Ratings

"Do I think there are too many crime stories on television? Yes," said Pat Casey, managing editor at KCBS-Channel 2 in Los Angeles. "But it's not nearly what it was or what it could be. . . . Every story needs to be judged on its merits. I think that's our responsibility."

Local television stations have ever more vivid ways of covering crime. With the rise of freelancers who shoot nighttime crime video and then sell it to the

stations, as well as the use of news helicopters, stations could rely solely on crime news for their broadcasts if they wished.

"In Los Angeles, the thing you need to watch is stringer tape the nighttime video and helicopters," Casey said, adding that the station has cut in half the number of freelance video pieces it buys. "In any afternoon in Los Angeles, you could find death and destruction to fly over."

Fear of Crime Is Good for Business

The fear of crime also has spawned whole new areas of research for criminologists, sociologists and others. At Florida State University, Ted Chiricos, a professor in the criminology and criminal justice school, said he has conducted several large-scale surveys on that issue.

In his most recent study, the impact of local television crime news on residents' fear levels was significant, regardless of whether the residents lived in high-crime areas.

"People living in places with lower crime rates and people with high crime rates all had the same levels of fear," Chiricos said. "Local news is definitely related to higher levels of fear."

The Times Poll, which surveyed 1,143 city residents with a margin of error of 3 percentage points in either direction, found similar results. In that poll, 80% of city residents believed that media reports of violent crimes increased their personal fear of crime, with more than half saying it increases fear "a lot."

The same poll found that a majority of the residents--58%--did not know anyone who had been shot, stabbed or seriously wounded in Los Angeles.

But crimes, particularly violent ones such as assaults or rapes, leave a legacy of fear in victims. For those people, declining crime statistics are nearly meaningless. Once the crime occurs, victims often say, it shatters whatever sense of security they once had.

As a result, the message put out by some police and politicians confirms victims' perceptions of crime.

Fear not only helps police and politicians, it also is good for business.

The Correctional Corp. of America, a publicly held company that builds private prisons, has looked at California with relish: The state needs to build new prisons to accommodate the 25,000 more inmates expected by 2000. The prison guards union, the California Correctional Peace Officers Assn., has become one of the most powerful lobbies in Sacramento--in part because it donates huge sums to political campaigns.

The security industry is booming. Americans spent an estimated \$ 14 billion on professionally installed electronic security products and services last year, and more than one in five homes in the United States and Canada had electronic alarm systems by the end of the year.

Experts say these companies, not unlike campaigning politicians, use the public's fear of crime to sell the latest home- and car-alarm systems and other protective devices.

Aside from their television and print ads--which can be graphic in depicting lone motorists securing their cars--some security, alarm and lock companies regularly promote products by manipulating crime data so crime appears to be worse.

For example, at the end of a recent release issued by a lock company, officials said that "in the time it has taken you to read this article, another nine property thefts have occurred. . . . Theft is a crime of opportunity; eliminating the opportunity eliminates your chance of becoming a victim."

One security alarm company sent out notices listing burglars' "likes and dislikes," including these: "Burglars prefer homes near highways and homes with privacy fences and large shrubs. . . . Their favorite time to operate is during the day, when no one is home. Deterrents for burglars include security systems and dogs."

Those who work in the industry defend their practices.

"I think we are part of the solution," said Dave Saddler, a spokesman for the National Burglar and Fire Alarm Assn. in Bethesda, Md. "The steps people are taking to protect their communities themselves are working. I think it's the random nature of crime--that it can happen any time, anywhere--that keeps people afraid."

Perhaps, as some suggest, reasons to be fearful are so prevalent that residents can't help but be afraid.

"If I'm watching a cop show at 10 and then the news comes on at 11 with the latest murder, it all just blends together," said Sterling of the Criminal Justice Policy Foundation. "That's reality, and I see it every night. It's counterintuitive to think of the actual crime rates."

"The data is boring, it's numbers and it's irrelevant," he said. "This is what I'm seeing: another atrocious crime being committed. And that is still attention-grabbing."

(BEGIN TEXT OF INFOBOX / INFOGRAPHIC)

The Series at a Glance

Sunday: A decade of falling crime has not left Americans feeling safer. One reason for that is a coalition of self-interest--politicians, media, police and security companies--that exploits the fear of crime in order to gain from it.

Monday: The Los Angeles Police Department is committed to reducing "the fear and incidence of crime." It has succeeded in one mission but failed in the other.

Tuesday: In one Los Angeles County neighborhood, fear outruns reality, leaving residents uncomfortable in their community even though the statistics

suggest that they should be enjoying a sense of security.

(BEGIN TEXT OF INFOBOX / INFOGRAPHIC)

More Worry, Less Crime

Annually, the Gallup organization asks Americans the question: What is the most important problem facing the country today?

For much of the 1990s, the highest percentage of respondents cited crime and violence as their greatest concern.

* Researchers attribute the 1994 jump in concern over crime to the national debate over the federal crime bill.

During a decade in which fear of crime has remained steady or grown, reports of serious crime actually have declined:

Actual incidents of violent crime (in millions)

'97: 1.59

Source: Uniform Crime Reports, 1990-96. 1997 figures is an estimate drawn from the preliminary report issued in May

(BEGIN TEXT OF INFOBOX / INFOGRAPHIC)

THE TIMES POLL: Safety Check

From a 1997 Times poll

Do you feel safer in your community now than you did five years ago, or less safe, or do you feel about as safe as you did five years ago?

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

Safer: 13%

Less safe: 43%

About as safe: 34%

Don't know: 10%

*

WESTSIDE

Safer: 8%

Less safe: 27%

About as safe: 41%

Don't know: 24%

*

CENTRAL

Safer: 16%

Less safe: 38%

About as safe: 41%

Don't know: 5%

*

SOUTH

Safer: 20%

Less safe: 42%

About as safe: 36%

Don't know: 2%

Crime in the News

Number of crime stories featured on national network TV broadcasts

1990: 757

1991: 630

1992: 830

1993: 1,698

1994: 1,949

1995: 2,574

1996: 1,227

1997: 1,617

Note: 1994 and 1995 were skewed heavily by coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial

Top 10 Topics of the Nineties



Number of stories on ABC, CBS, NBC evening newscasts

Crime: 9,391

Economy/Business: 6,673

Health: 6,047

USSR/Russia: 4,962

Persian Gulf War: 4,867

Yugoslavia/Bosnia: 3,780

Israel/Palestinians: 2,674

Campaign '92: 2,427

Campaign '96: 1,865

Iraq: 1,547

Source: 1997 Times Poll, Center for Media and Public Affairs

GRAPHIC: PHOTO: Bob Lichter, of Center for Media and Public Affairs, said crime was the leading TV news topic of the 1990s. PHOTOGRAPHER: VINCE LUPO / For The Times GRAPHIC: More Worry, Less Crime, LORENA INIGUEZ / Los Angeles Times GRAPHIC: THE TIMES POLL: Safety Check, LORENA INIGUEZ / Los Angeles Times

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The News and Observer (Raleigh, NC)

August 9, 1998 Sunday, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT; Pg. G1

LENGTH: 2113 words

HEADLINE: Two views of the local news

BYLINE: ADRIENNE M. JOHNSON, STAFF WRITER

BODY:

It was an odd remark to hear in a local news broadcast. In a report last week about a new law requiring students to stay in school if they want to get their driver's licenses, people complained in on-camera interviews that they didn't know about the new rules before they took effect. The reason? A lack of media attention, the reporter stated.

These days, local newscasts don't show too much action at the Legislature, where laws are proposed, debated, enacted. Coverage has changed, shifting toward a people-oriented approach to the news. Newscasts have more weather and crime, personal finance and health than nuts-and-bolts coverage of newsmakers and institutions. The approach is backed by research that underscores the need to grab attention visually and to connect with viewers personally.

The trend has raised questions about whether local news has abdicated its responsibility to inform in favor of a desire to please.

"Journalism has been called - what? - the fourth estate, the fourth branch of government," says Dave Boliek, a former WTVD reporter who left the business after more than 25 years to start a nonprofit service. "You watch the government to make sure it is doing what it is supposed to do. The rape of the day, the murder of the day, the poor soul of the day has nothing to do with that. It has to do with gaining audience, and the media is now more concerned with attracting audience than it is with telling that audience anything that's useful, anything that's vital."

But just as vigorous in defense are those in the news business and still proud of their profession. They don't deny that the business has changed. Instead of journalists dictating what they believe the public needs to know, they are listening to what the public says it wants. That doesn't mean a loss in quality, they insist.

"We do cover politics, but we're not going to do it the boring way," says Lowell Briggs, NBC 17's news director. "If there's a reduction in the number of food stamps, we are not going to show that by interviewing the legislator. We're going to find the people it's going to affect. It ain't gonna hit home unless it has emotional impact. News is about people."

With five stations in the Triangle originating more than 12 hours of daily

newscasts, it's clear that there's room for plenty of stories on the air. But the power of television rests in its images, and some believe important stories that aren't visually exciting aren't making the cut.

"It's tough to sell a story that's journalistically sound, but with no good pictures," says Robert Carver, a former reporter for WRAL and WTVD who's now the deputy director of public affairs for the state Department of Crime Control and Public Safety. "Like the legislature. They do important business, but watching them do it is not the most interesting thing in the world."

If Carver's right, the loss of such stories is critical. A September 1997 study by the Center-for Media and Public Affairs, a nonpartisan research and educational organization, revealed that local television news reaches more people, gets better ratings of quality and has more credibility than network news or local newspapers. That means in many homes, local newscasts may have a primary role in shaping opinion, presenting images and providing information.

That's what got Chris Fitzsimon concerned. "Television is the most compelling medium when used correctly," says the executive director of the Common Sense Foundation, a public policy organization based in Raleigh. But he's found that the Triangle's local newscasts seldom meet his standard for what's important.

In May 1997, Fitzsimon and Andrea Verykoulis, a journalism student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, conducted a study of the newscasts on WRAL, WTVD and NBC-17. They watched 107 hours of taped broadcasts and took notes on what they saw - and what they didn't see.

On the day the state House of Representatives unveiled its plans for spending \$ 12 billion of taxpayer money, none of the stations covered the story. Instead, they focused on the start of the hurricane season, even though no hurricanes were in sight. On another day, local stations opted not to cover a plan by Gov. Jim Hunt's administration to cut welfare checks to families headed by disabled adults. Instead, the newscasts included stories about a sheriff's deputy hitting a van (and injuring no one), a rape in Wake County, arson in Fayetteville, sportscaster Marv Albert's indictment and other stories.

"Lack of coverage of state and local politics was the rule not the exception," said the study, which was released this past spring. Fitzsimon and Verykoulis tallied 410 stories about government and politics, compared with 842 stories about crime and 530 feature stories. The study suggests that the stations over-report crime, perhaps giving a distorted picture of life in this area.

"Who is this news intended to serve?" the study asked in its conclusion. "What does it offer those who watch it? ... Is this actually news?"

###

From service to product:

In its infancy, televised local news was considered a public service. Newspapers and the 6 o'clock national news were where you found the journalism heroics. That changed gradually, then rapidly. In the mid-'80s, deregulation brought more stations to the dial, and that meant more station owners seeking

Local News ✓

more revenue. They figured something out quickly.

"Local news, once you get the huge equipment purchase out of the way, is a relatively cheap enterprise," says Fitzsimon, who worked at WRAL in 1989 until 1991 when he left to work with then-Speaker of the House Dan Blue.

profitability
When news became linked with profitability, it became both a product and a service. Products, of course, are marketed. So ratings are measured, advertising is sold, demographics are considered.

"There were different economic demands then, than now," says Briggs. "It's a business. That's a reality today."

The level of competitiveness soared in this new environment. Newscasts had to be distinguished not just by content but by the visual strength of content. Stations started upgrading sets and adding jazzy graphics. Journalists got make-up tips.

To compete, some stations brought in advisors to read the public's interests and responses.

Boliek is particularly disturbed by that development. "Consultants tell you how you should be doing news based on what their surveys say the audience wants to know," he says. "But news is not what people want to know. It's a combination of what they want to know and what they need to know."

Triangle news directors downplay the role of consultants when it comes to shaping the news. But they do believe in research.

"No news department does what a consultant says," says Briggs. "They do what viewers say. You're trying to tell the weaknesses of the competition, but ultimately we're not going to do anything the viewer doesn't want us to do."

WRAL's news director John Harris agrees. "We are not a consultant-driven station. We don't have a consultant that deals much with content. We do research. It's a good way of gauging what people care about."

More and more, that means health teams, crime watchers and "your money" gurus.

"We are living in an era where people's concerns are less global, more personal," says Barbara Cochran, president of the Radio-Television News Directors Association. "There's no cold war. The economy's pretty good. People are interested in health, personal safety, personal finance, their kids' safety."

So, these broadcasts, with their heavier doses of news-you-can-use, lifestyle stories and resulting diminution of the straight-news approach, reflect a more democratic local newscast. But critics fear there's a price for that shift.

###

Finding a definition of news:

A basic tenet of journalism is that there are at least two sides to every story. Presenting both sides doesn't explain, however, how two groups can look at the same news and one sees erosion while the other sees improvement.

Part of the dispute is deciding what news is.

"There is not a definition of news that you can hang your hat on," says Boliek. "The day Eric Severeid retired from CBS he did his last commentary and he said it is a rude art. That it's not science. It's not a profession. it's not even art. It's a rude art."

Perhaps that's why if you turn to a local station's 6 o'clock news, you'll see all sorts of things that seem to qualify as "local news." One night last week, along with coverage of a tax evasion bill, crimes against Latinos and an ordinance that could affect the homeless, local stations also aired stories about a dog biting an animal control officer, a couple in Palm Beach that married on water skis and how to orient your child to kindergarten.

News has become both the events of the day and plain old information.

The other part of the dispute involves the shift to a more democratic newscast, where news reflects what research indicates the public wants.

News directors hold that the public decides on such a mix.

"In the old days, a journalist's and a news department's skill was defining what people wanted to know," says Briggs. "Old local news didn't have to answer to viewers in deciding what the most important story of the day was. News was appointment viewing. You could see it at six or 11. It's not like that now."

But Fitzsimon suggests that news directors are abdicating their responsibility as journalists when they let consultants and viewer surveys dictate the contents of a newscast.

"You generally think that journalists are professionals, that they make decisions about what's important and that's what they tell us," he says. "I have a lot of friends who are working two jobs and raising kids and they don't have time to read The N&O op-ed page everyday. ... So they turn on the television while they're making dinner or between jobs and they say, 'Well, I'll see what's going on in the world.'"

"They watch channel 11 or channel 17 and they feel like those people are making decisions and letting them know what's going on in their community. They count on television news. They count on people that they trust to tell them what they need to know, and I would argue that they are not being told what they need to know. I don't think it's fair to blame the viewers."

###

★ Over-reporting of crime?: ★

Sometimes, though, where viewer preference begins and journalistic judgment begins gets tricky. Take news coverage in crime, for instance. The Common Sense report tallied twice as many stories about crime as stories about politics and

local government, a distortion of the Triangle's level of crime. Are the newscasts stirring up viewers' concerns?

News directors say no. Crime stories often carry too much urgency to be ignored, they believe.

"It depends on the impact," says Jonathan Knopf, a TV news consultant until he replaced Kevin Kelly as news director at WLFL-WB22 last month. "Is there a lesson to be learned? Does it have relevance? That's my litmus test. The question is value.

"If the shooting is a stray bullet drive-by that kills a 3-year-old, no one wants to necessarily accept that it happened, but they want to hear about it. It's senseless. The story sends a message, a lesson we need to all be aware of: Guns kill people."

And, yes, it's emotional and visual, too. So, ultimately the challenge is to manage both sides of the news; to let public service thrive with profitability. At NBC-17, Briggs believes he meets that challenge. He speaks with pride about a recent investigative series on a landlord as a story that got both viewer and political response. He says other features such as the station's fan drive and Donna Gregory's series on local communities are examples of ways television now connects with viewers directly.

"We see these efforts as another way for a multimedia medium to reach people," he says. "TV has to be a lot more reactive to viewers."

"We can always do better. ... Better means how we serve viewers, how we can provide information in a variety of ways and how we read what viewers want."

In the end, then, it comes down to the viewer. That's who ultimately guides the news, be it through surveys, guidance, protest or passivity.

"I'm hoping what this study and others like it are doing is getting community leaders and citizens talking to the people who make these decisions," says Fitzsimon. "That's the ultimate solution, communities need to communicate with the people. People talk about sending politicians letters, or calling them or having meetings with them all the time. That should happen with the people that cover the news."

GRAPHIC: c photo; photo; file Robert Carver, who spent 17 years in television news, says important local stories that lack visual appeal often fail to make the newscast. Dave Boliek, photographed at the end of his tenure with WTVD, says local news should balance what people want to know with what they need to know. Staff photo by Scott Sharpe

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HEADLINE: Crime rate recedes, but wariness remains

BYLINE: Patrick O'Driscoll

BODY:

The statistics are stunning: For six years in a row, serious crime in America has steadily declined.

Since 1991, murder has fallen almost 28%. Rape is down 13%. Robbery has plunged 29%. In almost every big city from New York and Boston to Los Angeles and San Francisco, the number of assaults, burglaries and car thefts has plummeted.

In 1996, the number of crime victims was the lowest since the federal government began keeping track 25 years ago. Still, the impression lingers among many that the United States is in the clutches of more lawlessness, despite numerical proof of less.

But dozens of personal interviews and a new USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll suggest the drop in crime may be sinking in. Across the country, there are flickers of recognition that serious offenses are receding across the board. In Boston, Los Angeles and other cities, some colleges and universities attribute increased enrollment in part to parents who are no longer afraid to send their children to inner-city campuses. In New York, Baltimore and elsewhere, real estate prices are climbing in neighborhoods once abandoned or shunned out of fear.

Even mundane acts like getting home-delivery pizza or strolling through a local park are possible again in formerly tough neighborhoods from Columbia, S.C., to Union City, Calif.

In the new poll, five in 10 of the 1,013 adults questioned think there's more crime in the country now than a year ago. But in an identical poll in 1993, nearly nine out of 10 felt that way.

Compared with a similar poll question five years ago, fewer people say they worry very much now about being murdered, mugged, raped, burglarized or attacked in their cars.

Not that they've lost their wariness. However long the decline continues, the crime wave that preceded it conditioned American society to keep its guard up, perhaps permanently.

Decrease
in
CRIME

Levels of caution thought unnecessary in the 1950s are common behavior today. Nearly 8 million people now live in gated communities in the suburbs, with their implied promise of walling out strangers and criminals. Millions more are installing home and car security systems. In 42 states, growing numbers are carrying concealed handguns for self-protection.

Sunday, the FBI will publish final crime reports for 1997, chronicling a sixth straight year of fewer violent and serious offenses. From cities to suburbs to rural towns, there is less murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Also down are the major property crimes of burglary, larceny, car theft and arson.

"There was a time when I couldn't jog in my own neighborhood. Now I can walk it at night," says Maria Viramontes, 47, of Richmond, Calif., who heads an anti-crime coalition of 16 East Bay suburbs of San Francisco. "Perception is catching up with reality. People do have a sense of feeling safer."

In a 1992 Gallup survey, only 19% thought crime in their own areas had lessened over the previous year. But in this new poll, nearly half, 48%, say there's less crime in their neighborhoods than last year. It's the first time in 10 different years of asking that question that Gallup found a majority of Americans saying crime is going down in their home locales.

The FBI statistics are "seeping through to people," says Frank Newport, editor-in-chief of the Gallup Poll. "But we still don't even have a majority of Americans who say there's less crime now than a year ago."

Crime coverage

America's crime perception gap has been fostered, criminologists say, by a steady drumbeat of alarms: saturation coverage of crime as news on both television and in newspapers, violent TV dramas and crime-themed "action" movies, anti-crime political campaigns, fear-themed marketing by security businesses and, for some, personal experiences as crime victims.

"I don't think that whether the crime rate is 30% or 300% affects people as much as the fact that they just heard about their neighbor's house getting burglarized," says Robert Gardner, a California security consultant. "Crime still is a large concern, and numbers are a little ethereal."

Lower crime is relative. The rates of major crimes -- the number of crimes per 100,000 population -- have fallen dramatically. But the overall numbers are much higher than in the 1950s because today's population is bigger.

Last year, Los Angeles recorded its fewest murders in 20 years. But the body count of 590 in 1997 still was sobering.

"It's great that things are slightly less horrific than they were yesterday, but things are still horrific," says David Beatty, public policy director for the National Victim Center, a nonprofit group that works for crime victims' rights. "It's better than seeing (the crime rate) go up 5% or 10%. But to be honest with you, there are still 9 million violent crime victims in this country. When you're that far behind, the sense that (crime) is going down at all really doesn't give you that much solace."

Besides, feeling safer from crime often depends on where you live. In crime-ridden areas where a mix of stepped-up policing and neighborhood activism have dramatically lowered crime rates, residents notice it in a big way. But in locales where there never was much crime to begin with, reports of worse crime elsewhere can make them feel it's rampant, even if they're not personally threatened.

"You don't notice (crime) out here," says Craig First, 31, an optical technician from Concord, Mass., the famous colonial village and now an affluent Boston suburb. "This is a very quiet place. People have home security systems and all sorts of devices on their cars, but that's because of their lifestyle. That won't change because crime goes down."

The most significant drop in serious crime in the 1990s is in major cities, not the suburbs or the countryside. Preliminary FBI figures for last year show the overall crime index dropped 5% in cities of 250,000 people or more, compared with 3% in suburban counties and just 1% in rural counties.

"For most people, when the crime rate went up, they were not any less safe because the crime was not in their neighborhoods," says Alfred Blumstein, a professor of research and public policy at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

Skeptics say crime stats also lend a false sense of security. They note that the Department of Justice's National Crime Victimization Survey, which gathers data from victims' points of view, estimated in 1996 that only 42% of violent crime was reported to the police.

Police crime counts are what the FBI uses to calculate the crime index. Doubters note recent news stories that police in Philadelphia, Atlanta and Boca Raton, Fla., allegedly manipulated or falsely reported crime figures to keep up with pressure to deliver lower numbers.

What's more, the reports track only major categories of violent or serious crime. Left out are less serious but highly visible offenses: most drug crimes, prostitution, graffiti and vandalism. Such crimes often heighten awareness and fear in everyday life.

*Violent crimes =
Greater coverage*

The high-profile deadliness of random crime, a staple on the nightly news and daily front pages, also skews the fear factor. Think of carjackings and home invasions. Remember Ennis Cosby and Polly

*News
Coverage*

Klaas. Or schoolyards in Jonesboro, Ark.; Springfield, Ore.; Pearl, Miss., and West Paducah, Ky.

After last spring's heavily publicized string of school shootings, "all of a sudden, people are getting the impression as they see what's going on that there are no safe places," says violence researcher Delbert Elliott, director of the University of Colorado Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

Carnegie Mellon's Blumstein says most people react not to statistics but to "singular events that they themselves may identify with." He cites the case in 1993 of Polly Klaas, a 12-year-old California girl kidnapped from her bedroom, then raped and murdered.

"That really set people on edge," Blumstein says. "If it's two kids in a poverty area shooting at each other with weapons they may have stolen, it doesn't affect an individual's sense of risk. But if some deranged individual sneaks into your house and abducts your daughter, that can happen to any of us."

Who gets credit?

How and why crime has fallen is a source of endless debate for politicians, police, crime scholars and community activists. Some credit a strong economy where low unemployment means fewer people resorting to crime. Others credit community police patrols. The litany goes on: Drug-crime crackdowns. More cops to bust criminals. More criminals doing more time in more prisons. A smaller population in the "crime-prone" ages from mid-teens to mid-20s. Neighborhood "watch" patrols. Cleanup of blighted city blocks, graffiti and broken windows.

Whatever the reason, the effect of lower crime on everyday life shows up in ways both stark and subtle.

In high-profile places such as New York and Los Angeles, sheer size makes major crime more commonplace -- and its decline all the more noticeable.

Redeveloped downtowns in Denver and other growth cities are refilling with shoppers by day, diners and concertgoers by night and a new cadre of full-time dwellers in lofts and high-rises.

In Atlanta, waiter David Borgiet, mugged one night last August as he walked home, says he was actually victimized because his Midtown neighborhood is safer. With a local economic boom came a greater police presence and a greater sense of security. His caution had eased.

"I knew that area was pretty busy. It has cleaned up a lot since I moved here. My guard was down because of all the new development," says Borgiet, 28.

"When we wanted to go to the zoo or check out something in San

Diego, we didn't have to go to the extremes of the last 10 years. We felt a lot more comfortable," says Tracy McBryde, 33, a former Southern Californian who recently moved to Rittman, Ohio. "Before, you had to make sure you were back before dark, or make sure you were parked under really bright lights. I couldn't carry a purse (downtown). I'd put my things in my pockets."

In urban pockets reclaimed from drugs, violence or neglect, real estate prices are rising. It's not just because of the United States' bull run of prosperity this decade. Home sellers and buyers say the drop in crime is a key reason.

"My office, we're getting 300 calls a day," says Willie Katherine Suggs, a real estate broker in New York's Harlem district, where refurbished Victorian brownstones can now fetch more than \$ 700,000. Suggs credits community policing programs, begun under Mayor David Dinkins and fostered by Mayor Rudy Giuliani, as a major contribution to the neighborhood turnaround.

"Some people still think Harlem is one big slum," says Suggs, whose clients come in all colors and income levels. "But I've got an Academy Award-winning producer looking (for a home) here, an Emmy-nominated actress looking here. People aren't stupid. They're not going to live where they don't feel safe."

While Giuliani's high-profile campaign against crime has boosted tourism to record levels and improved the quality of life, no one seems to be abandoning caution and good sense in the nation's largest city.

At closing time, New York merchants still cover their storefronts with roll-down metal grates or doors. Even if crime is down, "it's too late to change. Better safe," says Andy Azzaro, owner of Top Man barbershop in Greenwich Village.

Boston was in the spotlight recently for its remarkable 21/2-year period without any gun-related deaths of youths. But all decade long, serious crime has plunged, a 44% dive since 1990. Citizens have definitely noticed.

In 1995, a survey of 1,003 Boston adults by the police department found 55% felt safe walking alone in their neighborhoods at night. Last year, police put the same question to 3,000 residents and got a startling new result: 76% said they felt safe.

Boston police credit aggressive "community policing," a popular '90s law enforcement philosophy in which officers walk beats and get to know neighborhoods and residents closely.

Skeptics suggest skyrocketing rents, which have pushed poor people out of town, are a less publicized factor. "Rent control is gone, and the cost of having a home here has tripled," says Jack Litwinsky, 40, a university clerk from Cambridge. "I worry about that more than crime."

Boston had a record 152 homicides in 1990. Last year, there were 43, the fewest in 37 years. Through 10 months of this year, the count was just 31.

Boston garden designer Tony Stanley doesn't pay much attention to news of crime's decline. "I lock my doors when I go out, that sort of thing. But I'd do that regardless of crime statistics," says Stanley, 29. "Why invite trouble?"

But Stanley, who teaches karate part time, connects the drop to a subtle change in his martial-arts clientele: "Lately people say they're coming for lessons because they're interested in health and sport and the artistry of it. They almost never mention self-defense these days."

On the opposite coast, community policing works in the San Francisco suburb of Union City, Calif., population 62,490, where there hasn't been a murder in three years. The police department has mini-stations in two neighborhoods once rife with crime.

Small successes beget greater ones. In 1994, pizza parlors quit delivering in the Gonzales Gardens public housing project in Columbia, S.C., because of rampant robberies. The next year, police opened a substation there and blended community policing with teen tutoring and a crackdown on school truancy. Today, the pizza deliverers are back, and schoolkids in the complex of 1,500 residents are thriving. Truancy is down. Classroom performance is up. Expulsions have virtually disappeared. School-age pregnancies have plummeted.

Five years ago, noisy street confrontations and gunshots were the soundtrack of daily life for young Neiasha Jones of Richmond, Calif., a working-class San Francisco suburb. She and her mother had just moved into their new home, a Habitat for Humanity house built in an edgy neighborhood. Directly across the street was a crack house.

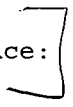
"The first day, four guys jacked the ice cream man. Hit him upside the head with a brick," recalls Jones, then just 12. Within days, thieves dug up and hauled off the shrubs that Habitat volunteers had planted in her front yard.

The house has a nice front porch, says Jones' mother, Charlene Young, 51, a records analyst at San Quentin federal prison a few miles away. "But I didn't go outside. I went to work in the prison, and Neiasha was in 'prison' at home."

But police eventually increased patrols and cracked down on the crackhouse. The landlord cleaned up the property, and the block came back. Jones is so spooked now by the calm that she can't be home without having the radio or TV playing as background noise.

"It's so quiet I can't stand it," she says.

On the screen 

The closest brush most Americans have with crime is a daily occurrence: They turn on their TV sets. 

Declining crime statistics don't mean much when news coverage or dramatization of horrifying acts slashes across the screen. 

Darold Condra, 67, a melon grower in rural Arbuckle, Calif., has a typical response: "Where's the crime rate going down?"

"We get all the Sacramento TV news reports," says Condra, who farms about 50 miles northwest of the state capital. "It seems like the news is full of (crime) every night."

James Fox, criminal justice dean at Northeastern University in Boston, says despite double-digit drops in crime, "a few grisly stories on the 11 o'clock news would have a much greater impact on people's fears and perceptions. The evening news is more the crime-time news than the prime-time news."

CRIME-time news
not
PRIME-time

The USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll found 82% of respondents believe TV news and entertainment programs show more crime and violence than five years ago. Recent studies of local and network programming also suggest that, even as the crime rate drops, crime and violence get far more air time than other topics. 

The Center for Media and Public Affairs, a Washington, D.C.-based group that monitors TV reporting of major news, found network coverage of murder rose 336% from 1990 to 1995, even after excluding the O.J. Simpson case. (Include that one, and the increase is 1,352%.)

During the same period, actual homicides fell 13%. The center calls this a "TV crime wave," with crime by far the most heavily reported subject of the decade on network news.

Since 1995, Rocky Mountain Media Watch, a Denver-based group, has measured local TV news content in four spot surveys of dozens of major cities.

It found that time devoted to crime stories far outstripped any other category of news.

In a survey of 102 local newscasts last March, crime took 27% of the air time, more than twice the next closest category.

crime - 27% of
air time

Crime stories led off 38 telecasts, evoking the broadcast cliché, "If it bleeds, it leads."

Barbara Cochran, president of the Radio Television News Directors Association, contends that broadcast news chiefs are putting more crime stories in proper context, "not so much to report crime but to talk about crime solutions." The group's annual convention

in September even included a panel discussion on covering crime and tragedy more responsibly.

"Crime is always going to be interesting news," Cochran adds. "But I see signs that news directors are taking steps to make crime coverage relevant. Certainly a diet of meaningless crime stories is not going to succeed in the long run with the audience."

Research by University of Pennsylvania professor George Gerbner, an expert on the long-term effect of TV on how people view the world, found heavy watchers are more likely to believe crime is rising, that their neighborhoods are unsafe and that they themselves will be targets.

Gerbner, now at Temple University in Philadelphia, calls this the "mean-world syndrome," the feeling that it's more dangerous out there than it really is.

Predictions for future

Even if the 1990s' remarkable decline in crime continues, don't count on a magical transformation of society into Utopia.

"There's not going to be one day where we wake up and aren't going to be afraid anymore," says Art Lurigio, criminal justice chairman at Loyola University of Chicago. "(Lower crime) numbers don't make my heart beat faster. When I walk out of my house and see a bunch of scary teen-agers on my corner, that's what makes my heart beat faster."

Lawrence Sherman, criminology chairman at the University of Maryland, adds: "As (sociologist) Emil Durkheim said a century ago, our perception of crime will remain constant even in a society of saints."

Sherman does think that if the United States retains its "security-mindedness" as the population ages, "it is quite plausible that we could see declining crime rates well into the next millennium."

Others note demographic projections that the most crime-prone age group -- mid-teens to mid-20s -- will peak numerically in the coming decade.

Some expect crime will spiral back up as a result, though that effect is hotly and widely disputed among crime researchers.

"It's great that the floodwaters are down to our knees now, but I'm afraid that the next demographic wave is going to swamp us," says Beatty of the National Victim Center.

In the end, everyday folk may not pay much heed to the experts or the numbers.

Jeanie Hewitt, 28, an artist in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood, says she has noticed the city feels safer, but adds, "Who really cares about the crime rate?"

Her view is pragmatic and fatalistic.

"Crime is related to the economy," Hewitt says. "When times are good, no crime. When times are bad, crime goes up. It's the way of the world, and you just have to accept it."

Contributing: Martha Moore in New York; John Larrabee in Boston; Debbie Howlett in Chicago; Carol Morello in Los Angeles; and Larry Copeland in Atlanta

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