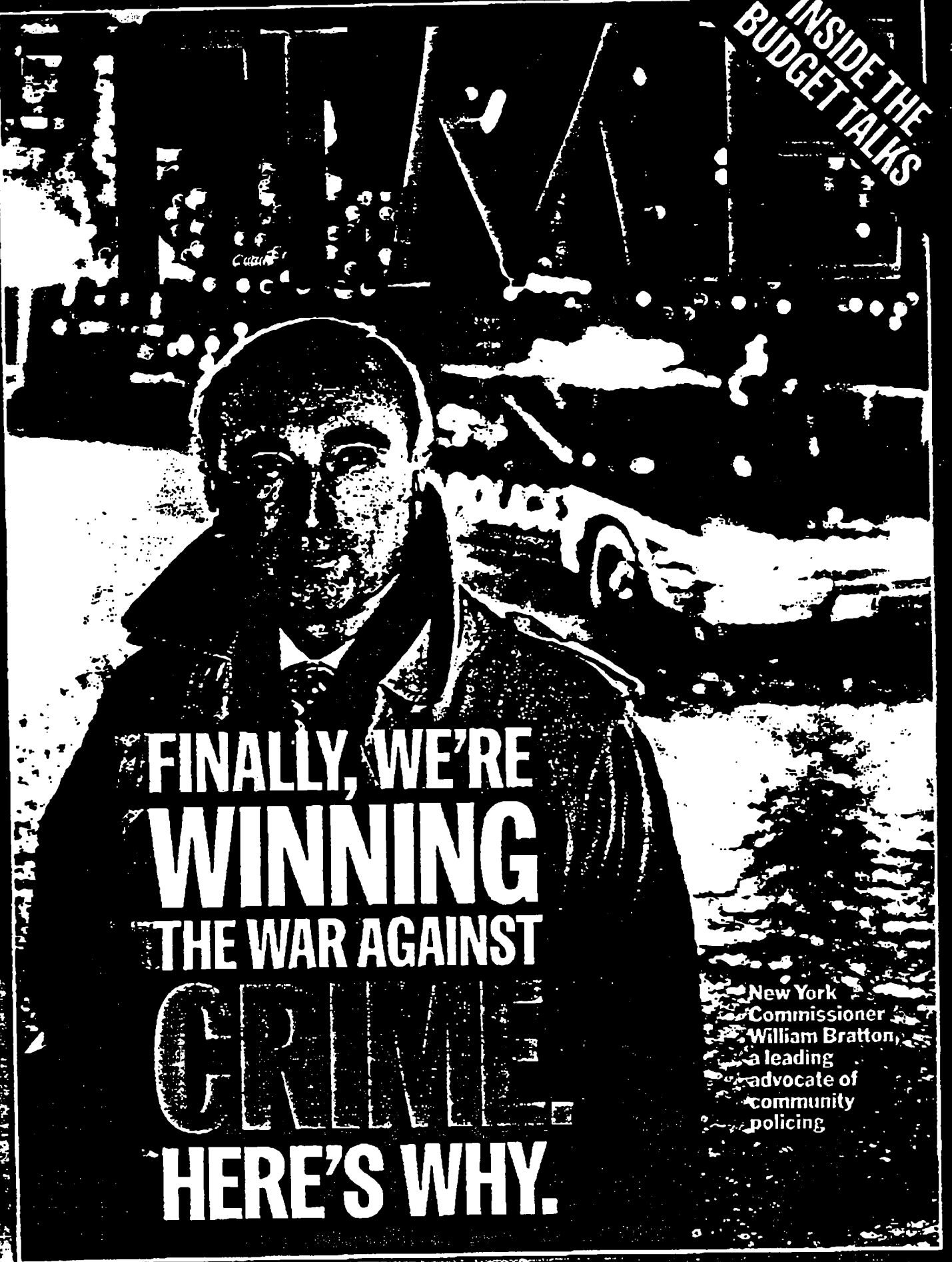


INSIDE THE
BUDGET TALKS

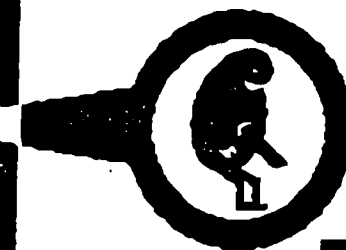


**FINALLY, WE'RE
WINNING
THE WAR AGAINST
CRIME.
HERE'S WHY.**

New York
Commissioner
William Bratton,
a leading
advocate of
community
policing

C R I M E

AND



Crime rates are down across the U.S.—some dramatically. Is this a blip or a trend? With so many factors in play, it may be a bit of both

BY RICHARD LACAYO

WANT TO SEE A CIVIC MONUMENT THAT NO CITY would ever want? Go to New Orleans and proceed to the intersection of Congress and Law streets, just a few blocks from the tourists' Latin Quarter. Walk anywhere in that neighborhood of trashed storefronts and blunt-shouldered housing projects. It won't take long to find walls that are spattered with grimy little craters. Those are bullet holes. Every one of them is an unofficial memorial to the mayhem that was daily life around there until not so long ago.

Starting in the late 1980s, drug dealers had claimed the place as their own, part sales ground, part killing ground, where they seized market share the hard way, with drive-by shootings and turf wars. At the nearby St. Philip Social Service Center, preschoolers learned to dive for the floor in "shooting drills," then stay there until their teachers sounded the all clear. By 1994 there were three or more killings each month on the streets outside. Standing now where the unthinkable used to be the unremarkable, police lieutenant Edwin Compass III looks around with a shudder. "I'd bet it was the most dangerous block in the U.S."

The good thing about monuments is they commemorate the past. Last year the city inaugurated a Community Oriented Policing Squad (cors), now headed by Compass, a name so foursquare no novelist would dare invent it. With secondhand furniture and federal money, police set up round-the-clock substations in vacant

632



EDIT:
no quicker
use cap lede
& cap body

COMMUNITY POLICING

Daylight basketball is just one aspect of the cops' increased presence in the Desire project in New Orleans. With a new police substation, gang bangers have fled

CRIME

apartments at three of the city's most deadly projects. The 45 cops assigned to them work foot patrol, get to know the law-abiding residents and sweep out the street dealers. They also help pick up trash, combat graffiti and round up kids who play hooky.

That mix of shoe leather and social work has made a difference. By the end of last year killings around the three projects had dropped 74%. A dozen dead bodies per annum is still no small problem. But if you don't happen to be one of them, it is cause enough for celebration. Lately, the neighborhood even sees its share of those spontaneous street parades that are defining outbreaks of civic life in New Orleans. What are people celebrating? Maybe just the return of their freedom to move around.

New Orleans is not alone. After years of depressing and implacable upswing, serious crime is retreating all around the U.S. In the nine cities with a population of more than 1 million, the decrease in violent crimes was 8% in 1994. Nationally, murders fell 12% in the first six months of 1995, and serious crimes of all kinds dropped 1% to 2%. The suburbs, long a growth area for felonies, posted declines between 4% and 5% last year in violent crime.

What makes these numbers important, not just encouraging, is that they extend what is plainly a sustained retreat from the crack-fueled crime wave of the late 1980s. According to the FBI, violent crimes started to decline in 1993. As always with crime, an area of famously wiggly trend lines, the downward curve is not to be found everywhere. Minneapolis, Minnesota, for instance, is still puzzling over why in 1995 homicides climbed more than 56% over the preceding year. Even with the downward trend, crime rates remain bloodcurdlingly high, especially when compared to the relatively peaceable kingdom of, say, 1985. (Murder victims per 100,000 then: 5.1. In 1994: 9.) And there are widespread predictions that another tidal wave will break as soon as the milk-toothed children of the '90s crowd into their saw-toothed teens. Whoever called economics the dismal science must not have heard about criminology.

For all that, even the experts in bad behavior are intrigued. Something is happening here. The question is, Why? The lineup of contributing factors includes most of the usual suspects: a decline in the proportion of young males in the general population, the leveling off of crack cocaine use, a moderate unemployment rate and tougher sentencing that gets more felons off the street and keeps them off longer.

Certainly demographics is part of it. Very simply, there are fewer people in the



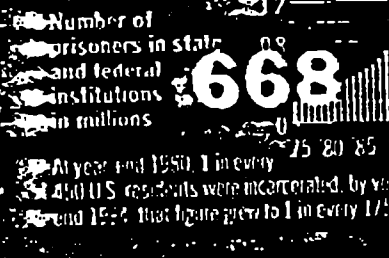
670



EDIT:
no quickie;
use cap lede
& cap body

STRICTER SENTENCING

The U.S. prison population has more than doubled over the past 15 years, which means that many repeat offenders have been taken off the streets. But finding a place to put them all is getting harder. At the California Institution for Men, in China, prison officials have had to turn the sports facility into a bunk room.



most crime-prone category, which is males from the ages of 15 to 29. The crime spree that began in the 1960s was largely the work of baby boomers as they moved into those years. The same boomers are tipping into their 50s, an age when you're just right for fly fishing but not much good with a semiautomatic. The bad news, however, is that today's smaller cohort of teenagers is more prone to crime than its elders were at the same age. Among 14- to 17-year-olds, for instance, murder rates skyrocketed over the past decade.

The trade in crack cocaine also appears to have changed. Perhaps it has lost its cachet. "As with any drug epidemic, the attractiveness of the drug begins to wear off, partly because users see so many of their friends dead," says James Q. Wilson, the UCLA professor who is one of the nation's most prominent thinkers on crime. That's important, because crack was the great im-

petus to crime in the late 1980s as it new dealers murdered in. Another theory is that the trade has simply stabilized in "mature market," as they say in the business schools, with surviving distributors less likely to clash over territory.

As for prison populations, they are more than doubled in the past 15 years. Most criminologists believe that a relatively small population of repeat felons is responsible for a disproportionate share of crime. Lock away the most energetic thieves and killers, and you make a sea change in their business. "Most prisoners are violent or repeat offenders," says Wil Bennett, the former Secretary of Education and drug czar. "Prisons do cut crime." Last week Bennett's Council on Crime in America, a commission he co-chaired with Griffin Bell, who was Attorney General under Jimmy Carter, issued a report warning that violent crime is still higher than p



Incarceration rate per 100,000

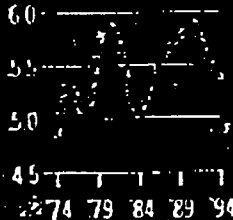
668	Lowest
573	West Virginia
536	Maine
510	Minnesota
473	North Dakota

records indicate because so much of it goes unreported. They urged even more aggressive jailings.

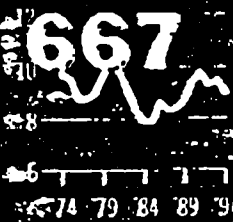
But time and again, the experts are also returning to an explanation they would have played down in the past: more effective policing strategies. It is respectable again to believe that cops can have a impact on crime rates, an opinion that has been seriously out of fashion among professional students of crime. For decades they held that crime was too deeply connected to underlying social causes, meaning everything from the state of the economy to the breakdown of the family. Such things are still assumed to play their part in producing crime. What changed is the view that police are useful only to chase down bad guys after they strike.

All over the U.S., the decade of the '80s seen a rapid reinvention of how the po-

Crimes per 1,000



Murders per 100,000



ECONOMY

Though crime and unemployment don't rise and fall perfectly in tandem, policymakers recognize that people without jobs are a crime wave waiting to happen. Parke Meyer, 20, works at the NightRider Overnight Copy Service in Chicago. He got there through Jobs for Youth, a largely privately funded program that guides young people from impoverished neighborhoods to their first job in the workplace.

lice do their jobs, especially in major cities. A change from squad cars to foot patrolling, a shift to "proactive" policing that seeks to dissolve problems such as open-air drug markets rather than just rack up arrests, the more frequent establishment of cross-agency task forces to target specific problems such as car theft or drug crime—all are now commonplace. "This decline in crime rates is more than a demographic phenomenon," says Jeremy Travis, director of the National Institute of Justice, the research arm of the Justice Department. "Public policy can make a difference. Police can make a difference."

Exhibit A for supporters of the new policing is New York City where major crime—murder, rape, robbery, auto theft, grand larceny, assault and burglary—is in something like statistical free fall, dropping 17.5% last year. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and his police commissioner, William Bratton, both insist that the reason is their devotion to new ways of doing police business. John DiIulio Jr., a professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton University, says that since the mid-'80s top brass who embrace a similar shift in philosophy have risen to key positions in cities all around the country. "So now you're seeing better policing. Not miracles or panaceas, but better policing."

To the extent that is true, police have had to pull themselves in two disparate directions—tougher and softer, as the cops

program in New Orleans illustrates. Tougher means more aggressive intervention. "If we see somebody we don't know, we ask them what they're doing there," says Compas. "If the story doesn't check out, we arrest them for trespassing. Now we don't see as many drug dealers around here." But at the same time, it has meant more neighborhood-friendly tactics, the foot patrolling and problem solving that form the loosely defined strategy called community policing. "We do neighborhood cleanups, counseling on child abuse, you name it," says Officer Djuana Adams. "We help the children with their homework, and they show up for treats when they get good grades."

New Orleans is also learning what other cities have discovered when they moved more officers away from the patrol-car policing that limited them to 911 emergency-response calls. The lesson: face-to-face contact between cops and the people they work among, with no windshield in between, helps to restore trust. For a city like New Orleans, which has recently seen some spectacular instances of police corruption, that is an invaluable side benefit. "I felt better almost as soon as the police moved in," says Brenda Holmes, who lives at Desire, the New Orleans housing project with the most poignant name. "They've given us our lives back."

The potential synergy between cops and residents works not only in big cities:

TIME, JANUARY 15, 1996

51

CRIME

Taylor, Texas, about 28 miles northeast of Austin, has just 13,300 people. But no place is too small for the drug trade. Five years ago, crack moved in among the cotton gins and railroad tracks, bringing with it assault, rape, car theft and murder. Crime got so bad that Mae Willie Turner, 70, and her sister, Gladys Hubbard, 73, could no longer sit at night on their front porch. "The place was infested," says Turner.

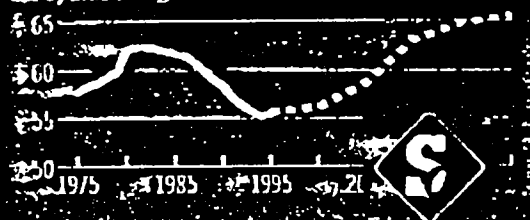
So they got off the porch and joined Turn Around Taylor, a community-action group designed to help locals take back their town. It was conceived by Herman Wrice, a Philadelphia management consultant who organizes citizen-led anti-crime groups as part of a federal program. And the man who brought in Wrice and his ideas was Fred Stansbury, the police chief who arrived in Taylor in 1993, on an April day when a local teenager was killed in a gang fight. "We wanted a program where the community felt it had a proprietary interest," he says.

That's what they got. Most weeks Turner and Hubbard put on jackets with slogans such as UP WITH HOPE, DOWN WITH DOPZ and joined other demonstrators on streets where the heaviest dealing happened. Stansbury got the town council to designate "downtown" Taylor as a historic district, which meant a ban on the public consumption of alcohol. The group even persuaded the Texas National Guard to bulldoze 48 worn-out buildings near the railroad tracks that had become weekend squats for drug dealers and their cus-

Number of murder offenders in each age group, 1994



Population age 15 to 25 in millions



DEMOGRAPHICS

Teenagers are the most crime-prone group. At the Mount View Youth Service Center in Denver, juveniles in custody for various offenses line up for lunch

tomers, who used to come in by car and train. Taylor these days is more like it used to be. "I can sit on my porch anytime now," says Mae Willie Turner.

The single greatest imponderable in the crime debate is the role of gun control. Or decontrol: last week Texas became the

28th state to allow people to carry concealed weapons. The rationale is to discourage crime—supporters say felons will think twice about assaulting people who may be armed. Florida became the first state to pass such a law in 1987. Since then, more than 150,000 people there have ap-

Now for the Bad News: A Teenage Time Bomb

THEY ARE JUST FOUR, FIVE AND SIX YEARS OLD RIGHT NOW, BUT already they are making criminologists nervous. They are growing up, too frequently, in abusive or broken homes, with little adult supervision and few positive role models.

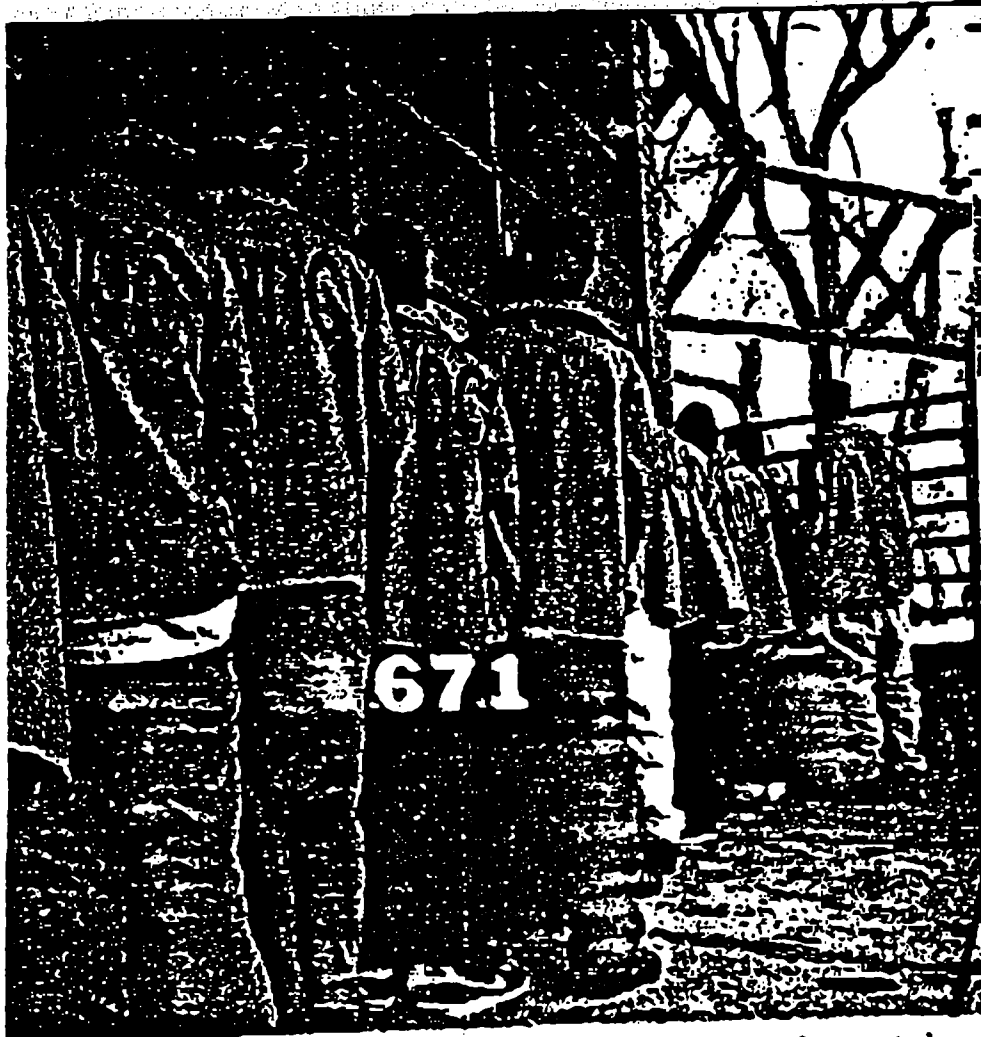
Left to themselves, they spend much of their time hanging out on the streets or soaking up violent TV shows. By the year 2005 they will be teenagers—a group that tends to be, in the view of Northeastern University criminologist James Alan Fox, "temporary sociopaths—impulsive and immature." If they also have easy access to guns and drugs, they can be extremely dangerous.

For all the heartening news offered by recent crime statistics, there is an ominous flip side. While the crime rate is dropping for adults, it is soaring for teens. Between 1990 and 1994, the rate at which adults age 25 and older committed homicides declined 22%; yet the rate jumped 18% for youths between 14 and 17, the age group that in the early '90s supplanted 18- to 24-year-olds as the most crime-prone. And that is precisely the age

group that will be booming in the next decade. There are currently 39 million children under 10 in the U.S., more than at any time since the 1950s. "This is the calm before the crime storm," says Fox. "So long as we fool ourselves in thinking that we're winning the war against crime, we may be blindsided by this bloodbath of teenage violence that is lurking in the future."

Demographics don't have to be destiny, but other social trends do little to contradict the dire predictions. Nearly all the factors that contribute to youth crime—single-parent households, child abuse, deteriorating inner-city schools—are getting worse. At the same time, government is becoming less, not more, interested in spending money to help break the cycle of poverty and crime. All of which has led John J. DiIulio Jr., a professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton, to warn about a new generation of "superpredators," youngsters who are coming of age in actual and "moral poverty," without "the benefit of parents, teachers, coaches and clergy to teach them right or wrong and show them unconditional love."

Predicting a generation's future crime patterns is, of course, risky, especially when outside factors (Will crack use be up or down? Will gun laws be tightened?) remain unpredictable. Michael Tonry, a professor of law and public policy at the University of Minnesota, argues that the demographic doomsayers



plied for permits to pack a gun. But two recent studies suggest loopholes in the law have also allowed felons, ordinarily forbidden to carry a gun, to do so legally. On the other hand, gun homicides in Florida have declined 89% since the law was introduced. Michael McHargue of the Florida

department of law enforcement shrugs, saying, "If you look at the overall statistical picture, we don't believe the law made any impression."

The effectiveness of gun laws that are stricter is no easier to compute. In the three cities with the most dramatic recent

declines in homicide—New York, Kansas City and Houston—police have very aggressive strategies for separating felons from their firearms and stemming the flow of cheap, illegal handguns. Chicago is currently celebrating a decline in homicides from 830 in 1994 to 823 last year. Police think part of the reason might be that Illinois' new, stricter penalties for felonies involving a firearm have persuaded many gang members and drug dealers to leave the guns at home. "We'll arrest a whole crew and still find no guns," says Paul Jenkins, the Chicago police department's director of news affairs. But while the anecdotal evidence is suggestive, it is nothing like firm. "If we knew the reason for success, we'd do a lot more of it," says Jenkins. "We'd bottle it."

For now, keep the bottles uncorked. Talk to most experts in law enforcement, and they soon complain about the paucity of solid research to identify what works against crime. Norval Morris, a professor of law and criminology at the University of Chicago, compares the state of knowledge in his field to that in medicine earlier in the century, when doctors were commonly in the dark as to whether their treatments worked, or why. "Testing the consequences [for crime] of different drug policies, different housing practices, different police practices—it's very, very rarely done," he says.

In the 1968 presidential election, when rising crime was an issue, Willie Horton became the wanted-poster child who

are unduly alarmist. "There will be a slightly larger number of people relative to the overall population who are at high risk for doing bad things, so that's going to have some effect," he concedes. "But it's not going to be an apocalyptic effect." Norval Morris, professor of law and criminology at the University of Chicago, finds Dilulio's notion of superpredators too simplistic: "The human animal in young males is quite a violent animal all over the world. The people who put forth the theory of moral poverty lack a sense of history and comparative criminology."

Yet other students of the inner city are more pessimistic. "All the basic elements that spawn teenage crime are still in place, and in many cases the indicators are worse," says Jonathan Kozol, author of *Amazing Grace*, an examination of poverty in the South Bronx. "There's a dramatic increase of children in foster care, and that's a very high-risk group of

kids. We're not creating new jobs, and we're not improving education to suit poor people for the jobs that exist."

Can anything defuse the demographic time bomb? Fox urges "reinvesting in children": improving schools, creating after-school programs and providing other alternatives to gangs and drugs. Dilulio, a law-and-order conservative, advocates tougher prosecution and wants to strengthen religious institutions to instill better values. Yet he opposes the Gingrich-led effort to make deep cuts in social programs. "A failure to maintain existing welfare and health commitment for kids," he says, "is to guarantee that the next wave of juvenile predators will be even worse than we're dealing with today." Dilulio urges fellow conservatives to think of Medicaid not as a health-care program but as "an anti-crime policy."

—By Richard Zoglin
Reported by Sam Allen/Boston and Ruth Kaminer/New York



Princeton's John Dilulio warns of "superpredators"

24K

helped elect George Bush. In 1992 Bill Clinton neutralized the Republican advantage by positioning himself as a tough-on-crime Democrat who favored the death penalty and would put 100,000 new police officers on the streets. In an interview with TIME, Clinton said last week that the country has embarked on a historic change: "What's happening now across America essentially closes the door on an era that began with the murder of Kitty Genovese 30 years ago." In that milestone episode of public inattention, Genovese, a young New Yorker, was murdered while dozens of people ignored her screams for help. "I think now we have ended both the isolation of the police from the community and the idea that the community doesn't have a responsibility to work with the police or with its neighbors."

Clinton's tough talk on crime helped him win back some of the Reagan Democrats who had fled the party. But with crime rates falling, the issue may lose some of the importance it had for voters two years ago. Though Americans still tell pollsters that crime is at the top of their concerns, that may change as lagging perceptions catch up to new realities. Meanwhile, the President sees the political advantage as his. Though crime has hardly been mentioned in the Republican primaries, the Clinton-Gore Re-Election Committee spent a surprising \$2.4 million last summer on TV spots that ran in 24 states, touting the President's record on crime.

As the year goes on, expect Clinton to attack congressional Republicans for their attempt to rescind the 100,000-new-cops provision in his 1994 crime bill. In the White House version, municipalities get the money only if they use it to hire new officers and use them in community-policing programs. Republicans want to send that money instead in bloc grants to states to use as they see fit. Last month the President vetoed the appropriations bill that would have distributed his police money that way. "I don't tell all these folks how to deploy the police," said Clinton, "or what they should do all day. All I say is there has to be a community-policing strategy because that's by definition grass-roots reform, and we know that it works."

Or at least that it is part of what works. There may be a conjunction of half a dozen lucky developments that are holding crime in check right now. The trick will be to find the way to keep it all working. But for once, it is possible to suppose the trick is one we can manage.

—Reported by Jyl Benson/
New Orleans, James Carney and Elaine
Shannon/Washington, Hilary Hyman/Toronto and
Robt Kambari/New York, with other bureaus

Police Commissioner William Bratton
set out to prove that cops really can cut
crime. The experts scoffed—but felony
rates have dropped so far, so fast, that no
other explanation makes sense

116/59
55M.55

#638

By ERIC POOLEY

CRIME IS FALLING FROM THE NEW YORK sky, but New York City police captain Thomas Lawrence looks as if he's been out in the sun too long. It's just past 7 on the third morning of the new year, and Lawrence, who runs the 10th Precinct in midtown Manhattan, is standing on a podium in the command control center at police headquarters—the "war room." His face is bright red and a little clammy. His body is wired up tight. He is surrounded by shelves of statistics, screens filled with computerized maps and charts and N.Y.C.D. bosses, who, amazingly, seem to know as much about crime in his precinct as he does. "It's been 30 days since we've seen you, Tom," says Chief of Department Louis Anemone, a dark tone creeping into his voice. "And we're seeing an increase in robberies."

"What's the pattern here, Cap?" asks Deputy Commissioner Jack Maple, the department's thickest, dandyish crime guru. Using a laser pen, Maple scrawls on an overhead map, tracing robbery patterns the way John Madden diagrams football plays. Maple circles an archipelago of red dots: muggings along Ninth Avenue. "What are you doing to take these guys out?"

Lawrence launches into a first-rate description of his anticrime efforts, but the CEO of this organization—a slim, well-tended man who wears his reading glasses slung low on an impressive nose—barely looks up from his papers. Police Commissioner William Bratton designed these Comstat (short for computer statistics) meetings as a way to make his 76 far-flung precinct commanders—and 38,000 cops—accountable for the crime rate. Nobody had ever done it before, and it's working: total felonies in New York City are down 27% in just two years, to levels not seen since the early 1970s.

Crime had been falling gently since 1989, thanks to community policing strategies, a thinning in the ranks of the crack-head army and thousands of new prison beds and new cops. But as Comstat took hold in May 1994, the drop became a giddy double-digit affair, plunging farther and faster than it has done anywhere else in the country, faster than any cultural or demographic trend could explain. For two years, crime has declined in all 76 precincts. Murder is down 39%, auto theft 35%. Robberies are off by a third, burglaries by a quarter. No wonder Comstat has become the Lourdes of policing, drawing pilgrim cops from around the world—Baltimore,

TIME, JANUARY 15, 1996

Y.18K

#638

EDIT:
2
for Cap
Leda &
Body

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION:
The commissioner, visiting
Manhattan station house,
wants an additional 10%
drop in crime

London, Frankfurt, Zimbabwe, Taiwan—
a taste of New York's magic.

If those waters seem bitter to some-
cops who can't take Comstat's pressure,
and Latino leaders who say some of
Bratton's cops carry his aggressive style too
—"that's too damn bad," says Bratton.
Success isn't pretty, even for his troops. Ef-
fective precinct commanders such as
Lawrence (crime was down 15% in his
precinct in 1995) merely get grilled to a
medium rare at Comstat. Those who show
up unprepared, without
coherent strategies to re-
duce crime, are fired
crisp, then stripped of
their commands. Half
of all precinct bosses
have been replaced un-
Bratton. Those who
survive get unprece-
dented autonomy but
have to demonstrate ex-
traordinary results. Some
feel pressured to shave
their stats; as the New
York Daily News report-
ed last fall, a commander
in the Bronx told his
troops that assault ar-
rests could be made only

when victims suffered broken bones, not fat
lips or black eyes. Crimes in the category
plummeted in his precinct.

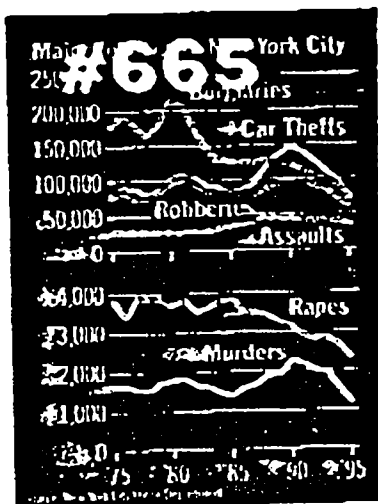
"You have delivered big time," says
Bratton, standing to address his Comstat
managers. He reminds them that when he
was hired away from the Boston Police De-
partment in January 1994 by Mayor-elect
Rudolph Giuliani, who had made crime
and quality of life his major campaign
themes, Bratton had asked for an immedi-
ate 10% decrease in crime (the request was

met with derision and
disbelief). "In the end,
we got 12%," he notes.
"In 1995 I raised the bar
to a 15% reduction, and
you gave me 17." Last
year you accounted for
60% of the national
crime decline—all from
one city. You proved
that police can change
public behavior. For
that you should be
proud," Bratton pauses,
then snaps, "Now get
your feet off the desk.
It's 1996." In the new
year, he says, he wants
an additional 10% re-

duction—more than even Giuliani expects.
If he gets it, New York's crime rate will be
half what it was five years ago. That, he says
later, "should show the criminologists who
refuse to give police credit."

Some experts doubt that Bratton is re-
sponsible for any of New York's crime
drop. "It's like trying to take credit for an
eclipse," says former New York City Police
Commissioner Raymond Kelly. Others are
watching Bratton with mouths agape. "I've
never seen anything like it," says Universi-
ty of Maryland criminologist Lawrence
Sherman, who has studied 30 police de-
partments in the past 25 years. "Police
chiefs routinely say, 'Don't expect us to
bring down crime, because we don't con-
trol its causes. But Bratton says just the op-
posite. It's the most focused crime-reduc-
tion effort I've seen. It will take time before
we can say how much effect it has had, but
this clearly is new. When I sat in at Com-
stat, I thought, 'Bratton is using crime data
for management by objective—a basic idea
that's never been tried before.'"

There's more to the Giuliani-Bratton
strategy, of course, than terrorizing cap-
tains at early-morning meetings. Though
their predecessors, Mayor David Dinkins
and Kelly, deserve real credit for putting
more cops on the beat, Giuliani instructed



TIME, JANUARY 16, 1996

12/29/95 J. Dipina
W. NTC 2412



service-oriented "community policing" introduced during the Dinkins administration, when beat cops were encouraged to be problem solvers for a neighborhood. (Now the patrolmen funnel these issues to their precinct commanders.) The Bratton version of community policing is to devise strategies that target specific criminal behavior. Special squads are dispatched to hit high-crime hot spots, while others track down illegal guns. Precinct detectives now interrogate suspects not just about the crimes they may have committed but also about other gun and drug dealers they know. Eventually, Bratton believes, all the policies begin to dovetail, and crime drops through the floor. "Most criminals commit multiple crimes," he says. "We're processing crime data faster than ever before, so we can identify patterns early and stop them after three crimes instead of 30. If you do that city-wide, you'll knock the crime rate down."

But what some rank-and-file cops refer to as "Bratton taking the cuffs off us" has increased force, abuse and discourtesy complaints to the Civilian Complaint Review Board 30%. Many of the complaints have never been investigated by the CCRA and are impossible to evaluate. Still, some New Yorkers fear the N.Y.P.D.'s new swagger. "A lot of people aren't comfortable with this style," says Kelly. "It goes to the question of what kind of policing we want in America. You can probably shut down just about all crime, if you're willing to burn down the village to save it. Eventually, I think, there will be a backlash, and crime will go back up. But Bill will be gone by then."

asked about persistent rumors that he'll soon jump ship. Bratton says even if he stays only another year, "that's enough time to consolidate our gains, so that long after I'm gone, my successors won't retreat." As for Kelly's burning-village imagery, Giuliani and Bratton dismiss such talk as sour grapes, pointing to the benefits of reduced crime being enjoyed by those hardest hit by it: Latinos and African Americans in the poorest parts of New York City. "The crime reduction has been across the board, in every neighborhood," says Bratton. That means four fewer people killed on the wealthy Upper East Side, but 51 fewer killed in war-torn East New York. The people who live there have noticed the change. "It used to be that I was throwing myself on the floor with my son all the time," says Elisandra Beltran, 27, "because of the bullets flying through my window. But now I haven't seen a bullet hole in a year." She doesn't much care who gets the credit, just as long as the bullets don't fly anymore.

—With reporting by Elaine Rivers/New York

Bratton to do something Dinkins would never have allowed: use those cops to crack down on minor offenders, public drunks, potheads, those who urinate on the street, aggressive panhandlers, graffiti scribbles and "squeegee pests," who converged on cars at stoplights to clean windshields for spare change.

This quality of life campaign tested a principle that Giuliani and Bratton had believed for years: the "Broken Windows" theory, first put forth in 1982 by criminologists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling. Wilson and Kelling argued that minor violations create a disorderly environment that encourages more serious crime. "I chose Bill Bratton," says Giuliani, "because he agreed with the Broken Windows theory." Sure enough, as arrests for small offenses rocketed, New York's streets became notably more civil. Then Maple, who has been Bratton's aide-de-camp and crime strategist since Bratton was slashing subway crime as New York's Transit Police chief in the early 1990s, proposed an intriguing corollary to the theory.

He wanted to go after shootings, and he knew that gun possession and drug dealing were intertwined. "It's relatively hard for a uniformed patrolman to catch someone carrying drugs," Maple says. "But as we'd seen, it's easy to catch someone for an open can of beer on the street." Thus what the cops call "beer and piss patrol" became a tactic for apprehending more serious criminals. "Your open beer lets me

check your ID," says Maple. "Now I can radio the precinct for outstanding warrants or parole violations. Maybe I bump against that bulge in your belt; with probable cause, I can frisk you." Civil libertarians have been screaming, but shootings, gun murders and other signs of firearms use are down—proof, Bratton says, that thugs are leaving the guns at home.

This is a significant departure from the

Murders	1995	change
#666	48	+32%
San Antonio	194	+140 +28%
New York City	1,571	1,182 +25%
San Diego	119	+94 +21%
Houston	379	+304 +20%
St. Louis	248	+203 +18%
Miami	129	+111 +14%
New Orleans	421	+364 +14%
Chicago	930	+823 +12%
Washington	399	+360 +10%
Atlanta	153	+145 +5%
Dallas	291	+276 +5%
Detroit	525	+514 +2%
Los Angeles	836	+828 +1%
Phoenix	244	+244 +0%
Baltimore	321	+325 +1%
Denver	85	+90 +6%
Boston	85	+98 +15%
Minneapolis	62	+97 +56%

Crime Prevention's Bottom Line

Crime rates are going down and Washington is eager to take credit. The Crime Act of 1994 quadrupled funding for state and local crime prevention to more than \$3 billion per year, the highest levels ever.

Whether that funding increase caused the subsequent decline in violent crime is unclear, primarily because federal funds support hundreds of different programs. Some programs work, some don't, and some may even increase crime. But until Congress spends more to evaluate these programs, we can't tell.

That is the major conclusion of a report prepared by the University of Maryland's department of criminology and criminal justice at the request of the Justice De-

Rule of Law

By Lawrence W. Sherman

partment and mandated by Congress. By asking for a comprehensive scientific evaluation of the Justice Department's funding for local crime prevention, Congress framed a more basic question: How do we know what works? What's the bottom line?

Despite recent efforts to "reinvent government" with closer analogues to a bottom line, the more appropriate model for evaluating crime prevention programs may be the Food and Drug Administration's approach to evaluating drugs: Do field tests with human beings show this program to be safe and effective? There are already documented examples of how this approach is relevant to crime prevention:

- A University of Southern California evaluation of a gang prevention program

found that the program was holding the gang together and sustaining its violent crimes. When the program lost funding, the gang broke up and its crime rate declined.

- Controlled evaluations of mandatory arrests for misdemeanor domestic assaults show that while arrest deterred some assailants, arrest caused some other assailants to increase their violence against women.

Despite these research results, Congress has spent hundreds of millions of dollars a year on domestic violence and gang prevention programs that may actually cause more crime to occur. Whether Congress is aware of these bottom-line results is unclear. What is clear is the absence of a systematic process for measuring the effectiveness of crime prevention programs.

Some of the most popular crime prevention programs have already been tested—at great federal expense—and found ineffective. Yet their funding continues unabated. Military-style boot camps for juveniles, Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) classes taught to schoolchildren by police officers, and neighborhood watch programs are but three examples of proven failures to which Congress gives millions of dollars annually.

More effective ways of treating juvenile offenders and preventing drug abuse have been demonstrated by careful evaluation research. Teaching juvenile offenders skills like reading works better than boot camps. Making schools more firm and consistent in overall discipline works better than D.A.R.E. But these strategies lack political advocates and lose out in the competition for funding.

The biggest danger from ignoring the bottom line of program evaluations is not

wasted funding; it is wasted opportunities. Some of the most effective crime prevention strategies known to science are not even on the national agenda for funding, let alone in congressional appropriations for the Justice Department. Two of these focus on a widely recognized cause of crime problems: early childhood development in the home.

In early infancy, home visits by nurses can produce major reductions in child abuse, which is a risk factor for later delinquency. Such visits are required in a number of Western nations. Hawaii offers it on a voluntary basis to all new parents, the majority of whom accept. Repeated visits for the first two

A recent RAND study suggests that home visits to infants may be more cost effective than prison.

years of life provide the greatest benefit to children at high risk. This is expensive, but the results are good. A recent RAND study suggests that home visits to infants may be more cost-effective than prison.

In preschool years, Head Start programs with home visits by teachers can prevent delinquency up through age 25. This clear effect has been found in several controlled tests started in the 1960s. Yet today, few Head Start programs are budgeted for teacher home visits, and Head Start itself lacks sufficient funds to meet demand.

The good news is that there is increasing evidence to support the largest single program in the 1994 Crime Act: putting 100,000 more police on the streets, funded

at \$1.4 billion in fiscal year 1996. National Institute of Justice studies show that an increased police presence reduces crime in high crime "hot spots," where most crime is concentrated. Full enforcement or "zero tolerance" policies in those hot spots may even reduce gun crime, the leading theory about New York City's free-falling homicide rate—now almost two-thirds lower than in the early 1990s.

The bad news is that much remains unknown about strategies for deploying police and the cost-effectiveness of different alternatives. Sudden increases in personnel provide an unprecedented opportunity for controlled tests of policing strategies, especially in high-crime poverty neighborhoods where policing often backfires. Funding this program without a substantial investment in comparing the impact of hundreds of different approaches to community policing is more than a wasted opportunity. It is comparable to the Eisenhower administration giving schoolchildren many different polio vaccines without testing any of them for safety and effectiveness.

The University of Maryland report recommends that 10% of all federal funding for local crime prevention be set aside for independent evaluations of the programs' impact, commissioned by an independent evaluation agency in the Justice Department. Several bills now pending in Congress use the same formula. Opponents of this idea say that evaluation money could be better spent on effective programs to fight crime. But until Congress invests more money in program evaluations, it will have no way of knowing which programs are effective.

Mr. Sherman chairs the department of criminology and criminal justice at the University of Maryland.

IMPEACHMENT FEVER!

DANA MILBANK: The White House hunkers down
DAVID GRANN: Moderate Republicans feel the heat
JASON ZENGERLE: Bob Barr's parallel universe

THE NEW REPUBLIC

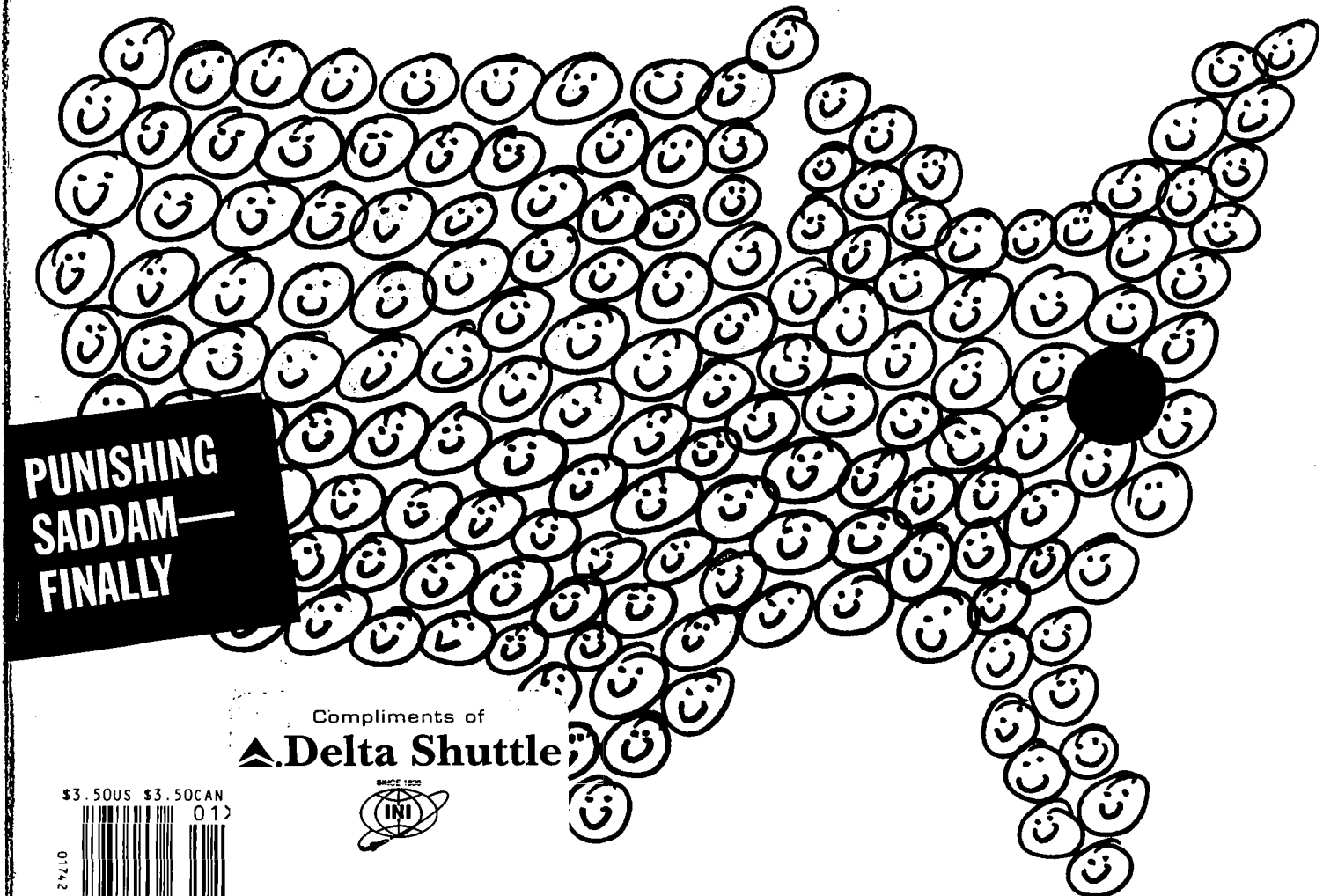
JANUARY 4 & 11, 1999 • \$3.50

Hillel Halkin Reports from Gaza • Ian Buruma on China and the West

America the O.K.

Life in Washington has never been crazier.
Life in the U.S. has never been better.

BY GREGG EASTERBROOK



Compliments of
Delta Shuttle



\$3.50US \$3.50CAN 012



AMERICA THE O.K.

By Gregg Easterbrook

I don't wish to alarm you, but American life is getting better. Crime has fallen sharply. The economy is booming. Teen pregnancy is declining. The federal budget is in surplus. The air and water are getting cleaner. Health is improving by almost every measure, including the first-ever decline in cancer incidence. Deaths in accidents are decreasing. Standards of living continue to improve. The use of drugs and cigarettes is waning. Levels of education keep rising. Women and minorities are acquiring an ever-larger slice of the national pie. Personal liberty has never been greater, while American culture becomes more and more diverse. Even home runs are at an all-time high!

Yet the steady betterment of American life is practically a taboo subject for intellectual debate. Left-wing thinkers shy from it because it smacks of triumphalism or simply spoils the doomsday script. Right-wing thinkers are terrified of having to admit that recent decades of progress have occurred under a regime of strong central government. Pundits and politicians see only calamity—in 1995, Newt Gingrich called the United States “a civilization in danger of simply falling apart”—while the country around them indecorously gets better. Right now, Washington is busily sinking to an all-time low in the disconnect between governors and governed, obsessively generating an institutional crisis, in part, just to make sure there's some really bad news.

To the extent favorable trends are remarked upon, they are often treated as ephemera of a strong economy—though impressive social transitions, such as pollution reduction, exist outside the business cycle. Notes Orlando Patterson, a Harvard sociologist: “It's astonishing how the Washington and New York elites, the people who benefit most from the improvement of the United States, are so out of sync with it, endlessly talking about how things are getting worse when the country is clearly improving.”

As David Whitman points out in his cogent new book, *The Optimism Gap*, polls show that personal optimism is at or near record levels—most people rating their own prospects around eight on a scale of ten—but national optimism has never been lower, most people thinking that the country is in decline. Whitman calls this the “I'm O.K., they're not” syndrome. Failure to heed the improvement of the United States feeds cynicism and

robs us of valid congratulation: after race riots, Vietnam, and stagflation, isn't it good for everyone if America can like what it sees in the mirror again? And inattention to the optimistic deprives public thought of the chance to benefit from the lessons of successful reform.

Of course, there are gloomy trends, worst among them the persistence of poverty. Today, about 13 percent of U.S. households live below the poverty level, which seems ever less tolerable as the nation grows richer. As Michael Novak has noted, when the Bible declared, “You always have the poor with you,” the context was a feudal agrarian economy in which some poverty was unavoidable. Today's high-tech, knows-no-obstacle economy could transfer enough goods to everyone, and, until it does, a sword will hang over American abundance.

And, of course, the international scene presents anxieties. Beyond the specters of war and ethnic hostility, the developing world's ecosystems continue to deteriorate. Global population will rise to around nine billion before stabilizing in the twenty-first century. This means the world must eventually feed, educate, employ, and care for the health of a human race half again its present size. There's no way the United States will be able to sit out that great challenge and no sign we are preparing for it.

But, overall, the American scene is progressively more encouraging. Let's review the facts:

ACCIDENTS. Despite the sirens-and-carnage images projected by local TV news, accidents have been declining pretty much across the board for more than a decade. In 1985, 40 Americans out of every 100,000 died accidental deaths; by 1996, the rate was down to 35 of 100,000, a twelve percent decline. Workplace fatalities dropped spectacularly during this period, from about 11,600 in 1985 to 6,218 in 1997. Traffic fatalities have been declining, too, and in 1997 reached a record low of just 1.6 deaths per 100 million miles driven, the smallest such figure since federal agencies began keeping traffic-death statistics in the 1960s. Highway fatalities are going down in absolute numbers—in 1984, there were 46,200 traffic deaths, for example, versus 41,967 in 1997—even as there are more people driving more cars at faster speeds for more total miles.

On a related front, building fires are steadily declining.

The National Fire Protection Association reports that the total number of "structure" fires in the United States went from three million in 1980 to slightly less than two million in 1996. Jill Leovy recently reported in the *Los Angeles Times* that, in her city, building fires fell from 8,557 in 1979 to 3,406 in 1997. Firefighters now have so much free time that they are teaching boating and bicycle safety. More than 6,000 Americans died in home fires in 1960; in 1996, just 2,900 did, though the population had risen almost 50 percent through the period. Trends like this have nothing to do with the economy.

What's behind such developments? Liability pressure, consumer activism, and improving technology have made cars notably safer. Automakers spent years resisting air bags and crash-impact engineering, claiming cars would become exorbitantly expensive while losing functionality. Instead, auto offerings are getting zippier and roomier—today's Ford Taurus, loaded with new safety features plus air-conditioning and a CD player, costs 70 percent less in real-dollar terms than a Model T did. Never underestimate the ability of industry to make products less dangerous—or excuse corporations from doing so.

While auto manufacturers have improved the safety engineering of products, crusades against drunken driving, plus lower legal tolerance for the same, have had the desired effect. Once, to get behind the wheel after knocking back a few was viewed as boys-will-be-boys behavior; now, it's viewed as idiocy and dishonor. The lesson: Public awareness campaigns really can work.

The drop in fires stems from a similar mix of awareness, regulation, and better management. In the past 20 years, smoke detectors have become ubiquities, a reform driven both by government rules and awareness campaigns. Federal regulators have required increasingly strict standards for fire-resistance in products and building materials. Local fire codes have become ever-tighter: Scottsdale, Arizona, now requires built-in sprinklers in every newly constructed room, even confessional booths. Fire departments and building-code writers have switched from a philosophy of fire fighting to one of prevention, with an emphasis on careful inspections of buildings or blueprints. Many big-city fire departments are becoming ambulance departments that fight fires as a sidelight. It's a wonderful transition.

CRIME. Homicide is down about 20 percent from the level of the early '90s; in 1997, it reached the lowest rate in 30 years. During the '80s, Brooklyn averaged two murders per day; last March, Brooklyn went a full week without a homicide for the first time in a generation. Crime is down in nearly every category, including burglary and robbery. Since 1993, not only has the felony rate dropped, but the total number of violent felonies has fallen 14 percent, even while the population continues to grow. As Gordon Witkin has written, "It's hard to think of a social trend with greater significance."

Many factors are at play here, among them the sheer reduction in perpetrators. Tougher laws and sentences

have led to a furious rate of incarceration, with 1.8 million Americans now jailed, more than double the figure of a decade ago. The shift toward "community policing" has helped, though felonies are also falling in cities that have not adopted this system. It's important to note that, while most policing has improved in the past decade, there has been no national initiative on this score, just lots of local experiments.

The adoption of James Q. Wilson's "broken windows" theory of civic propriety has helped, too. Annoying as New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani's anti-jaywalking campaign might be, there is no doubt that an environment in which people take petty laws seriously creates sociological pressure to respect the sort of laws we really care about. Putting more officers on the street has helped, as has the upgunning of law enforcement. During the '80s, when most police carried revolvers, drug-runners had superior weapons. Now that half of all cops bear the high-rate-of-fire Glock semiautomatic, only a fool would try to shoot his way out of an arrest.

Conspicuous in recent crime trends is the decline of crack. The nature of this drug product—packaged for volume sales of inexpensive rocks that produce only a brief high, requiring the user to make multiple purchases—made it a street-corner enterprise. Lots of salesmen were needed, so the young and intemperate were recruited. As Alfred Blumstein, a criminologist at Carnegie Mellon University, describes it, crack crews carrying wads of cash themselves became the targets of crime, and, since drug dealers who were robbed couldn't exactly dial 911, they armed themselves. The result was thousands of teenagers toting guns in tense situations.

Thus, not the intoxicating effects of crack but its distribution by armed, fidgety teenagers caused the '80s homicide wave. Nearly all the murder surge occurred among under-30 males; the homicide rate in other groups actually declined during the very period of the murder epidemic. Leading the current homicide decline is a rapid drop in killings among those under 30—though the rate among those under 18 remains historically high.

Then there's the "younger brother effect." The '90s generation of inner-city kids, having seen the medically destructive effects of crack and the self-genocide it produced in minority communities, wants little to do with the opiate of the '80s. Crack use continues, but mostly among older addicts who do their buying from a new breed of dealers, who work from client lists and beepers, avoiding street confrontations.

For police, an essential policy shift was a campaign against weapons possession. Traditionally, police departments have looked the other way regarding guns alone: If someone had an illegal weapon but hadn't used it, he'd get off lightly. Beginning around 1990, patrol officers and prosecutors began going after the guns themselves. It proved easier to make cases involving traceable firearms than cases based on plastic bags of crack the suspect could claim he never saw before. Arrests of minors for weapons possession peaked in 1993; by 1994, the incidence of minors carrying firearms began to

decline. Perhaps not coincidentally, it was also in 1994 that the homicide rate began its fall.

Both a growth economy and social circumstances now work against violent crime. As Jeffrey Fagan, a professor of public health at Columbia University, notes, the kids who became crack-runners in the '80s had been born into a period of upheaval: inner cities were in decline, parents were losing jobs as industry fled urban areas, welfare was pushing fathers out of homes, and, to many whose parents traversed the '60s, rioting—violent contempt for law—had briefly been seen as somehow useful to minority aspirations. Now, Fagan says, "the phase of social reorganization is basically over for the inner city." Downtown areas have stopped declining, and some are improving. People have made their peace with the new service industries, rendering legitimate employment possible again. Stability is returning, and, with it, community contempt for crime.

Within the positive trends an obvious worry is that some new street drug or an economic downturn could cause a new spate of crime. But what's most striking about falling homicide rates is that they represent rapid progress in an area where bad news was widely believed inevitable. "It's possible you won't be able to solve this problem," New York Governor Mario Cuomo said of the murder rate in 1989. Nine years later, the arrows point up.

DRINK, DRUGS, AND FOOLING AROUND. Crack is hardly the only bane in decline. On the key barometer of ingestion by high school seniors, cocaine has declined from something tried by 17 percent of students in 1985 to seven percent in 1996. Twenty-two percent of high school seniors in 1975 had tried stimulant drugs; by 1996, the figure was down to 15 percent. Use of some, though not all, other illegal drugs is also down.

Even legal, socially acceptable forms of indulgence are in remission. In 1965, 42 percent of American adults smoked; today, 25 percent do. Per capita U.S. consump-

tion of spirits has been going down for years. In 1980, 72 percent of high school seniors reported having consumed alcohol recently. This figure has gone down steadily since, falling to 51 percent in 1996. Can it be that half of America's young aren't even sneaking beers anymore?

Another entirely legal (except in Washington) form of earthly pleasure, sex, also seems in decline, at least among the supposedly incorrigible young. The portion of teenage girls reporting to have had intercourse had been climbing steadily since the '60s, a statistic commonly cited—often by middle-age commentators who themselves once devoted countless hours to the pursuit of teenage sex—as a sign of American moral erosion. Now, according to the National Center for Health Statistics, the percentage of sexually active girls ages 15 to 19 has dropped from a peak of 53 percent in 1988 to 50 percent in 1995. Teen pregnancy rates have begun to decline; in 1995, teen pregnancy fell to the same rate as that of 1975, and the downward statistical slope continues. Births to teens have dropped twelve percent since 1991. The number of teen abortions has fallen for seven consecutive years.

Smoking's decline clearly reflects improved awareness of lung cancer. Drug declines probably result from a combination of

law-enforcement intensification and rising understanding of the fact that, with the possible exception of marijuana, drugs simply aren't innocuous private choices. Less drinking seems to stem from anti-drunken-driving campaigns and a changing anthropology of the social event, today less viewed as a sanctioned time during which to get schnockered (think *Virginia Woolf*) than as a time at which to sip wine and listen to music.

Less sexual activity among young people may be influenced by concern about sexually transmitted diseases and by religious feeling. A reaction against cultural pressure in favor of sex, especially the repulsively phony Hollywood and rock-video conceptions of sex, might be just as important. Teenage pregnancy decline results directly



DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

from higher birth control use—contraceptive use at first intercourse is up from 48 percent among females in the early '80s to 78 percent in 1995. Contraceptives are getting safer (the low-dose Pill) and more convenient (the inject-and-forget Depo-Provera). As important, probably, is a shifting sociology of birth control—which is increasingly seen as smart and responsible.

Less drug use, less drinking, less smoking, and less fooling around hardly synchronize with conventional hand-wringing about the United States as a self-indulgent, libertine realm where anything goes. Rather, these trends suggest that public habits can be moderated through awareness campaigns, rational arguments, and common sense.

THE ECONOMY. Financial situations can change rapidly, so the milk might curdle; that admonition aside, the American economic outlook is the best it's ever been. Unemployment and inflation are at their lowest points in a quarter-century. Growth is strong, though below record levels. Economic troubles elsewhere in the world seem barely to have dented the system here. Gasoline prices are at a postwar low in real-dollar terms, while mortgage rates are at 30-year lows. Industry isn't disappearing, as is commonly assumed—current U.S. industrial production is 90 percent greater than in 1970, though that figure is achieved with fewer workers. It's common to hear analysts bemoaning the fact that median household income has risen only slightly in the past quarter-century. But the standard concept doesn't take into account that fewer and fewer people live in the median household: factor that in, and household income is up about 15 percent since 1970. The only major negative indicators are the savings rate and the balance-of-trade deficit. As problems go, that's not bad.

The transition from federal deficit to surplus should remind us how often "impossible" problems are solved. Think back to the hollow legislative rituals of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings law, written to be vacuous on the assumption that real deficit reduction simply could not happen. Now the federal balance sheet has improved so much that lower government borrowing helps drive down interest rates, benefiting everyone. And this has been accomplished without punitive taxation. As Derek Bok pointed out in his 1996 *The State of the Nation*, the American tax burden is 27 percent of GDP, versus 44 percent in France or 50 percent in Sweden.

Having lived the past few years in Europe, I often heard Euros express astonishment at the American economic engine. How could it be, they would ask, that your system has so much litigation, adversarial confrontation, hype, spin, glibness, and overwrought scandal, and yet functions so marvelously? I liked to reply that lawsuits, hype, spin, and scandal must in some way aid American success, forcing our society to accept perpetual change. The sincere answer might be that positive trends in U.S. national wealth have been sparked by ever-greater acceptance of true market economics, with its tumult and endless unanticipated results.

"It's only in the last generation that most people have been converted to the belief that market economics is good for everybody, not just a tool of the wealthy," says John Mueller, a political scientist at the University of Rochester and a rising star in the study of what makes societies run well. Stagflation stopped after Jimmy Carter began deregulation, freeing air travel, energy, and telecommunications. National economic performance shot upward not long thereafter, and, though not all results of deregulation have been favorable, each year brings more evidence that the country is better off with market forces driving most decisions.

ENVIRONMENT. Twenty-five years ago, only one-third of America's lakes and rivers were safe for fishing and swimming; today two-thirds are, and the proportion continues to rise. Annual wetlands loss has fallen by 80 percent in the same period, while soil losses to agricultural runoff have been almost cut in half. Total American water consumption has declined nine percent in the past 15 years, even as the population expands, especially in the arid Southwest. Since 1970, smog has declined by about a third, even as the number of cars has increased by half; acid rain has fallen by 40 percent; airborne soot particles are down 69 percent, which is why big cities have blue skies again; carbon monoxide or "winter smog" is down 31 percent; airborne lead, a poison, is down 98 percent. Emissions of CFCs, which deplete stratospheric ozone, have all but ended.

Other environmental measures are almost uniformly positive. Toxic emissions by industry declined 46 percent from 1988 to 1996, even as petrochemical manufacturers enjoyed record U.S. production and copious profits. About one-third of Superfund toxic waste sites are now cleaned up, with the pace of cleanup accelerating. The forested acreage of the United States is expanding, with wildlife numbers up in most areas, led by the comeback of eastern deer, now thought to be at pre-colonial numbers. Since the Endangered Species Act was passed, only a few U.S. species have fallen extinct, not the thousands predicted, while species such as the bald eagle, gray whale, and peregrine falcon have recovered enough to no longer require full legal protection. Only two major U.S. environmental gauges are now negative: continuing inaction against greenhouse gases and continuing loss of wildlife habitats to urban expansion.

An important conceptual lesson is being learned: When pollution stops, natural recovery does not require ponderous geological time. Consider Boston Harbor, whose filth was an issue in George Bush's 1988 campaign against Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. Even as Bush filmed his memorable commercial standing on the sludge-caked Boston shore, a \$4 billion water treatment plant was rising in the background. At the time, most experts predicted that it would take 50 years or more to rinse the harbor. Instead, cleanup has been so rapid that Boston Harbor is already safe again for swimming and fishing. Activists, who once had to rail against sludge by the ton, are down to complaining

about detection in the harbor of trace parts-per-billion or even parts-per-trillion of compounds. As Paul Levy, who ran the first phase of the cleanup project, has said, the fact that activists now remonstrate about smaller and smaller issues shows that the big issues are under control.

The left side of the environmental debate can't seem to deal with the fact that technology has (for the moment, at least) entered a relatively benign phase in which products and industrial processes consume steadily fewer resources and produce steadily less waste. Says Jesse Ausubel, director of the environment program at Rockefeller University and a leading thinker in the new field of industrial ecology: "The larger lesson here is about the sparing of resources," driven by new technological ideas. The right can't seem to deal with the fact that, if it weren't for ecological regulations, most positive trends in the environment would not have happened. Tailpipe controls on automobiles, for example, not only cleared the air but also saved the car industry. If cars still spewed smog as they once did, Los Angeles's air would be poison gas; mandatory driving bans would be unavoidable.

Because the character of environmental progress is nonideological—reflecting well both on federal initiatives and on business—neither political camp knows how to extol what's happened. That no interest group sees itself as benefiting from public awareness of environmental success might be just a political foible, but it has the effect of preventing commentators and voters from focusing on the locus of the real environmental emergencies—the developing world.

HEALTH. Both incidence and death rates for cancer began to ebb in the early '90s, reversing a 20-year trend of increase. Cancer incidence, or the occurrence of new cases, had risen about 1.2 percent per year from 1973 to 1990; since then, incidence has fallen by almost one percent per year, with the decline manifesting in the big-four cancer forms (lung, prostate, breast, and colon-rectum) for both genders and across all major age and ethnic groups other than black males. Mortality for most cancers is now either level (as it is for breast cancer) or in slight decline. Only melanoma and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma are now rising.

By nearly all other measures, U.S. public health is getting steadily better. Heart disease and stroke are both in decline relative to population growth, with heart disease deaths, the number-one medical killer, falling 3.4 percent from 1996 to 1997. Infant mortality is now down to 0.7 percent of live births, the lowest such figure ever for the United States. (Some European countries do slightly better.) AIDS deaths are declining markedly in the United States. The rate of suicides is declining, falling 4.6 percent in 1997. There are a few worrisome public-health trends, such as the reappearance of TB and the emergence of microbes that resist currently available antibiotics. But, in the main, public health is getting better by leaps and bounds.

Most remarkable is the continued rise in life expectancy, now 76 years at birth for the typical American,

up from 54 years when the World War II generation was being born. The rise in life expectancy is global, expressing itself in nearly every country in the world, outside Central Africa. Indeed, the reason there is global population growth is not that the world's women are having more babies—per capita they are having steadily fewer, even in developing nations—but that people the world over are living so much longer.

Most of what's going on in public health appears to be a mix of advancing medical knowledge and public awareness. The biggest factor in the cancer decline, for example, is the drop in smoking. Heart disease decline has been aided by better drugs, better therapy (the coronary-artery bypass operation, touch-and-go 20 years ago, has gotten so much more efficacious that it's now working even for the elderly), and advancing understanding of lifestyle issues such as fat intake. The improving sophistication of medical education and other factors are also at play.

Better public health hasn't come cheaply: medical spending was seven percent of GDP in 1970 and is almost 14 percent now. Yet, much as you may detest your HMO, keep in mind that most trends in health care costs are favorable, too. During the late '80s, costs were rising so rapidly that it was common to predict that 15 to 20 percent of GDP would be spent on health care by the end of the century. If that had happened, American prosperity would have been damaged. Instead, in the past five years, there has been little medical inflation. Managed care creates annoying preapproval hassles and longer waits for some appointments. But on the key points—protecting health at an affordable cost—the system is doing well.

PUBLIC DEBATE. Despite so many auspicious indicators, the America depicted in political and intellectual debate is invariably a place we should be building starships to flee. To the left, the United States remains a land of racial and sexual repression, corporate oligarchy, and environmental decay; to the right, a country where all things pure are collapsing. Such views hold considerable sway. Whitman's *The Optimism Gap* reports that 1996 polls showed that only 15 percent of Americans believe the country is getting better. In similar polls, about half said the nation is worse off compared to how it was when their parents were growing up, and 60 percent believed the United States in which their children dwell will be worse still. Though most Americans are today healthier, better housed, better fed, better paid, better educated, better defended, more free, and diverted by a cornucopia of new entertainment products and services, somehow they've managed to convince themselves their parents had it better during the Dust Bowl.

As Robert J. Samuelson noted in his skillful *The Good Life and Its Discontents*, the revolution of rising expectations has taken on a life of its own: "[T]here can never be enough prosperity." (Polls now suggest that, regardless of how much money an American has, he or she believes that twice as much is required.) Samuelson further contends that one reason for all the unfocused

anxiety is that the media have gotten so much better at emphasizing things to worry about. Tropical storms that *might* hit the United States get more network coverage than any favorable turn of events.

Television crime coverage, especially, now seems pitched to cause civic fright, while movies and network entertainment programming depict violence as far more pervasive than it actually is. As Christopher Jencks, a professor of government at Harvard University, notes: "When I was growing up there was violence on TV, but it was cowboys having shootouts. I never worried that rustlers would come over the hill into my neighborhood. Now the violence on television is presented as if it's about to get you personally. Every screen you look at, at home or in theaters, has something disastrous on it. No wonder people think the country is out of control."

Conservative thinkers and politicians seem distressed by the contemporary milieu in part because Americans are more or less willingly adopting gender equality and cultural openness, including a culture in which minority writing and art are being admitted to the canon. (Recent polls have found that three of the most admired people in the United States are Colin Powell, Oprah Winfrey, and Michael Jordan.) The political and academic left can't stand the contemporary milieu in part because class war, economic breakdown, and environmental calamity seem less and less likely. "The left elites talk with obsessive negativism about the religious right because it's one of the few things they can find to still get upset about," notes Orlando Patterson of Harvard. "The right elite is similarly obsessive about the supposed culture war, when all the evidence is that the United States is becoming ever more tolerant and ever more at peace with diversity."

Of course, generations at least as far back as Plato have felt that nations were sweetly ordered in their youths but now decline. "When we think about the past, we focus on our childhoods, to a time when our parents protected us from the world," Jencks notes. "Now as adults, even if society's gotten better, the sense of being sheltered is gone. Nobody's taking care of you anymore, so it feels like everything is getting more worrisome, even if objectively it's getting better." Mueller of the University of Rochester has memorably phrased it this way: "Golden ages do happen, but we are never actually in them."

RACE. As William Julius Wilson has extensively documented, attention to the problems of inner-city dysfunction causes us to overlook what history will judge as the big racial story of late-twentieth-century America: the emergence of a black middle class.

Through the last generation, the portion of African Americans living in middle-class circumstances has more than doubled. Some kind of watershed was crossed in 1994, when the average income of black families in Queens, long a community treated as symbolic of working-class to middle-class transition, surpassed the average income of white families there.

Georgia, Maryland, and other states now contain large, economically independent black middle-class areas where life is suburban, family structures conventional, and values entirely middle-American.

African American income still lags significantly behind that of whites, but, as Steven Holmes has written, in the past few years poverty rates "have dipped below 30 percent of black households for the first time in the country's history." Black male college graduates now make, on average, twelve percent less than their white counterparts, a much smaller gap than a generation ago, while black female college grads now earn slightly more than white female grads. Jencks's 1972 book, *Inequality*, argued that, even if minority education rose, minority income levels would not, owing to barriers of prejudice. Jencks now feels the situation has changed, with minority education "look[ing] far more important than it did in the 1960s," because African American accomplishment in school can now translate into economic success.

Minority educational accomplishment continues to improve. In 1996, black high school graduation rates became about the same as white rates—needless to say, a historical first. The black-white math SAT score gap, which was 140 points in 1976, is 110 points now, owing to black improvement, not white erosion. Bok and William Bowen write in *The Shape of the River* that, although African Americans entering most colleges have lower overall grades and SAT scores than white schoolmates, on the real-world test of what they do when they leave the university, top black students now have about the same career achievement as top whites.

At the turn of this century, many African Americans weren't even literate; today, the college-completion rates of black Americans exceed the comparable figures for much of Europe. If one views African Americans as an immigrant cohort that "arrived" in the United States with the passage of the civil rights laws, black rates of social progress are similar to those previously displayed by white ethnic immigrant groups, which typically required two to three generations to join the establishment.

STANDARDS OF LIVING. Living standards are improving so fast and so consistently that to mention them today seems almost banal. Most fundamental is housing. The typical contemporary home is 40 percent larger than a 1970 house, while only three percent of Americans, the lowest percentage ever, live in overcrowded conditions, defined as more than one person per room. That every person should have at least one room to call his or her own is a social innovation of the American present. The majority of today's dwellings have air-conditioning and other improvements. More than half of Americans now live in suburbs, which may be superficial and intellectually insufferable but are physically pleasant: the reason they are popular.

The metric of living standards is rising so rapidly that merely how to track its ascent has become a controversy, centering on whether the Consumer Price Index

adequately recognizes such once-rare, now-quotidian indicators as computer ownership or eating out. Another way to meter the evolution of living standards, championed by Richard Alm and W. Michael Cox in the forthcoming book *Myths of Rich and Poor*, is how long the typical person must work to acquire consumer items. Between rising wages and larger dwellings, for example, in 1956 the typical worker had to invest 16 weeks at labor to buy 100 square feet of home; now the figure has fallen to less than 14 weeks. The McDonald's brothers' first burgers cost half an hour of work at the time; now 180 seconds buys one. Only health care and university-level education are growing more expensive when measured by work hours required for purchase.

"A seven-day Caribbean cruise," Alm and Cox write, "slipped from 51 hours in 1972 to 45 hours in 1997." Not only are they getting cheaper, excursions on 42-deck luxury liners with names like *Insatiable Princess* are another indication of the rising standard of living: such experiences may be stupefying, but what matters is that they are becoming standard middle-class events. Leisure and tourism barely existed as economic sectors a generation ago; today they are a hefty slice of the GDP.

As Robert J. Samuelson has written, overall the U.S. standard of living has continued to rise in the '80s and '90s roughly as rapidly as it did in the '50s and '60s; it's just that we now take out a considerable share of national wealth in forms that don't show up well in price indexes, such as better health, cleaner air, and the ability to fly anywhere, anytime, at an affordable price.

WEDLOCK. The family-breakup wave may have crested. The divorce rate, which was 2.5 per 1,000 people in 1966, peaked at 5.3 per 1,000 in 1981. The rate leveled off in the early '90s at about 4.7 and now appears to be in a shallow decline. A few years ago, half of all new marriages were expected to fail; now only 40 percent are, with the average length of a marriage starting to creep back up again. And Census Bureau figures suggest that the reduction in conventional two-parent families—which dominated American demographics from 1970 to 1990—is "flattening" and might be about to end.

Whether the decline of divorce is just a blip or suggests some larger social trend can't be determined by only a few years of data. But it's worth noting that sociologists and writers have spent the past decade elaborately documenting the fact that, whatever it means in terms of adult personal freedom, family breakup harms children. That message may be sinking in.

At first glance, there seems no single thread that runs through the subjects where life is improving. Some seem a case for more Washington: environmental protection is arguably the most impressive achievement of progressive government since the establishment of the Social Security system. But "outside of pollution control, it's hard to see where federal regulations have been the driving factor in recent social improvements," says Gary Becker, a Nobel Prize-winning

economist at the University of Chicago. Economic vigor has been aided by deregulation. Crime reduction, welfare reform, and other positive trends have arisen mainly through state and local initiatives. Public health has certainly benefited from federal investments, but advancing knowledge is the primary factor. Betterment of personal behavior, such as the reduction in drunken driving, has been inspired mainly through private efforts.

It's possible that what the surge of national good news tells us is that, as pragmatism supplants ideology, society will get better at fixing things. "We're living in an age with very few romantics and revolutionaries," says Mueller of the University of Rochester. "People with vast, sweeping visions caused most of this century's problems. Most of the time you don't want leaders with visions, you want society run by cautious pragmatists. At the moment, the pragmatists are in control of most nations, and it's making things better."

It's possible that the upswing in good news tells us that reform initiatives of the '60s and '70s have finally begun to work. Pollution-control regulations, affirmative action programs, crime crackdowns—all started off clunky and problem-plagued, but, as the snafus were ironed out, results began to flow. And it's possible that what the late-century tidings convey is simply what the United States would have looked like all along if so much of its brainpower and resources had not been diverted to the cold war.

But what the good news unequivocally tells us is that it's never too late to change the world. In that sense, there is a bright thread running through all these examples: intractable or "impossible" dilemmas can be solved. Our efforts matter; when we attempt reform, we can be crowned with success. It is no coincidence that the aspects of life that have gotten better are those that people have dedicated themselves to improving. America can still become whatever it wants to be. We do not have to accept what we see out the window; rather, we can make the view the one of our choosing.

Knowing that reform still works should grant us courage to strive for change in areas where progress now seems "impossible." For instance, the greenhouse effect may seem unstoppable today, but that's only because we have not yet tried to stop it. There is no reason we need accept poverty: it can be bested. Polls show that, far from thinking society spends too much to lift up the poor, 60 percent of Americans think the country should take more action against poverty. So let's—because it will work!

Consider an astonishing figure: The United Nations estimates that it would cost \$40 billion per year to provide the basics of life—adequate food, clean water, health care, shelter, and literacy—to every person on the planet. That works out to \$151 per American. Every one of us would gladly write that check, if only there were a way to be sure the money were properly used. All that's stopping us from attempting reform of this noble magnitude is the false belief that life is rolling irrevocably downhill.

It's not, and the proof gets stronger each day. •

Clinton Presidential Records Digital Records Marker

This is not a presidential record. This is used as an administrative marker by the William J. Clinton Presidential Library Staff.

This marker identifies the place of a publication.

Publications have not been scanned in their entirety for the purpose of digitization. To see the full publication please search online or visit the Clinton Presidential Library's Research Room.

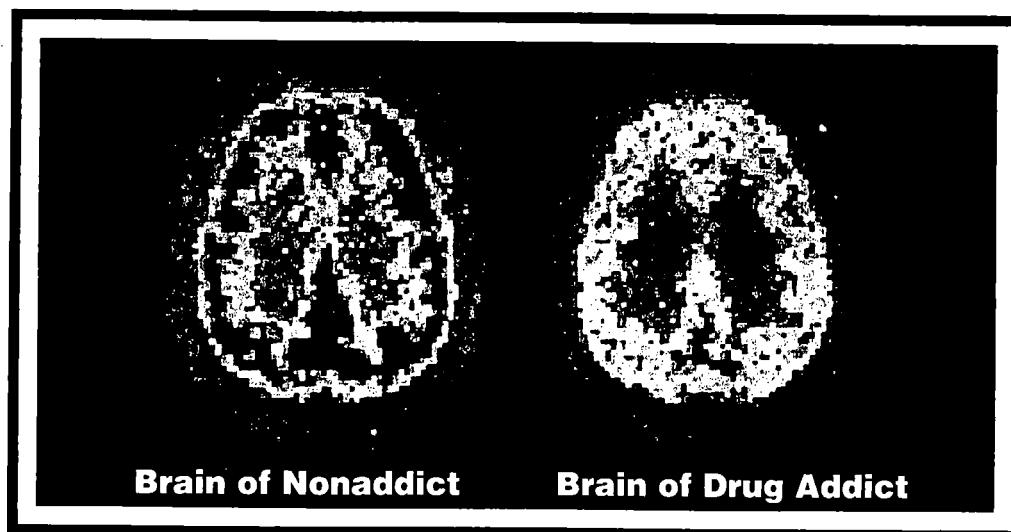


National Institute of Justice

JOURNAL

October 1998

ADDICTION IS A BRAIN DISEASE— AND IT MATTERS



ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE:

Crime's Decline—Why?

The IDENT System: Putting "Structure to the Chaos of the Border"

Reducing Crime by Harnessing International Best Practice

Using City-Level Surveys to Better Understand Community Policing

Clinton Presidential Records Digital Records Marker

This is not a presidential record. This is used as an administrative marker by the William J. Clinton Presidential Library Staff.

This marker identifies the place of a publication.

Publications have not been scanned in their entirety for the purpose of digitization. To see the full publication please search online or visit the Clinton Presidential Library's Research Room.

Why is Crime Decreasing? Conference | Booklet

The Journal of Criminal Law
& Criminology,
The National Institute of Justice,
and
Northwestern University
School of Law

Present a Conference on

**WHY IS CRIME
DECREASING?**

Saturday, March 28, 1998
Thorne Auditorium
Northwestern University
School of Law
357 East Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60611-3069



THE JOURNAL OF
CRIMINAL LAW
AND
CRIMINOLOGY

Northwestern University School of Law
357 East Chicago Avenue, L-311
Chicago, Illinois 60611-3069
Telephone (312) 503-8547
Facsimile (312) 503-0132

April 2, 1998

Jose Cerda
Domestic Policy Council
The White House
O.E.O.B.
Washington, DC 20

Dear Jose:

Please find enclosed copies of the six papers that were presented at our Conference, "Why is Crime Decreasing?" this past Saturday, March 28, 1998. These papers are currently being prepared for publication in the *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology* (Summer 1998). As a result, they are subject to editorial revision over the next few months.

Please feel free to contact me (312) 503-8547 if you have any questions regarding the papers, or wish to speak to the authors directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Melissa L. Jampol".

Melissa L. Jampol
Editor-in-Chief

CONFERENCE DRAFT: DO NOT QUOTE OR CITE

DECLINING HOMICIDE IN NEW YORK CITY: A TALE OF TWO TRENDS^a

Jeffrey Fagan^b
Franklin E. Zimring^c
June Kim^d

March 12, 1998

Forthcoming:

Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology

a. This research was a joint effort of the Center for Violence Research and Prevention at the Columbia School of Public Health, and the Earl Warren Legal Institute at the School of Law, University of California, Berkeley. The authors thank Marlene Pantin, Carolyn Pinedo, and Tamara Dumanovsky for invaluable research assistance. We are grateful to the New York City Police Department and the New York City Department of Health for their assistance and generosity.

b. Professor, School of Public Health, and Visiting Professor, School of Law, Columbia University

c. William G. Simon Professor of Law, and Director, Earl Warren Legal Institute, School of Law, University of California, Berkeley

d. Research Assistant, Earl Warren Legal Institute

The mass media pay plenty of attention to crime and violence in the United States, but very few of the big stories on the American crime beat can be classified as good news. The drive-by shootings and car jackings that illuminate nightly news broadcasts are the opposite of good tidings. Most efforts at prevention and law enforcement seem more like reactive attempts to contain ever expanding problems rather than discernable public triumphs. In recent American history, crime rates seem to increase on the front page and moderate in obscurity.

The recent decline in homicides in New York City is an exception to the usual pattern, the most celebrated example of crime-news-as-good-news in decades. No doubt part of the public attention can be explained because the story took place in the media capital of the United States. But more than location made the New York story newsworthy. The drop in homicides was both large and abrupt--the homicide rate in the nation's largest city fell 52% in five years. Further, changes in police manpower and strategy are widely believed to have contributed to the decline. If this drop can be plausibly tied to enforcement activities, it would be the most conspicuous success of city police deployment policies in the 20th century.

This article reports our attempt to assess the extent and causes of the five-year decline in life threatening violence in New York City. Part I puts the homicide decline in a variety of statistical contexts, comparing the drop to previous New York

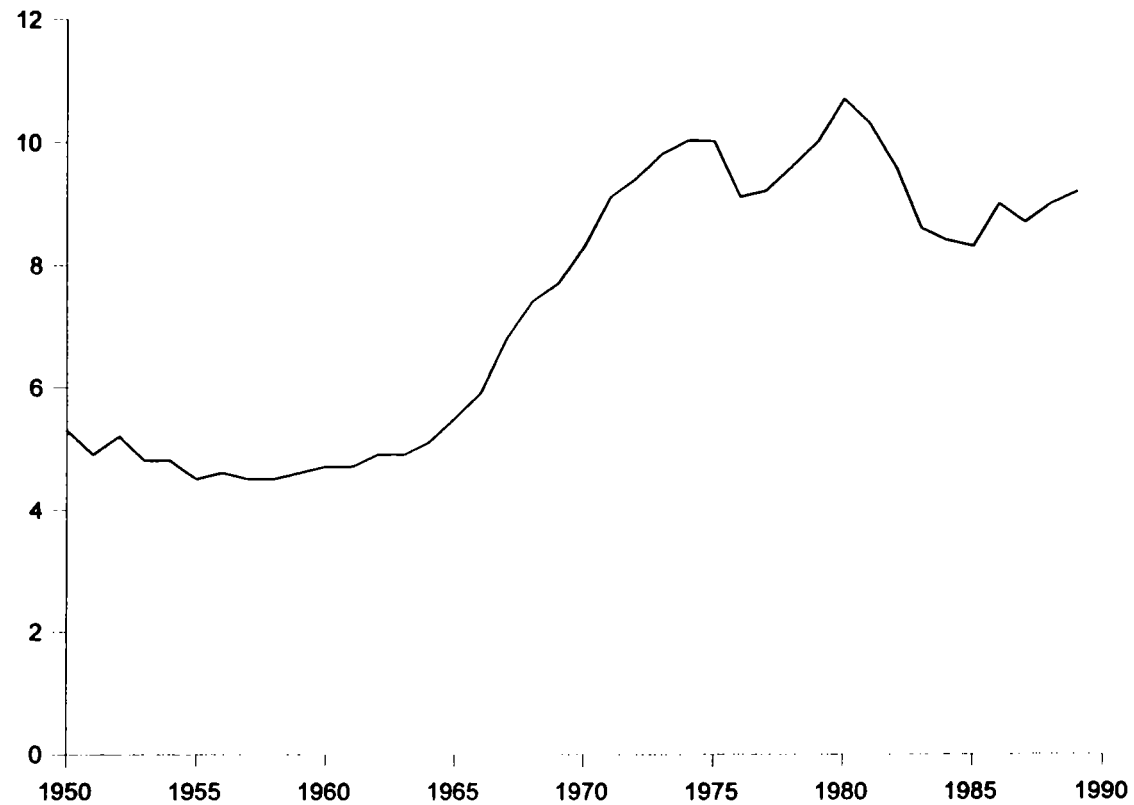
experience and to the experiences of other cities in the United States. Part II examines changes in patterns of homicide during the decline in search of clues about causes. Part III examines available police and other data about the breadth of the decline in crime and violence over the years when homicide dropped. Did many crime categories fall, and by how much? Was the decline concentrated in a few categories or spread evenly across the spectrum of felony crime? Part IV reviews some explanations of decline.

I. How Big a Drop?

The purpose of this section is to place the five-year decline in New York City homicide in a variety of historical contexts. How large is this drop compared to previous periods in the history of New York City? Is a drop this substantial a typical event in the history of a big city?

One important element of context for studying the New York City experience is the recent history of homicide rates in the United States. Figure 1.1 provides national level homicide rates by year over the period 1950 to 1995.

Figure 1.1. U.S. Homicide Rates (per 100,000), 1950-1989



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1976; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991.

After steady to declining trends until the early 1960's, the homicide rate doubled in the period from 1964 to 1974 from just under 5 per 100,000 at the beginning of that period to just under 10 per 100,000 in 1974. After 1974, the trend over time appears to be fluctuations around the 1974 high. Homicide drops somewhat in the mid-1970's then climbs back up to just above 10 per 100,000 in 1980, drops in the early 1980's, then climbs back up close to the 1980 high point in the early 1990's only to drop off again after 1991.

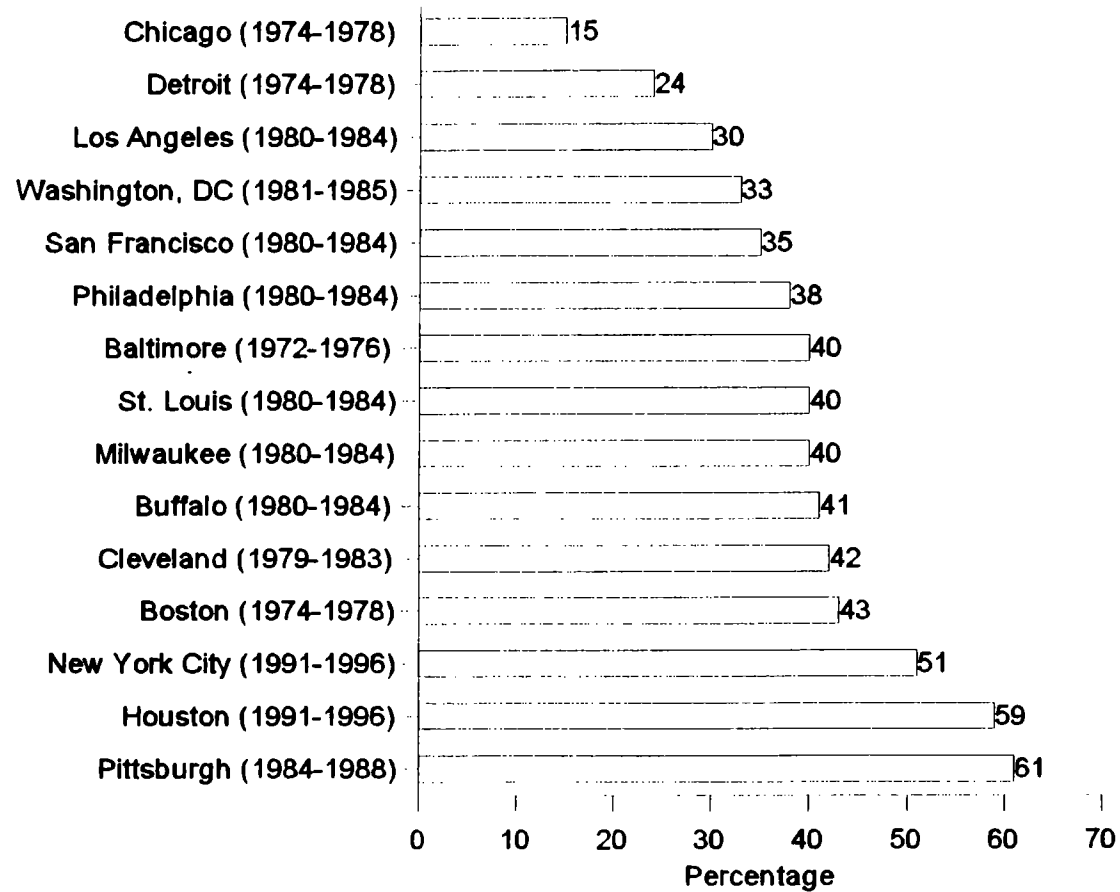
If all the homicide trends since 1964 were forced into a single trend line, the direction of the trend would be upward. If the doubling of rate prior to 1975 is plotted separately, however, the two decades since 1975 represent a trendless fluctuation up and down from the new peak rate of 10 per 100,000 per year and then back up. By 1995, the homicide rate had dropped back near but not yet below the twenty year low set in 1984.

The New York City history can be briefly stated. In its relative and absolute magnitude, the homicide drops after 1992 were by far the largest in the postwar history of New York City. The second largest percentage drop was 25% from 1981 to 1985. The number of lives involved is even more impressive, with more than 1,100 fewer homicide victims in New York City in 1996 than in 1992. This reduction in homicide far exceeded the total

number of homicides the city experienced each year in the 1950's and early 1960's.

The comparison of this New York experience with the experience of other cities is a more complicated story. Figure 1.2 begins the analysis by reporting on the largest five-year declines in homicides reported since 1945 in each of the 15 largest cities in the United States as of 1950.

Figure 1.2 Biggest Five-Year Homicide Declines
in the Fifteen Largest U.S. Cities, 1950-1996

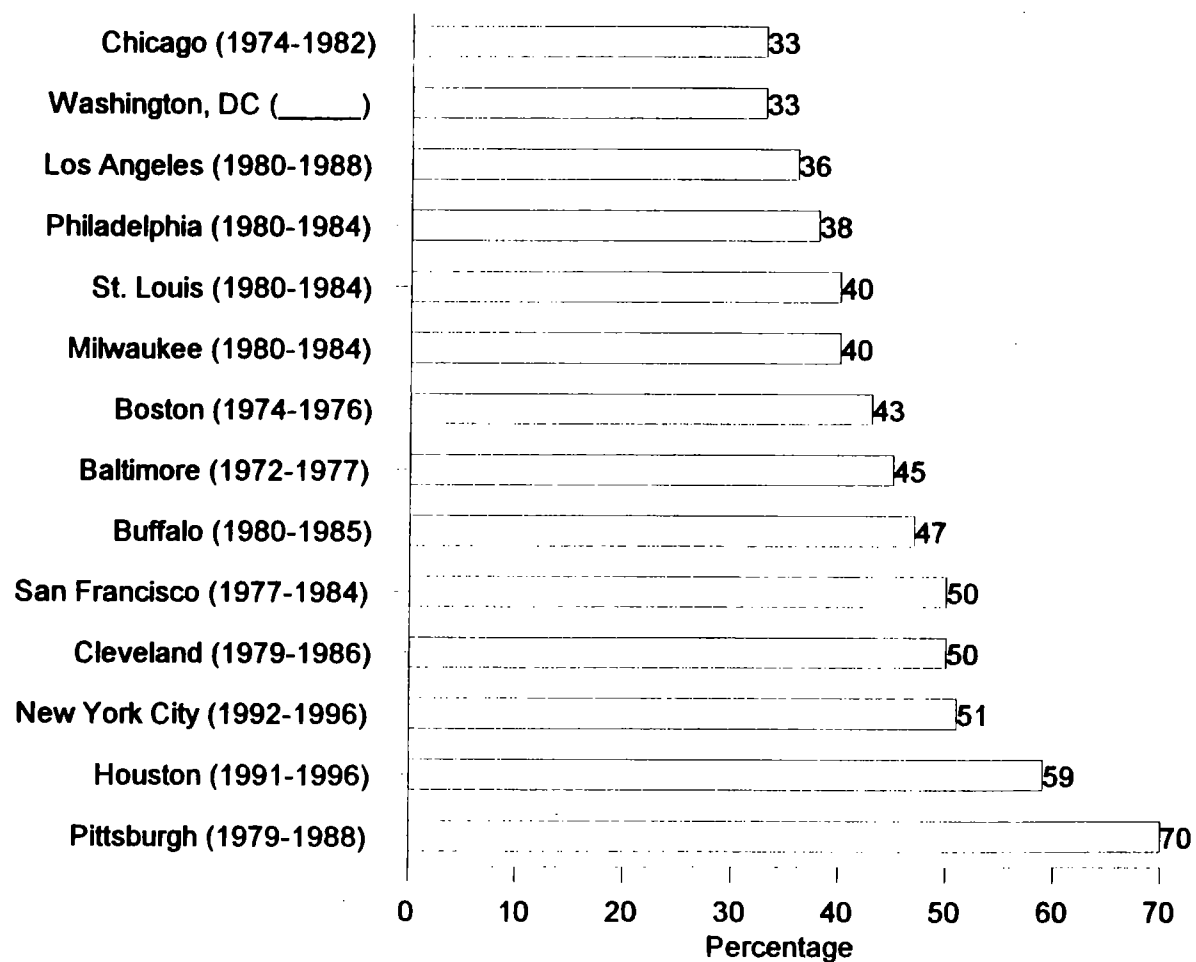


Source: Crime in the United States, Federal Bureau of Investigation, various years

The five-year records for big cities vary from a 61% decline in Pittsburgh through a 15% decline in Chicago. The median decline was 40% and seven cities reported highest decline percentages between 43 and 38 percent. The New York decline is the third highest for the major cities, behind Pittsburgh, equal to Houston, and about 25% larger than the cluster of city records around 40%. On the straight arithmetic the New York experience is not unprecedented, but is a higher percentage drop than 12 of the nation's 15 biggest cities have experienced in a five-year span.

There are two other city comparisons that help to illuminate the relative standing of the New York City decline. Figure 1.3 drops the constraint of a five-year span and searches for the largest homicide declines in a decade or less for each of the 15 largest cities in 1950.

Figure 1.3. Biggest Homicide Declines in Less than a Decade
in the Fifteen Largest U.S. Cities, 1950-1996



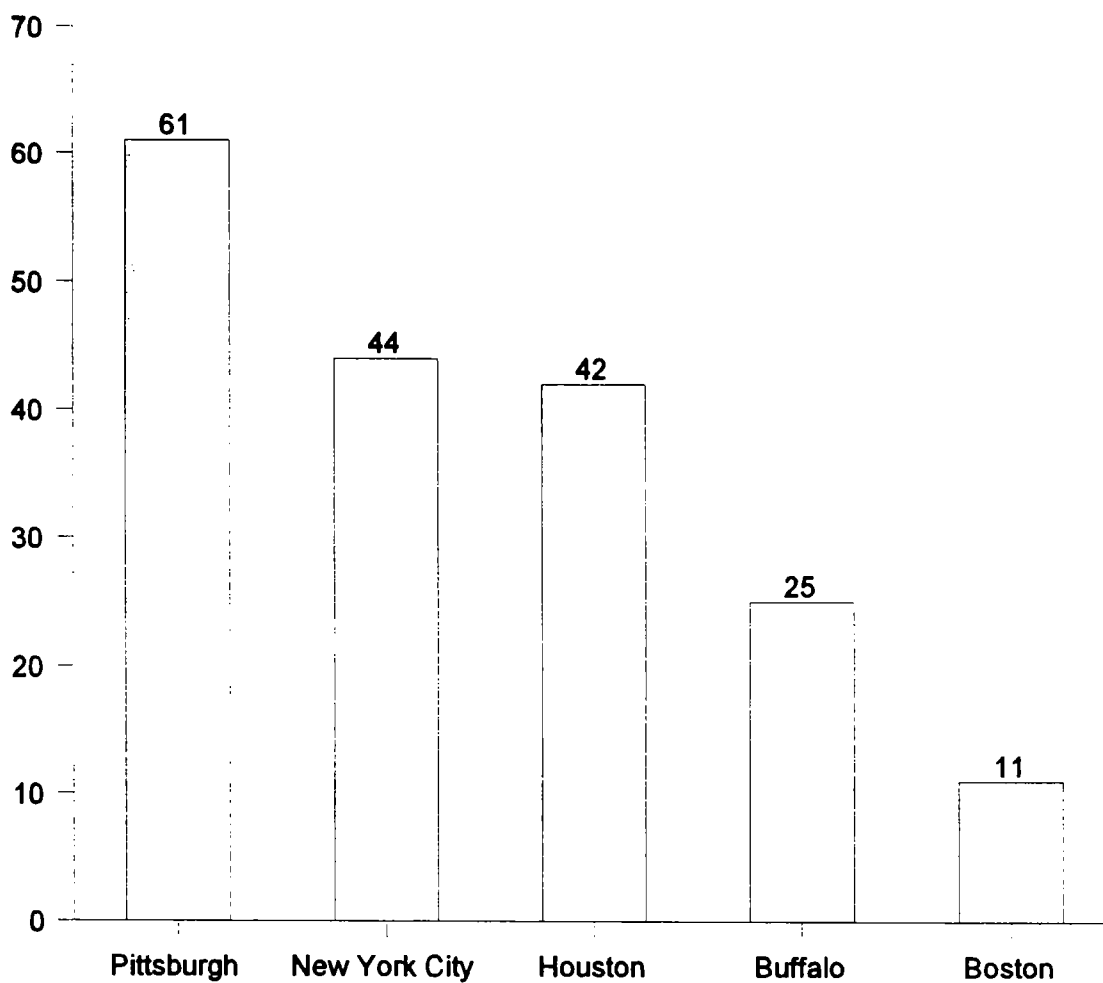
Source: Crime in the United States, Federal Bureau of Investigation, various years

New York City's five-year drop maintains its position as the third largest in this comparison, but a much larger number of cities record declines of the same general magnitude of New York's 51%. It is worth noting however than the very largest cities in the U.S. other than New York City have more modest percentage declines than the smaller cities. New York City's population greatly exceeds Houston's, the next largest city with a similar relative homicide decline.

Figure 1.4 tests the five cities with the highest 5 year declines against the possibility that an abnormally high homicide rate for a short period of time is the reason for a large drop in the homicide rate. The low year in the largest five-year decline is compared to the mean rate in that city for the previous 15 years.

Figure 1.4 helps the observer tell the difference between a big drop that occurs when a city rate returns to near historically normal rates from an atypical high level and declines that still look dramatic when compared with homicide in a city over the long term.

Figure 1.4 Biggest Five-Year Declines from Mean Homicide Rates
for Previous Fifteen Years



Source: Supplemental Homicide Reports, Federal Bureau of Investigation, various years.

Three of the five largest declines (including New York City's) represent a substantial reduction from the average rate in the previous fifteen years. For Pittsburgh, Houston and New York City, it is difficult to argue that the drops recorded were merely regression from abnormally high rates. The Boston decline by contrast was only to a point 11% below the previous long term mean. Regression is a much more likely explanation in that case.

There is one further measure of possible regression of relevance to our inquiry. In an era when very wide savings in rates of criminal homicide occur, sharp downward movements in the homicide rate might be expected after sharp upward movements. The theory here is that some downward momentum might be expected after a steep climb in homicide rates for the same reason that rollercoasters tend to drop faster when they have climbed to a great height. The 59% drop in Houston homicides after 1991 came after a sharp increase in rate. Between 1987 and 1991, Houston's homicide rate climbed from 18.5 per 100,000 to 36.3, a 96% increase. Viewed against this background, both the swiftness and the extent of the decline is less astonishing. When measured against the previous low point in 1987, the Houston homicide rate had declined 19.6% instead of 59%, from 18.5 to 14.9 per 100,000. Moreover, the first year in which the Houston homicide was lower than its 1987 level was 1995, three years after the decline started. The real possibility of cyclical variations means that Houston may not have broken out of its long-term pattern until late in the current decline, and that the current homicide level

is only modestly lower than the previous low. Similar measures can be found in Dallas, where a 58% decline in homicide brought the 1996 homicide rate to 23% under the city's 1983 rate.

How does New York City fare on this measure? To use the rollercoaster metaphor, the climb in New York City was not as steep prior to the post-1991 drop, so that less of the New York decline seems likely to be merely cyclical. Between 1985 and 1991, New York City's homicide rate had increased 56% from 17.5 to 27.3 per 100,000. The homicide rate in 1996 was 23% below the 1985 rate, so that about half of the decrease noted by 1996 was outside the range of cyclical variations experienced in the recent past in New York City.

Still much of the New York decline could have been cyclical and this possibility constrains our capacity to expose the homicide decline on other grounds and to time with precision when New York homicide started behaving in nontypical fashion. As late as the end of 1995, the New York homicide rate was within 10% of its 1985 level. The rate of lethal violence broke important new ground only after 1995 or 1996.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this brief excursion into the natural history of homicide rates in U.S. cities. The percentage decline experienced in New York in five years is quite large but by no means unprecedented in major cities. The largest five-year drop in the average major city

since the second World War is about 40%, a figure 20% smaller than New York City's. When declines over a 6 to 9 year span are allowed, six other cities produce declines of a magnitude similar to the New York experience at some point in post war history. These declines usually come after periods of general increase in homicide rates. The most common year as a starting point for a city's record decline was 1980, the highest year in U.S. homicide for at least a half century.

Decline of the magnitude of that experienced in New York City are not unprecedented, but they are not very common either. Only two other very large cities exceed the New York percentage decline at any time in the post war era. The New York record far exceeded the short term drops recorded in any other city with a population of more than two million. And the large difference between the 1996 homicide rate in New York City and the previous fifteen years of homicide make a strong case against regression as a major part of the explanation for the five-year decline. So the decline is large by historical standards and not merely an echo of a sharp but temporary previous rise. None of this goes directly to the question of what may have caused the New York drop. We have first attempted to get an accurate measure of the size of the effort we are studying.

The next section shifts attention from the number of homicides occurring in New York City to an account of the different trends for different types of killings. The theory is

that shifts in the types of homicides that take place can provide clues as to why the change has occurred.

II. The Nature of the Homicide Decline

The homicide statistics discussed in the previous section are an aggregation of many different types of attack, many different community areas, and many different population groups that live in New York City.

A. Variations by Borough

This section will report on our efforts to analyze the types of homicide that changed the most, to look for clues as to the probable causes of the changes. The analysis reports on cross-tabulations of New York City homicide over time by borough, by weapon and by demographic groups in the city. Each of these disaggregations produces findings we believe to be of major importance in interpreting the New York story.

One important approach to disaggregating New York homicide is by borough. The four major boroughs in the city--Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and the Bronx--each have a population that would rank in the top 10 U.S. cities. These four urban assemblages differ importantly from each other in economy, culture, population and many other community characteristics. A natural question to ask is whether the homicide decline has been

spread evenly over these four clusters or has been uneven in impact.

Figure 2.1 approaches this question by taking the average annual homicide cogent for each of the four large boroughs for the years 1985, 1986 and 1987 and expressing each year over the period 1985-95 as a percentage of that year of that base. If the homicide count in Manhattan during 1989 was 25% more than the annual average during 1985-87, the index for 1989 homicide in Manhattan will be 125 on the figure. This strategy is adopted to facilitate comparing the trends over time in the four boroughs. Staten Island is deleted from the analysis.

INSERT FIGURE 2.1

The four different boroughs differ importantly in the patterns observed while homicide rates grew in New York City, but are much less divergent during the years of decline. The peak volume of homicide in Manhattan was 35% greater than the 1985-87 average, while Queens and Brooklyn grew 64 and 69% and the Bronx grew 93%. These are large differences in growth rate that are accompanied by a slight difference in timing. The peak year in Manhattan and the Bronx was 1990, while Brooklyn and Queens have their highest levels in 1991. Still, the temporal pattern during the late 1980's and early 1990's is pretty consistent across boroughs.

There is even more abundant parallel amongst the boroughs in the period of decline. Even though the increases were very uneven across the boroughs, each of them experienced quite close to a 50% drop from the high value of the decade by 1995. The 1995 volume of homicide in the four boroughs ranges from 47% of the high for the Bronx to 50.6% of the high value in Queens. The extent of the increase had no discernable impact on the proportionate homicide decline. The pattern seems the obverse of a rising tide carries all boats.

B. Patterns by Weapon

The significant break of homicides in New York by weapon is between gun shot deaths and all others. The best data available on homicide by weapon over time comes from the office the Medical Examiner, which includes a small category of justifiable killings but otherwise should be parallel to the police data. Figure 2.2 shows the pattern by weapon using the 675 non-gun killings in 1995 and the 834 gun killings in that year as a base of 100 to track trends over time. The non-gun total for 1990 has been adjusted by deleting 85 of the 86 killings from the Happyland fire, in effect counting that episode as one homicide. This is done to smooth out the long term trend curve.

INSERT FIGURE 2.2

The patterns for gun and non-gun killings are sharply different. Non-gun killings drift downward from the beginning,

interrupted only in 1990 by the 86 fire deaths in a single incident. By 1992, non-gun deaths had dropped by 35%, and this trend continues through to 1996. Gun deaths meanwhile double between 1985 and 1991 and do not fall back to the 1985 level until 1995.

The gun death pattern is well known, and the rise in homicide by gun was large enough in the late 1980s and early 1990s to increase the total level of homicide until 1990 in the medical examiner's data and to keep total homicide high through 1993. What the gun trends obscure is the steadiest long-term trend in New York City--a downward movement in homicides by all means other than gun that begins after 1986 and gathers momentum steadily throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. By 1992, 70% of the total decline in non-gun killings noted in the entire 1985 to 1996 period had already occurred. The declines after 1992 in non-gun killings appear to have been a continuation of the eight years of previous decreases.

There are thus two dynamic and different pattern in the data on homicide by weapon. Gun killings first increase then fall back to previous levels. Non-gun killings trend down from start to finish. The magnitude of the non-gun trend is substantial and its timing is well documented. But it has not previously been noticed.

C. The Demographics of Homicide

The distinct patterns of gun and non-gun homicide raise questions about whether these patterns were similarly distributed among the population of homicide victims. Using the Medical Examiner records, we disaggregated characteristics of gun and non-gun homicide victims by age, sex and race. The demographic patterns of gun and non-gun homicide throughout this period tell two interesting stories. First, the homicide trends for women differ from the patterns for men, a gender contradictions consistent with prior studies on the stability of female homicide. Second, changes in adolescent homicide rates were accompanied by parallel but less dramatic changes among older population. This trend varies from the national picture of steadily declining rates among older groups.

1. Sex

Homicide rates for women were lower overall from 1985 to 1995, consistent with homicide trends historically. However, the trends in gun and non-gun homicides for males and females differed in the magnitude, timing and duration of change over the period. Figure 2.3 shows that gun homicides by women increased by 68 percent during this period, compared to an increase of over 105 percent for males. The timing and duration of the increase for females was similar for males and females. Rates for women peaked in 1991, the same year as males, and sustained their peak rate for approximately three years before dropping sharply in

1994. By 1995, gun homicides for females had dropped 5 percent below their 1985 levels, but remained 10 percent above the 1985 levels for males.

INSERT FIGURE 2.3

The steady decline in non-gun homicides described earlier was not consistent for men and women. Figure 2.3 shows that there were steady declines for both groups, but the decline was greater for men than women. By 1995, non-gun homicide rates for males were 45 percent below their 1985 rates.¹ However, the rates for women declined far less. After reaching a low of 25 percent below their 1985 rate in 1992, they settled at about 80 percent by 1995. In fact, the overall trend for women is no change since 1992.²

2. Age

Much of public and scholarly attention on violence in the past decade has focused on the increase in gun homicides by adolescents (e.g. Blumstein, 1995; Cook and Laub, in press). Trends nationwide show that gun homicide rates for adolescents increased during this period while gun homicide rates for persons over 25 years of age were declining. Figure 2.4 shows that while

1. The 1990 spike for male non-gun homicides most likely reflects the 89 deaths in the Happyland Social Club fire. However, we could not adjust the rates for these deaths since data were not available on the gender composition of the victims of that fire.

2. Add: footnote on Veddy Verko and Verko's Law

adolescent participation in gun homicide did rise sharply from 1985 to 1991, rates for other age groups also continued to rise during this period.³

INSERT FIGURE 2.4

Gun homicides by adolescents ages fifteen to nineteen rose more quickly and sharply over this period. by 1991, gun homicide rates for this group reached a peak of 176 percent above their 1985 rate. The other population groups also increased, peaking at approximately the same time at about 100 above their 1985 rate. Rates for the oldest population group, those 35 years of age or more, rose slightly more slowly, peaking at 77 percent of their 1985 rate. Accordingly, adolescents did not replace became an active part of a homicide epidemic that spanned age groups.

The decline among adolescent was equally precipitous. By 1995, their homicide counts declined to 25 percent above their 1985 base rate. All other population groups returned to their 1985 rates or below. The slightly higher rate in 1995 for this group compared to the older groups suggests that a process of replacement, with pre-adolescents during the 1991 peak joining the higher risk fifteen to nineteen age group by 1995.

INSERT FIGURE 2.5

3. We include only homicide victims ages 15 and above. The gun homicide counts for those 14 and younger were extremely low during this period, and their participation in non-gun homicide exceeded gun homicide by 50 percent or more.

Figure 2.5 show that the non-gun homicide rates during this period declined for all age groups. We excluded the 1990 data, since age distributions of the Happyland Social Club fire victims were unavailable. The oldest and youngest age groups contributed proportion to the non-gun homicide decline from 1985 to 1989. By 1991, the decline was evident among all age groups.

3. Race

None of the data sources permitted detailed disaggregation of the homicide trends by race over the entire 1985 to 1995 period. Detailed data were available only for African Americans; whites and Hispanics were not distinguished in the police or Medical Examiner data until after 1990. From the available data, there were no changes in the racial composition of the homicide population during this period. Data from several sources show that homicide rates among African Americans were higher compared to others throughout the period from 1985 to 1995.⁴

4. One data source does provide race-disaggregated information on weapon-related fatalities and injuries, but only from 1990-95. Sharp declines in firearm assault injuries and fatalities were observed for all races from 1990-95, according to the Injury Surveillance System of the New York City Department of Health. The surveillance system hierarchically combines case-level data on fatalities, hospitalizations, and emergency room admissions (NYCDOH, 1996). Firearm death and non-fatal injury rates declined by 50 percent or more for both Blacks and Hispanics from 1991 to 1995. Rates for Whites also declined, but at a slower pace. Rates of non-firearm deaths and injuries declined more slowly for all races during this period.

III. Concomitants

This section compares the city-wide homicide data developed in the previous section with trends in crime statistics and selected other social data widely believed to be linked to trends in lethal violence. City-wide data comparisons are presented because of the finding in the previous section that trends are consistent in time and, with one minor exception, in magnitude, over the four large metropolitan boroughs. The historical data for gun and non-gun violence is presented separately in this section because of the previous section's discovery that gun and non-gun homicides have distinctly different histories in the city.

This first part of this section compares homicide trends with trends in police reported assaults. A second section measures the trends in gun and non-gun homicide with trends in other crimes.

A. Homicide and Assault Data

The patten over time for firearms homicide and firearms assault is shown in Figure 3.1, with 1985 rates of shooting deaths and firearms assaults expressed as 100 and all other values normed to that scale.

INSERT FIGURE 3.1

The trends in police reported gun assaults and health department gun homicides are almost perfectly matched for the six

years of increase to 1991 and for the decreases thereafter. In both timing and relative magnitude, the firearm assault trends match the firearm homicide trends. For this time period, trends in known firearm assaults are a very good index of trends in gun deaths. The case fatality rate of gun death per each ten gun assaults is stable over time. The increased level of firearm assaults, about 8,600 more known cases by 1990 and 1991, appears to be the mechanism that is driving the increase in gun fatalities, and the sharp drop in firearms assaults after 1993 seems to be the dynamic in the drop in firearms fatalities, although no strict test for causal ordering can be imposed on this data.

The data on non-firearms aggravated assault trends and health department homicides by all means other than firearms are an extraordinary contrast to the firearms trends, as shown in Figure 3.2.

INSERT FIGURE 3.2

For most of the period, trends in non-firearm aggravated assaults are a very poor index of trends in non-firearm homicides: while the rate of death drops by half in the period from 1985 to 1995, the incidence of aggravated assault increases slightly. As a consequence of these sharply divergent trends, the case fatality rate drops from 16 per thousand in 1985 to 8 per thousand in 1995. Obviously, any increase in total

aggravated assaults during this period would have to be clustered in non-life-threatening types of attack.

There is however, a good reason to suppose that the growth in non-gun aggravated assault cases is solely the product of greater willingness to classify borderline cases as the aggravated form of assault. At the national level, assault rates have grown over the same period much more quickly than any change in death rates could explain. So New York may simply be reflecting this national reclassification tendency (see Zimring 1998 at Chapter 3).

1. One Trend or Two?

An objection might be raised that the major finding of this study -- the two separate trends in non-gun and gun homicides -- is really an artificial division of a unitary trend in violence over the period. The decline in non-gun killings that starts in the mid-1980s is merely a shift from knife and personal force attacks to gun attacks. There is no real reduction in violence to explain until after 1990 when total killings and presumably total high lethality attacks start to come down. Now that weapon specific assault data has been added to the homicide story, this objection can be addressed with some economy.

The circumstantial evidence against this possibility comes from many separate sources. In the first place, while gun deaths doubled between 1985 and 1992, a shift in the volume of knife,

other weapon, and personal force attacks that was large enough to reduce the non-gun homicide rate by 35% would increase the gun death total by at least 150% even if there was no decline in life threatening assaults. This is because the case fatality rate in 1985 for gun assaults was 88 per 1000 compared to 16 per thousand for the non-gun assaults in New York in 1985. Given the instrumentality effects, the increase in firearms death was too small to fit with a displacement rather than decline in non-gun violence. Non-gun high lethality violence had to be coming down in the second half of the 1980s

A second problem with attributing the increase in gun incidents in New York City to the same violent incidents now occurring with guns rather than other weapons of attack is that this is inconsistent with the prevailing explanation for increased gun attacks in the late 1980s. The conventional wisdom is that gun incidents increased in large part because of turf conflict in the new crack trade (see, for example, Blumstein, 1995). If new types of conflict explain much of the growth in gun violence, that would leave even less of the gun cases to explain as the effects of displacement.

A third problem with the late 1980s pattern as a reciprocal displacement story is that the timing of the two trends is inconsistent with reciprocity. The two largest increases in gun homicide in the late 1980s occur in 1988 and 1990. The biggest declines in non-gun homicide happen in 1987 and 1992.

A fourth problem with a reciprocity explanation for the first seven years after 1985 is that the non-gun homicide trends continue in a relatively uninterrupted fashion after 1992 as well. The magnitude of the drops in non-gun killing after 1991 are quite consistent with the non-gun pattern in the late 1980s, yet the increases in gun killings have disappeared. An observer would have to maintain grossly different explanations for the front end years of the trend and the later years, despite the similarity in over-all pattern for the eleven years.

There is also evidence external to New York City that expanding gun homicide levels are not associated with declines in non-gun violence. While gun homicide tends to increase more in up years than other weapon killings, and is also over represented in declines, the non-gun trends tend to be flat rather than to fluctuate in the opposite direction, see Zimring 1975 at footnote _____ (United States as a whole) and Zimring 1996 at Figure _____ (youth homicide).

Even granting the anomalous trend data for non-gun assaults throughout the period it still should be mentioned that the police non-fatal assault data just reviewed is also grossly inconsistent with any reciprocity explanation of the decline in non-gun violence in the late 1980s. More reliable non-fatal assault data for the 1980s would help us put a more precise point on the independence of the gun and non-gun trends but the pattern

seems clear on available evidence. A long decline in non-firearms lethal violence continued throughout the period under study. In twelve years, the death rate dropped steadily until the 1996 rate was almost exactly half the 1985 rate.

Meanwhile, homicide by gun increases substantially and then decreased even more swiftly. The two homicide trends occur in the same city but appear to be independent of each other at least through the early 1990s and perhaps for the whole period under study.

B. Other Crime Trends

Patterns of both robbery and property crime reflect the "two trend" finding in homicide, but the timing is not identical. Figure 3.3 shows the trends for firearm and other armed robberies for 1985-96, again using the 1985 incidence as the base.⁵ Figure 3.4 shows property crime trends. The pattern of firearm robbery during this period is similar to the patterns of firearm assault and homicide, peaking in 1991 before declining sharply. The general decline in non-firearm assault and homicide is mirrored by the trend for property crimes and non-firearm robberies, though the phasing of their decline differs by about two years.

5. The data point for the base year is greater than 100. The within-year fluctuations require smoothing of the curve based on moving averages of six-month periods. Thus, the initial data point actually includes the index for 18 months, or from January 1985 through June 1986.

INSERT FIGURE 3.3

The incidence of firearm robberies peaked in 1990, at 63 percent higher than the 1985 rate. This peak maintained for 12 months through 1991, before declining sharply through 1996. By 1996, the incidence of gun robberies was 47 percent lower than the 1985 index, a decline that substantially outperforms the gun homicide and assault trends. The trend for non-firearm robberies more closely resembles the firearm crime trends generally. These robberies peak in 1991 at 37 percent above the 1985 rate, and by 1996 decline to a point 25 percent below the 1985 rate.

At first glance, this trend appears to contradict the "two trends" finding from the homicide and assault data. One could conclude that these data portray a more unitary violence phenomenon during the period, with rates rising and falling in concert. However, there are two objections to this coupling of firearm and other robberies in a general violence trend. First, the robbery trend beginning in 1989 mirrors identically the "two trends" conclusion in homicides. From a high in 1989, non-firearm robberies begin an uninterrupted decline to an incidence 52 percent below the peak. Thus, what differs in the robbery trends is the phasing of the trend, not its shape or magnitude. Though beginning somewhat later, the decline in non-firearm robberies is nearly identical to the decline in non-firearm homicides.

Second, robbery itself is a heterogeneous crime, with acts ranging from chain snatching to threats or acts of violence to take property from a person. The growth in non-firearm robberies from 1985-89 may reflect a reclassification of borderline cases similar to the non-firearm assault trends. That is, theft or larceny (without force) cases could be reclassified as robberies in circumstances where threats may be reported. As we show in Figure 3.4, the incidence of larcenies rises slightly during this period, suggesting a general trend of property crime increases that may confound these two crime categories.

INSERT FIGURE 3.4

Property crime trends are shown in Figure 3.4. Motor vehicle theft spikes in 1989 at over 150 percent of its 1985 incidence, before declining precipitously through 1996. By 1996, auto theft is 25 percent below its 1985 point, and nearly two thirds of its peak incidence in 1988. Burglary trends decline steadily throughout the period, part of a long-term trend in burglary that dates back to the late 1970s. The incidence of burglary in 1996 is 50 percent lower than the 1985 incidence, and half of its 1980 incidence.⁶

6. Data on insurance claims confirm the decline in reports of auto theft and residential burglary. We obtained information from State Farm Insurance, the third largest underwriter of both automobile and homeowners insurance policies in New York City, on claims and settlements from 1991-95. The number of claims declined 46 percent, and insurance settlements declined by 29 percent (unadjusted for inflation).

Larceny patterns, by comparison, are very stable, rising only 17 percent above its 1985 level before declining steadily. By 1996, larceny was 38 percent below its 1985 rate, and over 50 percent below its peak in 1988. Thus, larceny and non-firearm robbery trends are close in both shape and phasing. And, though phased three years later, these trends reflect the general non-firearm crime decline observed earlier. Accordingly, the "two trend" conclusion does not contradict the interpretation of trends in both robbery and property crimes. The disjuncture between firearm and non-firearm violence extends to robbery, while the secular trend in non-firearm crimes now appears to include both violent and property offenses.

C. Social Trends

Both popular and social science explanations of the decline of New York homicide have focused on important social trends, particularly changes in drug markets and reductions in the population of offenders with greatest propensity for homicide and gun violence.⁷ There are two reasons that make these explanations particularly attractive. First, homicide and drug epidemics have been closely phased, both temporally and spatially, in New York and nationwide, for nearly 30 years (Fagan, 1990, in press). Homicide peaks in 1972, 1979 and 1991 mirror three drug epidemics: heroin, cocaine hydrochloride (powder), and crack cocaine. These long-term trends predict that

7. See, for example, Richard Curtis, in this volume.

declines in drug use would occur contemporaneously with declines in homicide.

Second, the scale of broader social trends, such as demographic shifts, matches the social scale on which broad crime trends rise and fall. Epidemic theories suggest that declines in the size of the susceptible populations would lead to declines in the incidence of social behaviors whose rapid rise above the base rate and equally rapid decline illustrate basic epidemic patterns (Rothman, 1986; Loftin, 1986; Gladwell, 1996).

Figures 3.5 and 3.6 compare trends in firearm and non-firearm homicide with trends in both drug activity and population change. We compiled two trends of drug activity: drug overdose deaths, from the records of the Medical Examiner, and trends in drug-related crimes, based on urinalysis results from the Drug Use Forecasting System (DUF). Figure 3.5 shows that the incidence of drug-positive arrestees remains unchanged throughout the period, and is unrelated to both firearm and non-firearm homicide trends. Moreover, non-firearm homicides decline steadily throughout the period, and appear to be independent from either drug indicator.

INSERT FIGURE 3.5

In contrast, drug overdose deaths follow a pattern of short cycles, with relatively brief periods of increase and decline. For example, by 1988, the incidence of drug overdose deaths is 60

percent higher than the 1985 base rate.⁸ They fall to 10 percent below the base rate in 1990, then rise through 1993 and remain about 40 percent above the 1985 incidence.

The rise in drug overdose deaths seems to increase as the incidence of firearm homicide deaths declines. By 1996, the incidence of drug overdose deaths is 21 percent above the 1985 base, while firearm homicide deaths are 22 percent below the 1985 base. Beginning in 1990, the mortality rate for drug overdose deaths rises from below 10 per 10,000 persons in 1985, peaks at 16 per 100,000 in 1993, and remains stable at 14.3 in 1996. During this period, the homicide fatality rate drops from over 30 deaths per 100,000 to 16.1 in 1996. Indeed, as Richard Curtis (in this volume) and others have pointed out, drugs such as heroin and ketamine supplanted crack as the a favored street drug. These drugs are more likely to cause overdose deaths.

What appears as replacement, however, may simply be a spurious relationship between firearm fatalities and drug overdose deaths. Drug use and selling have different correlations with violence, and tend to motivate different types of violence. Homicide rates associated with drug *sales* rose sharply during the crack era, but violence associated with drug use remained relatively infrequent (Goldstein et al., 1989;

8. The base year of 1985 is an important year, falling between the earlier emergence of street-level powder cocaine markets and the explosion of crack cocaine in 1986.

Fagan, 1992). And, although many users were involved in small-scale drug sales, most high-rate drug selling occurred among infrequent drug users (Fagan, 1992).

Accordingly, it is more likely that a decline in street-level drug selling activity may have reduced, to some unknown extent, the types of social interactions that lead to firearm homicides and assaults. It is less likely, however, that high violence drug sellers turned to more lethal forms of drug use.

INSERT FIGURE 3.6A AND 3.6B

Figures 3.6a and 3.6b show the trends for firearm and non-firearm homicides arrayed with population estimates for the subgroups with the highest homicide risk: males 15-29 years of age.⁹ Demographic trends appear to be unrelated to firearm homicides. However, non-firearm trends appear to coincide with population declines among white and Black males. The population projection for 1995 for Black males forecasts a 17 percent

9. Population subgroup estimates were obtained from the Current Population Survey for 1985, the U.S. Census for 1990, and population projections completed by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council for 1995. The latter were developed to predict transportation demand. The population model uses a cohort-survival technique that adjusts for cohort mortality, natality, survival rates and net migration rates at five year intervals. Population is broken down into age/sex/race-specific cohorts using the Census Bureau MARS dataset. Separate projections are made for each age/sex/race cohort. Population growth is based on forecasted age-specific fertility rates for females. The net-migration component is a function of historical rates and projected labor force demand segmented by type of job. See, New York Metropolitan Transportation Council Technical Memorandum 8.9: Population Forecasting and Analysis, 1995.

decline among males 15-29 years, or about 41,000 persons in absolute terms. For whites, the decline is sharper: 130,000 fewer males ages 15-29 are estimated to be living in New York City in 1995 than a decade earlier.

Can such declines produce the magnitude of homicide decline observed in this decade? Population declines for the highest risk groups, non-white males ages 15-29, were evident throughout the period, beginning during the increase in non-firearm homicide and continuing through the period of decline. Accordingly, it is tempting to dismiss demography as a correlate of the homicide decline. However, the relationship of population to a changing behavioral pattern may be non-linear, though (Gladwell, 1996). In other words, did the population decline reach a threshold where it could lead to a decline in the incidence of firearm homicides?¹⁰ This is a plausible but unfalsifiable explanation. Like the effects of declining drug markets, the contraction in

10. Sustained declines in populations with the highest propensity for lethal violence, males ages 15-29, might weaken their social networks and reduce the extent of social interactions of their members. The social and spatial clustering of homicide suggests that it is concentrated within overlapping social networks in small areas (Fagan, Wilkinson, Davies, and Zimring, 1998). Social contagion theory suggests that individuals are likely to mutually influence the behaviors of others with whom they are in frequent and redundant contact (Burt, 1992; Bovasso, 1996, at 1421). The social interactions underlying assaultive violence suggest its spread by social contact (Loftin, 1986). The dissolution of social networks from attrition would reduce opportunities for social transmission of assaultive violence. The relationship of network density to social contagion is non-linear, however. Thus, epidemiologists discuss thresholds, or tipping points, where behavioral change accelerates and spreads through a population before beginning its process of decline (see, for example, Crane, 1991; Gladwell, 1996).

the highest risk population is an important but unknowable influence on the decline in firearm homicides from 1992-96.

D. Law and Policy

Significant changes occurred in law and criminal justice during this period to produce important changes in the likelihood of detection and punishment of crime. Rapid expansion of prison populations have occurred in nearly every state, and including New York (Tonry, 1995). Moreover, New York City implemented an aggressive policy of street-level enforcement against both drug crimes in the 1980's (Sviridoff, Sadd, Curtis and Grinc, 1992) and "quality of life" crimes in 1994 (Kelling and Cole, 1997). In this section, we assess the relationships between these two policy shifts and the trends in homicide.

1. Policing

Figure 3.7 shows the trends in policing over the 11 year period. Changes in policing were unrelated to the long-term decline in non-gun homicides. This is a secular trend whose explanations lie beyond the hypotheses raised here about post-1990 interventions. But there are some apparent links between police resources, firearm killings and crime rates, as well as police strategy and homicide trends. Patrol strength increased from its 1991 count of 6,647 officers to over 8,305 officers in 1995, an increase of nearly 25 percent. Figure 3.7 shows that the increase in patrol strength was sharpest from 1991 to 1994, the period of onset of the decline in firearm homicides. In

addition, marked shifts in policing strategy began in 1994 (Kelling and Cole, 1997), concurrently with even sharper declines in firearm homicides from 1994-96.

INSERT FIGURE 3.7

Further evidence of the influence of policing on homicide is evident in data on the locations of homicides. The NYPD records whether crime events are "visible by patrol;" we use this indicator as a proxy for whether crimes occurred indoors or outdoors. Increased patrol and aggressive patrol tactics should reduce opportunities for visible or outdoor crime commission. Figure 3.8 shows trends in homicides committed indoors and outdoors, again using the 1985 incidence as a base of 100.

INSERT FIGURE 3.8

Visible homicides increased rapidly from 1986-90, peaking at 134 percent above the 1985 base rate. There were two periods of decline, from 1991-93, and a sharper decline from 1994-96 when they returned to the 1985 level. After a one-year rise in 1986, non-visible homicides fluctuated from 1987-94 before beginning a sharp decline. By 1996, non-visible homicides were 52 percent lower than the 1985 incidence. We find no evidence of displacement from outdoor to indoor homicide in these trends.

This represents a different "two trend" phenomenon with potentially different explanations for two different periods in this decade. From 1991-94, there were two downward shifts in

exogenous events tied to homicides, especially those occurring outdoors. The increase in patrol strength beginning in 1991 had a positive effect on reducing visible homicides. The second pressure was tied to changes in the dynamics of drug distribution. The decline in visible homicide was concurrent with the shift from outdoor to indoor drug selling, reducing the volatility of drug transactions and the opportunities for conflicts over money or territory (Hamid, 1994; Bourgois, 1995; Curtis, this volume).¹¹

The 1994-96 decline coincides with changes in police strategy. Combined with earlier downward pressures, the shift toward an aggressive enforcement strategy targeted at firearms produced sharp declines in both indoor and outdoor homicides.

2. Incapacitation

Both city and state incarceration populations are arrayed with homicide trends in Figure 3.9.¹² During the period of increasing firearm homicide rates from 1985 through 1991, prison and jail populations increased at the same pace. Jail

11. Although the "drug-relatedness" of specific homicides is difficult to determine, the direct and indirect contribution of drug problems to homicide rates has been stable over time (Goldstein et al., 1989; Fagan, in press). Changes in drug markets, as evidenced by shifts in consumption patterns and marketing styles, should contribute to changes in homicide rates.

12. Average daily populations are shown for the jail populations, and the year-end census is shown for the state prisons. According to the New York State Department of Correctional Services, approximately 70 percent of the state prison population in any year comes from New York City.

populations declined from 1992-1994, a year after the onset of the homicide decline. Jail populations then rose again in 1995 as homicides continued to decrease. By 1995, jail admissions were 50 percent higher than 1985. State prison populations rose throughout the period from 1985-95. By 1991, when the incidence of firearm homicides was highest, state prison populations had doubled the 1985 rate. That is, homicide and state prison populations rose in lockstep through 1991, and continued to rise even as firearm homicides, and homicides overall, began their rapid decline.¹³

INSERT FIGURE 3.9

While firearm homicides and homicides generally began their decline in 1992, state prison admissions continued to rise. By 1993, they were nearly 150 higher than the 1985 rate, and about 50 percent higher than the rate at the 1991 peak of the incidence of homicide and other firearm-related crimes.

The extent to which these legal policies influenced homicide trends differs by policy domain. Incarceration trends seem to be unrelated to homicide trends. There appears to be a negative correlation between police strength and firearm homicide, but the significance of these effects, or their primacy in relation to social influences, is unknowable. The effects of both manpower and tactical changes in policing are no doubt important and

13. Preliminary data for homicides in 1997 suggest that the divergence in prison populations and homicides continues to grow.

strong contributors to the homicide decline. However, the magnitude and timing of the decline in firearm homicides is so great as to require additional, contemporaneous explanations and effects that no doubt interact with policing to produce unprecedented change.

IV. Considering Causes

The identification of two separate types of homicide with two discrete time trends is a major complication to theories that wish to identify discrete causes of reduced violence and crime in New York City. In this brief concluding note, we give our own interpretation of how the "two trend" conclusion of this study might be particularly relevant to the frequently voiced theory that changes in policing that occur early in the 1990s are an important explanation of declines in New York homicide.

We start with our negative conclusion. The consistent decline in non-gun homicide identified in section II starts too early and continues too evenly throughout the period under study to have any plausible linkage to changes that come into the city two or three years into the 1990s. Indeed, the evenness of the decline across a decade suggests the influence of an accretive process rather than any sudden step-function change in the environment of New York city homicide was responsible for cutting the non-firearms homicide rate by half.

But some important process is involved. There was no indication of regression in this pattern because there was no steep increase prior to 1985 in non-gun homicide. Further, the rate of non-gun killing is much lower by 1992 than at any time in the previous fifteen years. The single or multiple processes that explain the decline in non-gun homicide in New York City happened too early to be in the design perspective of this research, but they are no less important for that reason.

The more difficult question is whether the expansion in police resources and changes in the way these were used were major causes of the decline in gun homicide in New York City. The temporal fit between policing changes and gun homicide declines is a good one. Gun homicides begin to decline in the Medical Examiner's count in 1991, but the declines were not large prior to 1994. Because of the steep increase in the gun homicide rate through the late 1980s, some regression would be expected from peak rates in 1990. So the initial declines in gun killings could be put aside as probable regression leaving the 85% of the drop that happens after 1993 as gun homicide declines that could have been produced by changing patterns of policing in the city. But we must also recall that police strength, though not tactics, began a measurable climb at the same time that firearm homicides began their decline. These colliding forces produced a decline of unprecedented proportions that continued through 1996 and beyond.

Regression Revisited

But while a little bit of regression might make the causal role of policing more likely, regression is also the primary completing explanation for the large drops in gun homicide after 1993. In Part I of this analysis, the hypothesis that the total decline in New York City homicide was attributable to regression was all but rejected because the decline by 1996 was to a level much lower than the city's long-term average rate, and homicide rates were lower also than the lowest previous level experienced in the past two decades. More than regression must have been at work when the totality of the city's homicides are combined into a single trend.

But once non-gun and gun homicide patterns are separated, the regression explanation for gun homicides is more difficult to reject. Figure 4.1 charts two decades of gun homicide volume in New York City.

INSERT FIGURE 4.1

To use a term introduced in Part I, the pattern of gun killings does rather resemble the shape of a rollercoaster, with an ascent through the late 1970s to a relatively low peak, a return to near the previous low point, a sharp increase to a high peak in 1990 and a precipitous drop thereafter. What makes the regression explanation harder to reject for gun cases is that the

1996 low point is not that far removed from 1978 and 1985 levels of gun homicide.

There is no rigorous method available to parse causal responsibility between law enforcement, social trends, and regression for the city's gun homicide record. All contributed to the decline, all were probably significant. What makes us reluctant to dismiss the law enforcement role is the sharp decline also noted in Part III in gun assault and gun robbery. These two offenses may also reflect cyclical regression but the broad pattern and similar magnitudes are consistent with a substantial environmental change. So while the entire gun homicide drop of 1991 to 1996 is within the boundaries of regression possibility, the more prudent view is to regard the convergence of cyclical variation, social trends in risk and exposure, and law enforcement changes as jointly responsible for a 60% decline in gun deaths in five years time. How much of the decline can be claimed by law enforcement alone simply cannot be determined.

Related to the problem of apportioning responsibility between regression, demography, and policing for the decline in homicide, a substantial variety of changes in policing are competing to claim credit for positive trends in New York's homicide prevalence: "broken windows" theories of aggressive enforcement, gun interventions, general increases in police enforcement resources, strategic targeting of police efforts

through computer mapping, and precinct-level management accountability for crime trends. Was the police share in the happy story graffiti control, squeegee control, gun control, or simply more police?

Because only gun homicide trends are in range to be attributed to police intervention, the case for gun-oriented policing strategies claiming credit is much stronger than for all other policies, but this inference is subject to two qualifications. First, a whole series of street enforcement tactics including stops justified on order maintenance rationale can have gun-specific results if police use them to produce gun search opportunities. Second, we would also expect regression artifacts in New York City to be much larger for gun cases than non-gun cases. So more than the differential success of police gun programs must explain the concentration of trend change after 1992 in the gun cases. Still, the pattern in New York City is much more consistent with gun-oriented policing than with indiscriminate quality-of-life interventions as a cause of decline.

The non-gun declines are in all probability not the consequence of policing changes or any other process that was not in effect until the 1990s. So one important part of the city's homicide decline was independent of the changes in the 1990s. If the origins of the non-gun decline were better understood, perhaps we could be more confident about the behavioral

explanations of the later gun homicide decline. But with this major reduction in non-firearms homicide unexplained, there is no good reason to be confident in guessing about the specific causes of the decline in gun killings. The trend in non-gun homicide for more than a decade remains a pleasant mystery that shrouds the whole explanation of variations in New York City homicide in fog.

We have already learned that attributing non-gun homicide declines to law enforcement changes was premature and unjustified. Rather than risk more precipitous error in the interpretation of the city's homicide trends, our current understanding of the period from 1985 to 1996 suggests caution. If the downward trend in gun killings continues far past the 1978 and 1985 levels, the probable role of the mid-1990s changes will loom larger with each further decline. If the non-gun homicides also continue in their post-1986 pattern, however, even the best statistical views about New York homicide will not yield easy answers on causation.

REFERENCES

Blumstein, Alfred. 1995. "Youth Violence, Guns, and the Illicit Drug Industry." *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 86:10.

Bourgois, Philippe. 1995. *In Search of Respect*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bovasso, Gregory. 1996. "A Network Analysis of Social Contagion Processes in an Organizational Intervention." *Human Relations* 49 (11): 1419-35.

Burt, Ronald S. 1992. *Social Contagion*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

City of New York. Various fiscal years. *Mayor's Management Report*. New York: Mayor's Office of Operations.

Cook, Philip J., and John Laub. In Press. "The Unprecedented Epidemic in Youth Violence." In Michael Tonry and Mark Moore, eds., *Youth Violence. Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Crane, Jonathan. 1991. "The Epidemic Theory of Ghettos and Neighborhood Effects on Dropping Out and Teenage Childbearing." *American Journal of Sociology* 96(5): 1226-59.

Curtis, Richard. In press. "The Improbable Transformation of Inner-City Neighborhoods: Crime, Violence, Drugs and Youth in the 1990's." *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* (forthcoming).

Fagan, Jeffrey. 1990. "Intoxication and Aggression." Pp. 241-320 in Michael Tonry and James Q. Wilson, eds., *Drugs and Crime. Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research, Volume 13*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fagan, Jeffrey. 1992. Drug selling and licit income in distressed neighborhoods: The economic lives of street-level drug users and dealers." Pp. 99-142 in *Drugs, Crime and Social Isolation: Barriers to Urban Opportunity*, edited by George E. Peterson & Adelle V. Harrell. Washington DC: Urban Institute Press, 1992.

Fagan, Jeffrey. In press. "Continuity and Change in American Crime: Lessons from Three Decades." In *Symposium for the 30th Anniversary of the 1967 President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice*, edited by Francis Hartmann. Washington DC: Office of Justice Programs).

Fagan, Jeffrey, Deanna Wilkinson, Garth Davies, and Franklin E. Zimring. 1998. "Social Contagion of Youth Homicide in New York." Forthcoming in: *The Epidemic of Youth Violence: A Substantive and Intellectual Challenge*, edited by Philip Cook J. and Mark Moore. Cambridge MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Gladwell, Malcolm. 1996. *The Tipping Point*. The New Yorker, June 3, 1996, 32-38.

Goldstein, Paul J., Henry Brownstein, Patrick Ryan, and Patti Belluci, 1990. "Crack-related homicide in New York City, 1989: A Conceptually-Based Event Analysis.— *Contemporary Drug Problems* 17(1): 109-120.

Hami, Andy. 1994. *Beaming Up*. New York: Guilford.

Kelling, George, and Susan Cole. 1997. *Fixing Broken Windows*. New York: Free Press.

Loftin, Colin. 1986. Assaultive violence as a contagious process. *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 62(5): 550-555.

New York Metropolitan Transportation Council. 1995. *Transportation Models and Data Initiative, Technical Memorandum No. 8.2: Population Model*. New York: Metropolitan Transportation Council.

New York Metropolitan Transportation Council. 1995. *Transportation Models and Data Initiative, Technical Memorandum No. 8.9: Population Forecasting and Analysis*. New York: Metropolitan Transportation Council.

Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology. 1997. "Summary of Vital Statistics, 1996, The City of New York." New York: New York City Department of Health.

Rothman, Kenneth. 1986. *Modern Epidemiology*. Boston: Little Brown.

Sviridoff, Michele, Susan Sadd, Richard Curtis, and Randy Grinc, 1992. *The Neighborhood Effects of Street-Level Drug Enforcement: Tactical Narcotics Teams in New York. Final Report, Grant 89-IJ-CX-0056*, National Institute of Justice. New York: Vera Institute of Justice.

Tonry, Michael. 1995. *Malign Neglect*. New York: Oxford.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1976. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

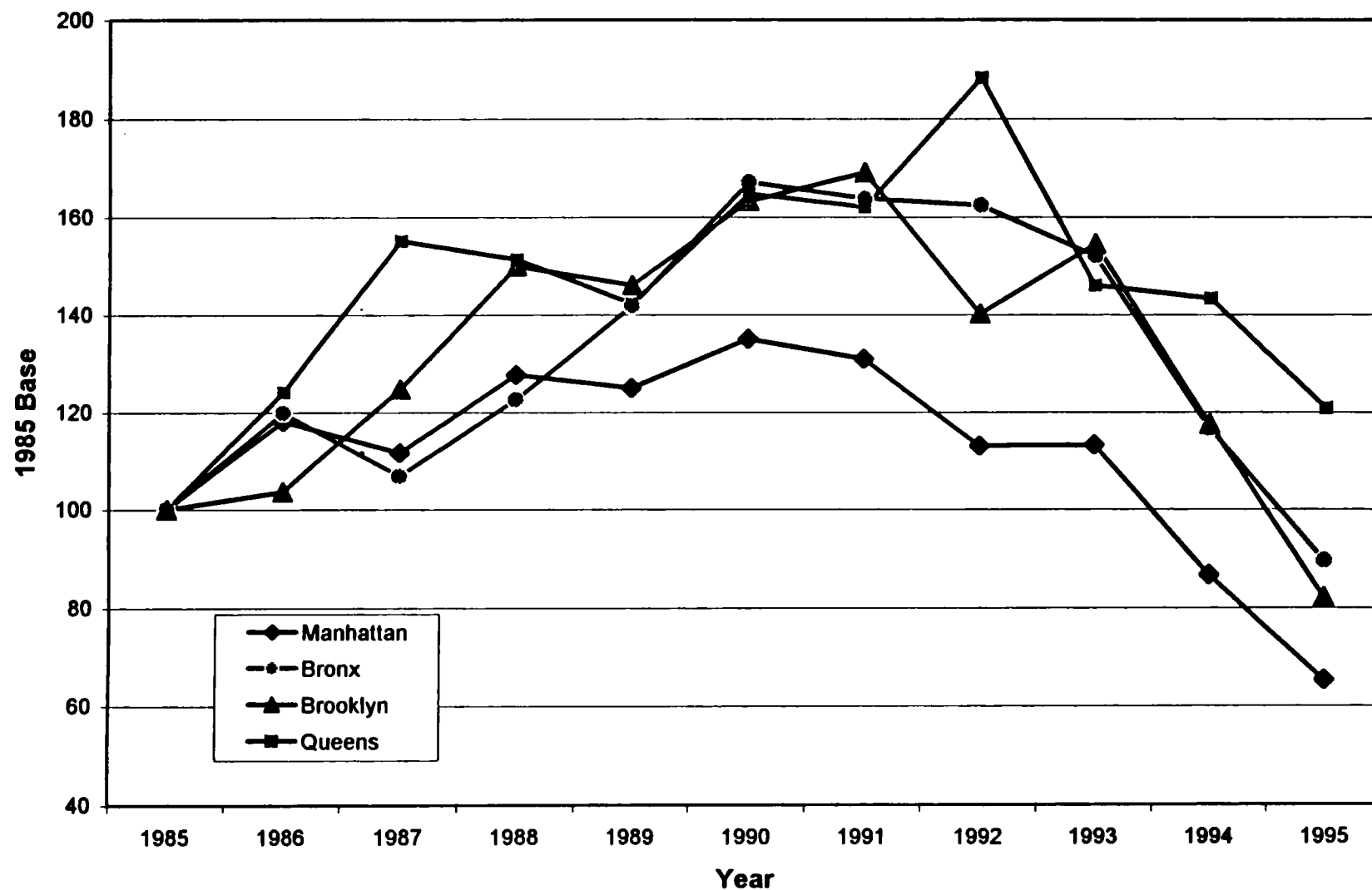
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 1991. *Vital Statistics of the United States, Volume II -- Mortality*. Hyattsville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Zimring, Franklin E. 1975. "Firearms and Federal Law: The Gun Control Act of 1968." *Journal of Legal Studies* 4:133.

_____. 1996. "Kids, Guns, and Homicide: Policy Notes on an Age-Specific Epidemic." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 59:25.

_____. 1998. *American Youth Violence*. New York: Oxford University Press.

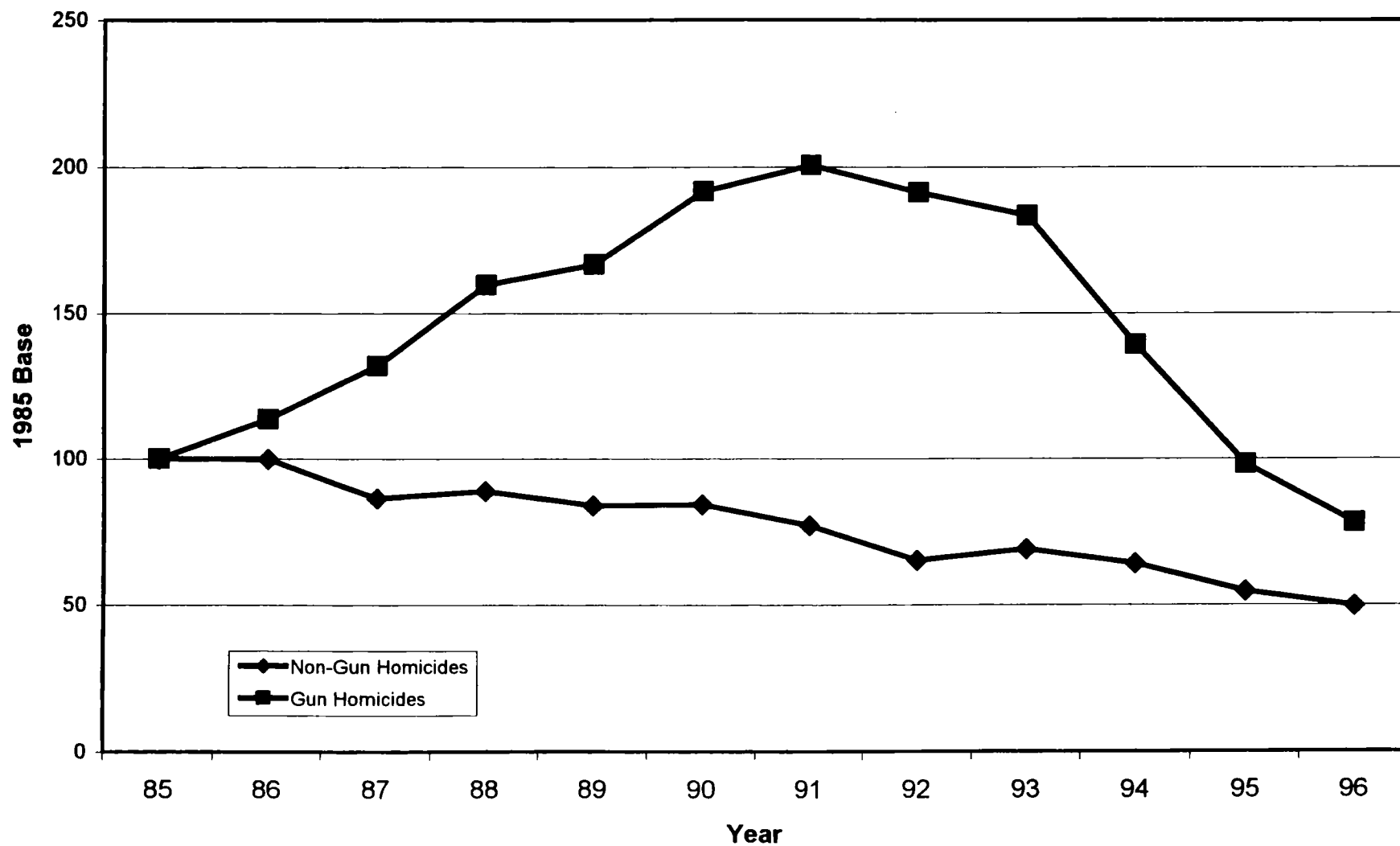
Figure 2.1 HOMICIDES BY NEW YORK CITY BOROUGH, 1985-95



Note. Bronx index excludes Happyland deaths in 1990 (89 deaths by arson). Staten Island cases excluded.

Source: Complaints and Arrests, New York City Police Department, various years.

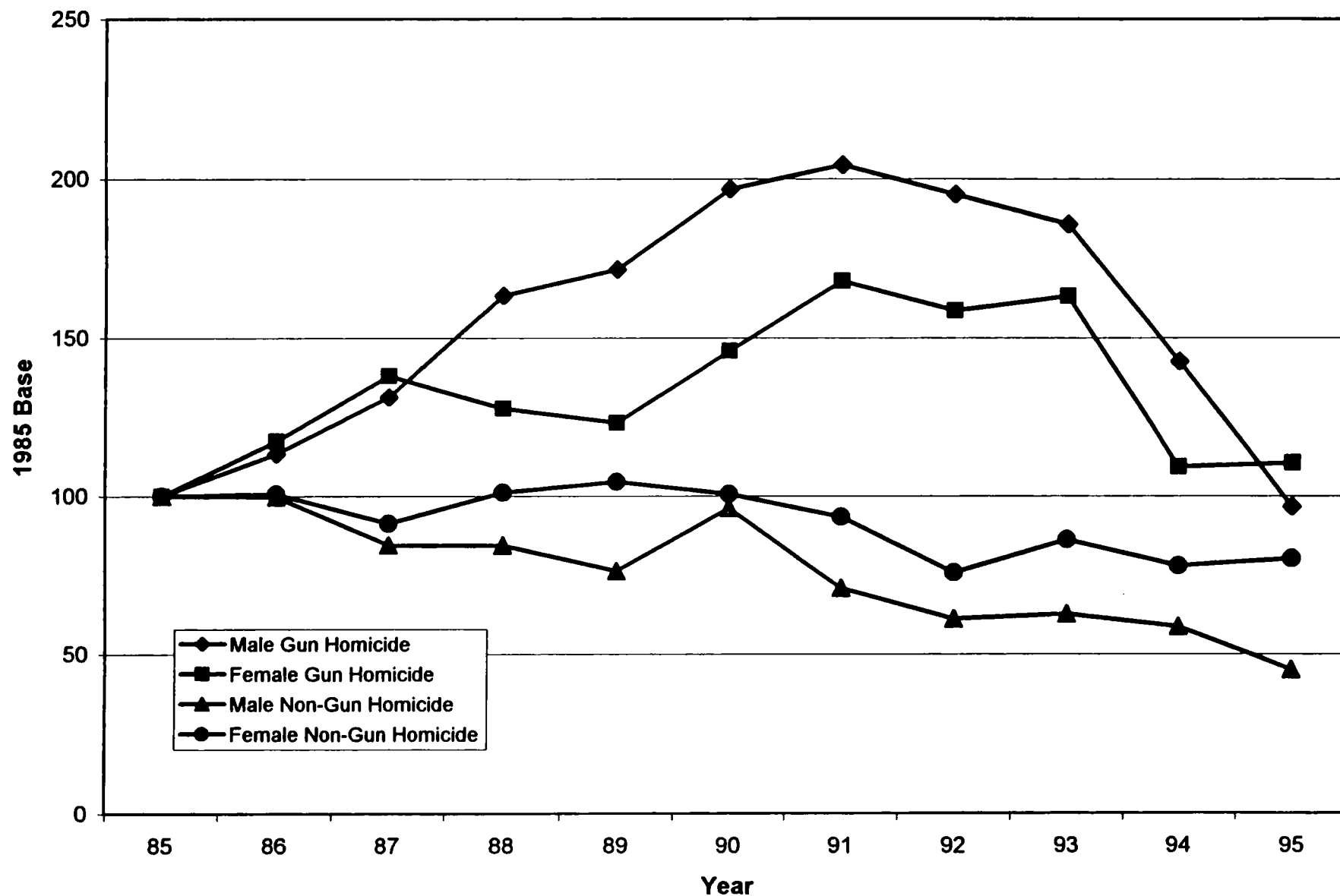
Figure 2.2 GUN AND NONGUN HOMICIDES, 1985-95



Note: Excludes Happyland deaths in 1990 (89 arson deaths).

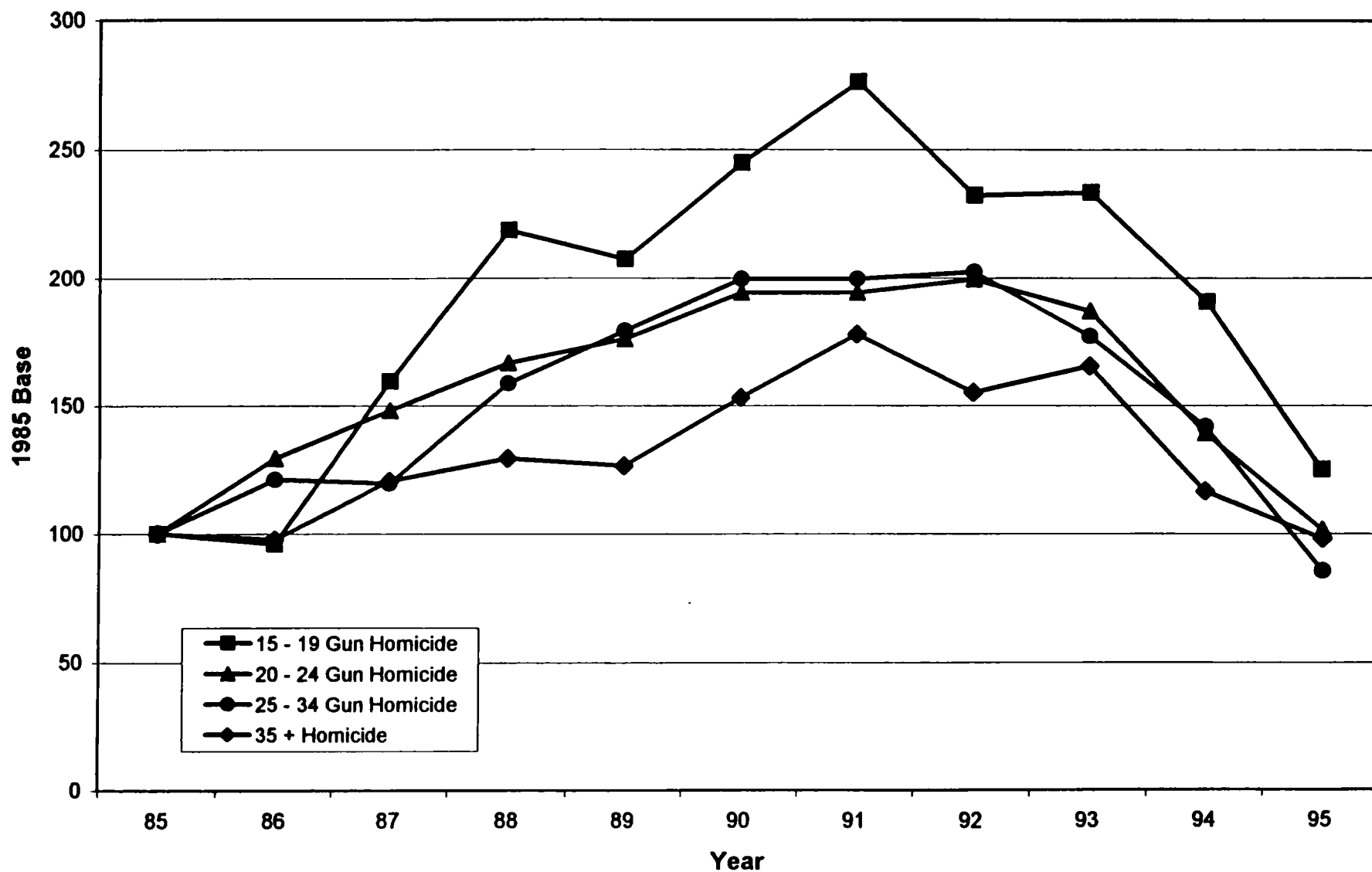
Source: Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, New York City Department of Health, data archive.

FIGURE 2.3 GUN AND NONGUN HOMICIDE BY SEX, 1985-95



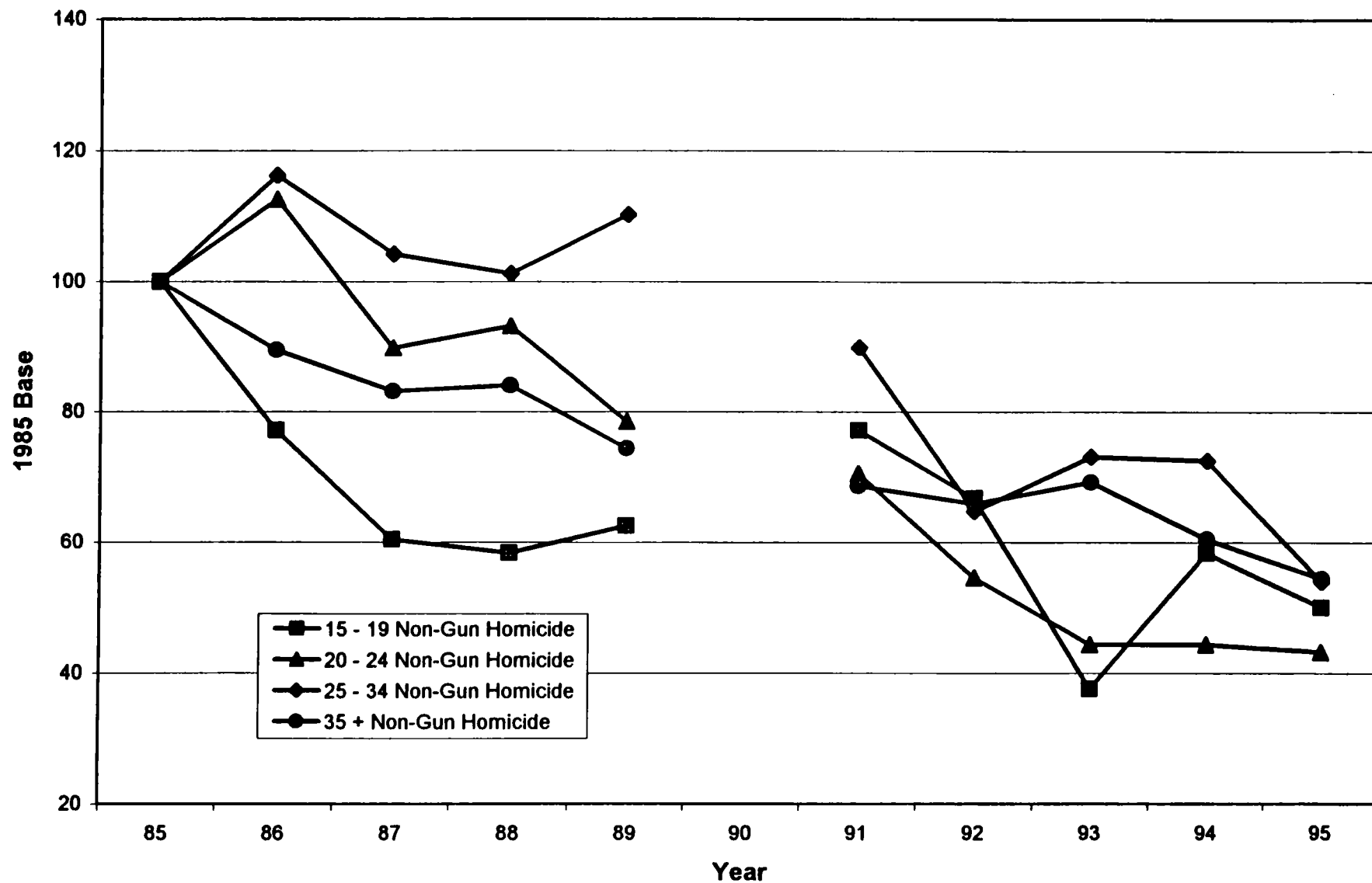
Source: Causes of Death, Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, New York City Department of Health, various years

FIGURE 2.4 GUN HOMICIDE BY AGE, 1985 - 95



Source: Causes of Death, Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, New York City Department of Health, various years

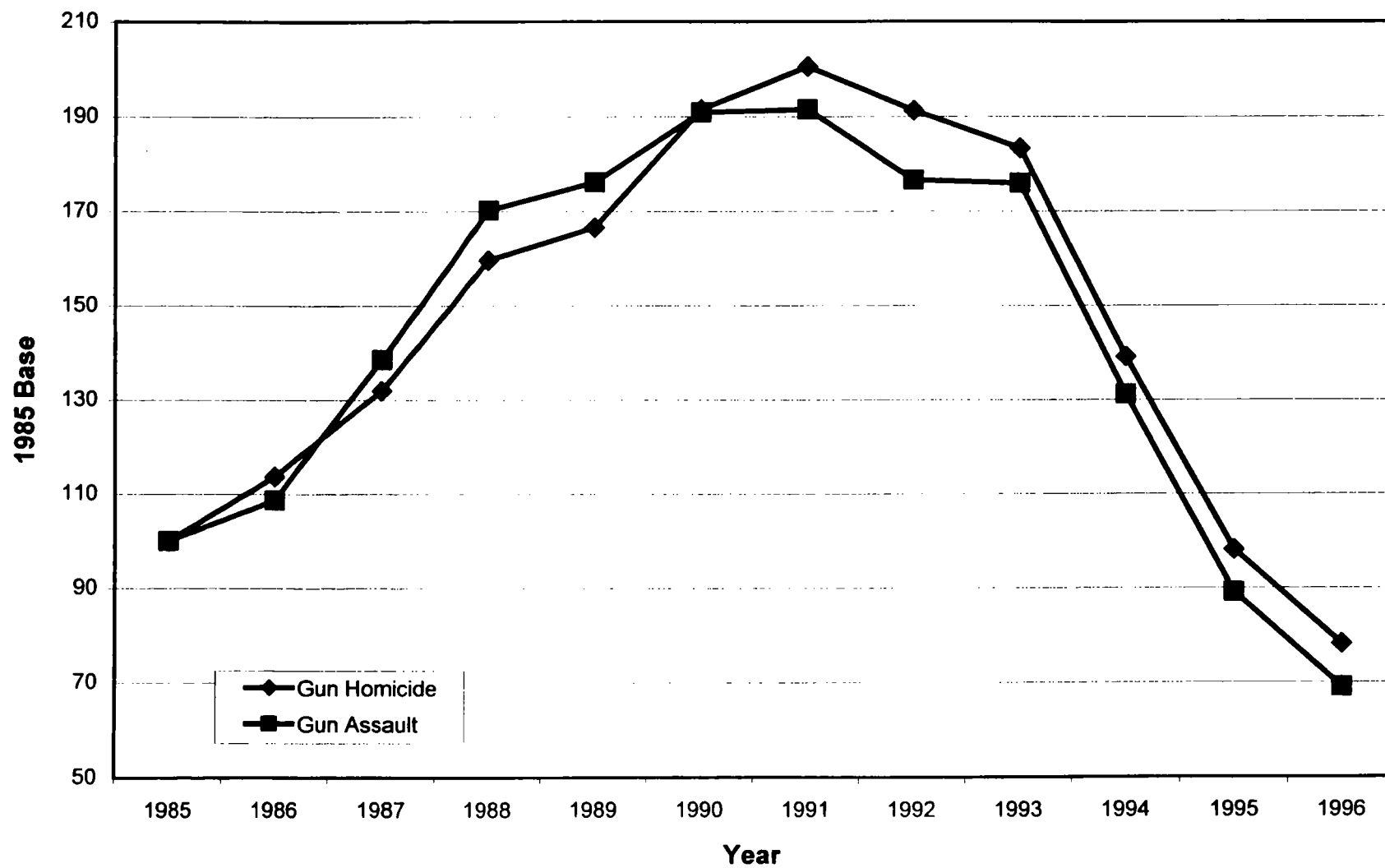
FIGURE 2.5 NONGUN HOMICIDE BY AGE, 1985-95



Source: Causes of Death, Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, New York City Department of Health, various years.

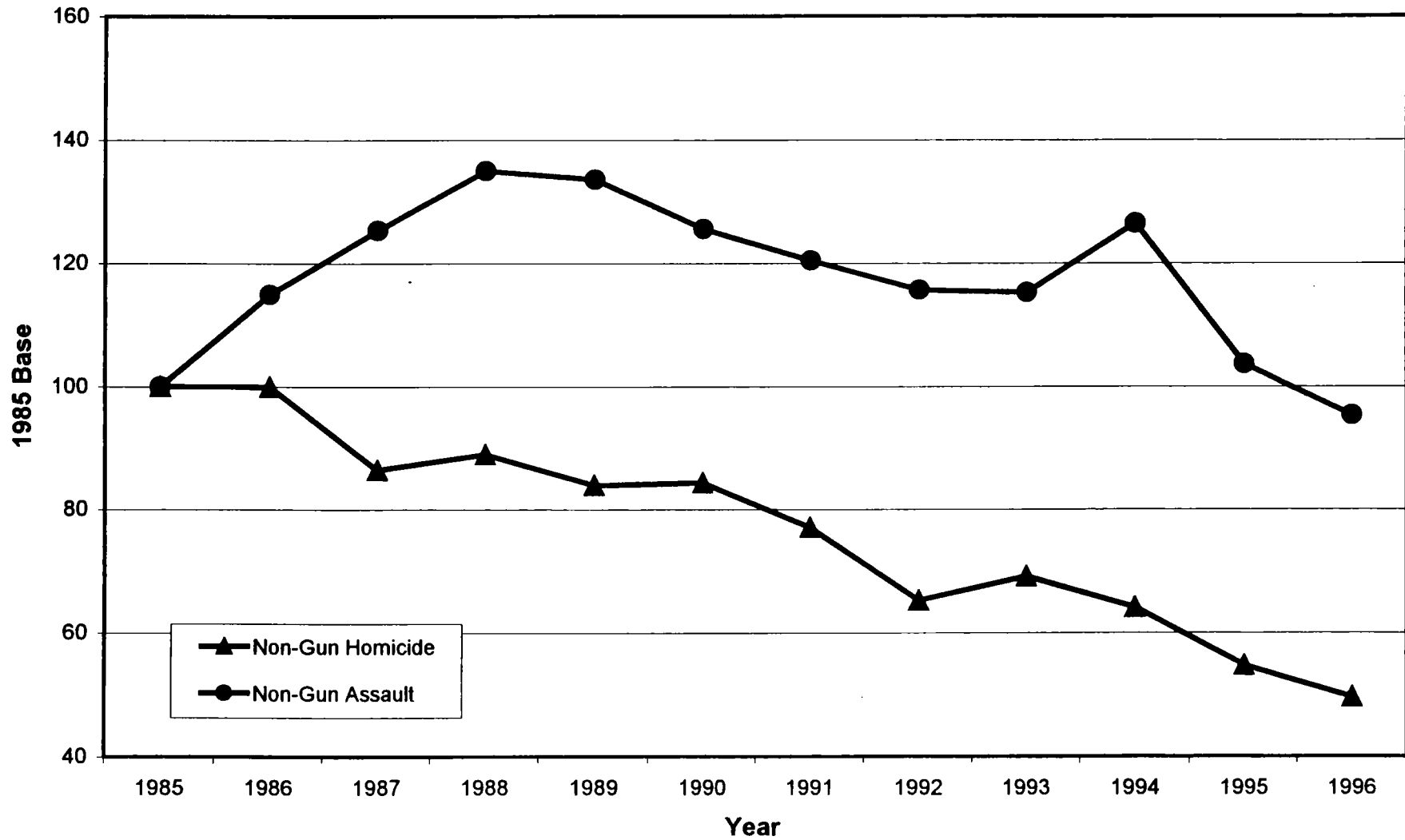
Note: 1990 data from Happyland Social Club fire not included since deaths could not be distributed by age of victim.

FIGURE 3.1 GUN HOMICIDE AND ASSAULT, 1985-96



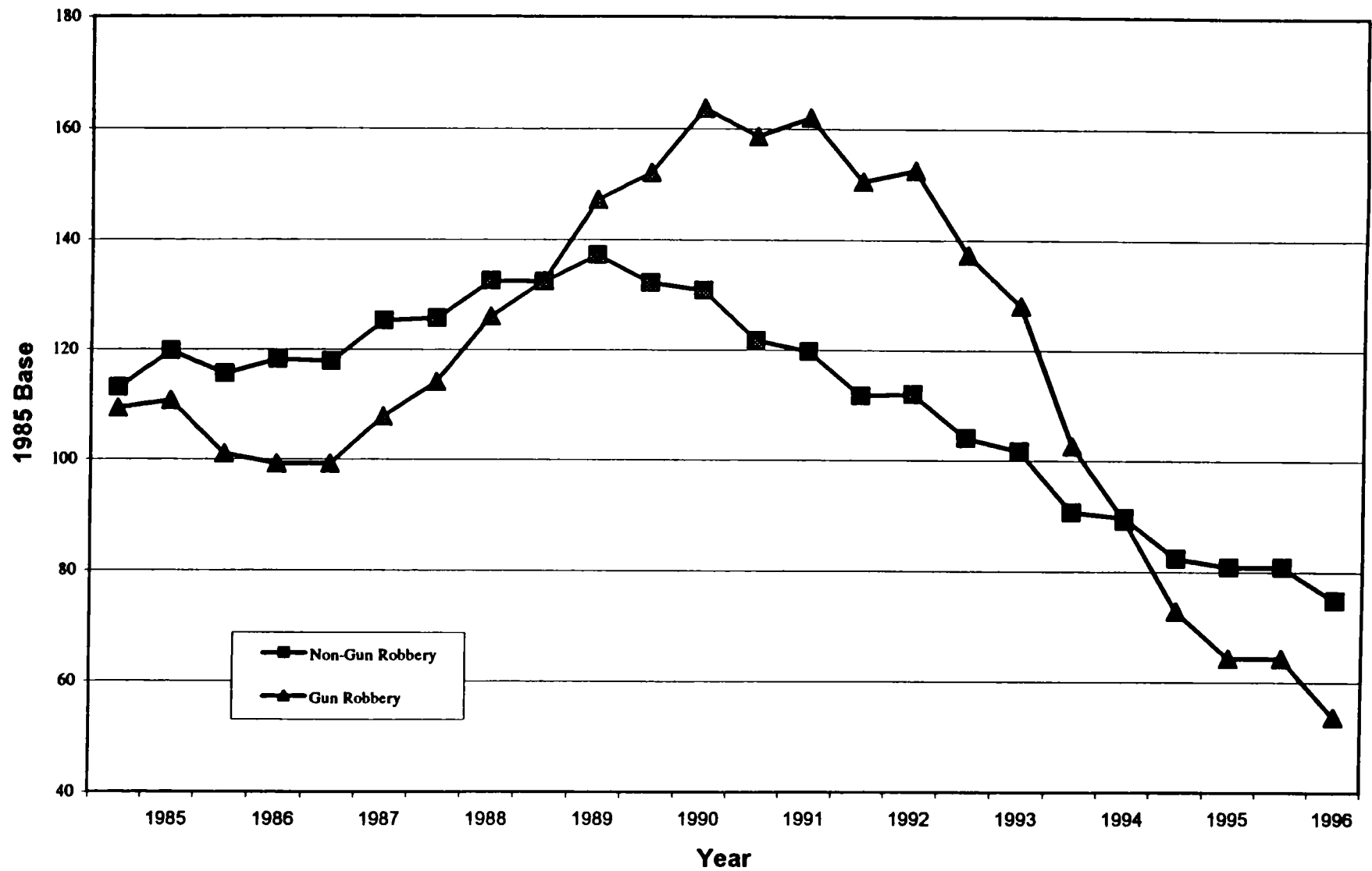
Source: Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, New York City Department of Health; Complaints and Arrests, New York City Police Department, various years.

FIGURE 3.2 NONGUN HOMICIDE AND ASSAULT, 1985-96



Source: Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, New York City Department of Health; Complaints and Arrests, New York City Police Department, various years.

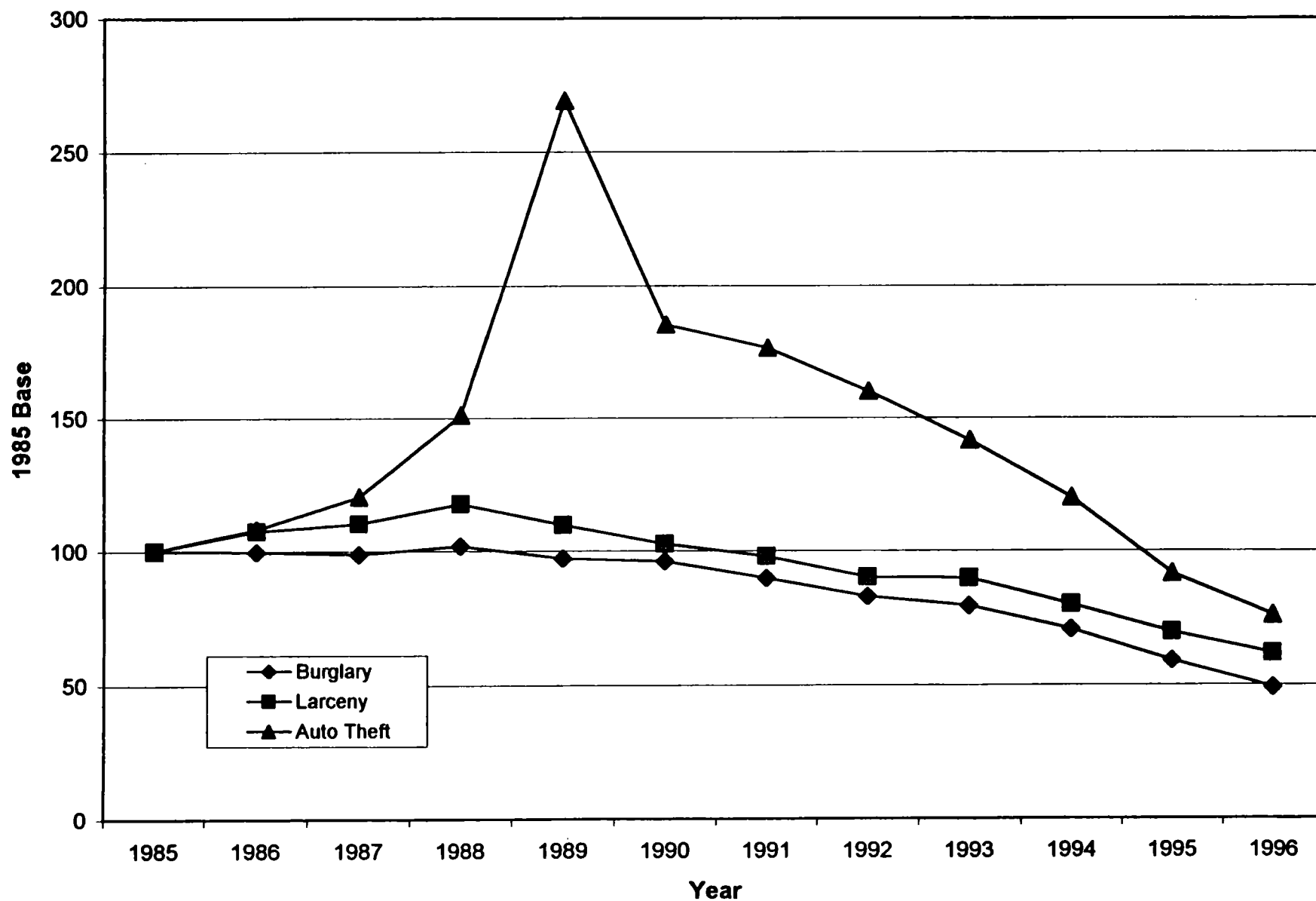
FIGURE 3.3 GUN AND NON-GUN ROBBERY, 1985-96



Note: Initial rate is greater than 100 due to smoothing of 3 six-month reporting periods.

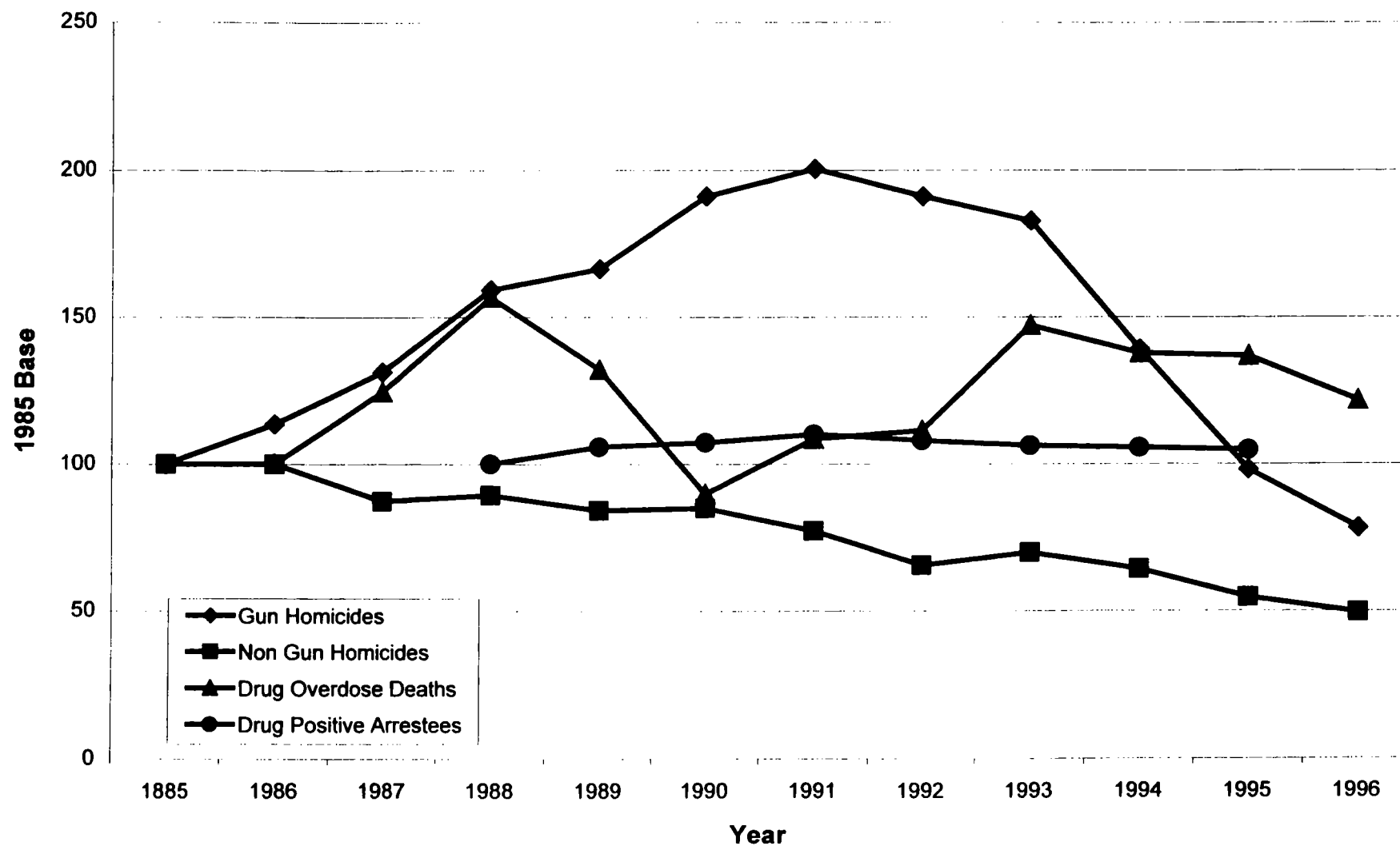
Source: New York City Police Department, Complaints and Arrests, various years

FIGURE 3.4 PROPERTY CRIMES, 1985-96



Source: New York City Police Department, Complaints and Arrests, various years.

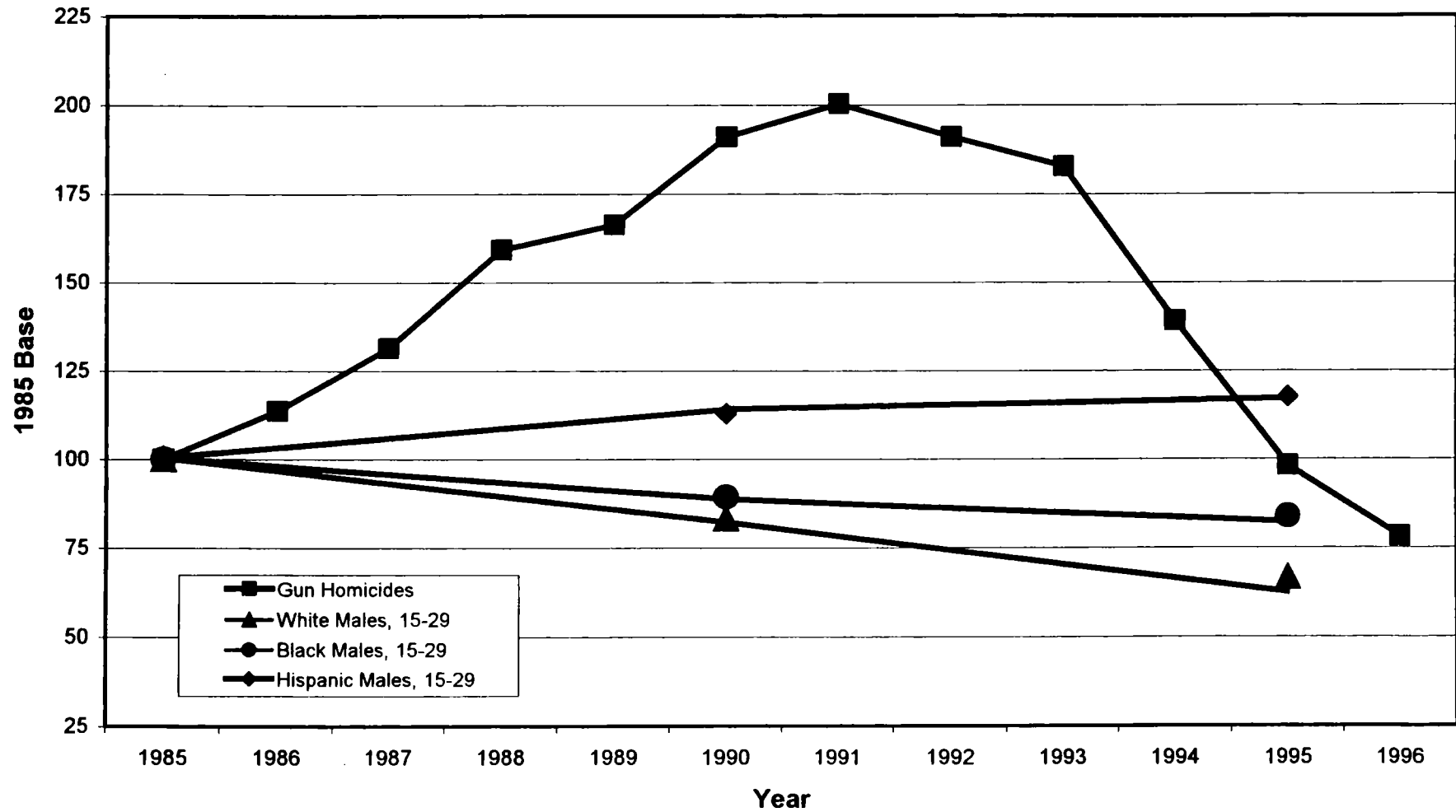
FIGURE 3.5 HOMICIDE AND DRUG ACTIVITY, 1985-96



Note: Drug Arrests and Drug Death series based on first year of available data.

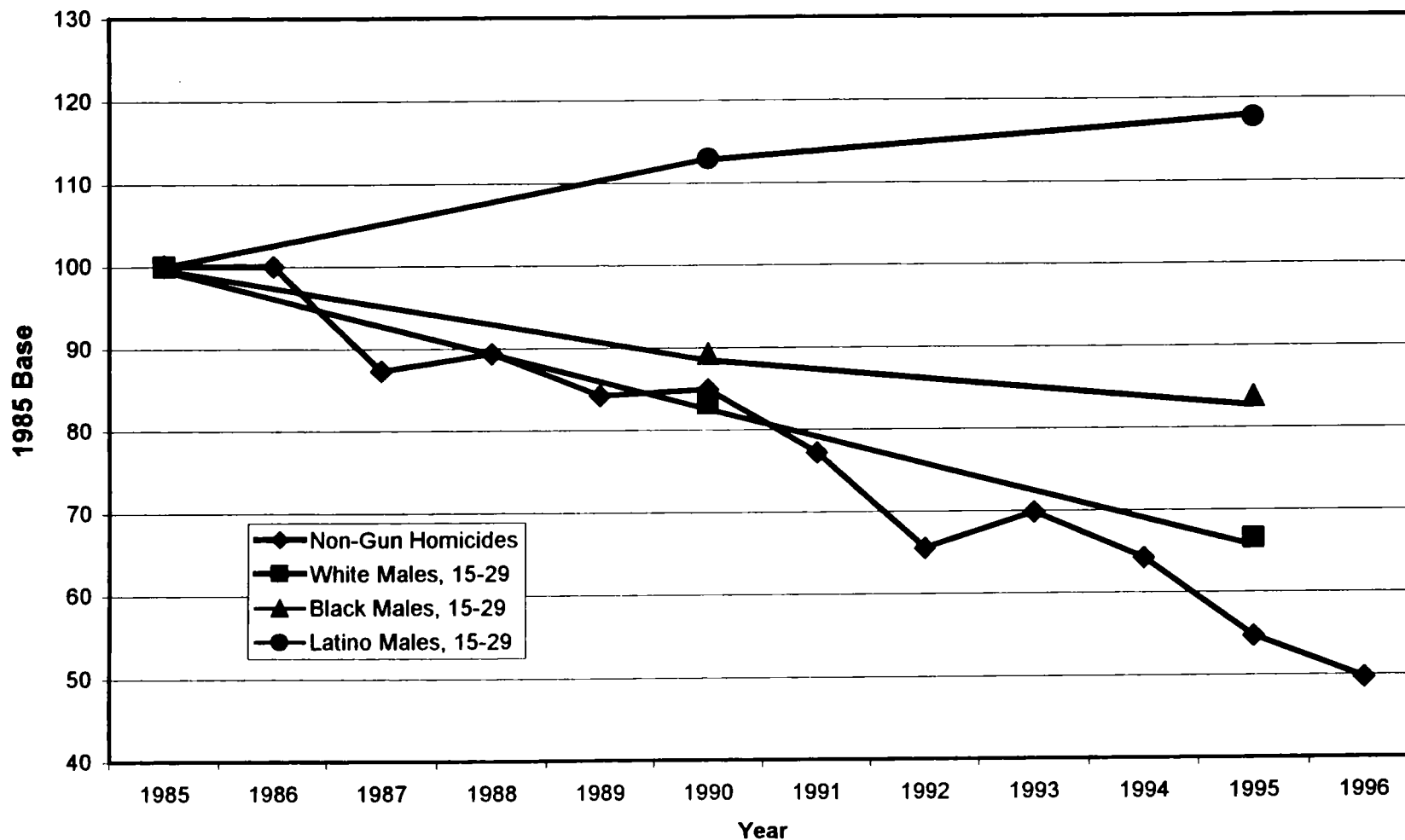
Source: Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, NYC Department of Health; Drug Use Forecasting System, National Institute of Justice, various years.

FIGURE 3.6A GUN HOMICIDES AND POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS, 1985-96



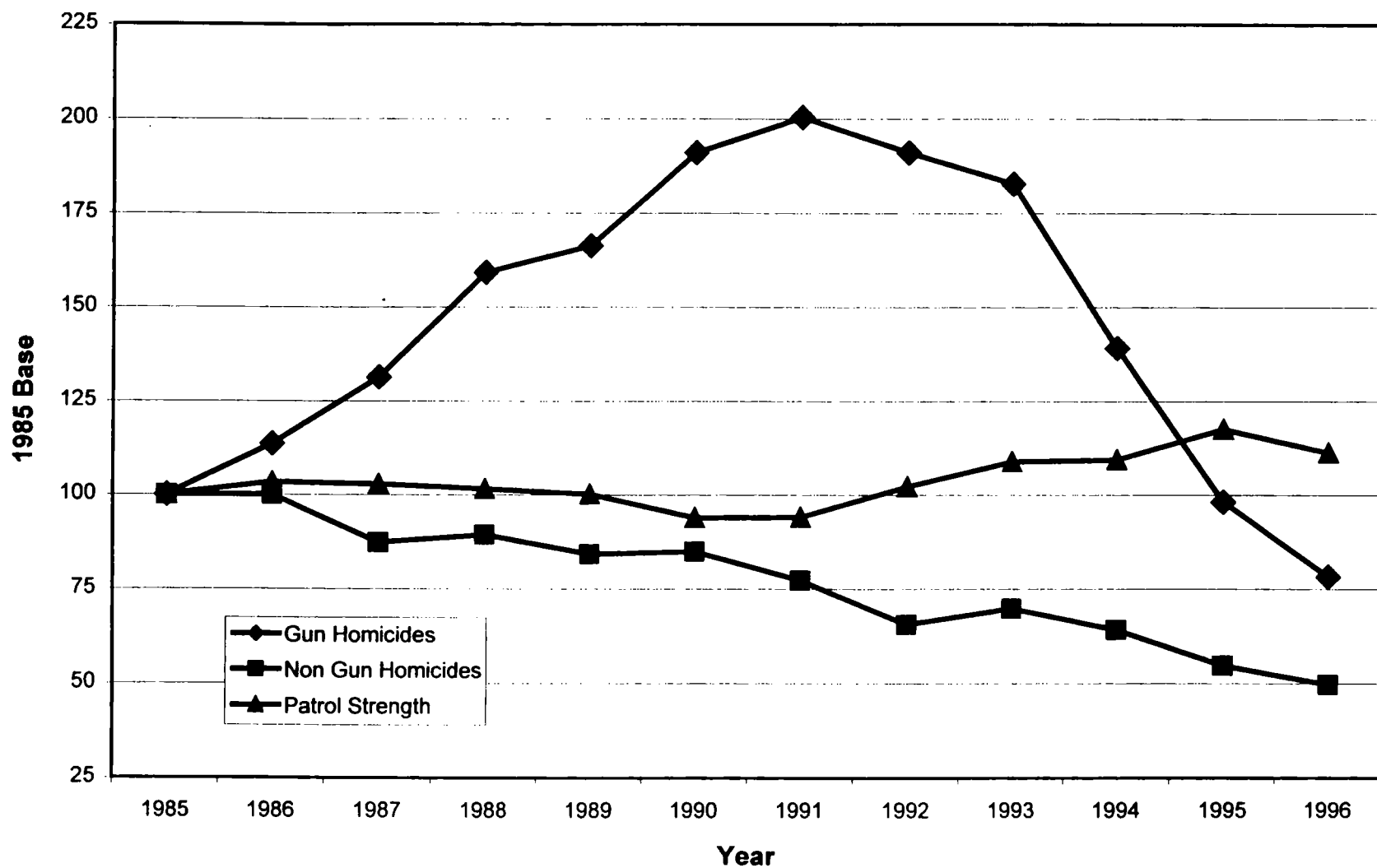
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census; Population Estimates, Regional Transportation Planning Board; Causes of Death, Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, NYC Department of Health

FIGURE 3.6B NON-GUN HOMICIDES AND POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS, 1985-96



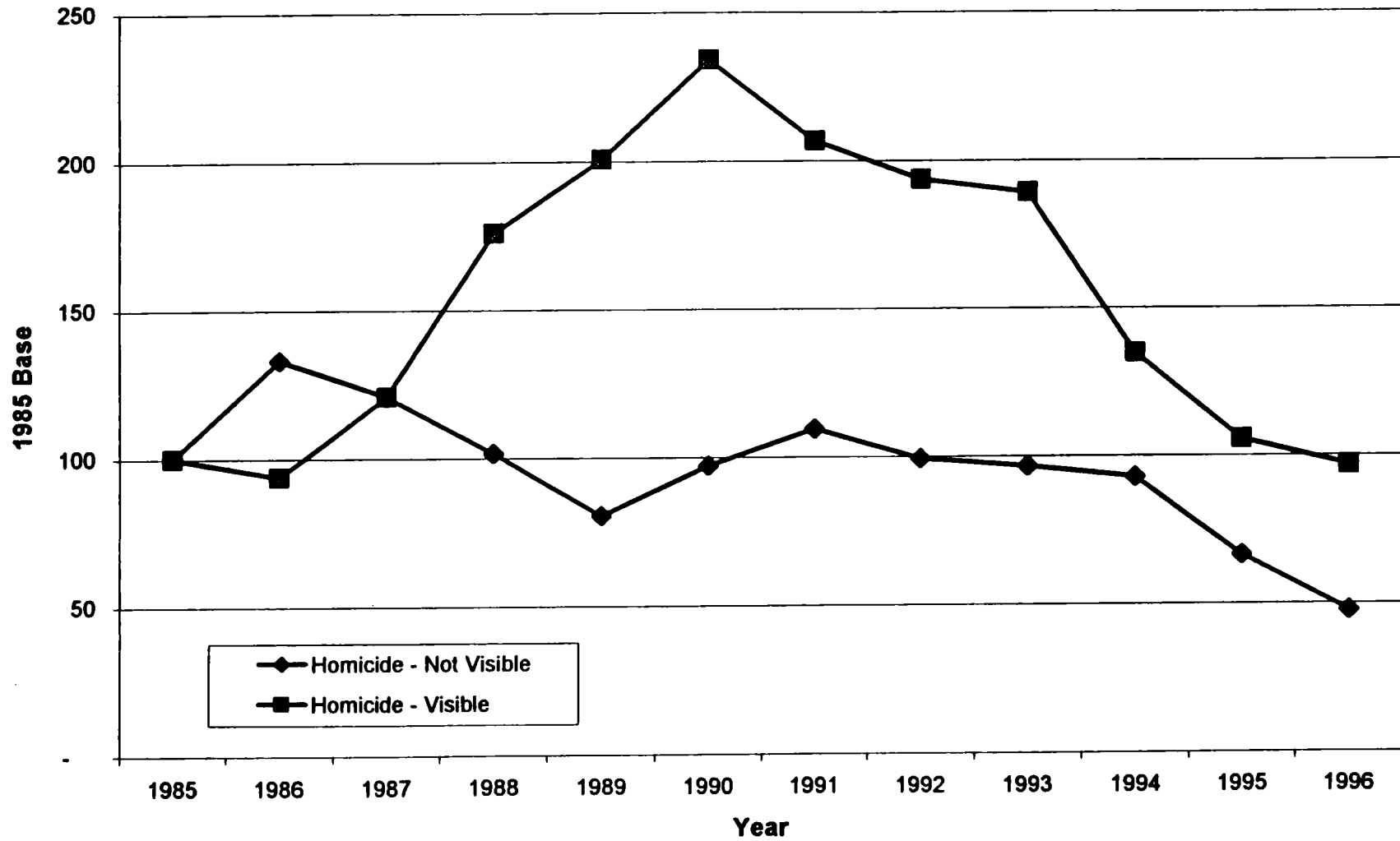
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census; Population Estimates, Regional Transportation Planning Board; Causes of Death, Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, NYC Department of Health

FIGURE 3.7 HOMICIDE AND POLICE PRESENCE, 1985-96



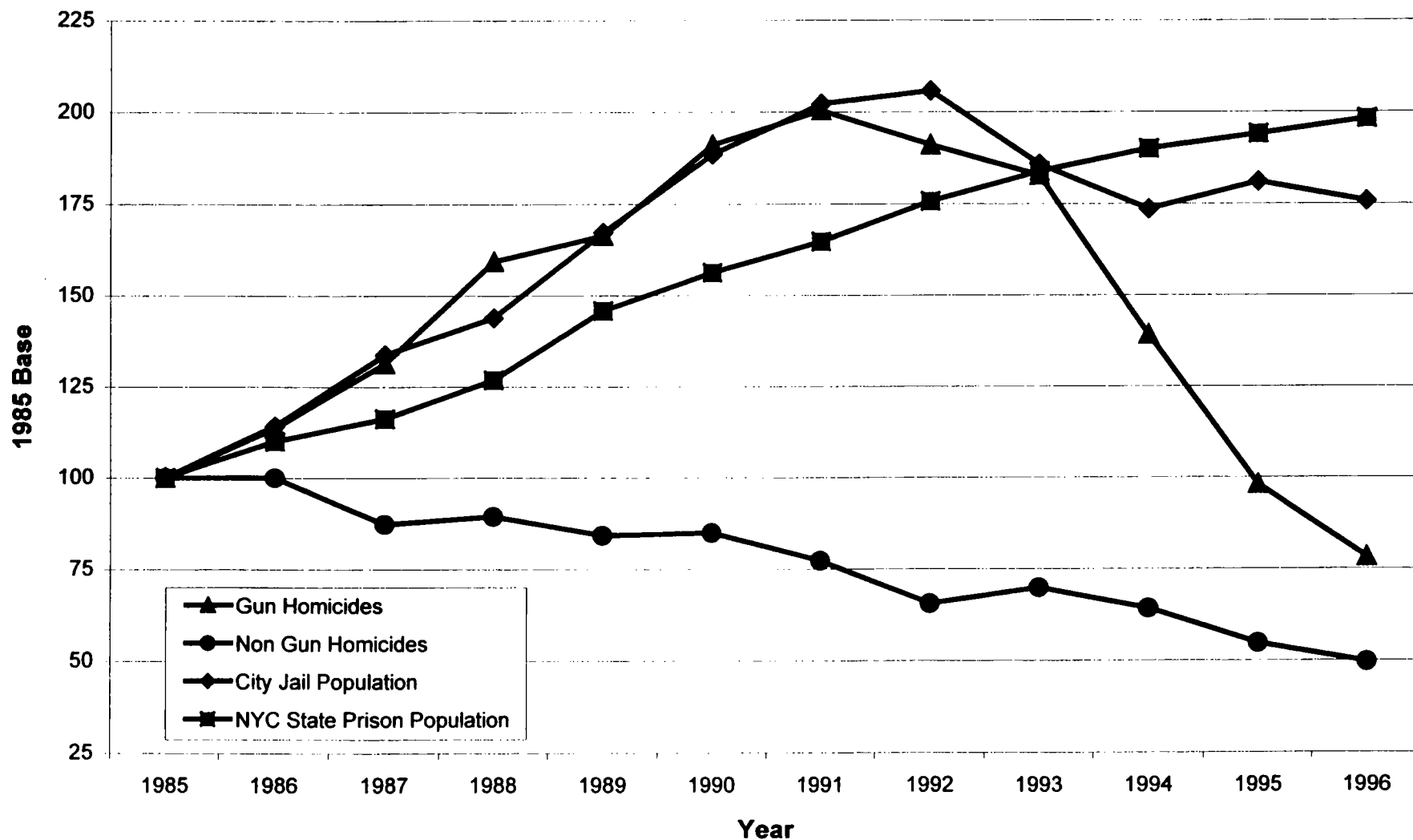
Source: Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, New York City Department of Health; Mayor's Management Report, City of New York, various years.

FIGURE 3.8 HOMICIDES VISIBLE BY PATROL, 1985-96



Source: Complaints and Arrests, New York City Police Department, various years; UCR "Return A" reports, NYPD, various years.

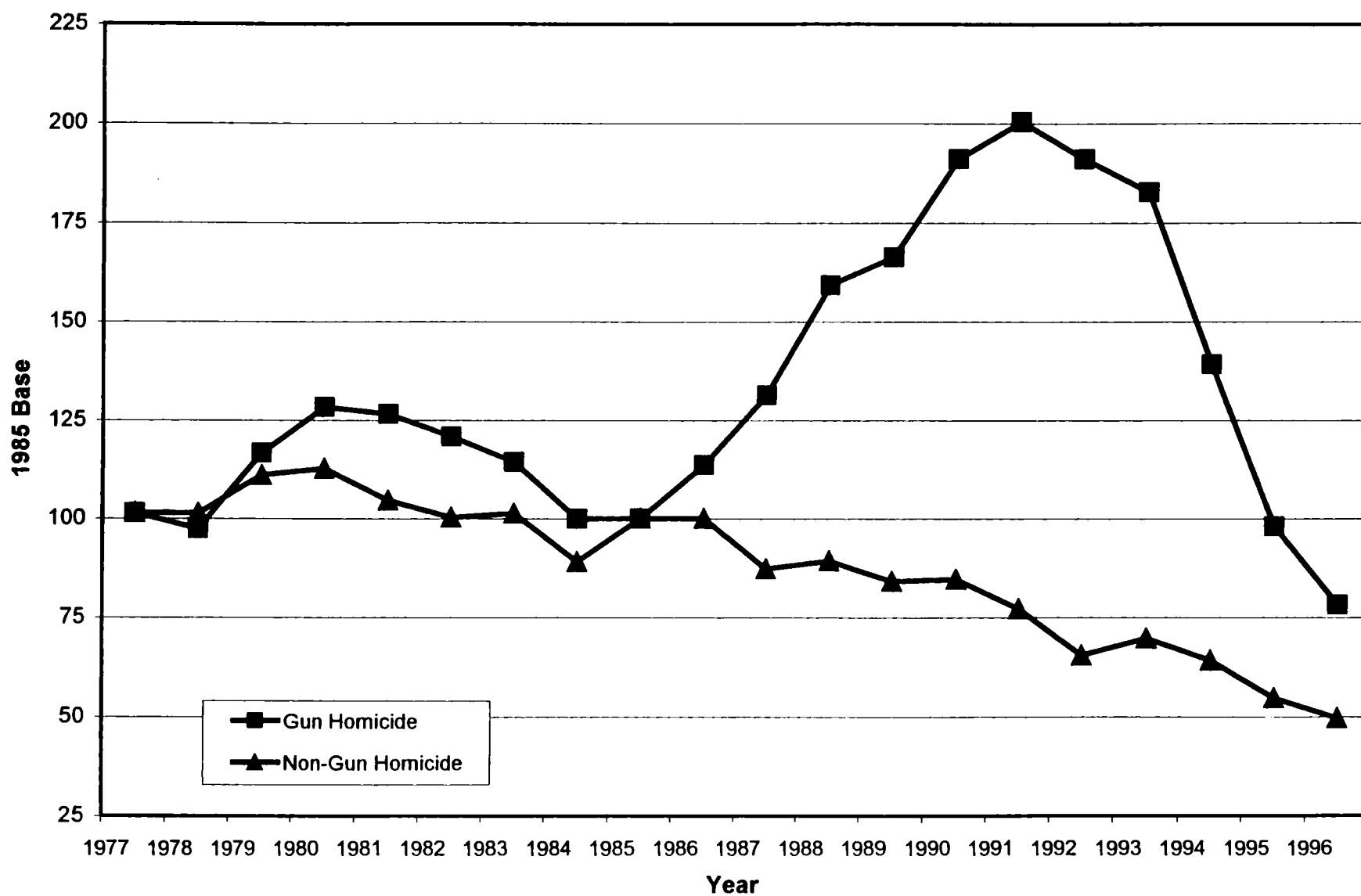
FIGURE 3.9 INCARCERATION AND HOMICIDE TRENDS, 1985-95



Note: Homicides exclude HappyLand fire deaths. NYC inmates are 70% of prison population.

Source: NYC Department of Corrections; New York State Department of Correctional Services; Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, NYCDOH.

FIGURE 4.1 GUN AND NON-GUN HOMICIDE, 1977-1996



Sources: Supplemental Homicide Reports, ICPSR (1977-84); Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, NYC Department of Health, various years (1985-95); Personal Conversation, Commissioner P. McGuire, NYPD (1996).

Explaining Recent Trends in US Homicide Rates

**Alfred Blumstein
Carnegie Mellon University**

**Richard Rosenfeld
University of Missouri-St. Louis**

I. The Changing Homicide Rate

During the past decade some very sharp swings have occurred in the homicide rate in the United States. The rate in 1980 was a peak of 10.2 per 100,00 population, and by 1985 it fell to a trough of 7.9. It then climbed a full 24 percent to a peak of 9.8 in 1991, and has been declining markedly since then, reaching a level of 7.4 in 1996 (see Figure 0). Early indications are that the rate for 1997 will fall still further to about 6.7 (based on trends during the first half of the year), a level that is lower than any annual rate since 1967.

[Figure 0 about here]

The jubilation over this decline is mixed with widespread curiosity over the factors that are responsible for it. In this paper, we explore some of those factors, focusing particularly on those whose effects are reasonably measurable and where aggregates may present a misleading picture. In some cases, for example, we identify some aspects of some variable contributing to an increase in homicide and others contributing to a decrease.

This is the case, for example, with age. During the late 1980s, young people were contributing to an increase in homicides while older people were doing less and

March 19, 1998

Page 2

contributing to a decrease. In other cases, there are important interactions, for example, between race and age. A large increase in homicide with handguns occurred among young African-Americans in the late 1980s, but we observe no such increase for older African-Americans. In such instances, demographic disaggregation is necessary to isolate the effects being examined. A general theme of our discussion is that it is not productive to think of homicide rates as a unitary phenomenon. Rather, recent change in the aggregate homicide rate is the product of several distinct subgroup trends. Any credible explanation -- much less forecasting-- of the overall change in homicide rates, therefore, must make sense of multiple, interactive, and sometimes countervailing influences.

Many explanations have been offered for the recent decline in homicide rates. There have been claims, most notably by New York City Mayor Rudolf Giuliani and William Bratton when he was New York's Police Commissioner, that virtually all of the homicide drop in New York resulted from smart and aggressive policing (Butterfield, 1995; Kelling and Coles, 1997; Krauss, 1996; Mitchell, 1994). Another view attributes the decline to a change in some of the factors that contributed to the growth, most importantly, a reduction in the high rates of firearm homicide committed by (and mostly against) young people, particularly African-Americans. Some of this turn-around may be the result of changes in policing, especially the use of aggressive stop-and-frisk tactics to remove guns from kids, but other factors could

March 19, 1998

Page 3

well be involved. These could include community efforts to mediate inter-gang disputes, a greater availability of jobs in the booming economy, changing drug markets with diminished roles for young people, and growing incapacitation effects through increases in the prison population. And, as one looks across the nation, we will find that the effects of changes in the large cities have a dominant effect on the aggregate rates.

In this paper, we assess the influence on homicide trends of some of these changes that have occurred during the last decade. We begin by setting out some basic facts about recent trends in homicide that any credible explanation must confront. These include the differing patterns by age, recent demographic shifts, the role of weapons, particularly handguns, and the dominance of the national trends by the changes occurring in the largest cities. We then evaluate several explanations for the drop in homicide, devoting particular attention to explanations which focus on the impact of declining or "maturing" drug markets, growth in incarceration, economic expansion, changes in family structure, and enforcement policy. We conclude with some speculations about the likely changes in homicide rates to occur over the next decade, given certain assumptions about stability or change in the conditions that, in our view, have been most closely associated with past trends.

II. The Rhetorical Context

We should say at the outset that it is not our intention to engage in explicit forecasting of homicide trends. Forecasting homicide became a popular academic pastime during the period of the rapid increase in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Some of the predictions were accompanied by dire and dramatic warnings of an impending crisis in criminal violence. One academic commentator warned of a coming "blood bath" of juvenile and youth violence that would inevitably accompany the increasing size of the youthful segment of the population, even if their offending rates did not go up (Fox, 1995). Others characterized a subgroup of active offenders as youthful "super predators" who would terrorize the nation's cities (Bennett, DiIulio, and Walters, 1996). The motivation for this kind of rhetoric from persons the public looks to for serious guidance on the crime problem is unclear. The effect, however, has been to reinforce an already overheated climate of opinion and policy regarding the homicide problem. We do not wish to contribute further to that rhetorical environment.

Claims of a rather different sort, coming primarily from public officials, accompanied the drop in homicide rates in one city after another in the early 1990s. As we have already seen in the case of New York, the inclination apparently was all but irresistible to account for the local declines in terms of this or that special local initiative (see Butterfield, 1995:10). Not surprisingly, perhaps, very different types of causal rhetoric dominate public discussion during periods of rising and falling

crime rates. During periods of increase, explanations tend to emphasize the importance of interpersonal conditions or forces for which public officials (at least those currently in office) cannot reasonably be held accountable. Popular examples are demographic changes caused by the birth rates of another decade, breakdowns in the family and other key institutions, and a generalized decline in morality and civilized behavior. In contrast, when serious violence is on the decline, the imputed causes are more often located in policies or practices for which public officials are willing or eager to take credit, such as putting more police on the street or more offenders in prison.

A kind of rhetorical bidding war began to emerge in the early 1990s between some academic criminologists, who tended to explain the decrease in homicide and other violent crimes in terms of factors that were largely beyond the control of policy-makers and policy enthusiasts who saw the decline as evidence confirming the utility or wisdom of a favored program or practice. This debate has a sterile and dogmatic quality that is unlikely to advance understanding of the multiple and interacting factors responsible for the rise and fall of homicide rates over the past decade. Our view is that policy can make a difference, but the difference it makes is highly dependent on existing levels and trends in violent crime. We elaborate this position later in the paper with reference to the dramatic decline in New York City's homicide rate. Our point here is simply that the debate over whether policy changes are responsible for

the drop in homicide has largely overlooked the question of how policy interacts with other factors influencing trends in criminal violence. A key factor with which any policy assessment must contend involves the sharply different trends in homicide by age.

III. Changes in Age-Specific Homicide Arrest Rates

An earlier paper in this journal presented the striking changes between 1985 and 1992 in age-specific arrest rates for homicide (Blumstein, 1995). That paper showed that, while the rates for persons age 18 and younger more than doubled, the rates for those 30 and above declined by about 20-25 percent. We can now extend those analyses to 1996, and we see some striking changes in the other direction for the young people. Figure 1a presents the age-specific arrest rate for murder for the years 1985, which was the last year of a 15-year period of very stable age-specific rates, and 1993, which was the peak year of juvenile age-specific rates. We see that, even though the rates for ages 20 and under had more than doubled over this interval, the rates for those over 30 had indeed declined.

[Figure 1a about here]

Figure 1b depicts the same 1993 situation along with the figure for 1996, where we see the rates for all ages decline, with the steepest decline around age 18, where the growth had been greatest.

[Figure 1b about here]

It is instructive to break out these changes in more detail by looking at the time trends for each individual age. Figure 2 depicts the trend for the ages traditionally displaying the peak homicide arrest rates, 18 through 24. We see how similar those rates were from 1970 through 1985, and then the divergence beginning in about 1985. The rate for the 18 year-olds more than doubled by 1991, dropped in 1992, reached a new peak in 1993, and then continued down for the next three years. The pattern is similar for the other ages depicted in Figure 2, although the rise in the late 1980s is less steep with increasing age, and the decline after 1993 is correspondingly less for the older ages. For youth under 18, the pattern is very similar, although the stable base rate in the 1970-1985 period is lower, but in all cases the rate more than doubled by 1993. The pattern for the ages above 24 is similarly flat through the mid 1980s, followed by a steady decline for most of the ages.

[Figure 2 about here]

These changes for the growth period, 1985 to 1993, and for the decline period, 1993 to 1996, are reflected in Figure 3, which depicts for each age the ratio of the age-specific arrest rate for murder to the rates that prevailed in 1985. Points above the heavy line (at the ratio of 1) represent an increase in the rates and points below that line represent a decrease. The upper graph portrays the ratio reached in the peak year, 1993, and the lower graph portrays the degree to which the ratio had declined by 1996.

[Figure 3 about here]

Here, we see that the arrest rate for 15 year-olds in 1993 was triple the rate that had prevailed in 1985. The growth to 1993 declined with age, but it was more than double the 1985 rate for all ages of 20 and below. In contrast, for the older ages of 30 and above, the 1993 rates were actually about 20 percent lower than the 1985 rates. This divergence between the patterns of young and old is striking and should be a central focus of explanations of the recent homicide decline.

The graph of the 1996-to-1985 ratio is clearly below that for 1993, and the greatest decline occurred in the teenage years. But it is clear that the teenage rates are still 60 to 80 percent above the 1985 rates that had prevailed since 1970, and so there is still considerable room for improvement to get back down to the 1985 rates.

Also, we note the continuing decline in the homicide rates for the older ages. By 1996, the 25-30 year-old group had declined from the 1985 rates by about 20 percent, and the older groups had declined by about 40 percent.

These figures underscore the central importance of the different effects of different age groups in explaining the trends in the aggregate homicide rate since 1985. The growth until the 1991 peak was caused because the rates of the younger people were increasing faster than the rates for the older people were declining.

Between 1991 and 1993, the rates for younger people were generally flat (as reflected in the pattern for the 18 year-olds in Figure 2), and so the decline by older ages dominated the aggregate, and so the down-turn began in 1992. And, since the rates of both young and old were decreasing after 1993, the aggregate rate continued to fall.

In sum, all of the increase in the level of homicide in the United States during the growth period of the late 1980s and early 1990s was due to the trends in the younger ages, because homicide rates for those 25 years old and older did not go up. However, some of the decrease during the decline period since 1993 is due to the drop in offending among young people, and some is attributable to the continuing decline in offending among older persons. Even though they commit homicide at much lower rates, the contribution of the older age groups to the recent decline in the aggregate homicide rate may be appreciable given their large numbers.

We have calculated the relative contribution of persons under age 25 and those 25 and over to the total decline in homicide since the 1993 peak in the juvenile rates. Table 1 shows that total arrests for homicide dropped 18 percent by 1996, the last full year for which UCR estimated arrest totals were available. As we have seen, the rate of decrease at the younger ages has been somewhat greater than for older persons. Estimated homicide arrests fell by 20 percent for persons less than 25 years old and by 16 percent for those 25 and over.

[Table 1 about here]

Not surprisingly, given their sharply higher arrest rates, younger persons contributed disproportionately to the overall decline in homicide arrests. Over four thousand fewer arrests were made for homicide in 1996 than in 1993, and the decrease in arrests of persons under age 25 accounted for almost two-thirds of that total decline. However, over one-third of the drop in homicide arrests was contributed by the decrease among older adults.

Explanations of the homicide decline that fail to take into account the factors responsible for the fall in homicide among adults are, at best, incomplete. At worst, they will be misleading, because these factors are not necessarily the same as those associated with the drop in homicide offending in the younger groups.

III. Effects of Changing Demographic Composition

Much of the speculation about the recent decline in homicide rates attributes the decline to changing demographics.(Note 1) This may be a hold-over from the realization that much of the decline that began in 1980 was attributable to a demographic shift, as the baby-boom generation aged out of the high-crime ages (Blumstein, Cohen, and Miller, 1980; Steffensmeier and Harer, 1991). But those same demographic effects are not still at work in the early 1990s, since demographic effects do not always have to work in the same direction.

The decline after 1980 was significantly affected by the shrinking size of the cohorts in the high-crime ages, but the US in the 1990s is in a period of growing cohort sizes in the late teens and early 20s. Figure 4a depicts the age distribution of the US population in 1998. It is evident that the smallest age cohort under 40 is about 22, the cohort born in 1976. Each of the younger cohorts is larger than its predecessor until the peak at age 6. Thus, if teen-age age-specific crime rates were to remain constant, then the aggregate crime rate would increase as a result of the larger cohort sizes. This possibility spurred the warnings of a demographic "crime bomb" set to go off during the 1990s (DiIulio, 1996).

[Figure 4a about here]

Yet, it is important to recognize that these age-composition changes are relatively small, with cohort sizes growing at a rate of about 1 percent per year. In the face of much larger swings in the age-specific crime rates, as much as 10-20 percent up (in the 1980s) as well as down (in the 1990s), the 1 percent change in demographic composition is a minor effect.

Examining changes in age-composition by race (Figure 4b), we see basically similar patterns for whites (which includes a large majority of Hispanics) and blacks (whose number is scaled up by a factor of 7 to provide a comparison with whites). The more recent growth rate for blacks at the younger ages is somewhat greater than that for whites, but even so, the growth rate for black cohorts younger than the trough

year of 22 is still only about 2 percent per year, well below the swings in the age-specific homicide rates.

[Figure 4b about here]

It is possible, finally, that changes in relative cohort size could alter the age-specific rates through mechanisms described by Easterlin and others (Easterlin, 1987; Smith, 1986). However, the evidence suggests that, if changes in the relative size of age cohorts influence homicide rates, the cohort effects are minor compared to age and period effects (Maxim, 1985; O'Brien, 1989; Steffensmeier, Streifel, and Shihadeh, 1992).

IV. Examining the Role of Weapons

There is widespread recognition of the changing role of weaponry in young people's hands. Over the last decade the weapons involved in settling juveniles' disputes have changed dramatically from fists or knives to handguns, with their much greater lethality. That growth in lethal weaponry is reflected in the changes in the weapons involved in homicides in different race and age groups. (Blumstein and Cork, 1996, and Cook, 1996, more generally).

The FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR) provide data to track such changes. Those reports, filed by individual police departments, provide considerable detail on individual homicide incidents. Each report contains information on the

victim and (where known) offender characteristics and their relationship, the weapon involved in the homicide, and the circumstances leading up to the homicide, such as argument, drug involvement, or gang involvement. Unfortunately, only a single circumstance may be designated, and so time trends in the fashion with which police designate the single circumstance limits the reliability of that aspect. (Note 2)

A. The Growth Period, 1985-1993

Figures 5a-5c provide information on the time trends of the weaponry used in homicides by offenders in three age categories: adults, 25-45 years old (Figure 5a); youth, 18-24 (Figure 5b); and juveniles, 17 and under (Figure 5c). The weapons are classified into three groups: handguns, other guns, and non-guns (which includes no weapon). We can see that over the time period shown, 1977-1995, little meaningful change has occurred in the use of handguns by adults. The situation for youth and juveniles is quite different, however. For both these groups, there was no clear trend until 1986, and then a significant growth in handgun use began. With 1985 as the base year, handgun homicide among youth increased over 100 percent by 1994, and juveniles' use of handguns increased over 300 percent. In both these groups, there is a leveling out from 1993 to 1994, and we see a sharp anticipate a decline in 1995 and we anticipate a similarly sharp decline in 1996, consistent with the decline in homicide arrest rates shown in Figure 2.

[Figures 5a-5c about here]

In all these figures, no appreciable increase has occurred in either the long-gun or the non-gun categories. There has been some decline in the non-gun category for youth, but this decline (28 percent from 1985 to 1994) is small compared to the more than 100 percent growth in their use of handguns. Thus, we observe that the growth in homicides by young people, which accounted for all the growth in homicides in the post-1985 period, was accounted for totally by the growth in homicides committed with handguns. Clearly, the sharply increasing prevalence of handguns in youth and juvenile homicide must be considered of fundamental importance in any explanation of the homicide increase of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

We also observe some important racial differences in the growth of handgun homicides, with the dominant growth being among African-American young people, both as offenders and as victims. Figure 6 presents the number of homicides committed by black youth, 18-24, and displays the sharp growth, more than tripling from the low in 1984 to the peak in 1993. There was no comparable growth in the role of the other weapon types.

[Figure 6 about here]

While some growth also occurred in handgun homicides by white youth, that growth was far less than among the black youth. The difference is depicted in Figure 7, which compares the two racial groups. This figure focuses on all cities over 100,000 population, and includes in the "white" group all those also classified as

Hispanic. Here we see the strong growth in handgun prevalence for black youth, from a low in 1984 to a tripling by 1993. The rise for the whites does not start until 1989, but does display a doubling by the 1993 peak. Finally, the post-1993 decline is much sharper for the black youth than among young whites.

[Figure 7 about here]

B. The Decline Period, 1993-1996

Because the available SHR data extend only a few years into the decline period, we cannot be as confident about how changing patterns of weapon use may have contributed to the decline. However, the flattening of the growth in the handgun homicide rate between 1993 and 1994 is consistent with the decline in youth homicide rates shown in Figure 2, suggesting that the decline in homicide is also associated with the decline in the use of handguns by young people.

The pattern of growth and decline in handgun use also is reflected in Figures 8a and 8b, which depict the time trend in the rate of weapons arrests at the various ages. The pattern here is very similar to the homicide patterns depicted in Figure 2, but there is a much more distinct peaking in 1993, with a clear decline subsequently. Changes in the rate of weapons arrests result from a combination of changes in the presence of weapons in the population and changes in police aggressiveness in pursuing illegal weapons. It is clear from other data that there was considerable

growth in weapon prevalence during the late 1980s, and also that police became more concerned about weapons, especially in the hands of young people. That combination is reflected in the rise in weapons arrests until the peak in 1993. There is no indication that there was any abatement by police in their concern about young people's guns after 1993, and so it seems likely that the decline after 1993 is due much more to a reduction in the carrying of guns than to a slackening of police efforts to capture the guns. The reduction in carrying seems to have contributed to the decrease in homicide by young people.

[Figures 8a and 8b about here]

V. Role of the Big Cities

The largest cities contribute disproportionately to patterns of serious violence for the nation as a whole. The prominent role of the large cities is clearly evident in the trends in homicide. Based on UCR data for 1991, for example, the US experienced 24,700 homicides. New York City alone provided 2154 of them, or 9% of the total. As New York City's homicide rate has declined faster than the national rate, its percentage contribution to the total has dropped to a value below 5 percent.

Although no other city has as large an effect as New York, the importance of the large cities is reflected in the relative contribution they make to the total homicide picture. In 1996, 10 cities (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, Philadelphia,

Washington, New Orleans, Baltimore, Houston, Dallas, in order of decreasing numbers of homicides) accounted for fully one-quarter of all the nation's homicides. In contrast, in 1991, when New York alone accounted for 9 percent of all US homicides, only seven cities (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Dallas, and Washington) were needed to account for a quarter of US homicides. (Data from UCR for 1991 and 1996).

New York City has been a major contributor to the national decline since the early 1990s. In the national net decline in homicides from 1993 to 1994 (a reduction of 1,200 homicides), New York City's drop of 385 accounted for 32% of that change. In the net change from 1994 to 1995 (a national net drop of 1720 homicides), New York City's drop of 384 accounted for 22% of the total decrease. New York City's contribution to the drop since 1995 has been closer to 10%, still very large, but smaller than in the earlier years, in part because the smaller cities are beginning to catch up. It is thus clear that what goes on in New York City, or the largest cities more generally, can have a very powerful effect on national statistics.

Examination of the trends over time offers a compelling picture of the saliency of the large cities, both in the rise of homicide in the 1980s and the decline during the 1990s. Figures 9a (for homicides with other than handguns) and 9b (for homicides with handguns) uses the Supplementary Homicide Reports to estimate the number of

homicides in each of four groups of cities (those of 1 million or more, those in the range of 500,000 to 1 million, 250,000 to 500,000, and 100,000 to 250,000). (Note 3)

[Figures 9a and 9b about here]

Because the number of homicides associated with each of the city-size groups other than the largest is roughly the same in each year (Note 4), we can discuss these results as associated with the large cities and contrast them with the smaller cities. There were six cities in the million-plus group: New York, Detroit, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Dallas. (Note 5).

Figure 9a shows that limited variation associated with the non-handgun homicides. There was very little change in the smaller cities, and a rather gradual decline of 18 percent in the large cities from a peak in 1986 through 1993, with a comparable drop of 21 percent from 1993 to 1994.

But these changes were much smaller than those in the handgun homicides. Figure 9b shows that the large cities had a major growth beginning in 1996, increasing 85 percent from 1985 to the flat 1991-1993 peak, and then declining 37 percent to the low in 1995, with indications that that decline will continue, at least for some period into the future.

We note that the smaller cities also had a distinct up-turn in the handgun homicides, but that the up-turn did not begin until 1988, two years later than in the large cities. That up-turn was even larger in percentage terms, collectively increasing 116% from the trough in 1987 to the peak in 1993. The more recent down-turn also began later than in the large cities: in 1994 in the 250-500 cities and not until 1995 in the other two groups. The drop from the collective 1993 peak was still only about 16 percent in 1995.

The rise in the handgun homicides could be associated with crack markets, as hypothesized by Blumstein (1995). Since crack markets generally emerged first in the largest cities, and may have diffused to smaller cities at a later time, that could possibly account for these lag effects.

It is also the case that the peak occurs later in the smaller cities. It is reached in 1991 in the largest cities, and the lag is larger as the city size grows smaller. We also note that the decline in the largest cities is quite sharp after the flat 1991-1993 peak. In the smaller cities, however, a comparable sharp decline is not yet observed. Indeed, recent news reports chronicle the escalating homicide rates in some mid-sized cities and speculate that these increases could be associated with the later emergence of crack markets and associated drug-related violence (Janofsky, 1998).

To the extent that both the increase and down-turn in handgun homicides in the largest cities are associated with corresponding changes in crack markets, then we would anticipate that homicide rates in the smaller cities should be reaching a peak and in some instances beginning to decline. The timing of these changes should correspond with city size: the declines should begin first in larger cities and later in the smaller cities. SHR data beyond 1995 will be needed to confirm these speculations about the role of drug markets in the increase and the decline of US homicide rates, and in the differences in the timing of these changes observed across cities of different sizes. However, the observed patterns are highly consistent with explanations of homicide trends that assign central importance to the rise and decline of crack in the US.

VI. Some Observations and Speculations About Causes of the Decline

It has been striking to note the sharp rise in homicide during the late 1980s and the correspondingly sharp decline in the 1990s. The increase in the aggregate homicide rate was due to escalating rates among juveniles and youth, predominantly (although not exclusively) by and against black males, particularly in the larger cities – and exclusively involving handguns. To 1996, the decline is still less than half-way to the stable rate that prevailed for the fifteen years from 1970 through 1985. But we are not necessarily at the end of the down-turn of the cycles, and there is some reason to hope that the declines will continue.

If the observed process of a rise, followed by a subsequent decline is indeed cyclical with a reasonably well defined cycle time, perhaps the difference between the larger and the smaller cities is merely one that reflects the lag in the initiation of this process: the large cities started first, and then the smaller ones followed, roughly in order of their size. Subsequent data from the smaller cities over the next few years will be available to test this speculation. If this speculation is in fact confirmed, that opens the questions, first, of the forces driving this cyclical process, both up and down, and, second, of the factors contributing to the lag between the larger and the smaller cities. Here again, we can only speculate. The evidence available so far, while short of providing unambiguous confirmation, is largely consistent with the earlier hypothesis of the sequence that created the rise phase: introduction of crack in the mid-1980s; recruitment of young minority males to sell the drugs; arming of the drug sellers with handguns; diffusion of guns to peers; irresponsible and excessively casual use of guns by young people, leading to a "contagious" growth in homicide (Blumstein, 1995; see, also, Loftin, 1986).

There is still no comparably strong hypothesis about the decline period, but a variety of forces are likely implicated, some more salient in some places and others elsewhere. These can be grouped as

- 1) *independent forces* that came about on their own and contributed to the decline, and

2) *reactive forces* that responded to the growth in homicide to stop the rise and turn it down.

Although the two types of factors are distinct from one another in important respects, their impact on homicide rates is fundamentally interactive: multiple factors are almost certainly responsible for the recent homicide decline, and the effectiveness of any single factor depends on the presence of others. We illustrate this contention in concluding remarks about some of the more important independent and reactive factors in the homicide decline.

A. Independent Forces

1. Drug Markets

The independent forces could be of many forms. One involves the changes in the nature of the demand for drugs, as identified by Golub and Johnson (1997). As the number of new crack users diminished in the early 1990s, that could well have brought some stability to drug markets, allowing them to function in a more secretive and surreptitious manner off the streets, and reducing the need to keep recruiting young people who are irresponsible with the use of violence. Those alterations could well have been amplified by the maturity of those managing the supply side of the market, many of whom were the survivors of the early violent period and had time and opportunity to develop dispute-resolution mechanisms other than the use of violence, much as their Mafia predecessors had done a generation earlier.

We acknowledge the absence of systematic evidence for the salience of any such maturation process, either in the markets or in the individual sellers or buyers. However, explanations of the homicide decline that emphasize the central role of changes in drug markets are a promising point of departure for the necessary research. For one thing, they are causally symmetrical: they account for both the increase and the decline in violence. Rates of serious violence, including homicide, went up during the rise phase of the crack epidemic and have been dropping during the decline phase (Baumer, Lauritsen, Rosenfeld, and Wright, 1998; Butterfield, 1997; Lattimore, Trudeau, Riley, Leiter, and Edwards, 1997). As the crack epidemic spread in the mid- and late 1980s, so did the danger around inner city drug markets, driving up the incentive for more kids to arm themselves in an increasingly threatening environment. That environment also became a prime recruiting ground for urban street gangs. Once kids acquire guns to protect themselves from other kids, a classic arms race began, and firearm violence can diffuse away from the drug markets which were the initial spawning ground (Blumstein, 1995; Sheley and Wright, 1995).

As the crack epidemic began to abate in the early 1990s, levels of firearm violence fell as well, although some lag should be expected due to the self-perpetuating, "contagious" quality of an arms race. The drug market-firearm diffusion hypothesis, then, is suggestive of an epidemic-like process inherent in the

growth and decline of homicide. Indeed, an important reason why public health terms like "contagion" and "epidemic" may have more than merely metaphorical significance for explanations of serious criminal violence lies in the intriguing connection between the recent cycles of violence and drug use in the US.

The focus on changes in drug markets also helps to account for the variable timing of the peaks and declines in homicide across cities. A large coastal city such as New York, for example, where crack took hold earlier and where it peaked sooner than in other cities (Golub and Johnson, 1997), should have experienced a drop in its rate of homicide sooner than in other cities -- and it did. An additional advantage of the drug-market hypothesis is that it directs attention to the population groups in which the changes in homicide were concentrated: youth, not necessarily as drug users, but as attractive sellers because of their reduced legal liability, and on African-American youth in particular, who disproportionately participated as sellers in inner-city crack markets.

2. Economic Expansion

Some of the recent decline in homicide rates is almost certainly related to the economic expansion of the past six years. Unemployment rates have dropped to levels not seen since the early 1970s, and consumer confidence is higher than in nearly three decades (Hershey, 1997a; 1997b; Uchitelle, 1997). Importantly,

economic gains have been shared by racial minorities, teenagers, and high school dropouts, groups at disproportionate risk for serious criminal violence (Nasar, 1998).

The role of opportunities in the legitimate labor market interacts in complex ways with changes in the illicit opportunity structure of distressed urban communities. The availability of low-wage jobs in the secondary labor market is particularly relevant when illicit markets and the employment opportunities they offer are shrinking. The conventional view of the connection between employment and crime portrays individuals, especially teenagers and youth, as turning to criminal activity when their legitimate employment opportunities are restricted. The relationship is likely to operate in the other direction also. Young people can also turn to legitimate jobs in response to dwindling opportunities for illegitimate work. Evidence from Freeman (1994, 1996) suggests that low-income teenagers will substitute illegitimate for legitimate work when the perceived rewards of doing so outweigh the costs, and that a sizable fraction of inner-city young men engage in both legal and illegal activity at the same time, moving back and forth from one to the other as opportunity permits: "Someone may need help selling stolen goods; a car with a stereo may be parked on a deserted street; the local fast food franchise or supermarket may be hiring. If the opportunity is there, and if the likely gain exceeds the reservation wage, someone will act on it" (Freeman, 1996:17).

These observations imply that the effects on criminal involvement of legitimate and illegitimate opportunities are fundamentally interactive: when the supply of illegitimate opportunities drops, the demand for legitimate work increases. If the assessments of the decline in crack markets in large cities in recent years are correct, then the movement to legitimate employment should have a particularly pronounced effect on the level of criminal involvement of low-skilled teenagers, and especially on their willingness to risk the serious violence associated with drug markets. There may be much to criticize about the low-end "go nowhere" jobs produced during the economic expansion of the 1990s, but they do employ teenagers - they are the only kind of jobs for which the great majority of teenagers are qualified - and they do reduce their risk of being victims and offenders.

Whatever the other drawbacks of flipping hamburgers or bagging groceries, kids are far less likely to kill or to be killed when working in a fast-food restaurant or supermarket than when selling crack on the street corner outside. These effects, however, are inherently short run, not only because of the cyclical character of legitimate employment opportunities, but also because jobs in the secondary labor market are not, by themselves, a strong foundation for the kind of long-term integration in the mainstream economic and social life of a community that is necessary to reduce the economic attractions of crime in a permanent way. It would be very unwise policy to count on purely cyclical forces, and their interaction with

changes in illegitimate income opportunities, to prevent youth crime and violence. Although low-wage jobs can have important short-run preventive effects, longer term benefits will require education and training programs that prepare teenagers in the work skills, habits, and discipline they will need as adults and that operate during periods of economic decline as well as expansion (see Wilson, 1996:207-238, for one set of proposals).

3. Incarceration Effects

Although in one sense changes in sentencing policy and resulting changes in the level of imprisonment are clearly "reactive" with respect to the problem of criminal violence, we include them as independent forces in our discussion because the dramatic growth in incarceration began a decade before homicide rates went up in the mid-1980s. Incarceration effects are undoubtedly an important contributor to the continuing decline of homicide rates among older people (as displayed in Figure 3), especially for those over 30, who displayed a 40 percent drop in homicide rates between 1985 and 1996 . This connection is particularly close because the median age of prisoners is about 32.

One of the contributors to the growth in incapacitation effects is the large number of drug sellers who have been sentenced to prison in the last two decades. Ironically, they have not been major contributors to a decline in drug offending

because they have been replaced by other sellers, but, as long as they have a non-zero risk of committing homicide, they have contributed to the decline in homicide rates. Unfortunately, however, we cannot at this time isolate these incapacitation effects from other effects contributing to a decline in homicide by older people, such as the effects of the reductions in intimate-partner homicide.

Incarceration effects are far less likely to have been a significant factor in the more recent decline in homicide rates among teenagers and youth, and most likely limited to older youth whose incarceration risk is greatest. In addition, levels of homicide have fallen in the younger age groups in recent years even as their incarceration risk has increased. It is possible of course that the decline might have been steeper in the absence of the "get tough on kids" sentencing policies enacted in recent years.

4. Declining "Domesticity" and Intimate Partner Homicide

In addition to the incapacitation effects of increasing incarceration on adults, there has been a pronounced drop in homicides involving spouses, ex-spouses, and other "intimate partners" over the past two decades. This decrease, which is especially pronounced among African-American adults, results from a corresponding drop in "domesticity," that is, declining marriage rates, increasing age at marriage, and high divorce rates (Rosenfeld, 1997). Some preliminary evidence suggests that

the increasing availability of legal advocacy and other domestic violence services also may have played a role (Dugan, Nagin, and Rosenfeld, 1997).

B. Reactive Forces

1. Police Programs to Remove Guns from Kids

Notable among the reactive forces are police efforts to remove guns from kids. These tactics could include a mixture of aggressive stop-and-frisk, especially in high-violence neighborhoods (reputed to have been an important part of the response in New York City), introduction of programs offering a bounty for reports of illegal guns that would lead to confiscation (undertaken in Charleston, SC, with apparent success), and "voluntary" searches of homes with suspected illegal weapons (with an agreement to confiscate the weapons but with a commitment not to press criminal charges for the possession) carried out in St. Louis. The theory behind the confiscation strategies lies not only in the benefits of the confiscation itself, but in the broader deterrent threat that the risk of confiscation has on deterring the carrying of the weapons or on the brandishing of a gun. To the extent that the carrying is reduced thereby, it in turn reduces the concern over self-protection, and thereby diminishes the incentive for others to carry their own guns. Thus, the contagious escalation characteristic of the rise period can display a similar contagion process of disarmament during the decline period.

Enforcement activity and related community-based reactive forces almost

certainly have contributed to the drop in homicide in specific localities. However, the magnitude of this effect is difficult to gauge, because levels of homicide also have decreased in places with no discernible change in enforcement and because the effects of enforcement tend to interact with other influences over which the police and community leaders have little control. Understanding the interactions among the reactive and independent forces responsible for the recent decline in homicide rates should help policy makers and the public think more realistically about what communities can and cannot do when the rates turn up again.

2. Community Efforts

Other reactive forces would include community efforts to stop and reverse the escalation process. These efforts may be independent of the police, but could well involve community-policing resources when those were seen as relevant. These can take the form of mediation and negotiation between conflicting gangs, mentoring programs, hands-are-not-for-guns campaigns, introduction of various community-center activities (e.g., "midnight basketball") stimulated by concern over the escalating violence in their midst.

VII. Summary

It is clear that the candidate factors contributing to the decline in homicides over the past several years are numerous and complex, and could well differ in different places. A significant aspect of the improvement involved undoing some of the factors that contributed to the growth in the late 1980s - especially some kids

March 19, 1998

Page 31

carrying and using guns and thereby stimulating others to do likewise. Efforts in that direction have been provided by both police and by community groups. Much of the decline may be attributable to incapacitation associated with the doubling of the incarceration rate since 1985, but that effect shows itself only in reductions in older individuals, since young people are only rarely candidates for incarceration, and that emphasizes the importance of efforts to prevent homicide by finding ways to socialize them and train them with the skills necessary to function in a rapidly evolving economy. Current economic conditions seems to have provided legitimate economic opportunities at the same time that opportunities in the illicit drug markets were diminishing, but the cyclical nature of economic conditions makes their crime reduction effects uncertain in the future. There is undoubtedly a connection between illicit drug markets, and particularly cocaine and crack markets and violence, but the nature of that connection is undoubtedly very complex, and is not simply addressed through prohibition of the drug or through "cracking down" on the markets. To the extent that addicts were treated medically, for example, that could diminish the activity in the markets, and could well diminish the violence as a result. As we look to the future, there are concerns associated with a resurgence of active drug markets and any violence they may bring with them, a turn-down in the economy and the impact it would have in the communities where violence is most likely to re-ignite, and a concern over the impact of welfare reform as the individuals least able to transition into the economy are dropped from the rolls.

Notes

1. Writing in the *New York Times*, David Kocieniewski (1997) states that "some [unnamed] criminologists attribute the decline to demographic factors like a smaller number of teenagers". In an article on the "mystery" of the drop in crime, David Anderson (1997) notes that some analysts explain the drop as resulting from "random demographic changes" (49).

2. The number of incidents reported by an agency to the SHR is close to, but not identical to the number of incidents reported to the UCR. The variation can result from differences in the reporting procedures when different segments of the police department handle the two reporting tasks. A number of jurisdictions have varied considerably over time in the number of incidents reported to the SHR, including years when they simply submitted no reports at all. Rather than misrepresent fluctuations in reporting as changes in homicides, we have omitted from our analyses those places that display such large fluctuations.

3. Each individual city was assigned to a "city size" category based on its mean population over the period 1988 to 1992 in order to ensure that each category contains the same cities over the period shown. Without some such stabilizing assignment rule, this assignment would vary over time and would by itself affect the group rates

whenever a change took place. Because the homicide rate is positively related to population, as cities grow and move from one class to a higher one, even if there were no change in any city's homicide rate, that movement alone would reduce the homicide rate in the group they left, but also reduce it in the group they moved up to. These effects would be negligible among the large numbers of smaller cities, but could be very influential among the smaller numbers of the largest cities.

4. This is partly a result of the fact that, as the population size approximately halves between groups, the number of cities approximately doubles, thereby keeping the number of homicides roughly stable.

5. Some cities, including Chicago and Houston, were not included here because their reporting to the SHR was sporadic, and we did not want to attribute these fluctuations in reporting to changes in the homicide patterns being observed.

March 19, 1998

Page 34

References

Anderson, David C. 1997. "The Mystery of the Falling Crime Rate." *The American Prospect* (May-June):49-55.

Baumer, Eric, Janet L. Lauritsen, Richard Rosenfeld, and Richard Wright. 1998. "The Influence of Crack Cocaine on Robbery, Burglary, and Homicide Rates: A Cross-City, Longitudinal Analysis." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* (1998, forthcoming).

Bennett, William J., John J. DiIulio, and John P. Walters. 1996. *Body Count: Moral Poverty and How to Win America's War Against Crime and Drugs*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Blumstein, Alfred. 1995. "Youth Violence, Guns and the Illicit-Drug Industry." *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 86:10-36.

_____, Jacqueline Cohen, and Harold Miller. 1980. "Demographically Disaggregated Projections of Prison Populations." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 8:1-25.

_____ and Daniel Cork. 1996. "Linking Gun Availability to Youth Gun Violence." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 59:5-24.

Butterfield, Fox. 1995. "Many Cities in U.S. Show Sharp Drop in Homicide Rates." *New York Times* (August 13):1, 10.

_____. 1997. "Drop In Homicide Rate Linked to Crack's Decline." *New York Times* (October 27):A10.

Cook, Philip J., ed. "Kids, Guns, and Public Policy." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 59.

DiIulio, John J. 1996. "Why Violent Crime Rates have Dropped." *Wall Street Journal* (September 6).

Dugan, Laura, Daniel Nagin, and Richard Rosenfeld. 1997. "Explaining the Decline in Intimate Partner Homicide: The Effects of Changing Domesticity, Women's Status, and Domestic Violence Resources." National Consortium on Violence Research, Working Paper.

Fox, James A. 1995. Presentation to the meeting of the American Academy for the

March 19, 1998

Page 35

Advancement of Science, Atlanta, GA.

Freeman, Richard B. 1994. "Crime and the Job Market." National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No. 4910.

_____. 1996. "Why Do So Many Young American Men Commit Crimes and What Might We Do About It?" National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No. 5451.

Golub, Andrew Lang and Bruce D. Johnson. 1997. "Crack's Decline: Some Surprises Across US Cities." National Institute of Justice, *Research In Brief*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

Hershey, Robert D., Jr. 1997a. "US Jobless Rate Declines to 4.7%, Lowest Since 1973." *New York Times* (November 8):A1, B3.

_____. 1997b. "Confidence of Consumers is Surging." *New York Times* (December 31):C1, C8.

Janofsky, Michael. 1998. "Some Midsize Cities Defy Trend as Drug Deals and Killings Soar." *New York Times* (January 15):A1, A14.

Kelling, George L. and Catherine M. Coles. 1997 *Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities*. New York: Free Press.
Kocieniewski, David. 1997. "Number of Crimes in New York May Reach 30-Year Low." *New York Times* (December 25).

Krauss, Clifford. 1996. "Crime Rate Drops in New York City." *New York Times* (December 20):A1, B23.

Lattimore, Pamela K., James Trudeau, K. Jack Riley, Jordan Leiter, and Steven Edwards. 1997. *A Study of Homicide in Eight US Cities: An NIJ Intramural Research Project*. National Institute of Justice, Research in Brief. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

Loftin, Colin. 1986. "Assaultive Violence as a Contagious Social Process." *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 52:550-555.

Maxim, Paul. 1985. "Cohort Size and Juvenile Delinquency: A Test of the Easterlin Hypothesis." *Social Forces* 63:661-679.

Mitchell, Alison. 1994. "Giuliani Points to Drop in Crime Rate Despite Other

Problems." *New York Times* (September 14):A13.

Nasar, Sylvia. 1998. "Jobs Juggernaut Continues Surge; 300,000 Find Work." *New York Times* (March 7):A1, B14.

O'Brien, Robert M. 1989. "Relative Cohort Size and Age-Specific Crime Rates: An Age-Period-Relative Cohort Size Model." *Criminology* 27:57-78.

Rosenfeld, Richard. 1997. "Changing Relationships Between Men and Women: A Note on the Decline in Intimate Partner Homicide." *Homicide Studies* 1:72-83.

Sheley, Joseph F. and James D. Wright. 1995. *In the Line of Fire: Youth, Guns, and Violence in Urban America*. New York: Aldine.

Steffensmeier, Darrell, and Miles D. Harer. 1991. "Did Crime Rise or Fall During the Reagan Presidency? The Effects of an 'Aging' US Population on the Nation's Crime Rate." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 28:330-359.

Steffensmeier, Darrell, Cathy Streifel, and Edward S. Shihadeh. 1992. "Cohort Size and Arrest Rates Over the Life Course: The Easterlin Hypothesis Reconsidered." *American Sociological Review* 57:306-314.

Uchitelle, Louis. 1997. "6 Years in the Plus Column for the US Economy." *New York Times* (March 12):C1, C4.

Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Knopf.

March 18, 1998

Page 32

Hershey, Robert D., Jr. 1997a. "US Jobless Rate Declines to 4.7%, Lowest Since 1973." *New York Times* (November 8):A1, B3.

_____. 1997b. "Confidence of Consumers is Surging." *New York Times* (December 31):C1, C8.

Janofsky, Michael. 1998. "Some Midsize Cities Defy Trend as Drug Deals and Killings Soar." *New York Times* (January 15):A1, A14.

Kelling, George L. and Catherine M. Coles. 1997 *Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities*. New York: Free Press.
Kocieniewski, David. 1997. "Number of Crimes in New York May Reach 30-Year Low." *New York Times* (December 25).

Krauss, Clifford. 1996. "Crime Rate Drops in New York City." *New York Times* (December 20):A1, B23.

Lattimore, Pamela K., James Trudeau, K. Jack Riley, Jordan Leiter, and Steven Edwards. 1997. *A Study of Homicide in Eight US Cities: An NIJ Intramural Research Project*. National Institute of Justice, Research in Brief. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

Loftin, Colin. 1986. "Assaultive Violence as a Contagious Social Process." *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 52:550-555.

Maxim, Paul. 1985. "Cohort Size and Juvenile Delinquency: A Test of the Easterlin Hypothesis." *Social Forces* 63:661-679.

Mitchell, Alison. 1994. "Giuliani Points to Drop in Crime Rate Despite Other Problems." *New York Times* (September 14):A13.

Nasar, Sylvia. 1998. "Jobs Juggernaut Continues Surge; 300,000 Find Work." *New York Times* (March 7):A1, B14.

O'Brien, Robert M. 1989. "Relative Cohort Size and Age-Specific Crime Rates: An Age-Period-Relative Cohort Size Model." *Criminology* 27:57-78.

Sheley, Joseph F. and James D. Wright. 1995. *In the Line of Fire: Youth, Guns, and Violence in Urban America*. New York: Aldine.

Steffensmeier, Darrell, and Miles D. Harer. 1991. "Did Crime Rise or Fall During the Reagan Presidency? The Effects of an 'Aging' US Population on the Nation's

March 18, 1998

Page 33

Crime Rate." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 28:330-359.

Steffensmeier, Darrell, Cathy Streifel, and Edward S. Shihadeh. 1992. "Cohort Size and Arrest Rates Over the Life Course: The Easterlin Hypothesis Reconsidered." *American Sociological Review* 57:306-314.

Uchitelle, Louis. 1997. "6 Years in the Plus Column for the US Economy." *New York Times* (March 12):C1, C4.

Table 1. Change in Homicide Arrests by Age Group, 1993 to 1996

	1993	1996	Change	Percent Change	Percent of Total Change
Total Estimated Homicide Arrests	23328	19070	-4258	-18.2%	100.0%
Suspects Under Age 25	13399	10709	-2690	-20.1%	63.2%
Suspects Age 25 and Over	9929	8361	-1568	-15.8%	36.8%

Figure 0

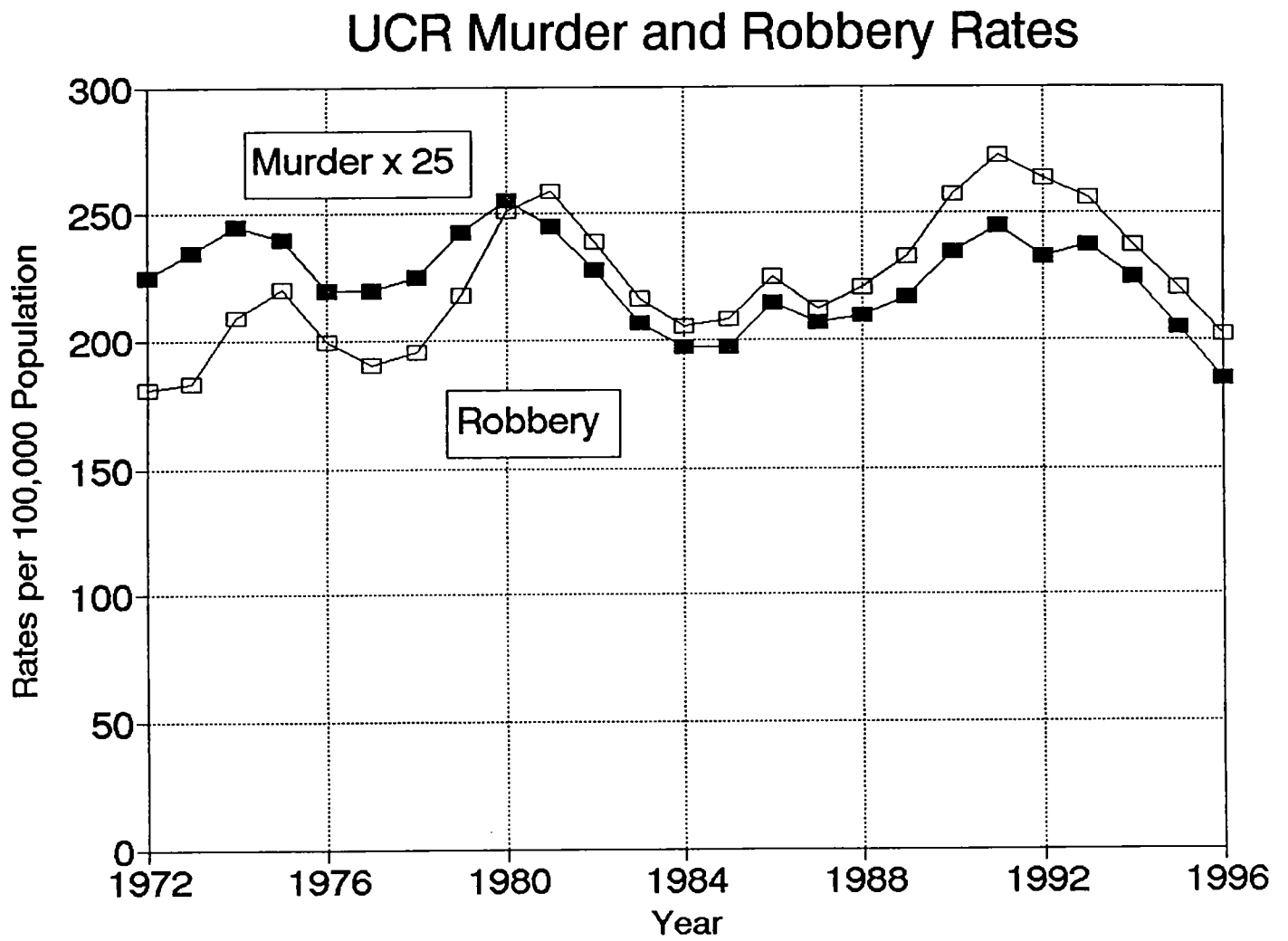


Figure 1a



Figure 1b



Figure 2

Trends in Age-Specific Murder Rate

Trends for Individual Peak Ages

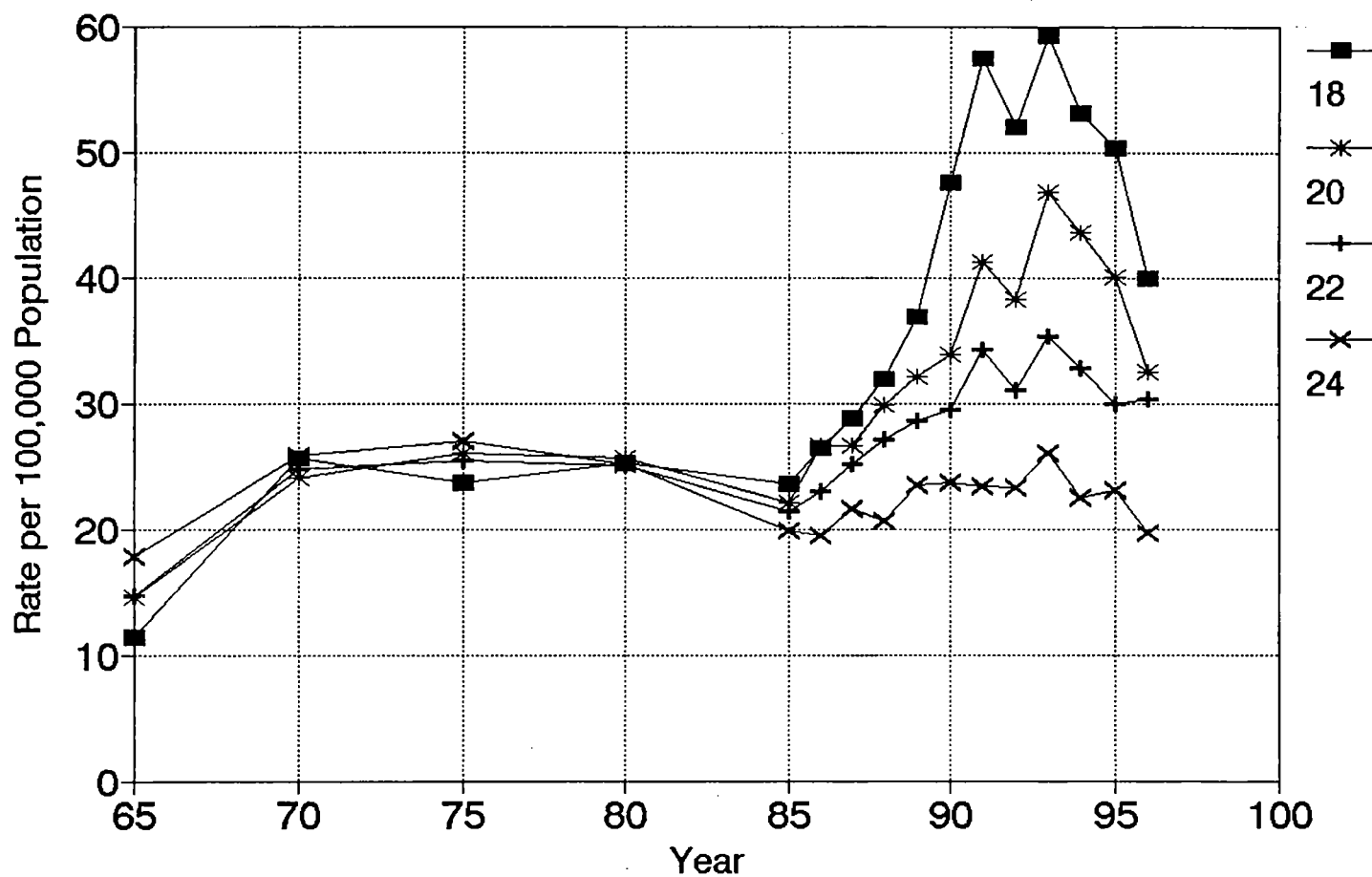


Figure 3

Ratios of Recent Age-Specific Rates
1993 and 1996 Murder Arrests re 1985

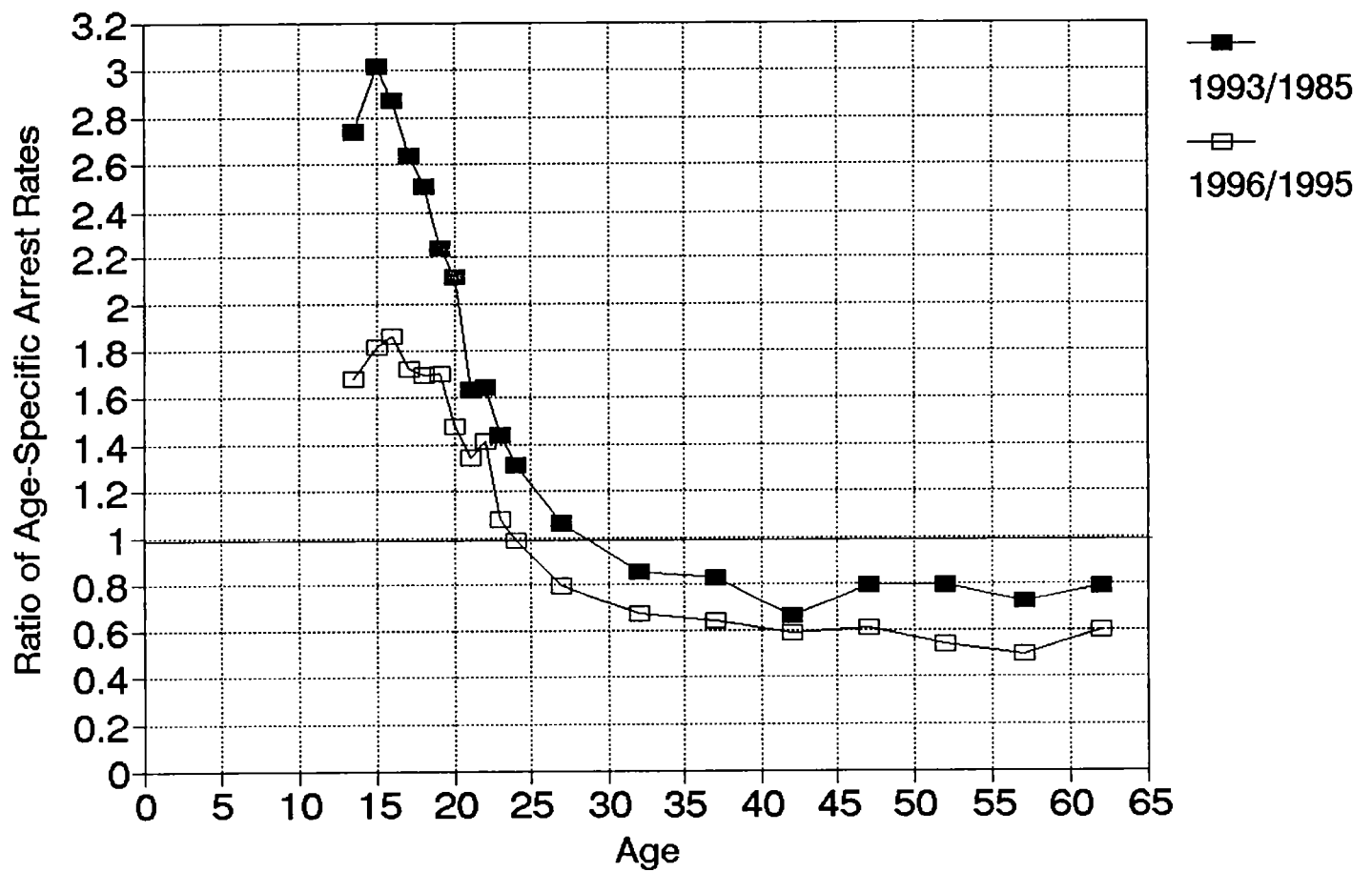


Figure 4a

Age Composition of US Population - 1998

No. of Persons at each Age

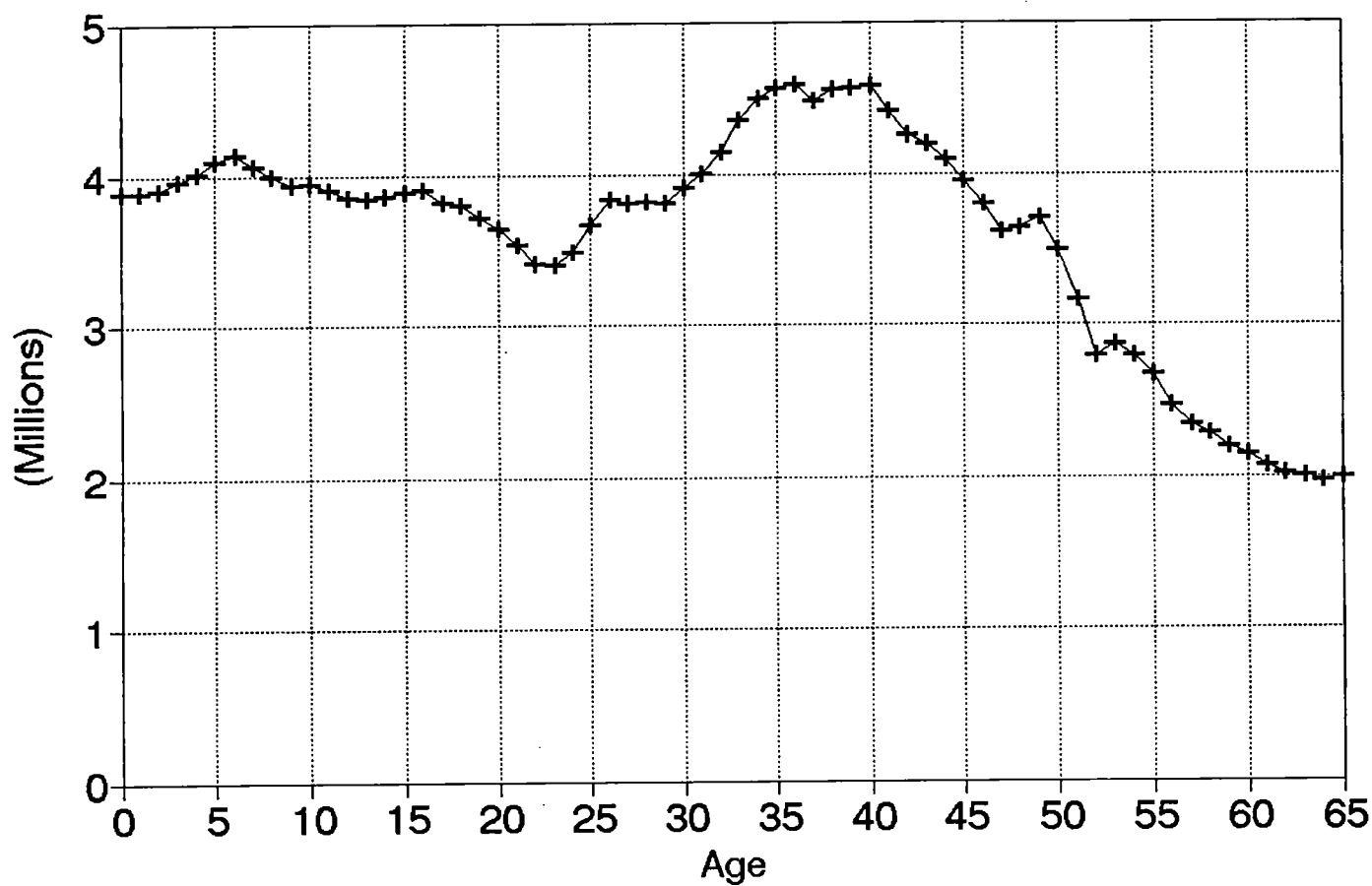


Figure 4b

Age of US Males by Race - 1998

No. of Persons of Each Race at Each Age



Figure 5a

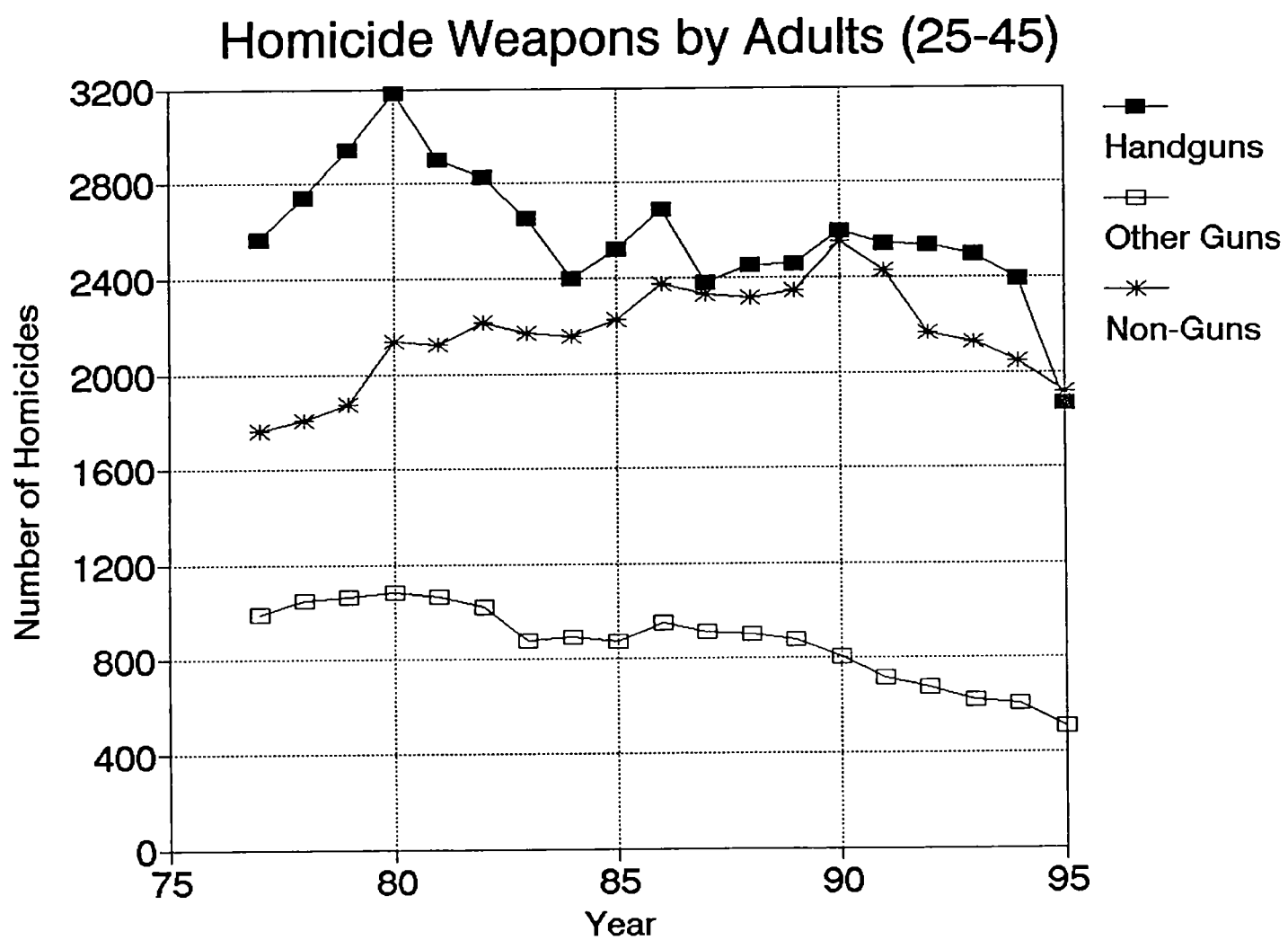


Figure 5b

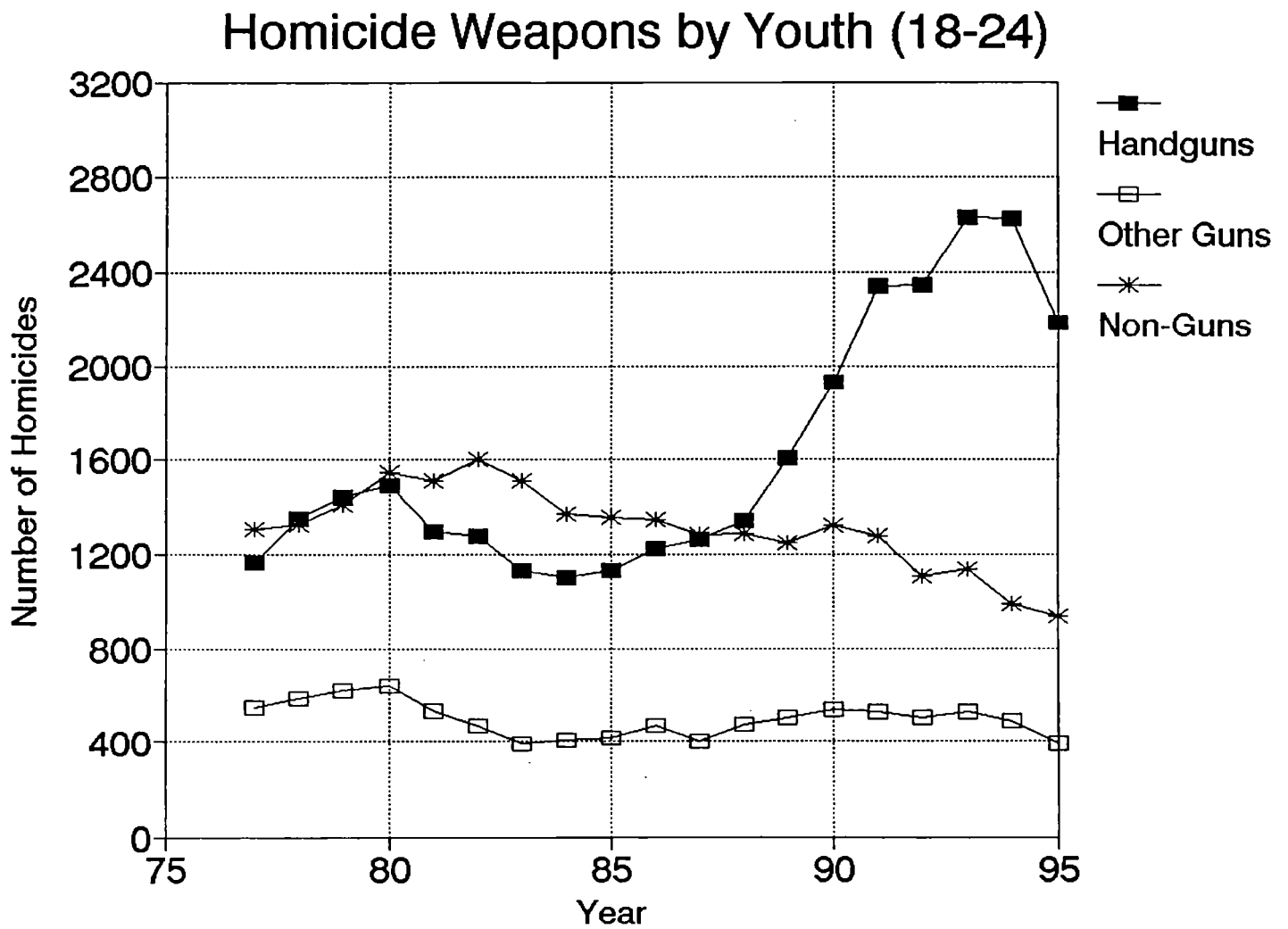


Figure 5c

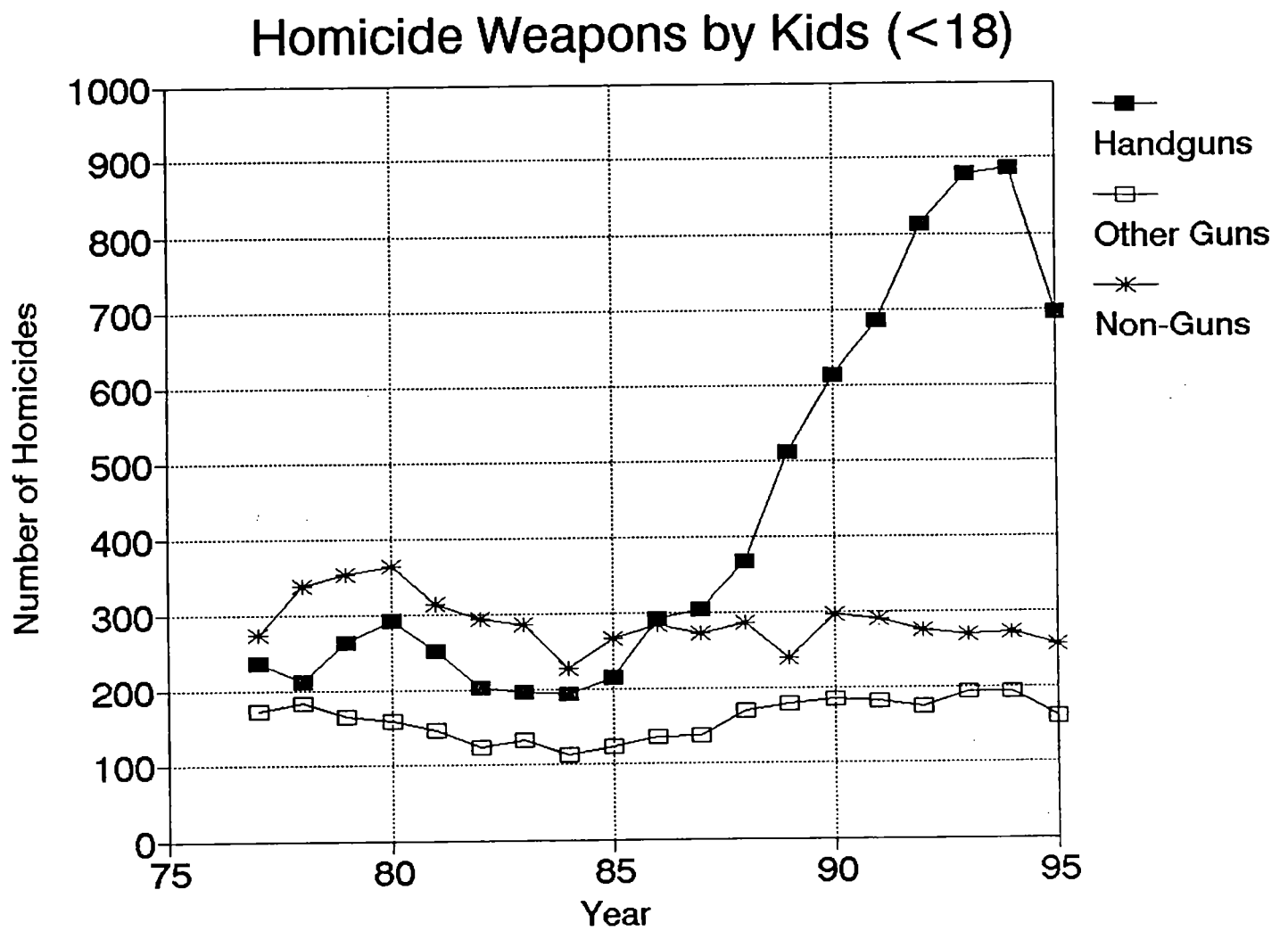


Figure 6

Homicides by Black Youth 18-24

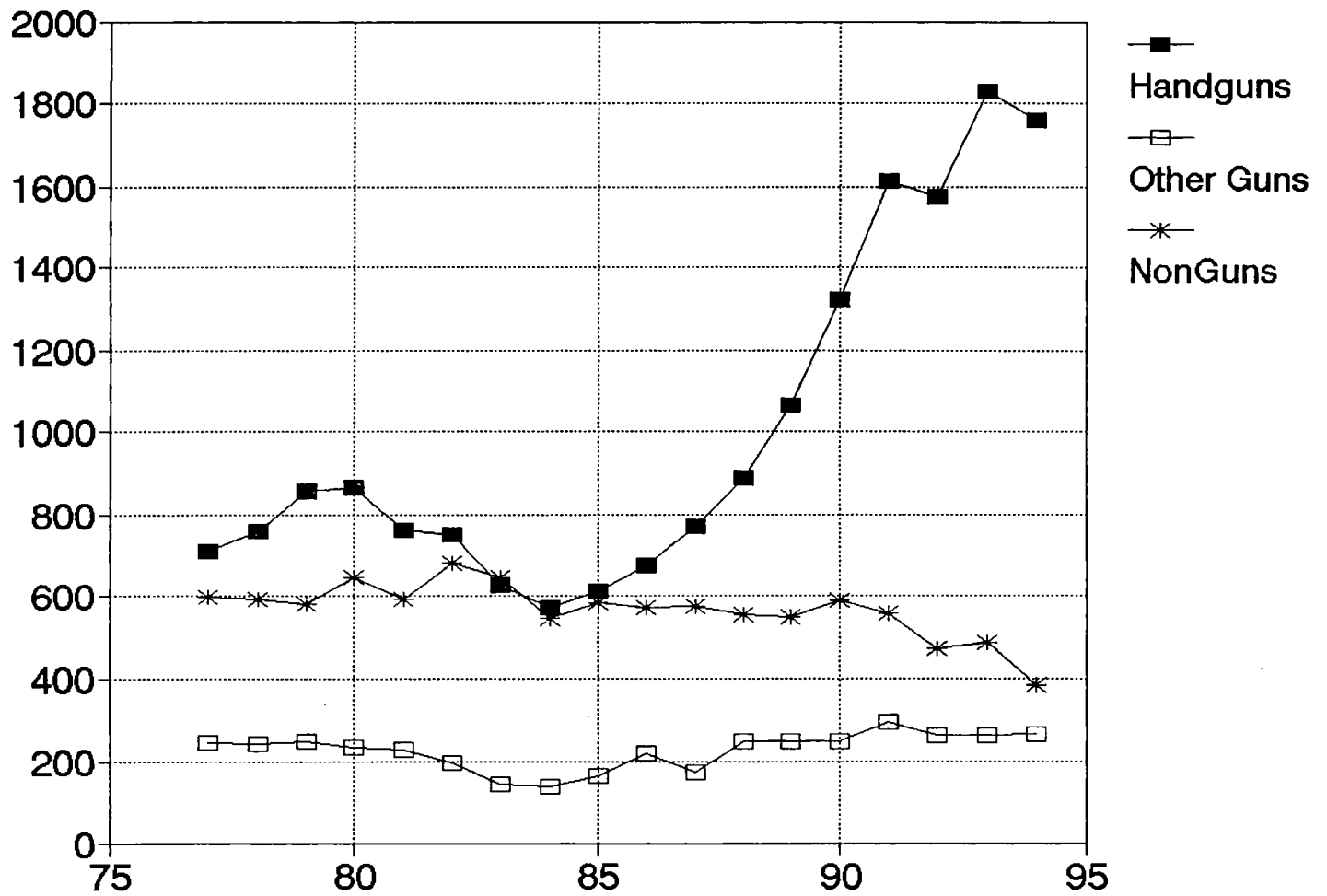


Figure 7

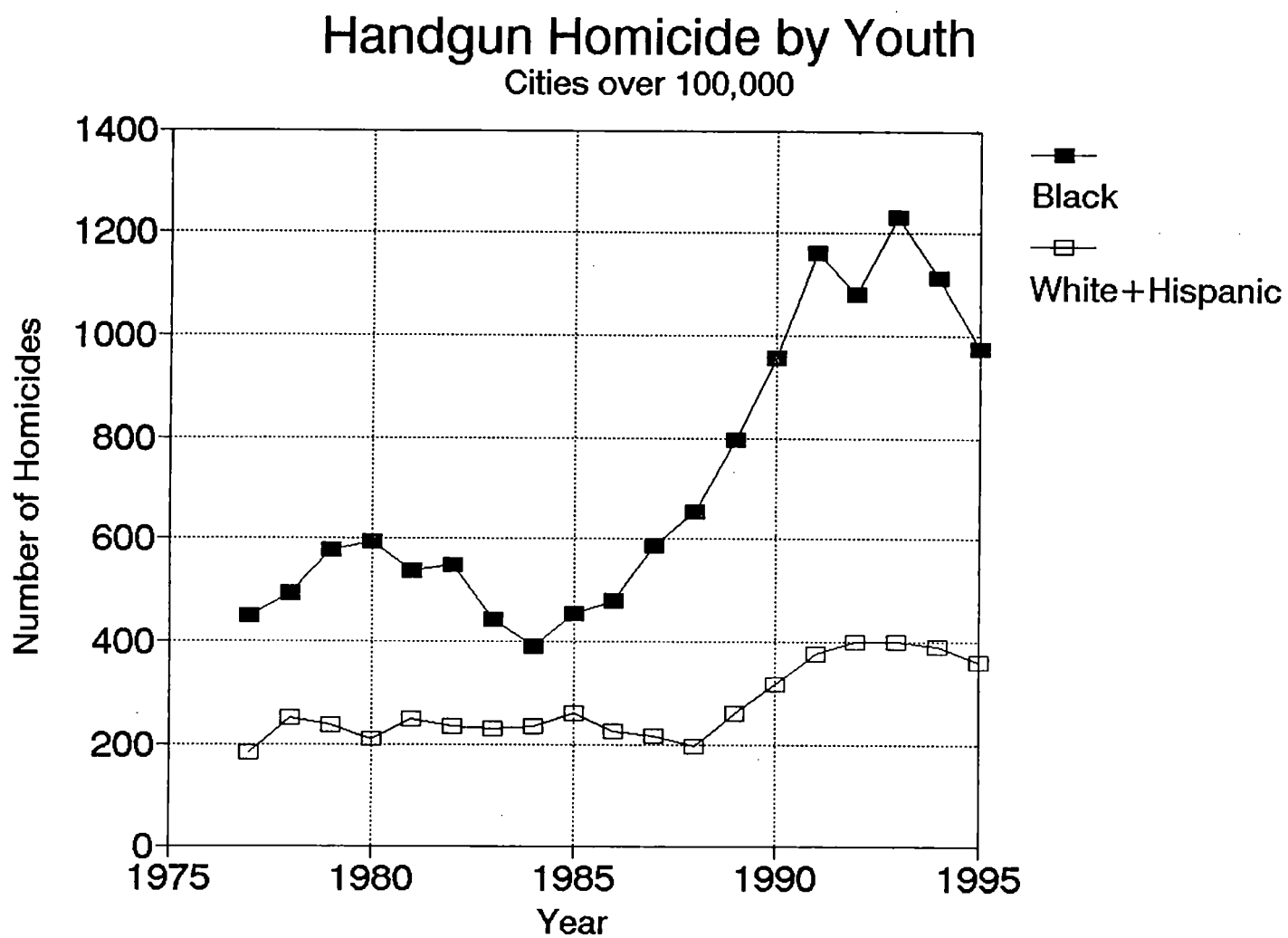


Figure 8a

Trends: Weapons Arrest Rate by Age

Trends for Individual Peak Ages

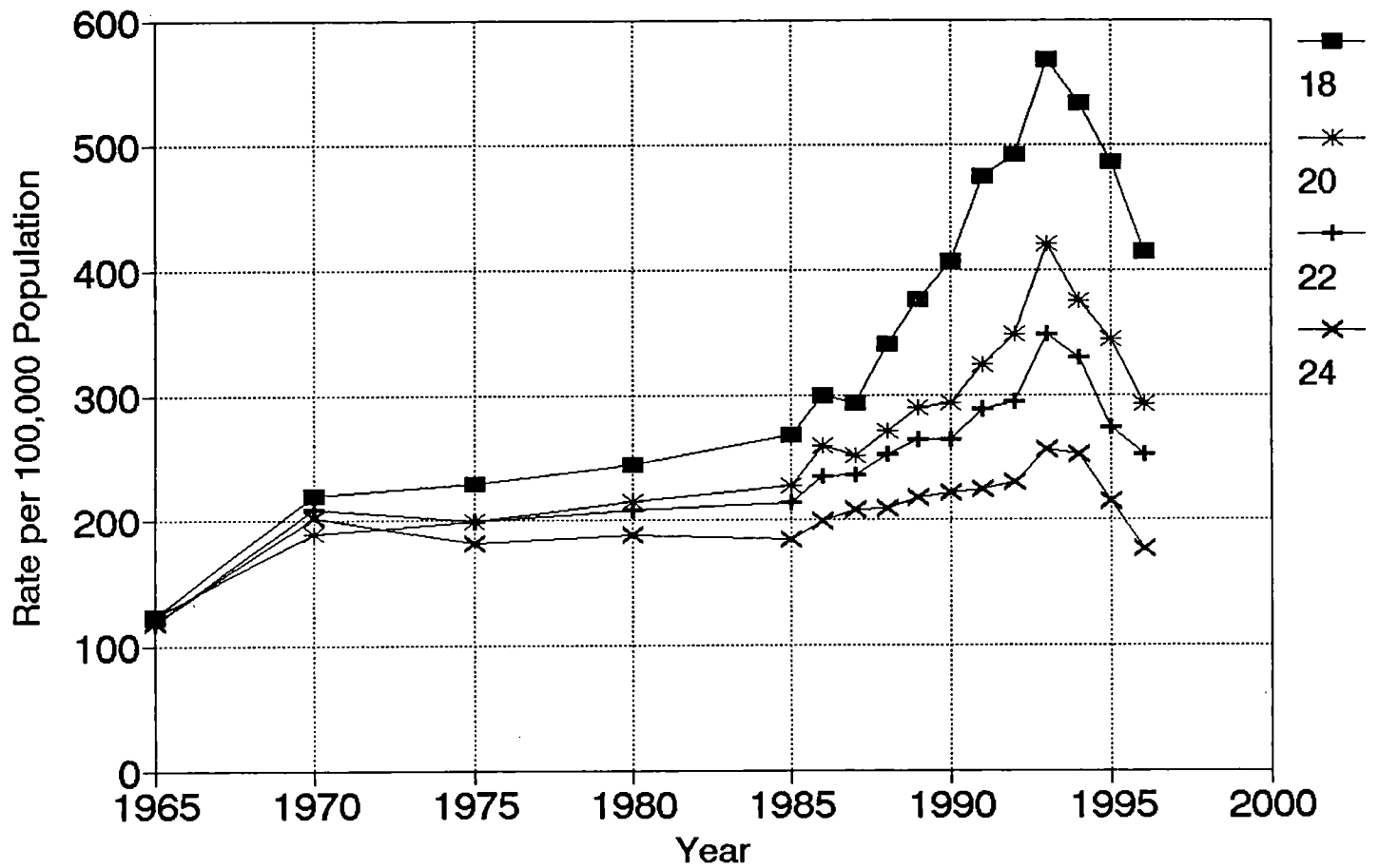
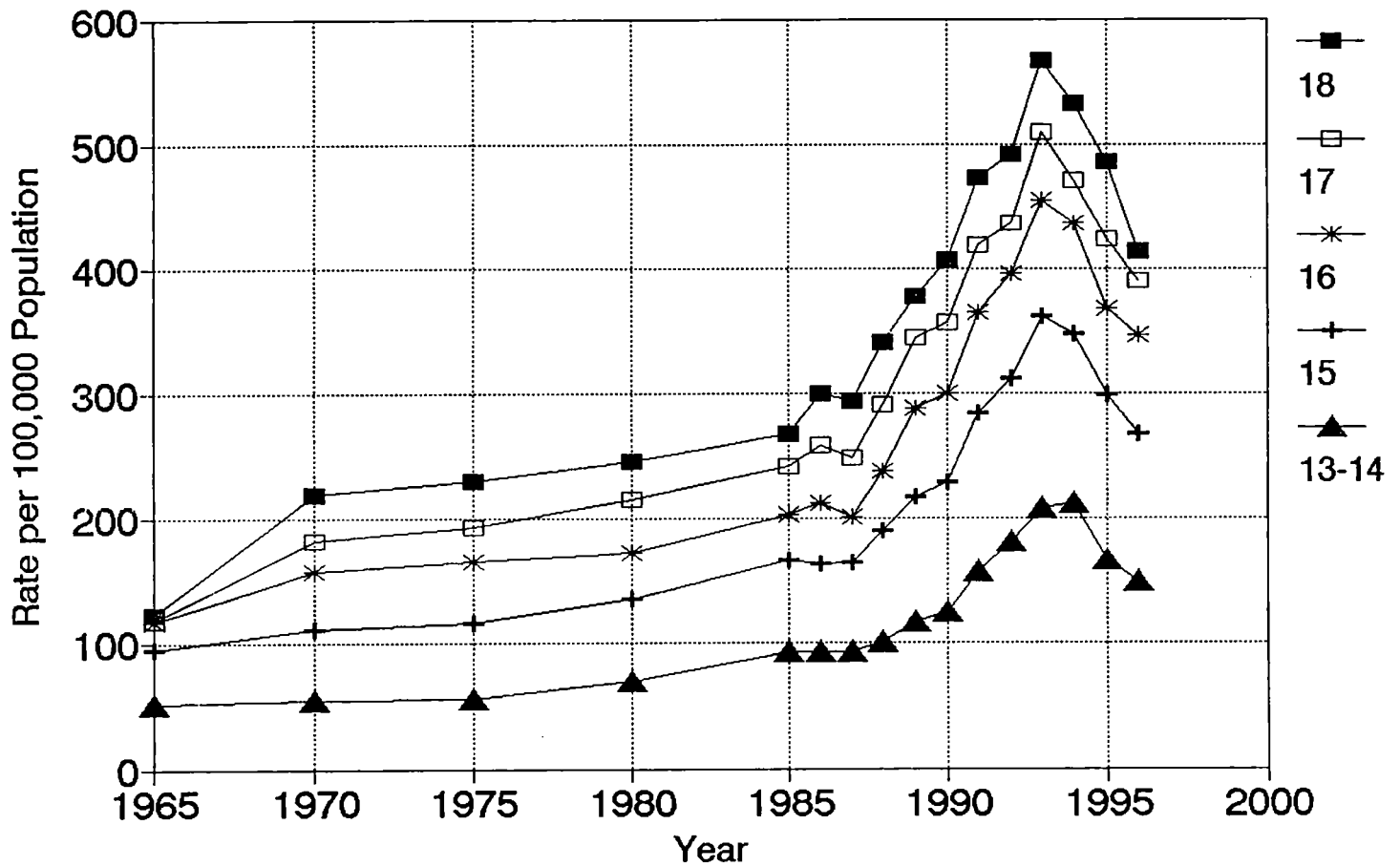


Figure 8b

Trends: Weapons Arrest Rate by Age

Trends for Individual Young Ages



Homicides with NonHandguns by City Size

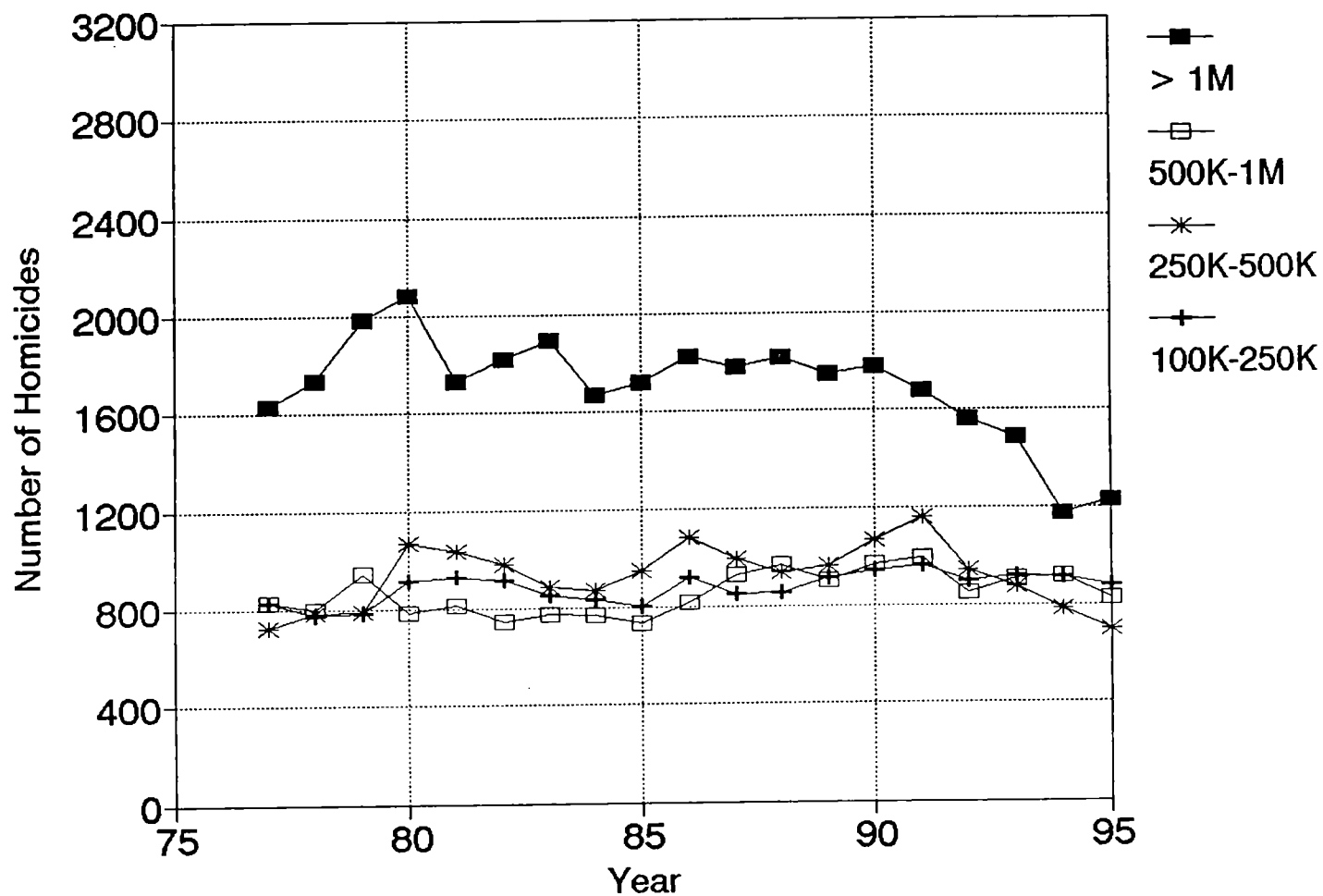


Figure 9a

Homicides with Handguns by City Size

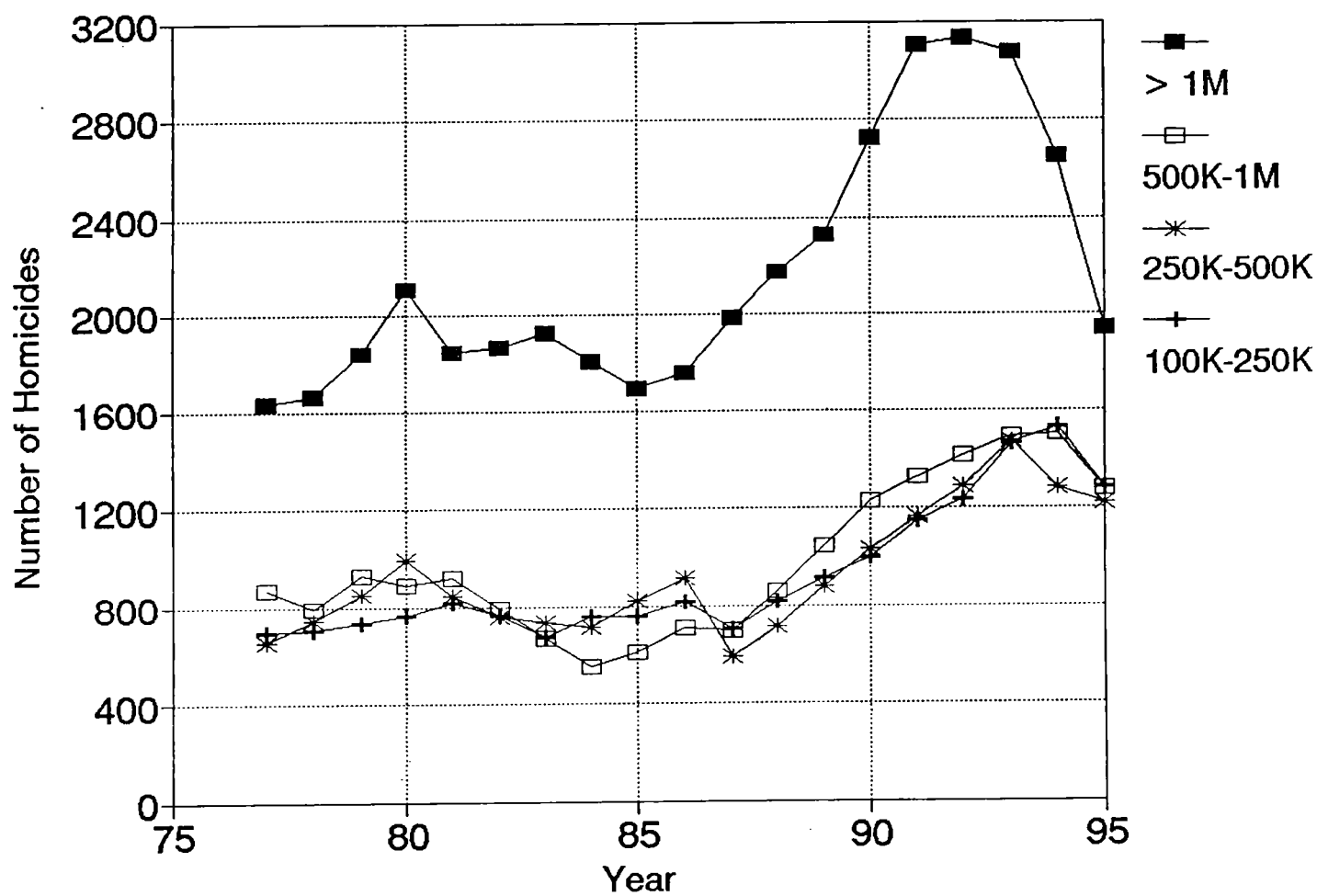


Figure 9b