

**ALCOHOL AND HOMICIDE IN THE UNITED STATES, 1934-1995, OR ONE REASON WHY
U.S. RATES OF VIOLENCE MAY BE GOING DOWN**

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Introduction

A great deal of attention has been devoted in the last few years to the apparent decline in rates of homicide and other kinds of violence in the United States. There has been some debate about whether or not rates of violence are actually declining, and there has been even more debate on the reasons for this apparent decline. The purpose of this paper is to examine the trends, both recent and more historical, in the overall rate of homicide and, for reasons to be made clear below, homicide disaggregated by race, and to explore the possibility that one reason for an apparent recent decline and indeed, one explanation among several for the path that homicide rates have taken since the end of Alcohol Prohibition in the U.S., 1934, that being the rate of alcohol consumption. There is a growing body of research that shows a significant relationship between alcohol and violence at different levels of aggregation, in different countries and sub units of countries, among different types of people, and across time periods. There has also been the beginnings of a theoretical body of knowledge that would explain why variations in alcohol consumption and availability should be considered as part of the explanation for variations in the rate of homicide and other types of violence. These issues will be discussed in detail in this paper, and the results of a new multivariate time series analysis of homicide, alcohol consumption and other indicators for the U.S. between 1934 and 1995 will be presented. The importance of this evidence for violence prevention policy will be discussed by way of conclusion.

Are Rates of Homicide in Decline in the U.S.?

According to the U.S. Vital Statistics (*CITATION*), the overall rate of homicide in the US has declined steadily in the decade of the 1990s. In 1991, the rate of homicides per 100,000 population was 10.5; by 1995, the last year of data available for this report, the overall rate was 8.0. Indeed, media reports

indicate that rates of 1996 and 1997 show further declines, with one major media outlet reporting recently that homicide rates are as low now as they were in 1970 (Los Angeles Times, January 2, 1997: 1). The data given here in Figure 1 confirm this, as the rate of homicide in the U.S. in 1970 was 8.3 per 100,000. However, a long term perspective on the issue of whether homicide rates are declining, as shown in Figure 1, might lead to a very different conclusion. Overall homicide rates decreased rather rapidly and more extensively than the decline evidenced in the 1990s during the 1930s and early 1940s, reaching a low of 5.0 in 1944, from a high of 9.7 in 1934. After a brief rise at the end of World War II, the homicide rate declined steadily during the 1950s, reaching a 20th century low of 4.5 per 100,000 in 1957 and 1958. It is important for gaining an understanding of recent trends to place those trends in a longer term context as in Figure 1.

Another important aspect of the trends in homicide that is not displayed in Figure 1, however, is the fact that hidden inside this overall trend in homicide rates is a great deal of variation in those trends themselves, especially when disaggregated by age of the victim. As Blumstein (1996), Sherman (1997), and others have argued, the recent decline in homicide rates, significant as it is, really only applies to the homicides of adults 25 years of age and older. The data for youth show the opposite trend, that is an almost steady increase in homicide rates, especially beginning in the mid 1980s (See also Parker et al., 1997). In addition, as Ronck and Meier (1993) have shown, homicide rates vary enormously across city blocks, and Alaniz et al (1998) have shown that rates of assault and other kinds of youth violence vary enormously over short distances within moderate and even small sized cities. Sherman (1997) has also argued that 30 major urban areas in the U.S. account for a substantial majority of all the homicides in the country. Thus some caution should be exercised in the interpretation of the overall homicide rate.

An additional pattern that is revealed in Figure 1, however, is reflected in the fact that for the vast majority of the time covered in these data there is a remarkable correspondence between the rate of alcohol consumption per adult (Williams, et al; 1994; NIAAA 1997) and the homicide rate. Beginning

with a downturn in consumption at the end of WW II, which was followed by a decline in homicide about a year later, a pattern in which changes in alcohol consumption foreshadow changes in the homicide rates continues for most of the period. For example, alcohol consumption begins a long and steady climb in the middle 1950s, while homicide rates, begin their climb in 1958, running to a peak in the early 1970s. By this same time consumption is flat with a slight decline; homicide begins to decline in the middle 1970s. Again alcohol consumption peaks in the late 1970s, with homicide following to a peak at the end of the decade. By the early 1980s alcohol consumption begins a steady decline still in evidence in the late 1990s, with homicide again dropping to a low in the middle 1980s. In the late 1980s, fueled by increases in youth homicide, the two trend lines diverge for the first time in fifty years. By the end of the time displayed here, alcohol consumption's decrease has again foreshadowed a decrease in homicide beginning in the early part of the 1990s and continuing into the latter part of the 20th century.

As was the case with trends in homicide alone, it would be inappropriate to over interpret the relationship displayed between alcohol and homicide in Figure 1. Alcohol consumption also varies by age, and the trends differ by beverage type as well, as will be described below. However, the apparent relationship shown here has not received the proper attention from researchers and others asking the question that has motivated this collection of papers, i.e., what are the reasons why the rate of violence seems to be falling in the U.S.? The use of the plural here is deliberate, as it would also be inappropriate to claim that a decline in alcohol consumption is the most important or the only reason why homicide rates are falling; a complete explanation of the variation in the rate of homicide certainly involves a number of competing and complimentary explanations. However, Figure 1 clearly raises the notion that alcohol consumption has an influence on homicide to the status of a testable and reasonable hypothesis for consideration. In fact there is a growing body of scientific research that suggests a theoretically derived and empirically verified causal link between alcohol and violence net of other important relationships, theories, and hypotheses (See Parker and Auerhahn, 1998 for a review). The next section of this paper reviews some of the theoretical arguments that have been advanced to explain why alcohol

would be a causal factor in homicide and other forms of violence, with references to a number of empirical studies that have found support for this idea. The paper then presents the results of a multivariate time series analysis of the data displayed in Figure 1, with controls for some factors represented in the major theoretical models of homicide in the literature. Finally, the implications of the results this analysis are discussed in terms of their import for research on violence and for public policy designed to reduce rates of homicide and other violence in the U.S.

Linking Alcohol and Violence

A number of have found an association between the homicide rate and alcohol consumption. For example, a study of homicide rates in the U.S. in the early 1980s by Parker (1995) found that states with higher rates of alcohol consumption had higher rates of several types of homicide examined. In addition, alcohol consumption interacted with poverty so that places with above average consumption and above average poverty had even higher rates of homicide.

A second study estimated the impact of consumption on youth homicide rates (Parker and Rebhun, 1995: 102-117) This study examined all U.S. states during the period 1976 through 1983, and found that beer consumption rates were significant predictors of youth homicide rates in five of six types of age by victim/offender relationship homicide rates examined. In both of these studies, additional factors such as poverty and inequality were included as well, and alcohol consumption was found to be a significant predictor of homicide net of these other factors.

A more comprehensive pooled cross section time series analysis of youth homicide for states over the period 1973 through 1992 also found a significant net effect for beer consumption on youth homicide rates overall and specifically for male youth homicide (Parker et al., 1997). In this case controls were included for poverty, inequality, urbanization, beer taxation and other indicators of alcohol policy, and a measure of the impact of the increasing concentration of poor and disenfranchised groups in inner cities (See Wilson, 1987).

Studies outside the U.S. have also reported significant effects of alcohol consumption on rates of homicide. For example Lenke (1990) examines the relationship between alcohol consumption and homicide rates in several European states and finds evidence of a significant relationship. Parker (1998) examined the impact of alcohol consumption on 17 European and North American countries in a comprehensive pooled cross section and time series model for the period 1950 to 1985. Although Parker reports that alcohol consumption did not have any direct effects on either male or female homicide rates, consumption interacted with divorce to increase homicide rates for male victims (1998: 21).

A second approach to the nature of the relationship between alcohol and homicide has included studies that examine this relationship in a more indirect manner. In the U.S. in general alcohol consumption rates, based on sales of alcohol (see Williams et al., 1997), are available only at the U.S. state level of measurement. Studies examining the alcohol and homicide link at levels less aggregated than this have utilized measures of the availability of alcohol as a proxy for consumption. This is based in part of results from research on the link between consumption and availability that shows a strong positive relationship between these two indicators (Gruenewald et al., 1993). For example, a longitudinal study of 256 American cities over the period 1960, 1970, and 1980, reported in Parker and Rebhun (1995) found that the density of liquor stores in a city was a significant predictor of the change in homicide rates, in a time frame in which homicide increased 300 %. The significant impact of outlet density was net of a number of indicators of processes well known to be predictors and causes of violent crime, including poverty, social bonds, family structure, and racial composition.

On the more micro level of analysis, in contrast to the macro level studies cited previously, two studies of violent crime locations at the address, block, and census tract level have found an association between outlet locations and violent locations. For example, Sherman et al. (1989), in an investigation of the places that police were repeatedly called to in a large U.S. city, on site outlets such as bars and restaurants were among the 'hottest' spots. For example, the top hot spot between December 1985 and December 1986 in the city examined was an intersection where there were several bars, a liquor store,

and a park. Police received 33 calls reporting rapes, robberies, and auto thefts during the year observed in these data. The third ranking hot spot, with 27 such calls, was another intersection with several bars; the fifth and sixth hottest locations, 27 and 25 calls, respectively, also involved multiple or, in the case of the sixth hot spot, a single on site alcohol outlet. In fact, Sherman et al. (1989:45) report that on site alcohol outlets were part of the locations that accounted for one third of the robberies, rapes, and auto thefts reported in the course of a year. Sherman et al. (1989:44) reported that the sixth hottest spot in the city, an individual bar, had a robbery rate that was seven times the robbery rate of the entire city, and a rate of 1 assault for every four persons who visited the bar during the year, assuming maximum occupancy during open hours.

An analysis of data at the city block level for a different American city also found an association between blocks that had bars located on them and the occurrence of assaults, robberies, and rapes (Roncek and Maier, 1991). In this analysis the impact of having one or more bars on the block was significant even after controls for unemployment, poverty, and racial composition had been entered into the regression model.

Two Paths Linking Alcohol Availability and Homicide

Taken as a group, these studies suggest two different paths by which we can explain how the link between alcohol and homicide could be brought about. Evidence of a relationship between alcohol and homicide is well established at the state, city, county, and block level in previous research. However, these two paths describe how this relationship comes about, and help to explain why the data in Figure 1 show such a strong correspondence. As we will evaluate this relationship at the aggregate level, it is important to establish the underlying causal reasoning that seeks to explain why the relationship makes sense as a candidate for explaining declining rates of violence in the U.S.

Path 1: Selective Disinhibition

In this linkage, the higher the concentration of outlets, the more likely it is that people in and around those outlets will have been drinking prior to the homicide. If we could be certain that one or more of the participants had been drinking prior to the event, this would make the inference that outlet concentration leads to violence much more straightforward, as we could invoke the selective disinhibition approach described by Parker and Rebhun (1995; see also Parker, 1993). Aggregate studies of the impact of availability on consumption show that greater concentration of outlets leads to more consumption (see Gruenewald et al, 1993), so the probabilistic statement describing this first step in the chain that links alcohol with homicide would be that the greater the concentration of outlets, the higher the likelihood that people near those outlets will have consumed alcohol. If potential victims and offenders have consumed alcohol, and the well known effects of alcohol on judgment and information processing come to bear (see Pihl et al., 1993), such that individuals are more likely to misinterpret the actions of others, mistake the response of others to their own behavior, to focus more closely on immediate goals rather than more distant goals, and lead to the operation of active and passive constraint (Parker and Rebhun, 1995). Active constraint is the social interactional situation in which doing something contrary to the social and behavioral norms is clearly in the personal interests--material, physical, social, psychological, etc. --of an actor. Internalized beliefs and/or external social control must be actively present and functioning to prevent the actor from seeking his/her own interests in an active constraint situation. If alcohol has the effects that many studies show that it does on judgment, information processing, and focus on near vs. long term goals and interests, the person under the influence of alcohol is more likely to overcome active constraint and use violence to achieve a near term personal interest goal than those who have not consumed alcohol in the same situation. It is also likely that the amount of alcohol consumed, relatively to body weight and gender may also increase the probability of overcoming active constraint and leading to violence. Thus this pathway connects outlet

concentration with consumption, consumption with selective disinhibition, and selective disinhibition with an increased likelihood of violent behavior.

Passive constraint operates in situations where even to an intoxicated youth, violence provides no enhancement of personal interests and goals, of whatever nature, making norms against violence easy to conform to. No active intervention of externally or internally focused agents of control is necessary to prevent violence. This is why alcohol's effect on violence is 'selective'-alcohol does not always disinhibit because even intoxicated persons have some sense of goals and the means to secure them (Pernanen, 1991).

So in this pathway, alcohol outlet density increases violence because it increases alcohol consumption by potential offenders and victims, this latter distinction being one of outcome not intent by participants (Lauretsen et al., 1991). In addition the fact that the vast majority of offenders and victims are similar in terms of age, ethnicity, and social class leads to the prediction that both violent offending and victimization would be higher in places with greater concentrations of outlets. Alcohol consumption plays a direct role in this pathway, linking aggregate consumption to homicide rates; changes over time in consumption should lead to changes in homicide rates.

Path 2: Outlet Concentrations as 'Great Attractors'

In astronomy the concept of a 'great attractor' is that of an immense region in the universe of known space so full of matter that all other galaxy clusters and individual galaxies are drawn towards the attractor by the physical force of gravity. In this approach to understanding the outlet density violence relationship, places with outlet concentrations are social 'great attractors,' providing a magnet that draws young people to these locations. Once concentrations of young people are drawn to a particular corner or block, a number of possibilities exist. What kinds of places are these with high concentrations of bars, restaurants serving alcohol, liquor and convenience stores selling alcohol? In one sense it could be

argued that these are places that are socially disinhibited--people come to these places, to these establishments, for entertainment, for relaxation, to get away from the normal constraints of work, school, and home, to seek the company of others, and so on. So these are places where the usual social norms and external controls are weakened, and they are full of people seeking 'time-out' opportunities (MacAndrews and Edgerton, 1969). In such a context, it would not be surprising to find more violence, independent of alcohol consumption and the impact of selective disinhibition. Other nonnormative activities are likely to be attracted to these locations as well -- prostitution, drug use and drug sales, gang related conflicts -- all, of which would lead to greater rates of violence around these social attractor locations.

Does this argument then imply that alcohol availability is spuriously related to this violence? Not if the fact that alcohol outlets dominate the commercial and retail activity in the location; the concentration of the outlets creates the conditions that make all of people and their associated time-out behaviors possible by creating an atmosphere that attracts and further reinforces such activity. It is here that advertising may contribute to the sense of 'anything goes here,' in that the images and lifestyles portrayed in alcohol ads in and around outlets such as ads which commodify and demean women, may help to reinforce the idea that women who come to this location are available, especially in connection with alcohol (Alaniz and Wilkes, 1995; Parker et al., 1998). In addition, the notion that some places attract potential victims and motivated offenders is not a new idea, e.g., Erikson et al. (It could be said that in this pathway between alcohol outlets and homicide that the alcohol sold at these outlets is incidental, although actual consumption should lead to selective disinhibition here as well as elsewhere. However, it is the attractor nature of these places, a nature that is established and maintained by the concentration of alcohol outlets, that drives this process, so that from a public policy point of view, the fact that it is alcohol outlets that are concentrated and not dry cleaning outlets or gas stations is important. Thus, the implication is that reducing outlets would reduce violence, but it would do so

because of the decline in the 'attractiveness' of the location, not because of any decline in alcohol sales or consumption that might result.

We are not arguing that these two pathways are mutually discrete--probably some of each are operating to explain the strong empirical relationship found in this study as well as those cited here. However, the relative strength of each path may vary in locations or in historical periods, and the dominance of one path over the other would condition the nature of any public policy debate about why the concentration of outlets should be reduced if we wish to prevent violence. Given the data available in this project, we cannot distinguish between the two, but if we can convince the reader that one or both of these pathways is plausible, then we have a theoretical justification for examining this relationship in the context of a study designed to investigate the relationship between homicide and alcohol, and to contribute to the development of policy alternatives that have potential to prevent homicide.

Data and Methods

A number of studies have demonstrated the importance of race in research on homicide causation in general. As Messner and Sampson (1991) and Huff-Corzine et al. (1991) have demonstrated, many of the predictors of homicide operate differentially on rate-specific homicide rates. For example, Sampson (1987) finds that economic deprivation, among other predictors, has a greater impact on African American violent victimization than it does on non-African American rates. An examination of race specific rates of victimization in the present context might reveal that among African Americans, poverty has such a strong impact that any additional impact of alcohol is nonsignificant, while the opposite may be true for White Americans. Figure 2 show the homicide rate disaggregated by race between 1934 and 1995; the categories used here are 'Nonwhite' and 'White', for reasons of data availability over the entire period of time under

examination here (Hollinger, 1987; U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1996). Although the two curves parallel each other over the long term, the Nonwhite rate tends to change faster, and over a wider range than the White rate, which is multiplied by 4 in Figure 2 to allow for comparison in the same scale. There are also some differences in the timing of upward and downward movement, peaks and floors; for example, while rates for both groups begin to climb in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the rate for Nonwhites rises much faster and peaks first, in 1971, while the white rate does not reach its peak until the mid 1970s. Also note that this early 1970s peak is the peak for nonwhite homicide rates for the post WW II era, while for whites the overall peak for the entire series does not occur until the early 1980s. Previous research and these data suggest the possibility that alcohol may have a different relationship with homicide disaggregated by race.

Alcohol consumption can also be disaggregated among the three major beverage types that account for most of the total amount of alcohol consumed between 1935 and the present: beer, spirits, and wine. The three series are displayed in Figure 3, and it is immediately clear that wine consumption is of a different nature from that of beer and spirits during this period (Williams, et al; 1994; NIAAA 1997). Although all three beverages rise into the Post WW II period, wine changes very little after that rising from a 1945 peak of about .25 gallons of pure ethanol equivalent per capita to about .3 at the overall peak of the series, 1986. Spirits and beer, accounting for nearly 90% of total consumption across this entire period, rise more sharply after WW II to a peak in the early 1970s for spirits. Beer consumption continues to rise into the early 1980s, as does overall consumption, and it begins to decline until the end of the period considered here. This different pattern suggests that alcohol consumption should be disaggregated in terms of beer, spirits, and wine consumption

Additional Factors

In any time series analysis covering the span of time such as that in Figure 1, 2, and 3, the investigators will be limited in the number and variety of indicators represented factors other than alcohol that are known to play a role in homicide causation. However, it is incumbent upon the investigator to measure as many concepts from competing theories and perspectives as possible so as to reduce the possibility that chance alone will masquerade for an important effect in a statistical model. Criminology has been particularly plagued with the problem of what could be called 'the one factor wonder theory' a point that has been discussed elsewhere (Parker, 1995: 14). Here we have assembled indicators that represent the two major perspectives that have been most successful in understanding and predicting homicide: economic deprivation (Parker, 1989; Loftin and Hill, 1974) and routine activity (Parker, 1995; Sampson, 1987; Cohen and Felson, 1979).

Poverty is measured here by the infant mortality rate, one of the components of Loftin and Hill's (1974) structural poverty index and one of the more reliably measured indicators of poverty available (Loftin and Parker, 1985). Another advantage of this measure is that it is available for white and nonwhite infants throughout the entire period under study (U.S. Center for Health Statistics, 1961-1995; Grove and Hetzel, 1968).

We have included two measures from those often used as indicators of the routine activities perspective at the aggregate level. First, we have measured the proportion of the population that is between the ages of 15 and 24 inclusive (Parker and Rebhun, 1995; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1930-1995). In addition, we have also included in each model a measure of earned income, based on the arguments of Cohen and Felson (1979) and others that the flow of goods and services, for which earnings are a proxy for the availability of attractive and available targets for crime. In the case of the white homicide model the measure is adult per capita income, and in the nonwhite homicide models, total earnings from transfer payments of all levels of government. The use of two different measures was

designed to reflect the fact that whites dominate the total earnings of the US because of their majority status, and that for nonwhites transfer payments are a much larger proportion of total earnings than among whites historically (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1989; 1990; 1993; 1996).

In short, white and nonwhite homicide models will be analyzed, with disaggregated beverage types, infant mortality disaggregated by race, distinctive measures of earnings, and the proportion of the population that is young and male.

Statistical Methods

A multivariate time series analysis was utilized to enable a simultaneous estimation of relationship between homicide and of the independent variables. Estimating the impact of alcohol consumption on homicide requires a statistical methodology designed to model the complexity of the time dependent processes that are often found in time series data. In order to appropriately test the hypothesis that alcohol is a cause of homicide, the statistical method used must be multivariate in nature, that is, we must be able to estimate the longitudinal impact (if any) of alcohol on homicide while holding other factors that might have an effect on the latter statistically constant.

Given the complexities introduced by the time series data utilized here, ordinary least squares (OLS or multiple regression is not the most appropriate means to estimate the net effects of alcohol, routine activities, an poverty on homicide. One of the major assumptions of OLS, that the data points or cases are independently sample from the population, is clearly violated, i.e. observations from 1970, are not independent of observations from 196 This violation results in residuals or error terms that are correlated with one another, successively, across observation and therefore across time. Although it is possible to introduce a correction to an OLS model to deal with thi problem, the success of such an approach given the nature of our data is tenuous at best. A regression correcte model or generalized least squares model (GLS), rests on the assumption that simple corrections, e.g. first order seri dependence or perhaps second order dependence, is required to adjust for the problem. However, the more comple time driven error structures which are presented by these data are difficult to model, and the GLS approach has

number of shortcomings. Similar problems and limitations are also found with regard to Box-Jenkins (Box and Jenkins, 1976) style transfer function time series modeling (See Holder and Parker, 1992 for a detailed discussion).

Neither of these alternatives provides a fully analogous multivariate regression style model which can at the same time deal effectively with the complex error structures engendered by time series data. However, the multivariate time series model or Vector ARMA (Auto Regressive Moving Average) models (Tiao and Box, 1981), or which transfer function models are a special case, has provided analysts with the full OLS analog for time series data.

Model specification

Like the procedures used in univariate Box-Jenkins analyses (Box and Jenkins, 1976) the identification and evaluation of Vector ARMA models involve first an exploratory set of analyses designed to provide information about the nature of the model and lag structure required by the data. In this stage, two techniques are used: the cross-correlation matrix (CCM), analogous to the cross-correlation function used in bivariate modeling, and the auto-regression matrices (ARM). First, an attempt is made to identify a common noise model for the vector of series; although as described previously, Vector models can be more complicated, a common noise model is often useful and parsimonious. We utilized the modeling procedures as outlined by Tiao & Box (1981) and Liu and Hudak (1983). Significant cross-correlations occur when the noise component of the vector time series is driven by a moving average process, $MA(q)$, where q is equal to any time lag, in this case, q months. If the noise model is of the form $MA(q)$, the CCM for lags less than or equal to q will contain large numbers of significant entries, while those for lags greater than q will show relatively few such entries. Likewise, significant entries within the ARM will occur up to and including lag p , also expressed in months, if a noise model is driven by an auto-regressive process, $AR(p)$. A summary statistic distributed as a chi square can be used to determine the degree to which the auto-regression coefficients as a set depart from a null hypothesis of zero auto-correlation for each lag. It is often the case that one type of process or the other is found to be an acceptable description of the underlying time-oriented processes.

which drive the data, and this will be reflected in the comparison of the CCM and ARM- if one shows no pattern of decay at longer lags while the other demonstrates such a pattern, it is likely that the data can be adequately described by the process associated with the decaying diagnostic matrix. Once the likely lags for the MA(q) and AR(p) models have been identified, multivariate models can be estimated in which our hypotheses are specified and directly tested. The residuals from these models can be examined with the cross-correlation and auto regression matrices, thus helping to identify any additional noise components which should be included in the models and important omitted relationships to be examined in the context of the larger model. This procedure allows us to empirically identify the lag structure over which alcohol may cause changes in homicide, a useful feature of this approach because although prior research and theoretical analysis suggest that the relationship should be lagged, no insight about the specific lag structure is available.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 report results from the identification stage for the models of white and nonwhite homicide. These tables report the results of the CCM and ARM analyses of the six observed times series, in the case of Table 1, white homicide, per capita earnings, white infant mortality, wine consumption, spirits consumption, and young males. Thus there are 72 parameters in each CCM, resulting from the 6 by 6 variables in the model. The number of lags is somewhat arbitrary, but we examined 24 lags, more than 1/3 of the series, and found that after 8 lags almost no significant correlations were found. On the ARM side of Table 1, the auto regression models use many degrees of freedom, and so only models up to the fourth lag were identified. In the case of Table 1 the identification phase indicates that most of the action is in the AR side of the model, as indicated by the significant CCM correlations, and the sharp drop off in chi squares for the ARM models. The bottom panel indicates that the final model accounts for most of the significant CCM entries observed in the identification phase, and the Lag 1 chi square has dropped dramatically on the ARM side, suggesting the

appropriate model has been identified. Over fitting (see McCleary et al, 1980) was also used to further investigate this model, and no additional parameters could be justified.

Table 2 reports the identification results for Non white homicide. Although the final model does result in some reduction in CCM significant entries, the fact that this model includes a properly identified MA component is indicated by the much great impact on the ARM chi square values than was the case for white homicide. Over fitting also did not reveal any additional parameters of the AR or MA type which would significantly improve on the fit of this model.

Table 3 presents the substantive results for White homicide rates. As multiple versions of the same indicator at different lags can be included in the same model, very high correlations among estimates can cause difficulties analogous to collinearity in a regression model, so that in some cases a parameter which was non significant in the first version of the model was dropped if it displayed a very high correlations with one or more of the other estimates. The AR (1) results for white homicide show significant effects for per capita earnings, and spirits consumption, both positive and in the expected direction. Wine consumption has a negative effect on homicide lagged 1 year, a finding that probably reflects the social class position of wine drinkers rather than any preventive effect of wine consumption for white homicide. Beer consumption was included in the model, but did not have a significant impact, either in the absence of the other types of consumption or net of them. Beer consumption also showed very high correlations with the spirits estimates and was therefore dropped from the model. The AR (2) results add little to the overall substantive interpretation of the model, but significantly improve the fit of the overall model.

Table 4 reports the results for Non white homicide. The AR (1) and AR (2) results indicate that this model does not do a very good job explaining Non white homicide, except that the internal dynamics of each of the six series, with transfer payments substituting for per capita earnings, non white infant mortality for white infant mortality, and beer consumption for spirits, are highly significant at these lags (not reported in the tables). The MA (2) component shows that beer consumption has a significant an

positive effect on non white homicide between 1935 and 1995, but no addition effects are found. Spirits consumption was included in earlier versions of this model, and had to be dropped for the same reasons as beer was dropped from the white homicide model.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results in Table 3 and 4 provide corroboration for the notion so well demonstrated in Figure 1 that alcohol consumption has something to do with the falling rate of homicide in the U.S. Effects linking alcohol consumption to homicide were found for time lags of 1 and 2 years, a reasonable expectation given the way the changes in consumption have occurred over the last 60 years, and evidence is found for effects of alcohol on both white and non white homicide, albeit more so for the former rather than the latter. This is consistent with other evidence suggesting that African Americans drink less than whites, and may have fewer problems that are directly related to their alcohol consumption (Barr et al, 1993) . However, the fact that effects occur for both types of homicide, and with beverage specific constellations that make sense given the general consumption patterns of whites and nonwhites in the U.S., is suggestive that the importance of alcohol policy in violence prevention has been overlooked. Other evidence is beginning to accumulate that alcohol policy can have direct effects on rates of violence (Parker, 1997; Parker and Rebhun, 1995; Parker, 1995; Alaniz et al, 1998). Although the current study shows that alcohol consumption is leading rates of homicide downward, and that there may be many other reasons in addition to declining alcohol consumption that explain this trend, an examination of the history of homicide over the last 60 years that is displayed in Figure 1 demonstrates the fallacy of complacency. What is encouraging about these findings and others emerging in the literature is that if alcohol is indeed one of the cause of homicide and violence, we can develop some preventative leverage by taking this fact into account and designing policies that allow communities and states to more effectively regulate alcohol with an additional payoff of additional prevention and control of violence.

FIGURE 1: ALCOHOL AND HOMICIDE, 1934-1995
TOTAL CONSUMPTION (4X) PER ADULT

HOMICIDES PER 100,000

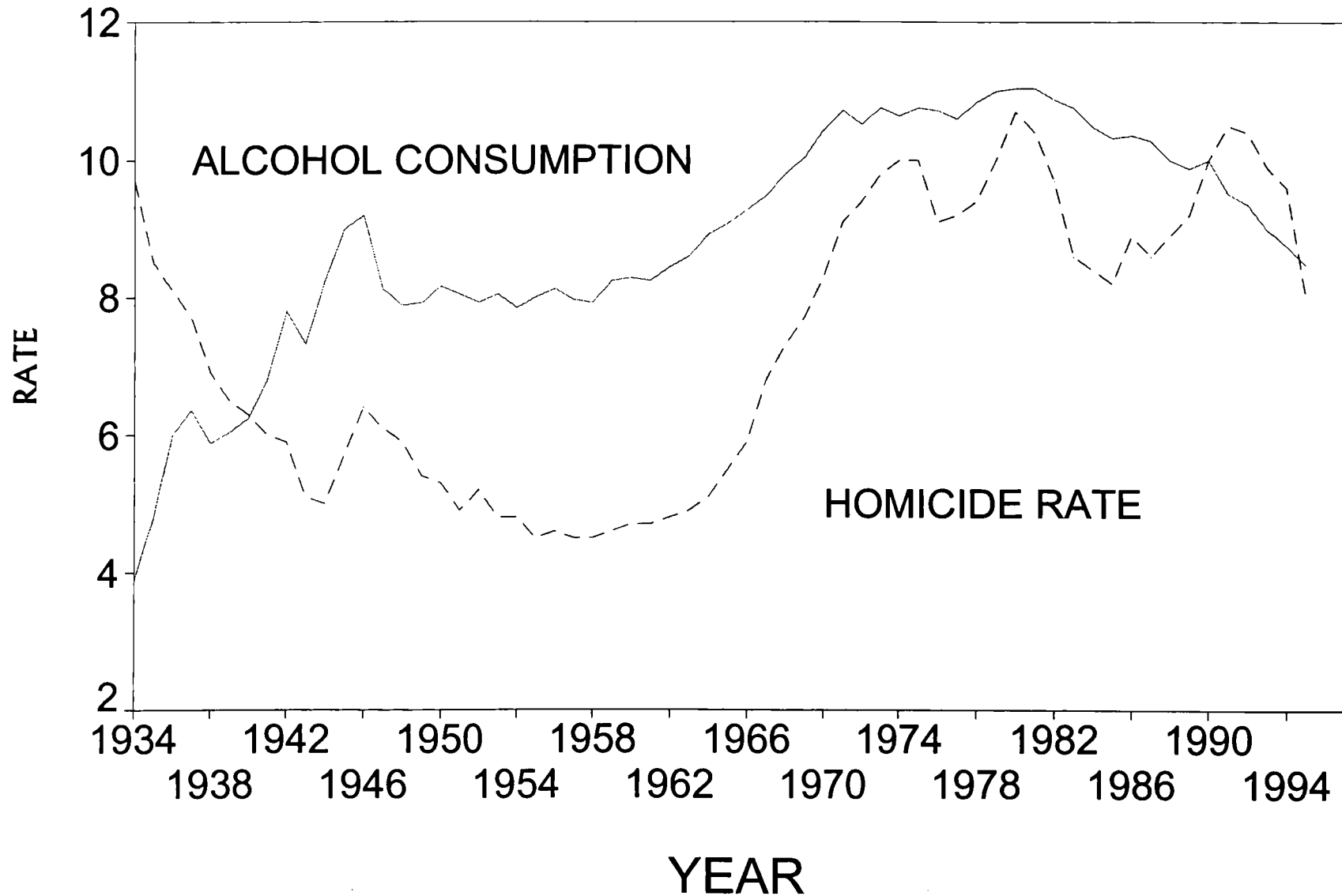


FIGURE 2: HOMICIDE RATES BY RACE, 1934-1995
NONWHITE HOMICIDE; 4X WHITE HOMICIDE

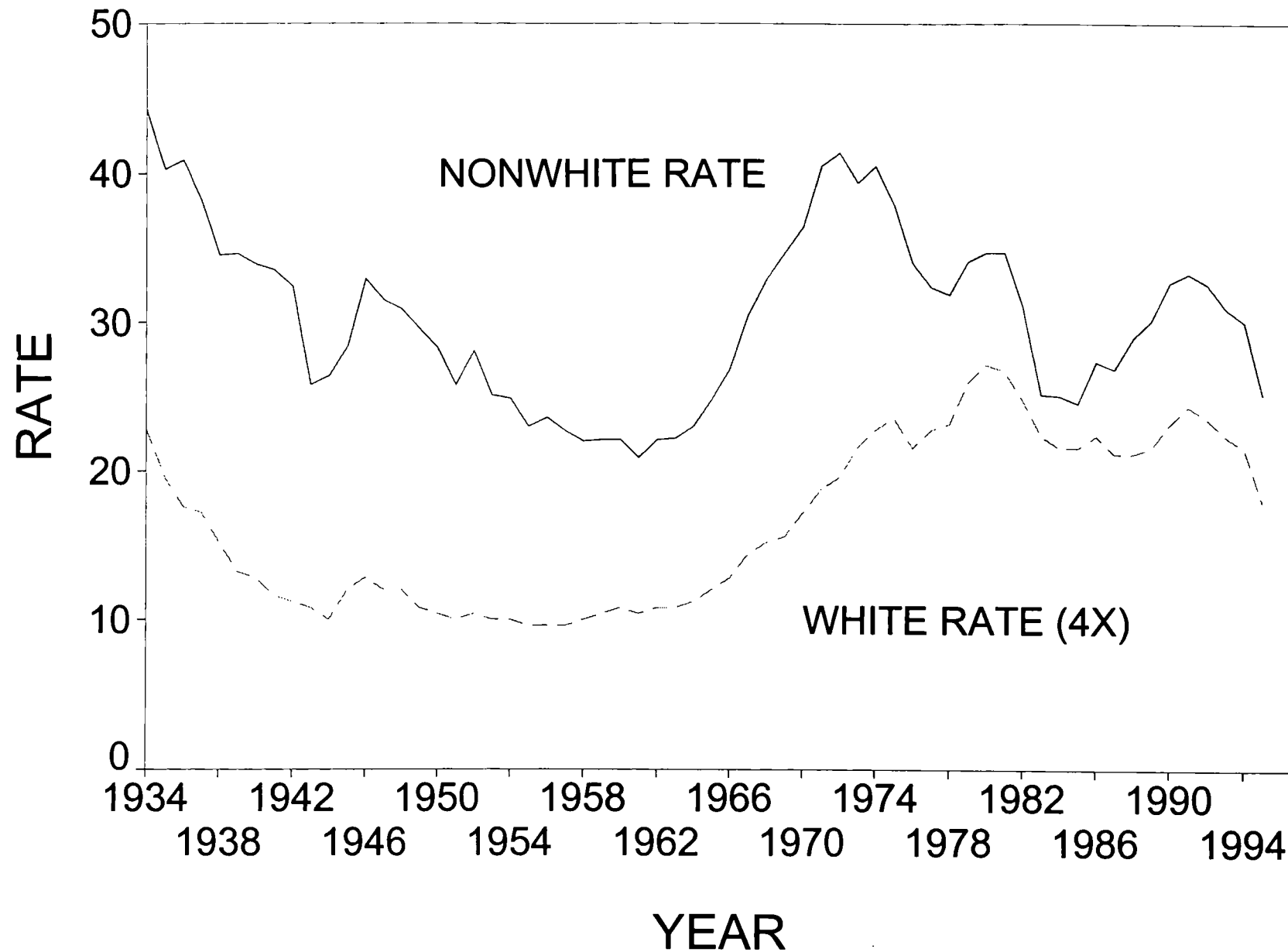


**FIGURE 3: ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION
BY BEVERAGE TYPE**

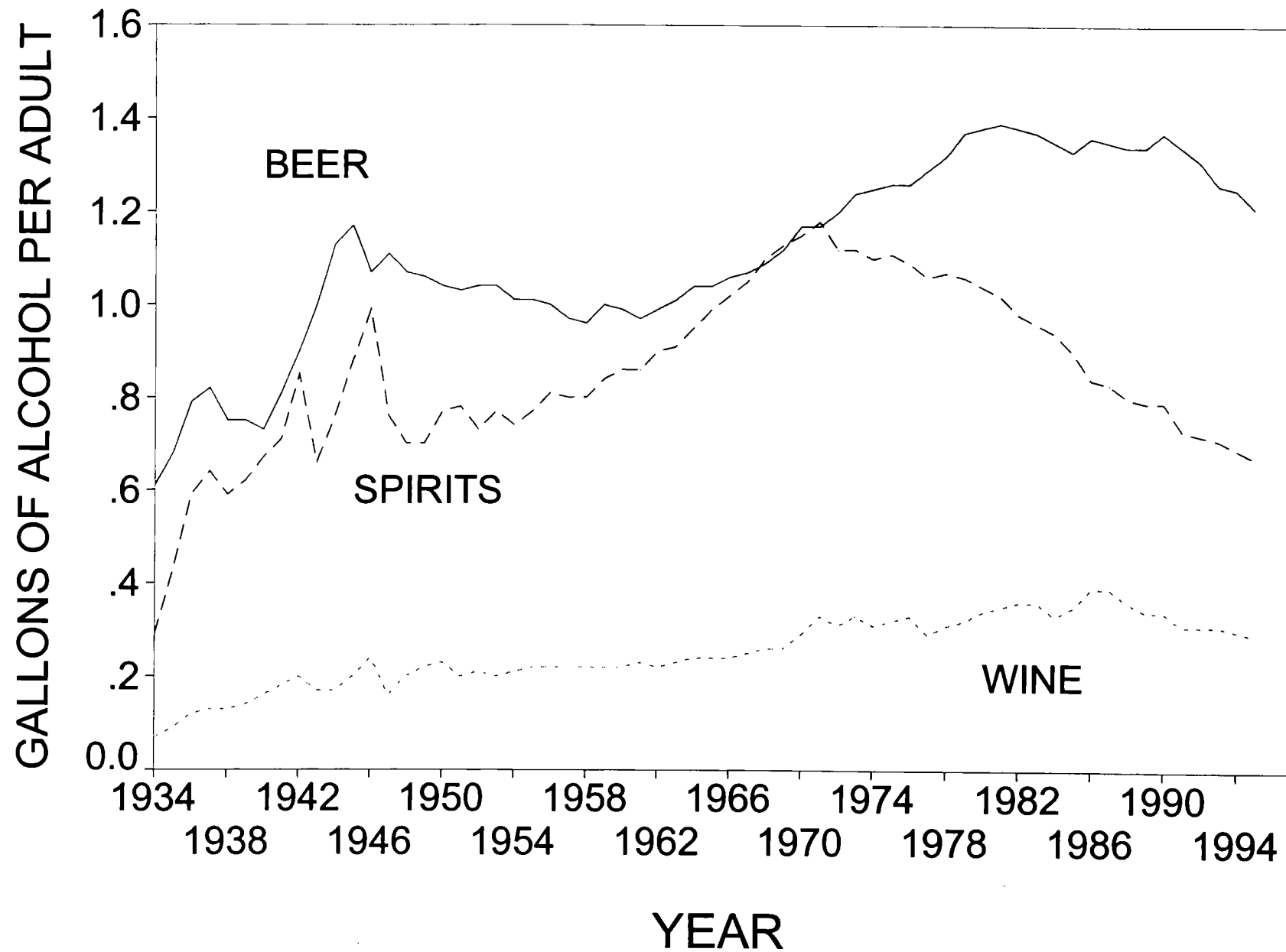


Table 1: Vector ARMA Analysis, White Homicide: Identification and Estimation Phase

Cross Correlation Summary

Auto Regression Summary

IDENTIFICATION

Lags 1-2: 15 of 72 significant

Lag 1: Chi Square = 156.69

Lags 3-4: 12 of 72 significant

Lag 2: Chi Square = 61.65

Lags 5-6: 16 of 72 significant

Lag 3: Chi Square = 58.22

Lags 7-8: 13 of 72 significant

Lag 4: Chi Square = 57.56

Lags are years; Chi Square significance levels: .05 = 52.6; .01 = 57.9

AR (1,2) Model

Lags 1-2: 7 of 72 significant

Lag 1: Chi Square = 40.87

Lags 3-4: 12 of 72 Significant

Lag 2: Chi Square = 60.44

Lags 5-6: 4 of 72 significant

Lag 3: Chi Square = 37.75

Lags 7-8: 2 of 72 significant

Lag 4: Chi Square = 58.87

Lags are years; Chi Square significance levels: .05 = 52.6; .01 = 57.9

Table 2: Vector ARMA Analysis, Non White Homicide: Identification and Estimation Phase

Cross Correlation Summary

Auto Regression Summary

IDENTIFICATION

Lags 1-2: 8 of 72 significant

Lag 1: Chi Square = 145.86

Lags 3-4: 9 of 72 significant

Lag 2: Chi Square = 78.72

Lags 5-6: 10 of 72 significant

Lag 3: Chi Square = 62.58

Lags 7-8: 7 of 72 significant

Lag 4: Chi Square = 60.62

Lags are years; Chi Square significance levels: .05 = 52.6; .01 = 57.9

AR (1,2), MA (2) Model

Lags 1-2: 7 of 72 significant

Lag 1: Chi Square = 61.49

Lags 3-4: 9 of 72 Significant

Lag 2: Chi Square = 55.00

Lags 5-6: 4 of 72 significant

Lag 3: Chi Square = 59.99

Lags 7-8: 1 of 72 significant

Lag 4: Chi Square = 53.64

Lags are years; Chi Square significance levels: .05 = 52.6; .01 = 57.9

Table 3: Vector ARMA Model of White Homicide: AR (1,2)

AR (1)	<u>Effect</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>T Value</u>
<u>Variable</u>			
Per Capita Earnings	.330	.115	2.87 *
White Infant Mortality	---	---	---
Wine Consumption	-.436	.074	5.89 *
Spirits Consumption	.487	.100	4.87 *
Percent Young Males	.492	.393	1.25

AR (2)	<u>Effect</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>T Value</u>
<u>Variable</u>			
Per Capita Earnings	---	---	---
White Infant Mortality	.360	.223	1.61
Wine Consumption	-.180	.082	2.20 *
Spirits Consumption	-.070	.085	0.82
Percent Young Males	---	---	---

Table 4: Vector ARMA Model of Non White Homicide: AR (1,2) MA (2)

AR (1)	<u>Effect</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>T Value</u>
<u>Variable</u>			
Transfer Payments	-.084	0.46	1.83
White Infant Mortality	-.021	.170	0.12
Wine Consumption	---	---	---
Beer Consumption	---	---	---
Percent Young Males	-.568	.641	0.89
AR (2)			
<u>Variable</u>	<u>Effect</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>T Value</u>
Transfer Payments	---	---	---
White Infant Mortality	---	---	---
Wine Consumption	---	---	---
Beer Consumption	---	---	---
Percent Young Males	---	---	---
MA (2)			
<u>Variable</u>	<u>Effect</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>T Value</u>
Transfer Payments	---	---	---
White Infant Mortality	-.235	.150	1.57
Wine Consumption	.116	.077	1.51
Beer Consumption	.525	.178	2.95 *
Percent Young Males	---	---	---

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ASYMMETRICAL CAUSATION AND CRIMINAL DESISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

We argue that theory and research on desistance from crime will advance both policy and scientific goals. Although etiological studies may yield critical tests of theory, they often suggest unworkable policy interventions. Neither the researcher nor the state has the ethical or constitutional license to alter, say, the personality, parental background, or associates of "at risk" or "predelinquent" youth who have yet to violate the law.

Desistance researchers, in contrast, have a more legitimate and expansive license to intervene: they can provide or deny truly exogenous treatments and concentrate resources on those likely to benefit from them. Studies of desistance—from crime, substance use, welfare receipt, and other phenomena—may therefore prove a useful policy guide. Yet we also need theories of desistance, since manipulating the conditions which give rise to a phenomenon is unlikely to curb the phenomenon. To the extent that such asymmetrical causation applies to crime, etiological theories must be modified to explain desistance. We discuss early desistance models, recent advances in developmental and life-course conceptions of crime, and the debate over criminal careers and the age-crime curve. We then offer some suggestions for promising new directions in desistance research.

ASYMMETRICAL CAUSATION AND CRIMINAL DESISTANCE

Although criminologists have long been concerned with desistance or cessation from crime (Glueck and Glueck 1930; 1937; Sutherland 1939), tests of theory are typically based on etiological investigations (for exceptions, see Meisenhelder 1977; 1982; Shover and Thompson 1992; Pezzin 1995). Desistance studies, in contrast, have historically been used for program evaluations, undertaken by professionals in social work, clinical psychology, and corrections. We argue that theory and research on desistance is absolutely critical to advancing scientific and policy goals. We do not attempt to break new theoretical or empirical ground in this paper, but instead present a systematic explication of the argument for desistance research.

The Growing Universe of Potential Desisters

Though ex-offenders are socially marginalized in America they are no longer a statistically marginal group. As of December 31, 1996, American State and federal prisons held 1,182,169 prisoners, with over 500,000 additional inmates held in local jails (Mumola and Beck 1997). Despite recent increases in mandatory minimum and mandatory life sentences, almost all of these prisoners will eventually rejoin civil society (Irwin and Austin 1994). Each year, several hundred thousand releasees pour into the general population (U.S. Department of Justice 1996), with

almost 400,000 leaving parole annually. Some will resume crime and others will desist from crime—they will temporarily or permanently cease offending.

Despite a longstanding concern within the discipline, criminologists today devote relatively little attention to deriving theoretical understanding of the desistance process. This is because criminological theory and research are primarily concerned with questions of etiology, or the causes of crime. Discipline-based criminologists such as sociologists, psychologists, and economists have focused their attention on etiological research addressing individual involvement in crime or community crime rates. Unfortunately, the study of these phenomena is conceptually complex, fraught with daunting methodological barriers, and in many (though not all) ways, without policy relevance. Desistance research may prove more rewarding for theory and policy, in part because it is more manageable conceptually and methodologically.

In this paper, we are less concerned with why people commit crime than with the conditions promoting social reintegration and desistance from crime. We make the following assertions: (1) that the causes of desistance likely differ from the causes of crime; (2) that knowledge of the true causes of desistance will be easier to obtain than knowledge of the true causes of crime; and, (3) that it will be possible to translate scientific knowledge about desistance into specific policy interventions. We begin

with a general discussion of crime and causality, then present the case for and against desistance research.

CAUSAL ASYMMETRY, CRIME, AND DESISTANCE

As social scientists researching crime and conformity, we often set out to make causal inferences. Temporal order, statistical association, and lack of spuriousness are generally accepted as minimal criteria for establishing causality in the social sciences (Lazarsfeld 1959; Hirschi and Selvin 1967; but see Marini and Singer 1988 and Price 1992 on temporal order), though these standards are rarely approached in practice. In the study of delinquency, for example, we continue to debate the putative causes: are delinquent friends causes or consequences of involvement in crime? Does family alienation precede or follow from one's involvement with delinquent peers? Definitive answers to such questions are elusive because of both conceptual confusion over the meaning of causality and operational difficulties implementing critical tests of theoretical propositions.

Crime, Desistance, and the Rubin/Holland Causal Model

Rubin (1974) and Holland (1986) offer a statistical model of causal inference that lays bare the difficulties in establishing causation in criminology. The Rubin/Holland model highlights the difficulties in establishing the causes of crime and illustrates the potential for desistance research. The central lesson of the Rubin/Holland model is to seek the effects of manipulable causes rather than to trace the causes of observed effects. They arrive at this conclusion in the following manner:

Holland (1986) defines a true causal effect of some factor **t** on response variable **Y** for individual unit **u** as

$$Y_t(u) - Y_c(u)$$

This difference implies that the effect of any cause **t** must always be assessed in relation to some other cause, the counterfactual condition *not-t* or **c**. The fundamental problem of causal inference, in criminological research as elsewhere, is that it is *impossible* to observe the value of **Y_t(u)** and **Y_c(u)** on the same individual person or "unit." If a respondent is employed at age 15 and commits delinquency at age 16, for example, we cannot determine whether she *would have* committed delinquency had she not been working. Because we can only observe one condition per unit, we face a missing data problem for the counter-factual condition. Holland (1986) distinguishes between scientific and statistical solutions to this problem. Both have been applied in criminological research.

Scientific Solutions. Among the scientific solutions, one can attempt to assure (or simply assume) that each individual unit is identical (assuming *unit homogeneity*) and submit unit one to treatment **t** and unit two to treatment **c**. If so, then the true causal effect is easily obtained as:

$$Y_t(u_1) - Y_c(u_2)$$

Alternatively, if it is reasonable to believe that prior exposure does not affect subsequent response, the scientist could expose the *same* unit to each treatment in succession (assuming *temporal stability* and *causal transience*).

$$Y_{t(\text{time } 2)}(u_1) - Y_{c(\text{time } 1)}(u_1)$$

Although such assumptions may be reasonable in laboratory work, they are rarely justified in criminological research: humans are not identical in all relevant respects, and human responses are neither constant over time nor unaffected by previous exposures. To continue the previous example, we cannot assume that a working teen is identical in all relevant respects to a non-working teen. Nor can we assume that exposure to work in eighth grade will have the same effects as exposure to work in tenth grade, or, for that matter, that working in eighth grade will not affect one's response to non-work in tenth grade. Therefore, as social scientists we must often rely on a statistical solution to the inference problem.

Statistical Solutions. The Rubin/Holland statistical solution is to find the expected value (**E**) of the *average* causal effect **T**, of **t** (relative to **c**) over a population **U**, or

$$E(Y_t - Y_c) = T$$

which can be expressed as

$$T = E(Y_t) - E(Y_c)$$

To continue the earlier example, one could deviate the average number of crimes (or the proportion committing a crime) among workers from the average number of crimes among non-workers. This replaces the unobservable causal effect of **t** on a specific unit with an estimate of the average causal effect of **t** over a population of units. This approach breaks down in practice, however, because of the failure of an important assumption.

Mean Independence. For the statistical solution to hold, we must assume *mean independence*: the mean values on **Y** for the **t** group and the **c** group must be independent of the selection or assignment mechanism (**S**) that determines whether **Y_t** or **Y_c** is observed for any given unit. In general, mean independence fails in the social sciences and the observed

average treatment effect $T_{(obs)}$ is not equivalent to the true treatment effect T^1

$$T_{(obs)} = E(Y_t | S=t) - E(Y_c | S=c)$$

The mean independence assumption for groups is thus analogous to the unit homogeneity assumption for units. Both allow the comparison of observed quantities with latent or unobserved quantities. Only when Y_t and Y_c are both mean independent of S , however, does

$$E(Y_t) = E(Y_t | S=t) \quad \text{and} \quad E(Y_c) = E(Y_c | S=c)$$

So that

$$T = T_{(obs)} = E(Y_t) - E(Y_c)$$

The two conditional means $E(Y_t | S=t)$ and $E(Y_c | S=c)$ must be independent for them both to equal the unconditional mean $E(Y_t)$.² If the selection

¹ Holland distinguishes between a "prima facie" cause T_{pf} and the true average causal effect T .

² This point becomes clear when expressed in terms of conditional probabilities. The expected value for the treatment group is composed of two parts, the mean if assigned to treatment and the mean if assigned to control. The first quantity is the product of the expected value of the mean for the treatment group and the probability of selection into that group. The second quantity is the unobserved mean for the counterfactual (the mean the controls would have had, were they assigned to treatment) multiplied by the probability of selection into the counterfactual, or control status.

$$E(Y_t) = E(Y_t | S=t)P(S=t) + E(Y_c | S=c)P(S=c)$$

Similarly, the expected value for the control group is:

$$E(Y_c) = E(Y_c | S=c)P(S=c) + E(Y_t | S=t)P(S=t)$$

The expected values for both treatment and control groups are thus weighted averages of the observed and counterfactual conditions (the latter shown in italics). By substituting these quantities into the expression $T = E(Y_t) - E(Y_c)$, we obtain

mechanism **S** is randomized assignment to employment, this is a reasonable assumption for the work and crime example above. If **S** is *self-selection*, however, this assumption is invalid: those that self-select into employment are likely to have lower crime means than those that self-select out of employment. If selection is partially determined by “ambition” and ambition is associated with crime, for example, the conditional distributions are unequal and the mean independence assumption breaks down. This is simply one important variant of the more general omitted variable problem that biases parameter estimates. Criminology is particularly vulnerable to violations of mean independence, however, because the selection processes into levels of our independent and dependent variables are so poorly understood.

Selection Mechanisms and Strong Ignorability. When researchers cannot control the assignment mechanism (**S**), as in observational studies of delinquency, causal inference requires “strong ignorability” to assure

$$T = E(Y_t | S=t)P(S=t) + [E(Y_t | S=c)P(S=c)] - E(Y_c | S=c)P(S=c) - [E(Y_c | S=t)P(S=t)]$$

Of course, we only observe Y_t when a unit selects into the treatment condition and we only observe Y_c when a unit selects into the control condition, computing $T_{(obs)}$ as follows:

$$T_{(obs)} = E(Y_t | S=t) - E(Y_c | S=c)$$

To determine the true rather than the observed causal effect, we need information about the unknown (and unknowable) counterfactual conditions. If the mean of Y is independent of the assignment mechanism S , however, then

$$E(Y_t | S=t) = E(Y_t | S=c) = E(Y_t) \text{ and } E(Y_c | S=c) = E(Y_c | S=t) = E(Y_c) ,$$

so that

$$T = T_{(obs)} = E(Y_t) - E(Y_c)$$

mean independence (Rubin 1977; Rosenbaum 1984). For a selection mechanism to be strongly ignorable: (1) all factors related to both the treatment and non-treatment condition must be included as covariates; (2) all units must have a non-zero probability of assignment to treatment and non-treatment conditions; and, (3) a unit's response to treatment must not be affected by either the assignment mechanism or the treatments other units receive (Berk 1988). These conditions require much more exhaustive data and much more painstaking analysis than are usually conducted in etiological studies of crime and delinquency. *Each* variable of causal interest must be fastidiously examined. In the example above, we would have to pay at least as much attention to the process by which young people find jobs as we would to the effects of jobs on crime. We would also need theory and data regarding factors such as peer associates, success or failure in school, parental supervision, and myriad other indicators likely to be related to both processes. In sum, Berk's observation that strong ignorability may be a "pipe dream" in observational research is particularly true for the study of crime (Berk 1988:165).

THE MODEL'S IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND POLICY ON CRIME

To determine causality, then, the model requires at minimum a random or strongly ignorable assignment mechanism and factors that can (at least in principle) be manipulated. We argue that these conditions are unlikely to hold in etiological research on crime. In desistance analysis, however, both random selection mechanisms and manipulable interventions are much more feasible: a researcher can randomly assign to (or deny from) offenders a range of treatment modalities—a range of putative causes. She then can observe the effects of these causes relative to some other cause, presumably assignment to a control condition.

Disadvantages of Non-Experimental Etiological Research

In nonexperimental social research, we typically attempt to assure mean independence using covariate adjustment for factors likely to be related to both the putative cause and the selection process. As Sobel (1996:367) points out, if researchers can “name and measure the covariates that account for assignment” to a condition, then its conditional average effects are estimable from the data. Unfortunately, we often do not know which factors must be statistically controlled to render the selection mechanism strongly ignorable. Even when we can identify such variables, they are subject to measurement error. Until we have much more refined conceptual models of selection into our *independent*

variables, a safer alternative is to manipulate them as part of the research design.

As regards the *dependent* variables, there remains confusion over the appropriate domain of behavior in etiological research: how do we compare studies of involvement in minor crime with those investigating more serious, sustained, or socially harmful criminal behavior? How can we make causal interpretations when studies fail to distinguish entrance from continuation in crime, particularly since entrance appears to be virtually universal? The primary problem is one of endogeneity – isolating the true effects of factors that cannot be manipulated by the researcher.

Accounting for Selection. How can criminologists account for the selection mechanism and make causal interpretations when etiological studies of crime are beset by endogeneity? Perhaps the most promising approach is to examine within-person changes in offending (see, e.g., Horney, Osgood, and Marshall 1996). Still, even models that purport to control for individual differences can only account for *stable* within-unit differences. For example, it is common in econometrics to adjust for unobserved heterogeneity in pooled time-series analysis with fixed-effects models in which each variable is expressed as a deviation from its mean value. Unfortunately, such estimators are inappropriate when crime is not exogenously determined or a reciprocal causal relationship is suspected (Johnson 1994). If the past level of the dependent variable (crime) has a

causal effect on subsequent levels of the independent variable (employment), this violates the assumption of "strict exogeneity" (Keane and Runkel 1992; Johnson 1994:1071). Therefore, though good longitudinal data and analytic techniques enable researchers to statistically control for unmeasured stable differences, these models only correct for selectivity and omitted variable biases to the extent that the relevant unobservables are person-specific and fixed over time.

Manipulable Treatments. Although etiological studies have led to elegant tests of criminological theory (see, e.g., Matsueda 1982; Liska and Reed 1985; Hagan, Simpson, and Gillis 1987), their implications suggest interventions that are often unworkable for public policy. Neither the researcher nor the state has the ethical or constitutional license to alter, say, the personality, parental background, neighborhood, or associates of youth identified as "predelinquent" who have yet to violate the law (Glueck and Glueck 1972). In light of these problems, programs aiming to prevent the onset of delinquency have been excoriated in the evaluation literature (Lundman 1994: 245).³ There are few strong treatments that a researcher can administer in good conscience, leaving little room for bold experimentation among such a vulnerable population. Even well-intentioned efforts to increase opportunities for youth in high-risk groups

³ One otherwise evenhanded review of programs to prevent or control delinquency concludes that "Prevention projects don't work and they waste money, violate the rights of

may have unintended stigmatizing consequences (Becker 1963; U.S. Department of Labor 1992).

Causal Asymmetry. Etiological research has provided many well-established empirical generalizations, such as the relation between law violation and sex, age, urban residence, mobility, parental attachment, school success, and moral beliefs. Unfortunately, these findings do not translate neatly into a set of causal maxims or concrete policy prescriptions to prevent the onset of delinquency or crime. Moreover, we have little reason to believe that manipulating these factors will *alter* offending behavior once it has begun. The failure of programs as wide-ranging as family therapy, remedial education, reference group alteration, and psychological counseling suggests that either the presumed cause is misidentified or that symmetrical causation does not apply. Of course, the failure of particular policies does not rule out the possibility that more intensive, more costly, more focused, or more invasive treatments may indeed have the intended prophylactic result. Therefore, we must continue seeking innovative and creative policy interventions. This paper argues, however, that we must simultaneously begin a more systematic investigation of the causes of desistance.

juveniles and their families, inspire bizarre suggestions and programs, and fail to affect the known correlates of urban delinquency" (Lundman 1994: 245).

Manipulating Initial Conditions. We currently lack the information to determine whether the causes of crime and desistance are symmetrical. The situation is analogous to the apparent temporal asymmetry in radiative phenomena observed by Popper (1956): we understand why a stone tossed into a still pond will produce outgoing concentric waves on the water's surface. Yet it would strike us as remarkable to witness a confluence of *incoming* concentric waves arriving at just the right moment to launch a stone out of the pond and into one's hand. This could signal some asymmetry in the laws of thermodynamics *or* it could simply reflect our relative capacity to manipulate the initial conditions that give rise to each phenomenon. That is, in the existing world it is much easier to toss a rock into a pond than to engineer the sort of elaborate experiment necessary to reverse the process (Price 1992). For the study of crime and desistance, the situation is analogous: we can manipulate the conditions likely to engender desistance much more easily than the conditions likely to cause crime.

Advantages of Desistance Analysis

Desistance studies—of drug use, welfare receipt, and other phenomena in addition to crime—are much better situated to guide social policy than etiological studies. The primary advantage of desistance

analysis stems from the ability to randomly assign a target group to a truly exogenous treatment. Experimental evaluations examining desistance or recidivism outcomes often provide results that directly translate into policy prescriptions. Moreover, when interventions are tightly linked to theory, desistance analysis can provide the sort of critical tests of criminological theory that have eluded etiological researchers.

Temporal Order. Why is this best accomplished in a study of desistance? First, and perhaps most importantly, the desistance researcher works in concert with time rather than against it. Although twentieth-century physics has challenged traditional conceptions of temporal order in causality (Price 1992), the arrow of causation typically remains aligned with the arrow of time in the social sciences. In terms of the Rubin/Holland model, desistance research seeks the effects of manipulable causes -- interventions in the hands of the researcher -- rather than seeking to reconstruct the putative causes of observed effects. Too often, criminological researchers attempt to enumerate *all* possible causes of crime in a fruitless attempt to statistically deconstruct naturally occurring assignment mechanisms. By "controlling for" myriad causes, the argument goes, researchers hope to render selection strongly ignorable and get clean estimates of all of them. Instead, we believe with Holland (1986) and Sobel (1996:373) that we should carefully examine the effect of *particular* causes by consciously manipulating them.

A License to Intervene. The difficulties in etiological research are a matter of both logical and pragmatic considerations – of both causal sequencing and the authority to act. Where and how (and *when*) can we best craft and apply an intervention so that we may examine its consequences? Our ability to isolate the true causal effect of critical etiological factors such as parents, schools, and neighborhoods is constrained by our inability to manipulate the selection mechanisms guiding their allocation. For both social scientific research and for policy purposes, manipulation of these factors is unacceptably invasive in a democratic society. The researcher conducting a desistance study has a more legitimate and expansive *license to intervene* in the lives of participants. This means that she can provide, or perhaps more importantly, deny a particular program to a treatment and a control group. Although constitutional and ethical concerns do not disappear in desistance programs, participants have all been convicted of crimes, or in the case of juveniles, adjudicated delinquent. We may certainly provide or deny employment, for example. Although we do not advocate random assignment to marriage, we can certainly manipulate causal interventions that are designed to enhance marital quality or stability through financial, psychological, or behavioral counseling and support.

Focusing Interventions on Target Groups. Finally, desistance strategies are better able to concentrate resources on specific target groups likely to benefit from them. Prevention programs, in contrast, must cast a much wider net that is liable to include a large number of non-offenders (or offenders who only commit trivial offenses). For policy, this means that programs designed to foster desistance may bring a greater return to investments in released offenders – a greater potential to reduce the social harm associated with recidivism. For scientific purposes, this means that desistance analysis offers potentially greater efficiencies in design and statistical analysis.

Real and Imagined Disadvantages of Desistance Analysis

Devising Theoretically Relevant Interventions. In our view, the major weakness in existing desistance research has been the lack of theoretically derived interventions. Typically researchers assess the effects of a program, such as juvenile probation, without sufficient attention to the *mechanisms* thought to link that program with criminal behavior. Such a program could be based on deterrence theory, in which supervision and sanctions play a large role. Alternatively, it could be based on modeling or learning theory, in which the affective ties between the caseworker and the probationer are emphasized. Moreover,

policymakers and practitioners generally prefer to individualize rather than standardize treatments -- to do whatever appears to work without regard to theory (Rothman 1980). The result of such interventions is often uninterpretable. It is also difficult, though not impossible, to make valid inferences about the effects of mediating social-psychological processes that occur after randomization (Sobel 1996:373). Despite these barriers, it is certainly possible to structure theoretically derived interventions and to draw distinctions between models founded on theories as disparate as the labeling, deterrence, differential association, and social control traditions.

External Validity. The primary weakness of previous desistance analyses for policy purposes has been external validity or generalizability. Many interventions and evaluations have been based on pilot programs that drew subjects from rather narrow officially-defined offender subgroups, such as heroin users in New York City (e.g. Friedman 1978). Nevertheless, this difficulty is neither unique to nor inherent in investigations of desistance. A well-designed employment program and a long-term follow-up on a national probability sample of prison releasees, for example, is certainly a viable research project. The results of this type of study would generalize to a broad population of interest and could offer specific policy recommendations.

THEORY AND RESEARCH ON DESISTANCE

Early Desistance Models

We are not the first to make these points: criminologists have long suspected that the causes of crime and the causes of desistance may be asymmetrical. In tracing the history of theory and research on desistance, the first task is to arrive at a meaningful definition. The concept has a long lineage in criminology, though few theorists or researchers used the term until the 1970s (Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin 1972: 44). Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck spoke of "maturation," "cessation," or "reformation" as a process quite different from the genesis of delinquency or criminality (1930: 257; 1937: 98). Sutherland used the term "reformation" as well, both as a putative justification for punishment (1939: 357) and as a constructive process of character reorganization. The latter process, Sutherland argued, could be explained by his differential association theory of crime and his group conflict theory of the criminal code. Reformation for Sutherland results when the offender assimilates the values and culture of the group responsible for the laws, or when that group "assimilates the criminal" (1939: 364).

Though David Matza's (1964) theory of delinquency and drift was never intended to explain the behavior of the "compulsive or committed delinquent," much less the adult criminal, it provides conceptual tools

that generalize to the study of desistance among these groups (1964: 30).

"Maturational reform," Matza's (1964) term for the age-graded desistance process, connotes a life-course explanation of crime and desistance.

Matza's "drift" theory is founded on an episodic view of crime:

"delinquency is a status and delinquents are incumbents who *intermittently* act out a role" (1964: 26). Most delinquent youth spend long periods of time in a state of desistance that is only occasionally punctuated by delinquent activities. Over time, with age and increasing responsibilities, most will eventually enter a permanent state of desistance (see, e.g., Sampson and Laub 1994).

More recently new models of desistance have been developed based on economic choice (e.g. Grogger 1994; Pezzin 1995), or choice plus a combination of sociological and social-psychological indicators (Clarke and Cornish 1985; Cusson and Pinsonneault 1986; Shover and Thompson 1992). In these models, situational factors such as negative criminal experiences and life events such as marriage cause offenders to re-evaluate their readiness to commit crime. Although these theories are usually tested with observational data, many of the mechanisms might easily be translated into manipulable interventions such as financial aid to releasees.

The Career Paradigm

Today, the concept of desistance from crime is most commonly associated with the study of "chronic offenders" (Wolfgang, Figlio and Sellin 1972; Tracy, Wolfgang, and Figlio 1985), "career criminals," and the criminal career perspective more generally (see, e.g., Blumstein, Cohen, and Farrington 1988). The career paradigm suggests that criminal activities follow distinct patterns and introduces concepts such as "age of onset," "participation," and "desistance" to describe these patterns (see, e.g., Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, and Visher 1986).

The career concept has provoked a rancorous debate surrounding desistance. As Wolfgang et al. acknowledge (1972) and Hirschi and Gottfredson (1983) criticize, the concept of desistance appears to imply a criminal career. For Hirschi and Gottfredson, the term "career" connotes specialization in particular offenses and escalation in offense severity over time. Since empirical research generally reveals versatility rather than specialization in offending (Hindelang 1971; Klein 1984; but see Lynam 1997) and decreasing severity rather than escalation with age (Glueck and Glueck 1940), Hirschi, Gottfredson, and other critics of the paradigm argue that no new insights are gained by conceiving of crime as a career. Proponents of the career perspective, in contrast, maintain that no escalation in seriousness or specialization is implied by the term "career" and that the predictors of participation differ empirically from the

predictors of onset and desistance (Blumstein, Cohen, and Farrington 1988).

Defining Desistance

This paper does not engage the criminal career debate, except insofar as it bears on the question of symmetric causation. If crime is conceptualized as a social event in the life course (Hagan and Palloni 1988), desistance can be conceptualized in a number of ways: (1) as simple non-crime, a behavioral state of indeterminate duration characterized by the absence of criminal events; (2) as non-crime conditional on prior commission of crime (e.g. one must first offend in order to desist); or, (3) as non-crime forever, a more-or-less permanent behavioral state characterized by the absence of criminal events. In this paper we have been primarily concerned with the latter two conceptions of desistance.

Future Desistance Analysis: Randomized Experimentation and Comparative Work

We have already learned a great deal from the few controlled experiments conducted with ex-offenders (e.g. Lenihan 1976; Rossi, Berk

and Lenihan 1980; Piliavin and Gartner 1981), though such studies have historically examined rather circumscribed economic questions. To unravel the causes of desistance, further randomized experimentation for both juvenile and adult offenders is crucial. We therefore conclude on a programmatic note. We need not think of desistance programs as narrowly limited to existing correctional practices or evaluation research at the individual level. Desistance research can reasonably examine a diverse range of questions at the situational, group, or even the societal level of analysis.

Comparative research on desistance is prompted by empirical differences across nations in factors such as the relation between age and desistance. In Japan, for example, the peak age of offending is earlier in adolescence and the decline in the late teen years is steeper than in the United States (Harada 1995). The rationale for comparative analysis stems from potential American exceptionalism with regard to deviant behavior. The United States is clearly the most punitive of the advanced Western societies (Currie 1985; Reichel 1994; Sutton 1996), with an incarceration rate that exceeds Germany's rate by a factor of five (Savelsberg 1994) and Japan's rate by a factor of eight (Correction Bureau 1990). This creates disproportionately large officially-defined deviant populations. Yet the United States lacks institutional mechanisms for integrating delinquents and reintegrating adult offenders into the social and economic fabric of

civil society (Braithwaite 1989). Many attribute Japan's low crime rates to cultural traditions of shaming and apology (Braithwaite 1989), but quite apart from Japanese culture, a more rationalized school-to-work transition facilitates the integration of youth into adult society (Rosenbaum, Kariya, Settersten, and Maier 1990). Experimental (or quasi-experimental) pilot programs in U.S. communities that are modeled on German or Japanese structures might better isolate their causal effects, as well as the residual effects of enduring cultural differences. Comparative analysis may also qualify, extend, or refine generalizations based on the American case.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper has been to examine desistance among criminal offenders, rather than to plumb the limits of desistance research more generally. We believe that the same principles underlying desistance research on crime are likely to hold true for a wide range of deviant role-exits (Ebaugh 1988), such as substance use, homelessness, welfare receipt, perhaps even social-physiological phenomena such as eating disorders.

We have motivated this discussion of desistance with the Rubin (1974)/Holland (1986) causal model to highlight the extraordinary barriers

to causal inference in etiological investigations. We believe it is virtually impossible to assure mean independence in observational work on the causes of crime, despite the often brilliant methodological work-arounds devised by criminologists. If mean independence fails and we cannot account for selection into levels of our most critical independent variables, then the assumption of “strong ignorability” also fails. Under these conditions, any statistical solution to the fundamental problem of causal inference is unwarranted. Thus, we remain skeptical of the findings of etiological investigations.

As an alternative, we outline a case for increased theoretical and empirical work on the problem of cessation or desistance from crime. Desistance research better accounts for selectivity because the treatment is more often within the hands of the researcher. Moreover, we have greater ethical and constitutional license to intervene among admitted or convicted offenders and are thus able to administer stronger treatments to target groups. Among the challenges to learning more from desistance research are devising theoretically meaningful interventions and expanding and ensuring external validity. Our intent is not to discourage efforts for juveniles, but simply to acknowledge that we currently lack effective technologies for this population. More optimistically, desistance research could offer critical tests of existing theory, the potential for new breakthroughs, and concrete policy guidance.

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Social Institutions and the Crime "Bust" of the 1990s*

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Social Institutions and the Crime "Bust" of the 1990s

I. Introduction

While scarcely visible behind the wave of media attention devoted to crime, beginning in the early 1990s, researchers began to observe declining rates in violent and other serious forms of crime in the United States. In this article I begin by evaluating the size of these declines and comparing crime trends in the 1990s to crime trends in the U.S. since World War II. I also examine trends for different crime types and data sources, and for large cities. My review shows that crime rates in the 1990s have dropped rapidly and that declines have been broad gauged, affecting all of the street crimes that are routinely tracked by the two major sources of crime data in the United States. In short, the period from 1990 to 1996 represents the closest thing to a crime bust that the United States has experienced in more than 50 years.

In a recently published book, I argue that changes in the legitimacy of social institutions provides the most promising explanation for the street crime trends observed in America after World War II.¹ In particular, I argue that American crime rates surged in the 1960s as a result of increasing distrust of political institutions, increasing stress produced by economic institutions, and declining strength of family institutions. American society countered this growing legitimacy crisis by

¹ Gary LaFree, Losing Legitimacy: Street Crime and the Decline of Social Institutions in America (1998).

investing more in other institutions, most notably, criminal justice, education and welfare. Stabilization in the legitimacy of political, economic and family institutions, and investments in criminal justice, education and welfare, eventually produced downward pressure on crime rates. In this essay, I consider the applicability of these arguments for the declines in U.S. crime rates that have occurred during the first seven years of the 1990s.

I concentrate here on the group of offenses popularly known as "street crimes." While the term is imprecise, it has generally come to include the familiar crimes of murder, robbery, rape, aggravated assault, burglary and larceny. Glaser calls these crimes "predatory" because they all involve offenders who "prey" on other persons or their property.² He contrasts these offenses with nonpredatory crimes like prostitution and gambling. Predatory crimes are especially worthy of attention because they generally evoke the greatest popular fear and concern. They also draw the most universal condemnation from society. Probably as a consequence of these characteristics, we have more complete information on predatory crimes than on any other crime types.

II. Street Crime Trends in the United States

The characteristics of street crime automatically impose parameters on the number of ways they can be counted. Most basically, street crimes are all similar in that they each

² Glaser, Crime in Our Changing Society 6 (1978).

consist of an offender, a victim, and at least for the crimes that are reported or discovered, police and other legal agents. Generally, these parameters also define the crime data that may be collected: "official" data collected by legal agents, "self report" data collected from offenders, and "victimization" data collected from crime victims. Because self report data are likely to be most reliably collected for the least serious crimes,³ they are of less value for the street crimes examined here, leaving us to rely mostly on either official or victimization data. Moreover, national crime victimization survey data in the United States have only been collected on a systematic annual basis since 1973. In the next section I examine street crime trends from official data and victimization survey data for the 1990s.

A. Street Crime in the 1990s

The most comprehensive official data on street crime in the United States come from the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), collected annually by the Federal Bureau of Investigation since 1930. Table 1 shows rates for the seven street crimes most reliably compiled by the UCR, as well as totals for violent, property and all crimes, for 1990 and 1996.⁴ The percentage

³ Robert O'Brien, Crime and Victimization (1985).

⁴ UCR data includes only murders that are intentional--as opposed to unintentional killings, such as those resulting from negligence. The UCR includes robberies in which property was

change column indicates sizeable decreases in all seven crimes. The greatest percentage declines are for burglary, murder, robbery and motor vehicle theft--all of which registered at least a 20% drop in the first seven years of the 1990s. Percentage declines for rape, aggravated assault and larceny have been somewhat less, but still sizeable. Taken together, these seven crimes logged a 12.7% drop from 1990 to 1996.

Table 1 about here

National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data have been collected annually by the Bureau of Justice Statistics since 1973.⁵ The NCVS includes the same street crimes as the UCR with two exceptions: NCVS data do not report murders, and NCVS data

seized from another person by violence or intimidation. UCR rape cases include crimes of unlawful, nonconsensual sexual intercourse. Aggravated assaults in the UCR include cases in which individuals confront others with the intention of causing them serious physical injury. They are "aggravated" if they are accompanied by a deadly weapon or with an intent to kill, rob or rape. Burglaries in the UCR include cases in which individuals break into someone else's home with the intention of committing a crime; most commonly, theft. Thefts in the UCR refer simply to stealing someone else's property.

⁵ Rand, Lynch and Cantor, Criminal Victimization, 1973-95, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice (1997).

distinguish aggravated and simple assaults. Table 2 shows rates for seven street crimes collected by the NCVS for 1990 and 1996. Although there are substantial differences by crime type, the NCVS data, like the UCR data, show declines in all seven street crimes reported. Declines from the NCVS data are greatest for the three property crimes--all showing more than a 20% drop. Among violent crimes, rape rates show the greatest percentage decline. Simple assaults show the least change, declining by only a little more than 1 percent.

Table 2 about here

To assess how broad-gauged declines in national street crime rates in the 1990s have been, I next examined changes in crime rates for 10 of the nation's largest cities from 1990 to 1995. Using UCR data, I calculated crime rates per 100,000 citizens for the seven crimes reported in Table 1 for Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix and San Diego. Crime rates for 7 crimes in 10 cities produced a total of 69 contrasts between 1990 and 1995.⁶ Of these 69 contrasts, 60 (87.0 %) showed that crime rates had decreased. The size of decreases were typically much greater than the size of increases. For example, from 1990 to 1995, burglary rates declined by 51.0% in Dallas, 45.7% in Houston and 40.7% in San Diego. By contrast, for the one city that recorded increases in

⁶ Data on rape cases were missing for Chicago.

robbery from 1990 to 1995 (Philadelphia), rates increased by 10.2 percent.⁷

For all 7 crimes, a majority of cities reported declining crime rates from 1990 to 1995. Thus, all 10 cities reported declining murder and burglary rates, 9 cities reported declining robbery and motor vehicle theft rates, 8 cities reported declining rape rates, and 7 cities reported declining aggravated assault and larceny rates.

Taken together, data from both the UCR and the NCVS strongly support the conclusion that there have been substantial, broad-based declines in street crime rates during the 1990s. The UCR national data suggest that the declines have been greatest for burglary, murder and robbery while the NCVS data show the largest decreases for motor vehicle theft, burglary and larceny. City-level data from the UCR confirm that declines can also be observed in most cases for the nation's largest cities, especially for murder, robbery, rape, burglary, and motor vehicle theft. In the next section, I consider how the magnitude of the recent crime decreases compares to earlier crime trends in the post-World War II United States.

⁷ The biggest exception to these general trends was for homicide rates in Phoenix. In 1990, with a population of 983,403, Phoenix reported 128 homicide and non-negligent manslaughter cases. In 1995, with a population of 1,085,706, Phoenix reported 214 homicide and non-negligent manslaughter cases--an increase of 51.5%.

B. Putting the Recent Downturns into Context

NCVS data allow us to examine annual trends only from 1973 to 1996. I use UCR data to examine street crime trends from 1946 to 1996.

1. NCVS Data, 1973-1996

Figure 1 shows trends, 1973 to 1996, for the four violent crimes tracked by the NCVS. Trends for these four crimes provide considerable but not total support for the idea of a crime bust during the 1990s. The best case for a rapid decline in the 1990s can be made for rape cases and aggravated assault cases. Rape rates declined by 36.4% from 1991 to 1996 and aggravated assault rates declined by 27.3% from 1993 to 1996. In both cases, these were the steepest declines in the years included in the NCVS data. Similarly, from 1994 to 1996, simple assault rates exhibited the greatest three-year decline (14.5%) since data collection began in 1973--although simple assault rates were only slightly lower in 1996 (26.6) than they had been in 1990 (26.9). Although robbery rates fell considerably during the 1990s, they declined even more rapidly during the 1980s.

Figure 1 about here

Taken together, rates for robbery and aggravated assault were lower in 1996 than at any other point spanned by the 24 years of NCVS data. The lowest level of reported rapes was

recorded in 1995. While the lowest NCVS level of simple assaults occurred in 1986 (25.3), the levels were similar to those recorded for simple assaults in 1996 (26.6).

Figure 2 shows trends in the three property crimes included in the NCVS data from 1973 to 1996. Compared to violent crimes, NCVS data on property crimes are more consistently supportive of a 1990s crime bust. In fact, for burglaries, the declines began well before the 1990s, starting in about 1981. Altogether, burglary rates from NCVS data dropped by 55.4% from 1981 to 1996--with about half of this decline occurring in the decade of the 1990s. Similarly, theft rates began to drop consistently in the late 1970s, declining by more than 50% from 1979 to 1996. The case of motor vehicle theft is more complex: Motor vehicle theft rates declined slowly from 1973 to 1985, increased substantially from 1986 to 1991, and then began to decline again in 1992, reaching their lowest level in 1996. All three of the property crimes included in the NCVS were lower in 1996 than they had been at any time since the NCVS started collecting annual data in 1973.

Figure 2 about here

2. UCR Data, 1946 to 1996

To put crime trends for the 1990s in a broader historical context, I next present post-World War II trends (1946-1996) based on UCR data for the violent crimes of murder, rape, robbery

and aggravated assault; and for the property crimes of burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft. Figure 3 shows trends for the four violent crimes tracked by the UCR.

Figure 3 about here

As we saw in Table 1 above, all four of these violent crimes have shown clear declines during the 1990s. In this section I compare the recent declines in these crimes to earlier postwar trends. The largest overall declines in recent years have been for murder and robbery.

U.S. murder rates in 1996 were at their lowest level since 1969. From 1990 to 1996, murder rates declined by 21.3 percent. The only other period in postwar U.S. history with comparable declines in murder rates happened from 1980 to 1984 (a 22.5% drop). But so far at least, murder rates in the 1990s are not decreasing as fast as they increased in the 1960s. For example, in the four years from 1966 to 1969, murder rates increased by 30.4 percent.

U.S. robbery rates in 1996 were at their lowest level since 1978. From 1990 to 1996, robbery rates fell by 21.2 percent. There was a similar decline in robbery rates only once during the postwar period: The five years from 1981 to 1984 witnessed a 20.6% decline. As with murder rates, robbery rates so far have not declined as rapidly in the 1990s as they increased in the 1960s and early 1970s. Thus, from 1963 to 1975, robbery rates

increased by an incredible 257 percent.

Figure 3 shows that while recent decreases in rape and aggravated assault rates are less than those for murder and robbery rates, they are still substantial. In fact, declines in rates of rape and aggravated assault in the 1990s represent the largest single declines in UCR rates for these crimes thus far recorded during the postwar period.

Figure 4 shows UCR trends for three property crimes from 1946 to 1996. The clearest downward trend is for burglaries. Burglary rates in 1996 have not been lower since 1968. Since reaching a peak in 1980, burglary rates have declined by 44.0 percent. The declines from 1990 to 1996 (26.8%) were somewhat greater than those recorded from 1980 to 1986 (20.2%). Percentage declines for burglary in the 1990s have still been somewhat less than percentage increases in the 1970s. In just three years, from 1972 to 1975, burglary rates increased by 34.3 percent.

Figure 4 about here

Motor vehicle theft has also shown substantial declines during the 1990s (20.0% from 1990 to 1996). This represents the largest percentage decline in motor vehicle theft observed during the past fifty years. Still, these declines are not as large as the increases in motor vehicle theft witnessed during the 1960s. Thus, from 1961 to 1967 rates of motor vehicle theft increased by

82.0 percent.

Of the street crimes tracked by the UCR, rates of larceny have declined the least during the 1990s. In percentage terms, the greatest recorded postwar decline in larceny happened from 1980 to 1984 (an 11.9% drop). Moreover, larceny rates in the 1990s are not declining as quickly as they increased throughout most of the 1960s and 1970s.

Two main conclusions about crime trends in the 1990s are supported by these UCR data. First, the declines in crime recorded from 1990 to 1996 have been substantial. Thus far, the 1990s have witnessed the greatest recorded percentage drop of the postwar period for the violent street crimes of rape, robbery, and aggravated assault and the property crime of motor vehicle theft. Compared to the 1990s decline, postwar murder, burglary and larceny rates fell faster during only one earlier period: the early 1980s.

Second, thus far at least, the pace of recent decreases in these seven street crimes has not been as great as the speed at which they increased during the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, 1990s trends already represent the closest thing to a crime bust that the U.S. has witnessed since the end of World War II. Moreover, we do not yet know how great the declines in these crimes will eventually be. As this article was being prepared, the Federal Bureau of Investigation released UCR data showing that during the first six months of 1997, violent crime in the United States fell by another 5% and property crime by another 4

percent.⁸

3. Explaining the 1990s Crime Bust

Taken together, these postwar street crime trends provide us with at least three important clues about the 1990s decline in crime rates. First, substantial decreases have happened in a relatively short period. During the first seven years of the 1990s, UCR rates of murder, robbery, burglary and motor vehicle theft all fell by more than 20 percent. Total UCR violent crimes fell by 13.3% and total property crimes fell by 12.6 percent. During the same period, NCVS data show more than a 20% drop in rates of burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft and more than a 10% drop in rates of rape and aggravated assault. Thus, we are looking for crime explanations that are capable of rapid change.

Second, while there is considerable variation across crime types, the declines are extremely broad based. Thus, there have been measurable declines in the 1990s for all seven crimes reported by the UCR and for all seven crimes reported by the NCVS. These patterns suggest that we are looking for a general explanation that has implications for many different types of street crime.

And finally, the recent declines in crime are clearly time specific. That is, all of the street crimes tracked by the UCR

⁸ Press release from the Federal Bureau of Investigation dated November 23, 1997.

and the NCVS have registered declines in the 1990s. In fact, for several of these crimes, the declines during the 1990s have been the largest observed during the past fifty years. Therefore, we must ask ourselves what is it about the 1990s that encouraged declining crime rates? In the remainder of this paper, I concentrate on the role played by institutional legitimacy in bringing about the recent decreases in crime rates.

III. Crime and Social Institutions in the 1990S

As used here, institutions are the patterned, mutually shared ways that people develop for living together.⁹ These patterns include the norms, values, statuses, roles, and organizations that define and regulate human conduct. Institutions encompass proper, lawful, expected modes of behavior.¹⁰ They are guides to how we should live and conduct our affairs; daily reminders of the conduct that we hold to be either acceptable or unacceptable.¹¹ Legitimacy refers to the ease or difficulty with which institutions are able to get societal members to follow mutually shared rules, laws and

⁹ See Gary LaFree, Losing Legitimacy: Street Crime and the Decline of Social Institutions in America ch. 5 (1998); Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton, The Good Society p. 4 (1991).

¹⁰ See generally, Talcott Parsons, "The Motivation of Economic Activities," in Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science 187-203 (1940).

¹¹ Bellah et al., supra note 9, at 12.

norms.¹²

Institutions are arguably the most important of all human creations. They allow societies to endure over time as individuals are joined or replaced by new members. Thus, institutions for humans serve the same purpose as instincts do for other species: They channel our behavior into forms that help us satisfy basic collective and individual needs.¹³ In fact, because humans have relatively underdeveloped instincts, they are especially dependent on institutions for survival. Instead of relying on messages genetically transmitted from the past, humans are guided in large part by institutional rules that are passed from one generation to the next.¹⁴

This dependence on institutions has important implications for all human behavior, including crime. On the one hand, it allows institutions to change rapidly in response to environmental changes. But because institutions are little more than socially constructed agreements, they also have a fragility compared to the nearly automatic, "hard wired" responses produced by biological instincts.

A. How Institutions Regulate Crime

¹² For a classic discussion of legitimacy, see Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations 324-363 (1947).

¹³ Peter L. Berger, Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective 87-91 (1963).

¹⁴ Peter Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life 277 (1964).

In general, institutions control crime in three interrelated ways: by reducing individual motivation to commit crime, by supplying effective controls to curb criminal behavior, and by providing individuals with protection against the criminal behavior of others.¹⁵ Because institutions are primarily responsible for teaching children moral behavior, they have a direct linkage to our motivation to commit crime. The most obvious institutional connection here is the family. Through socialization, families teach children the differences between appropriate and inappropriate conduct. These lessons are enforced by social sanctions, both positive and negative. For example, families reenforce acceptable behavior with praise, love and support, and punish unacceptable behavior with criticism, ostracism and expulsion.

But the impact of institutions on reducing criminal motivation is not limited to families. In industrialized nations such as the U.S. educational institutions are increasingly important in this regard. Moreover, economic and political institutions may reduce individual motivation to commit crime simply by convincing individuals that they are fair, just and worthy of respect.

Institutions also regulate behavior by providing social control. As used here, social control refers to the mechanisms aimed at compelling individuals to adhere to institutional

¹⁵ I present this argument in greater detail in LaFree ch 5 (1998).

rules.¹⁶ Social control is extremely broad and far reaching in its effects.¹⁷ It tells us what crime is, how we are to respond to it, and what is right and wrong about it.

Social control can be further divided into informal and formal sources.¹⁸ Informal social control refers to sanctions imposed by individuals or groups who are not acting directly on behalf of official political agencies, and includes especially the influence of family, friends, and neighborhood residents. By contrast, formal social control refers to the control of individuals that are acting on behalf of official legal and political agencies, including especially police, judges, prison guards, and prosecutors.

Granovetter uses the term "embeddedness" to describe the social relations that link individuals to institutions and thereby regulate their behavior.¹⁹ Embeddedness provides a useful metaphor for how social control works. Most individuals are embedded in a complex web of social connections that will

¹⁶ Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls, "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy," 918 Science (1997).

¹⁷ Locations, types and forms of social control have generated a complex research literature. See David H. Bayley, Social Control and Political Change ch 2 (1985).

¹⁸ While this distinction is useful for my purposes, it is not without difficulties. For a discussion of these, see Bayley ch 2 (1985).

¹⁹ Mark Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness," 481 American Journal of Sociology 91 (1985).

either make them think long and hard before engaging in crime, or simply provide enough surveillance to make criminal behavior more difficult. For most people, the first social hurdles to crime are informal: the potential embarrassment they will face when their misdeeds become known to their families--spouse, children, parents and other relatives. Beyond the family, there is the shame associated with those with whom they work or attend school, members of their church or military company, civic or fraternal organizations to which they belong, and so on. Finally, in addition to all of these informal sources of social control, there is the formal legal system itself, with its threats of arrest, legal processing and punishment. Most individuals, then, are embedded in social networks that usually serve to channel their behavior into noncriminal paths.

In addition to regulating the motivation to commit crime and surrounding individuals with social controls, institutions also reduce crime by directly protecting individuals from criminal victimization. Thus, families, communities, businesses, and schools play an important role in terms of guarding their individual members from the criminal behavior of others. Likewise, criminal justice institutions, especially the police, are justified in large part by their ability to protect citizens from crime..

In general, then, institutions suppress crime by enmeshing individuals in social systems that reduce their motivation to commit crime, by increasing the effectiveness of those who are

informally or formally expected to regulate their criminal behavior, and by protecting individuals from the criminal behavior of others. In a smoothly functioning society, these elements are inextricably related. Thus, individuals who are well socialized in effect serve as their own social control agents. Strong social control reduces motivation and the need for protection; weak motivation makes social control and protection less important; strong guardianship may compensate in part for high levels of motivation and ineffective social control. Succinctly stated, as institutions lose their ability to regulate their members, more individuals will be more motivated to behave as they please, will be less successfully controlled by others for behaving as they please, and will be less effective in protecting institutional members from others who are behaving as they please.

B. Identifying the Most Important Institutions for Crime Control

If we think of institutions as nothing more than shared rules that regulate human conduct in recurrent situations, we may conclude that there are thousands (or even millions) of institutions in any given society. But obviously, some institutions are more important than others in terms of controlling criminal behavior. The three institutions that have probably been linked to crime most frequently by researchers and

policy makers are political, economic and familial.²⁰

Political institutions are primarily responsible for mobilizing and distributing resources for collective goals.²¹ They include the entire governmental apparatus: the legislature, the judiciary, the military establishment and the administrative agencies that implement governmental decisions. Political institutions have direct responsibility for crime control and the lawful resolution of conflicts. They are also responsible for maintaining social order, providing channels for resolving conflicts, and protecting citizens from foreign invasion.

Economic institutions are responsible for societal adaptation to the environment.²² Economic institutions include those organized around the production and distribution of goods and services.²³ The economy is responsible for satisfying the basic material requirements for human survival: food, clothing and shelter. Economic institutions also include a stratification system that ranks individuals in a social hierarchy of rewards and responsibilities.

²⁰ While I concentrate here on three institutions that have been frequently linked to crime by others, I do not argue that these are the only relevant institutions in controlling crime. For example, religion, neighborhood and community organizations, voluntary associations, and media and mass communication have all been suggested as important determinants of crime trends. See LaFree ch 5 (1998).

²¹ See Talcott Parsons, The Social System (1951); Peter M. Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life (1964).

²² Blau at 278.

²³ Parsons (1951).

For centuries, families in human societies have been chiefly responsible for the socialization of children. Coleman describes family institutions as "primordial" because, unlike other institutions, they are based in part on a social organization that develops through birth and blood ties.²⁴ In addition, the family has traditionally had primary responsibility for regulating the sexual activity of its members, caring for and nurturing children, and seeing to the needs of the infirm and the elderly.²⁵

Because they are human creations, institutions are constantly evolving and changing and newer institutions are being created and expanded to support or supplant older ones. Postwar America has responded to the declining legitimacy of political, economic and familial institutions in part by strengthening support for newer institutions. In particular, to shore up political institutions, American society has funded major increases in criminal justice spending; to reduce the deleterious consequences of a rapidly changing economy, American society has spent more on welfare; and to help support declining family institutions, American society has invested heavily in education.²⁶ All three of these institutional responses have

²⁴ James S. Coleman, "The Rational Reconstruction of Society," 58 American Sociological Review 2 (1993).

²⁵ Blau at 278.

²⁶ It would of course be simplistic to argue that these institutional responses were narrow reactions to a single type of institutional decline. For example, welfare spending is justified not only in terms of reducing economic stress, but also

important implications for crime rates.

C. Institutions and Crime in the 1990s

In the remainder of this paper I briefly consider the links between street crime declines in the 1990s, three traditional institutions²⁷ (political, economic and familial), and three institutions (criminal justice, education and welfare) that have gained increasing importance during the postwar years. In my earlier book, I argued that the postwar American crime boom occurred as a result of an institutional legitimacy crisis characterized by (1) growing distrust of political institutions, (2) rising economic stress and (3) increasing disintegration of the family.²⁸ American society responded to this crisis by providing greater support for criminal justice, education and welfare institutions. If these same arguments hold for the 1990s, then the crime bust should be accompanied by evidence of increasing trust in political institutions, declining economic stress, and growing stability of families, as well as increasing support for criminal justice, education and welfare institutions.

In Figure 5 I summarize these expectations. Of course my argument does not assume that all of these institutional effects

in terms of supporting the family and increasing trust in political institutions.

²⁷ I use "traditional" here in the very limited sense of indicating institutions that have customarily been thought to control or regulate crime.

²⁸ LaFree ch. 5 (1998).

are equally important, that all must be present to the same extent for crime rates to decline, or that all must be absent to the same extent for crime rates to increase. Rather, these six expectations can be seen as characteristics of a hypothetical society experiencing declining crime rates.

Figure 5 about here

In the remaining pages of this essay, I consider briefly the extent to which major institutions in the U.S. in the 1990s approximated this hypothetical society. I examine these six institutions in pairs, considering each of the three traditional institutions along with each of the three major corresponding institutional responses to the legitimacy crisis experienced by the traditional institution: political-criminal justice, economic-welfare, family-education. In each section, I first consider general connections between these institutions and crime and then examine postwar trends in the legitimacy of each institution and how these trends have changed since 1990.

1. Political and Criminal Justice Institutions

I argue that the declining legitimacy of political institutions increases crime in three main ways. First, individuals who perceive political institutions to be unjust or unfair will be less motivated to follow rules and laws. Second, individuals in societies with less political legitimacy will be

less vigilant about controlling the criminal and deviant behavior of others. And finally, societies with little political legitimacy will be less effective at protecting their citizens from the criminal behavior of others. I argue that connections between political institutions and crime in the postwar United States are most directly linked to the trust Americans have had in their political institutions.²⁹ I also argue that major increases in support for formal criminal justice institutions has reduced crime rates in the 1990s.

At the end of World War II, the U.S. entered a period in which its citizens reported unprecedented levels of trust in the honesty, fairness and integrity of American political institutions. There was widespread support for the war effort, high levels of respect for politicians and judges, and enough popular support to carry General Dwight D. Eisenhower, a military hero, into the presidency in 1952. As a result of the low crime rates associated with this high level of trust in government, per capita spending on criminal justice institutions was lower in the years following World War II than it would be for the next half century.³⁰

But levels of trust in political institutions began to erode substantially in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The civil

²⁹ I use trust here in the usual sense of level of reliance on the equity, justice or evenhandedness of others. See Diego Gambetta, ed., Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations (1988).

³⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics on Governmental Finance and Employment 26-28 (1985).

rights movement led the way by exposing long-standing racial injustices in American society. Further erosion accompanied the divisive war in Vietnam, a series of widely publicized political scandals, and the rights-based revolution that followed in the wake of the civil rights movement. Moreover, because political institutions are chiefly responsible for crime control, rising crime rates themselves further undermined political legitimacy.

By the 1990s, the free fall in levels of political trust had ended. In fact, there was some evidence of stability in the legitimacy of American political institutions. While a full treatment of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper, three developments are especially important here. First, there are important signs that overall levels of trust in government, while very low compared to the early postwar period, have nevertheless been stable and perhaps even improving during the 1990s. Since 1958, a national election survey has collected biennial information on American attitudes toward government.³¹ For example, for the past forty years, this survey has asked respondents, "How much of the time can you trust the U.S. government to do what is right?" The proportion of Americans answering "most of the time or just about always" peaked in 1964 at just under 80 percent. The percentage who expressed confidence in the federal government then declined rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s, scoring just over 25% in 1980. But since

³¹ Warren E. Miller, American National Election Studies Cumulative Data File, 1952-1996 (1996).

1980, the percentage who express trust in the federal government has held steady and even begun to rise a bit. In fact, levels of trust tapped by this measure were higher in 1996 than in 1980. Other measures of public confidence in government tracked by the national election survey data provide similar evidence.³²

Second, the rapid increase in crime rates in the early 1960s coincided in large part with the rise of collective political action associated especially with the civil rights movement and later, protests against the Vietnam War.³³ For example, the total annual number of race-related riots in America reached a postwar zenith of 287 in 1968. Similarly, protests against the Vietnam War became increasingly violent in the late 1960s. By contrast, in the 1990s, there was no organized collective political action that remotely resembled the scope of the civil rights movement or the anti-war protests of the early and middle postwar periods.

And finally, as the legitimacy of political institutions declined during the 1960s, the U.S. began to rely increasingly on formal criminal justice institutions to maintain law and order. Directly following World War II, Americans spent only \$255 a year (in inflation adjusted dollars), on all levels of federal, state

³² LaFree ch 6 (1998).

³³ Gary LaFree and Kriss A. Drass, "African American Collective Action and Crime, 1955-91," 75 Social Forces 835 (1997).

and local law enforcement.³⁴ They spent a little over \$100 a year at all governmental levels for corrections.³⁵ By the early 1990s, per capita spending on police had increased seven-fold and per capita spending on corrections had increased nearly twelve-fold.³⁶

The impact of these developments are perhaps clearest with regard to incarceration rates. From the end of World War II until the mid-1970s, imprisonment rates in the United States hovered around 100 prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents.³⁷ In fact, imprisonment rates in 1973 were about the same as they had been in 1946. But these rates began to change rapidly thereafter. From 1974 to 1996, U.S. imprisonment rates more than quadrupled, reaching a century high of 427 per 100,000 residents.³⁸ These increases have been particularly sharp in the 1990s. From 1990 to 1996 alone, imprisonment rates increased by 43.8 percent.³⁹

By 1995, an estimated 5.4 million Americans were under correctional supervision, including 1.1 million in prisons, one-

³⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics on Governmental Finances and Employment 6 (1979) 29.

³⁵ Id.

³⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Government Finances: 1991-92," Series GF/92-5, Summary 1 (1996).

³⁷ Bureau of Justice Statistics, Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 1996 518 (1997).

³⁸ U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prisoners in 1996 1 (1997).

³⁹ Id.

half million in jails, 700 thousand on parole and more than 3 million on probation.⁴⁰ Freeman provides the startling conclusion that by 1995, the number of American men under the supervision of corrections had surpassed the total number of unemployed men.⁴¹ While much research confirms that informal social control is generally more effective than formal controls such as imprisonment in reducing crime,⁴² nevertheless, increases in formal sanctions of this magnitude have undoubtedly dampened U.S. crime rates in the 1990s.⁴³

2. Economic and Welfare Institutions and Crime

Declining economic legitimacy increases street crime rates in two main ways: by raising the motivation of potential offenders to commit crime and by reducing the effectiveness of social control aimed at crime prevention and punishment. Conversely, spending on social welfare programs should generally reduce the motivation of potential offenders to commit crime and more generally, improve the effectiveness of social control mechanisms.

⁴⁰ U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations in the United States, 1995 5 (1997).

⁴¹ Richard B. Freeman, "The Labor Market," in J.Q. Wilson and J. Petersilia, eds., Crime 172 (1995).

⁴² This literature goes all the way back to the classic statement of Jeremy Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation 134-136 (1970 [1789]).

⁴³ For a comprehensive review of the empirical literature, see Thomas B. Marvell and Carlisle E. Moody, "The Impact of Prison Growth on Homicide," 1 Homicide Studies 205 (1997).

Perhaps the most obvious connection between economic legitimacy and criminal motivation is captured by the prosaic observation that compared to the more well to do, those with less property and wealth simply have more to gain by committing crime. The idea that economic deprivation increases criminal motivation has long been central to strain theories in criminology.⁴⁴ A large number of studies confirm that compared to the wealthy, the less economically advantaged are more likely to commit street crimes of every type.⁴⁵

While most criminology research on the link between economic legitimacy and crime has focussed on its impact on the offender's motivation, the declining legitimacy of economic institutions may also reduce the effectiveness of informal and formal social control. Those who believe that economic institutions are unfair or unjust might be reasonably expected to have less interest in helping to control or regulate the criminal behavior of others.

I argue that the legitimacy of economic institutions in the postwar U.S. was weakened directly by the growing strains the

⁴⁴ Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (1957); Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs (1961).

⁴⁵ John P. Hewitt, Social Stratification and Deviant Behavior (1970); Roger Hood and Richard Sparks, Key Issues in Criminology (1970); John Braithwaite, Inequality, Crime and Public Policy (1979); but see also, Charles R. Tittle, Wayne J. Villemez and Douglas A. Smith, "The Myth of Social Class and Criminality: An Empirical Assessment of the Empirical Evidence," American Sociological Review 43 (1978) 643-656.

economy imposed on Americans.⁴⁶ These strains were increasingly shaped by global economic trends. At the end of World War II, the U.S. entered an era of unprecedented economic prosperity.⁴⁷ The war jolted the U.S. economy out of a devastating depression and matched the undamaged industrial plants of the U.S. against the war-torn factories of Europe and Japan. America became a supermarket to the world.

But the economic picture had changed considerably by the late 1960s. Basic industrial production dominated by the United States following World War II was among the first areas to suffer: The U.S. lead in textiles, iron, steel and chemicals greatly diminished. Seeking higher profits and less competition, U.S. companies increasingly "outsourced" high-paying industrial jobs in these areas to lower-wage nations.⁴⁸ As economic changes accelerated, the influence of labor unions steadily declined and the high wages associated with unions also eroded.⁴⁹ Changes that began in traditional manufacturing and production areas

⁴⁶ LaFree ch 7 (1998); Gary LaFree and Kriss A. Drass, "The Effect of Changes in Intraracial Income Inequality and Educational Attainment on Changes in Arrest Rates for African Americans and Whites, 1957 to 1990," 61 American Sociological Review 614 (1996).

⁴⁷ Frank Levy, Dollars and Dreams (1987); Immanuel Wallerstein, After Liberalism (1995).

⁴⁸ Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, The Deindustrialization of America (1982).

⁴⁹ Mike Davis, Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the U.S. Working Class (1986); Samuel Bowles, David M. Gordon, and Thomas E. Weisskopf, After the Wasteland: A Democratic Economics for the Year 2000 (1990).

eventually spread to other parts of the economy. The U.S. encountered increasingly stiff competition even in newer, high technology industries that it once virtually monopolized, like robotics, aerospace and computers.⁵⁰ During the 1960s and 1970s, economic inequality grew substantially, inflation reached new heights, and corporate downsizing resulted in thousands of closures and firings.

The U.S. responded in part to these growing economic strains by investing more in welfare support. In 1948, total welfare spending amounted to 83 dollars per capita (in 1995 dollars).⁵¹

Spending rates increased only slightly during the early postwar period, reaching 116 dollars per capita in 1960.⁵² But from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, increases in welfare spending were rapid. From 1964 to 1978 alone, total per capita welfare spending (again, in 1995 dollars) more than quadrupled--from \$121 per year to \$551 dollars per year.⁵³

To fit my arguments about the connections between crime and social institutions, I am looking for evidence that economic wellbeing and the support of welfare institutions both increased during the 1990s. Indeed, the economic situation for the United

⁵⁰ Eamonn Fingleton, Blindside: Why Japan Is Still on Track to Overtake the U.S. by the Year 2000 ch 2 (1995).

⁵¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics on Governmental Finance and Employment, 26-28 (1985).

⁵² Id.

⁵³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Government Finances: 1984-1992, Series GF/92-5 1 (1996).

States has shown unmistakable signs of improvement in the last decade of the twentieth century. In 1996, the federal spending deficit reached its lowest level since 1979.⁵⁴ In 1994, the poverty rate began to fall for the first time in five years and income inequality began a modest decline.⁵⁵ In 1997, unemployment reached its lowest level since 1973.⁵⁶ After reaching double digits in the 1970s and early 1980s, inflation cooled off again during the 1990s, remaining under 3 percent from 1990 to 1996.⁵⁷

Changes in the welfare laws may at first seem to contradict the argument that the 1990s downturn in crime in the U.S. is related in part to higher levels of welfare spending. Thus, in 1996, Congress replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and several other long-established programs with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.⁵⁸ The new law sets up a system of block grants to the states, mandates that federal funding for TANF programs be capped at \$16.4 billion annually through the year 2002, and stipulates that recipients can only receive TANF benefits for a maximum of five

⁵⁴ U.S. Economic Report to the President 20 (1997).

⁵⁵ Id.

⁵⁶ Id.

⁵⁷ Id.

⁵⁸ Congress of the United States, "The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996" (1996).

years.⁵⁹ However, because of the way these changes are being phased in, it is still too early to tell what impact if any they will have on street crime rates. Program caps and limits on participation may not have major effects on recipients for several years. Moreover, as noted above, recent changes in the welfare system have been implemented during a period when the economy has been relatively strong.

3. Family and Educational Institutions and Crime

As with political and economic institutions, family institutions can reduce crime by regulating the motivation of offenders and by providing social control. In addition, the family can play a special role in protecting its members from the criminal activity of others. Throughout human history, families have been the primary institution for passing social rules and values from one generation to the next.⁶⁰ With few exceptions, children have more frequent and longer contacts with family members than with others and family contacts are generally earlier and more emotionally intense than other contacts. The family has long been the institutions with major responsibility for teaching children right from wrong, instilling moral values, and emphasizing the importance of law-abiding behavior. This socialization role of the family means that it is critical for training children to respect and abide by criminal laws.

⁵⁹ Id.

⁶⁰ Kingsley Davis, Human Society 395 (1948).

Families also control crime by directly regulating the behavior of their members. Families may limit the delinquent behavior of their children by restricting their activities, by maintaining actual physical surveillance over them, and by knowing their whereabouts when they are out of sight.⁶¹ But perhaps even more importantly, families often control the behavior of children simply by commanding their love and respect. A good deal of research confirms that children who care about their families will be more likely to avoid behavior that they know may result in shame, embarrassment, or inconvenience for family members.⁶²

Families are also an important crime-reducing agent in terms of the guardianship that they provide their members. Thus, families may reduce the criminal victimization of family members by protecting them from property crimes such as burglary and theft, and also by shielding them from the potential physical harm of unwanted suitors, and would-be molesters, muggers and rapists.⁶³

Beginning especially in the 1960s, there were major declines in the legitimacy of the traditional two-parent, male-dominated family in America. Two related processes were especially important. The first was a growing challenge to the traditional

⁶¹ Travis Hirschi, "The Family," in J.Q. Wilson and J. Petersilia, eds., Crime 128 (1995).

⁶² Hirschi 128 (1995); John Braithwaite, Crime, Shame and Reintegration 48 (1989).

⁶³ Hirschi 18 (1995).

form of the family.⁶⁴ As the feminist movement gained momentum in the 1960s, an increasing number of people came to regard the traditional two-parent family as a bastion of male oppression and dominance.⁶⁵ Occurring almost simultaneously and related in complex ways, was a growing movement toward greater sexual freedom and experimentation outside of marriage.⁶⁶ In response to these developments there was an explosion of alternatives to traditional family living arrangements.

Although it is important not to overstate the homogeneity of the American family directly following World War II,⁶⁷ the aggregate changes were nevertheless substantial. In the 1950s, divorce rates were lower than they would be for the next fifty years and the proportion of American households containing individuals with no family connections hovered around 10 percent.⁶⁸ After the 1960s, rates of divorce, children born to unmarried parents, and single-parent families rapidly increased and the total number of Americans living entirely outside of

⁶⁴ See, for example, David Popenoe, Disturbing the Nest: Family Change and Decline in Modern Society 51 (1988).

⁶⁵ Betty Friedan provides the classic statement of this view in The Feminine Mystique (1963); see also, Kate Millet, Sexual Politics (1970).

⁶⁶ For a general discussion, see Lawrence M. Friedman, The Republic of Choice: Law, Authority and Culture (1990).

⁶⁷ For a discussion of stereotypical thinking about the past forms of families, see Stephanie Coontz, The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap (1992).

⁶⁸ LaFree ch 8 (1998).

families skyrocketed.⁶⁹

Revolutionary changes in the economy also contributed to the declining legitimacy of the traditional American family. Three developments are especially important here. First, the steady movement of men away from agricultural labor at home to positions in the paid labor force, which had already begun in earnest during the industrial revolution, continued to gain momentum during the postwar period. Second, women joined the paid labor force in record numbers during the postwar years.⁷⁰ And finally, the amount of time children and young adults spent in schools rapidly accelerated. These changes have totally restructured the American family.

To summarize, the institutionalized model of a two-parent family with a husband working for pay and a wife running the household became far less common in America during the postwar period. These changes have been complex and can be measured in a variety of ways. However, they all lead to the same general conclusion: During the postwar period, the legitimacy of the traditional family declined enormously. Moreover, the new forms of family and nonfamily living that increasingly replaced it have thus far not developed the same levels of legitimacy that the traditional family enjoyed during the early postwar period.

However, at least two developments in the 1990s may be

⁶⁹ Id.

⁷⁰ Shirley P. Burggraf, The Feminine Economy and Economic Man: Reviving the Role of Family in the Post-Industrial Age 18 (1997).

changing the long-term relationship between declining family institutions and crime rates. First, nearly three decades have now passed since the most rapid changes in family organization began. Blended, dual career, male household manager, single parent and even gay family forms are becoming increasingly institutionalized. As these alternatives to the traditional family become routinized, their ability to prevent crime and deviance should increase.

Second, as the legitimacy of traditional family institutions continues to decline in the U.S., Americans have relied increasingly on educational institutions to perform responsibilities that were once performed by families. These changes have been nothing short of revolutionary. From 1990 to 1995 alone, the proportion of 3 and 4 year olds enrolled in public, parochial or other private schools jumped from 44 to nearly 49 percent.⁷¹ During the same period, the proportion of 14 to 17 year olds enrolled in school topped 96%, the proportion of 18 and 19 year olds in school reached 59.4%, and the total proportion of young adults 20 to 24 years old reached 31.5 percent.⁷²

Schools, like families can discourage crime by reducing criminal motivation, by increasing the effectiveness of social control, and in principal at least, by protecting students from

⁷¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 1996 15 (1997).

⁷² Id.

the criminal behavior of others. There is a well known tendency for offenders to be drawn from those with low levels of educational attainment.⁷³ There is also evidence that juveniles who accept the legitimacy of education and who have high educational aspirations and long term educational goals, are less likely to engage in delinquency.⁷⁴ Schools can reduce crime by effectively monitoring and supervising the behavior of children under their custody.⁷⁵ More generally, research also shows that juveniles are less likely to commit crime when they are strongly attached to school⁷⁶ and when their performance in school is strong.⁷⁷

Educational institutions have obviously not replaced family functions in America. Indeed, we could argue that educational institutions have steadfastly resisted expanding their responsibilities from the relatively narrow role of education established in the nineteenth century.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, a

⁷³ Delbert S. Elliott and Harwin L. Voss, Delinquency and Dropout (1974).

⁷⁴ See, for example, Allen E. Liska, "Aspirations, Expectations and Delinquency: Stress and Additive Models," 12 Sociological Quarterly 99 (1971); Josefine Figueira-McDonough, "Feminism and Delinquency," 24 British Journal of Criminology 325 (1984).

⁷⁵ Jackson Toby, "The Schools," in J.Q. Wilson and J. Petersilia, eds., 152-58 Crime (1995).

⁷⁶ For a review, see Braithwaite 28-29 (1989).

⁷⁷ See, for example, Robert Agnew, "A Revised Strain Theory of Delinquency," 64 Social Forces 151 (1985).

⁷⁸ LaFree ch 10 (1998).

growing proportion of infants, children, young adults and even adults are spending much of their waking hours in schools. Taken together, this growing participation in educational institutions should put downward pressure on crime rates.

IV. Conclusions

I argued that U.S. street crime trends in the 1990s can be accurately described as a bust. I then explored the possibility that the recent declines in crime were related to the renewed legitimacy of three traditional and the growing support for three newer social institutions during the last decade of the twentieth century. More specifically, I examined the possibility that declining crime rates in the 1990s have been produced by increasing trust in political institutions, increasing economic wellbeing, and growing institutionalization of alternatives to the traditional two parent American family. I also considered the impact on crime of increasing support for criminal justice, welfare and educational institutions in the 1990s.

Among the roles of social science, prediction is among the most precarious. If crime rates continue to drop during the last few years of the twentieth century, then history will likely interpret the 1990s as a period of major crime declines in the United States. If, on the other hand, crime rates again begin to increase over the next few years, the first half of the 1990s will more closely resemble the early 1980s--a period when most street crime rates faltered before heading upward again. Still,

taken together, the evidence suggests that the U.S. is currently experiencing the most broad-gauged and extensive drop in street crime rates that it has witnessed in the past half century.

How good is the evidence that these recent crime declines are related to the growing strength of the six institutions described here? The evidence is strongest for a connection between declining crime rates in the 1990s and increased support for criminal justice institutions, increased economic wellbeing, and increased support for educational institutions. Rates of criminal justice spending, imprisonment, and other forms of punishments have never been higher and much of this increase has happened in the 1990s. The economic condition of the country appears to be more favorable in the mid 1990s than it has been at any time since the oil embargo of 1973. And school enrollments and educational-related spending have continued to increase unabated throughout the 1990s.

The connections between recent crime declines and political, welfare and family institutions must be regarded as somewhat more tentative. Still, there is good evidence that public trust in political institutions is not experiencing the rapid declines that were common in the 1960s and 1970s. And it is clearly the case that there are currently no political protest movements in the U.S. with anything close to the level of intensity or commitment reached by the civil rights movement or the anti-Vietnam war protests. Changes in welfare support in 1996 may prove to be consequential but their effects on crime rates can

reasonably be expected to occur later, when automatic spending limitations are encountered. While there are few signs that family institutions are returning to the form they took in the 1950s, there are clear indications that family arrangements that would have been regarded with horror in the years directly following World War II, have now gathered much greater acceptance.

While any firm conclusions about the exact relations between these institutions and crime trends in the 1990s must await a far more detailed empirical analysis, institutions such as those examined here do seem to provide promising leads in our ongoing efforts to understand the crime bust of the 1990s.

TABLE 1. STREET CRIME RATES PER 100,000 U.S. INHABITANTS, 1990 AND 1996, UCR DATA.

Crime	1990	1996	Percent Change
Murder	9.4	7.4	-21.3
Rape	41.2	36.1	-12.4
Robbery	257.0	202.4	-21.2
Aggravated Assault	424.1	388.2	-8.5
Violent Crimes	731.7	634.1	-13.3
Burglary	1,235.9	943.0	-23.7
Larceny	3,194.8	2,975.9	-6.8
Motor Vehicle Theft	657.8	525.9	-20.0
Property Crimes	5,088.5	4,444.8	-12.6
Total Crimes	5,820.2	5,078.9	-12.7

Note: Data from U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports, Crime in the United States 1990, 1996. Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1991, 1997.

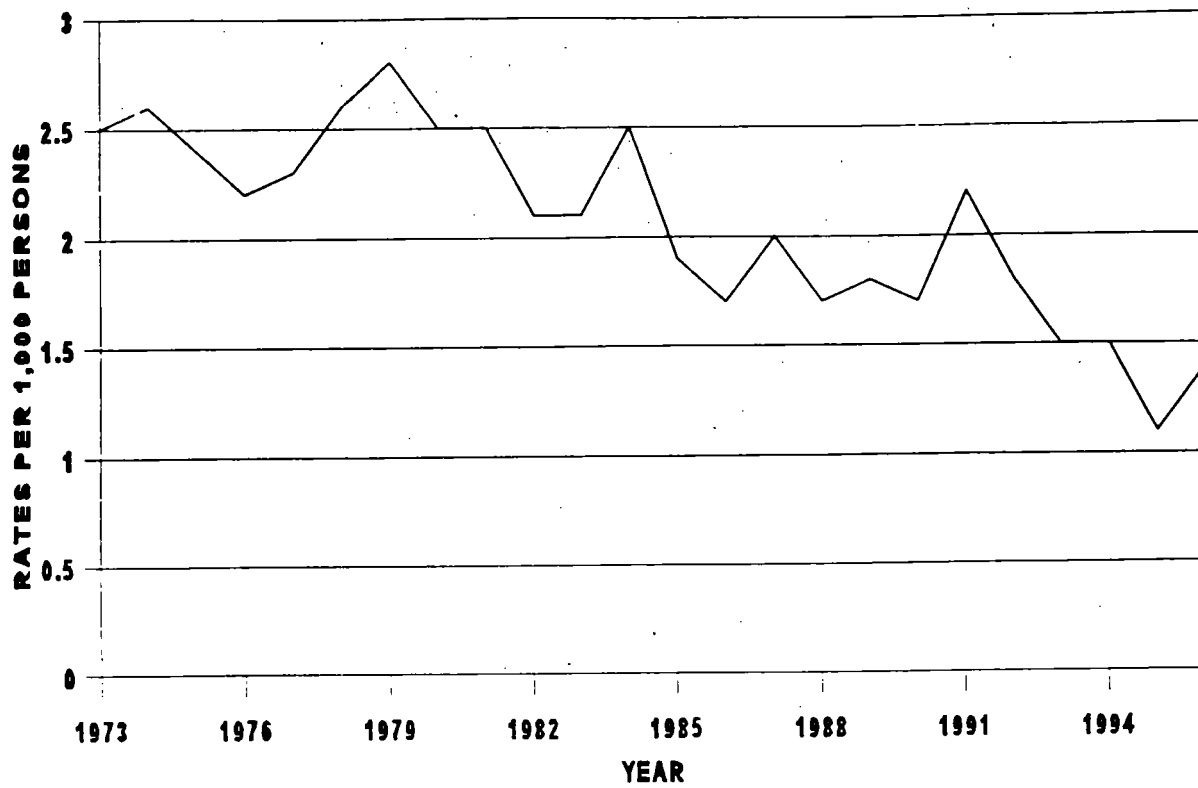
TABLE 2. STREET CRIME RATES PER 1,000 POPULATION, AGE 12 AND OVER, 1990 AND 1996, NCVS DATA.

Crime	1990	1996	Percent Change
Rape	1.7	1.4	-17.6
Robbery	5.7	5.2	-8.8
Aggravated Assault	9.8	8.8	-10.2
Simple Assault	26.9	26.6	-1.1
Total Violent Crime	44.1	42.0	-4.8
Burglary	64.5	47.2	-26.8
Larceny	263.8	205.7	-22.0
Motor Vehicle Theft	20.6	13.5	-34.5
Total Property Crime	348.9	266.3	-23.7

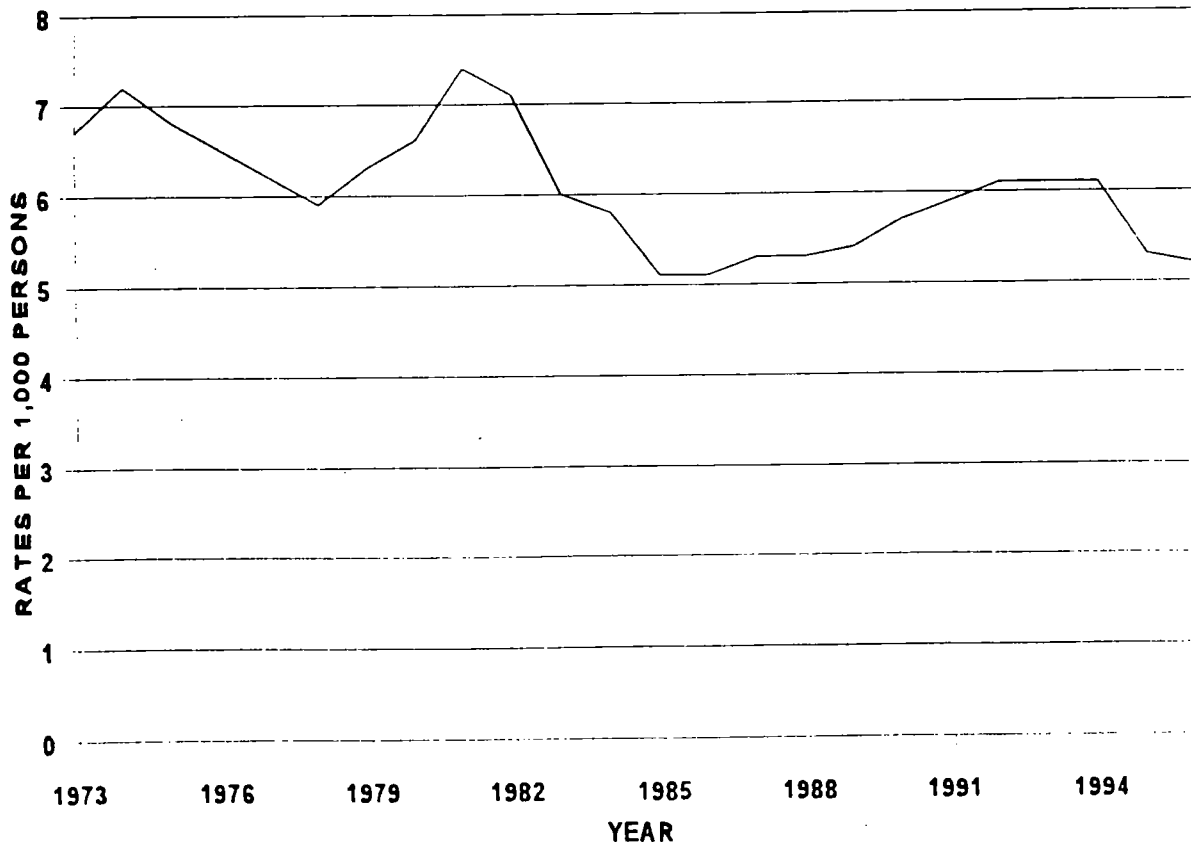
Note: Data for 1990 from M.R. Rand, J.P. Lynch, and D. Cantor, Criminal Victimization 1973 - 95 (1997); data for 1996 from C. Ringel, Criminal Victimization 1996 (1997).

FIGURE 1. VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION RATES PERSONS 12 AND OLDER, 1973-1996.

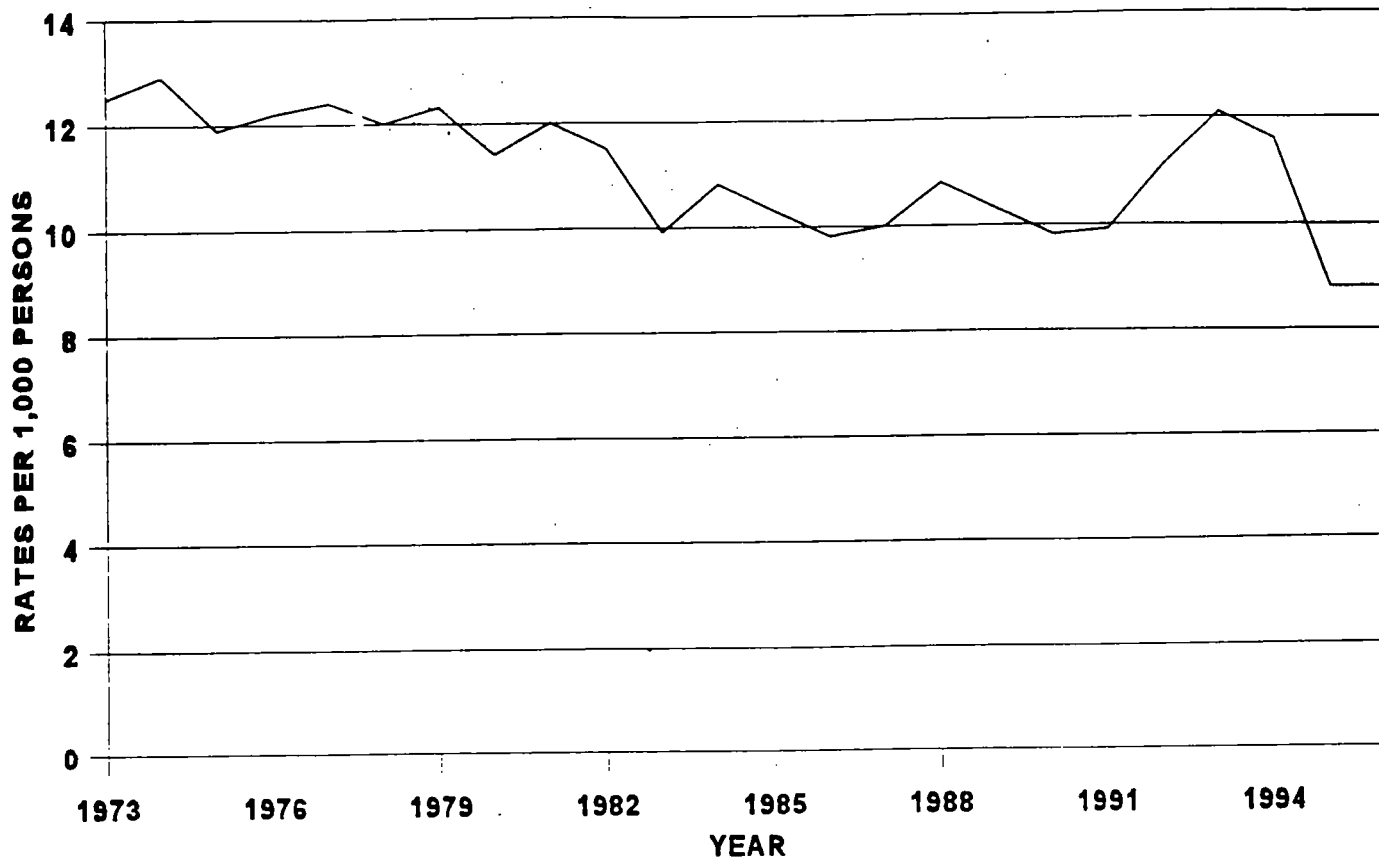
RAPE



ROBBERY



AGGRAVATED ASSAULT



SIMPLE ASSAULT

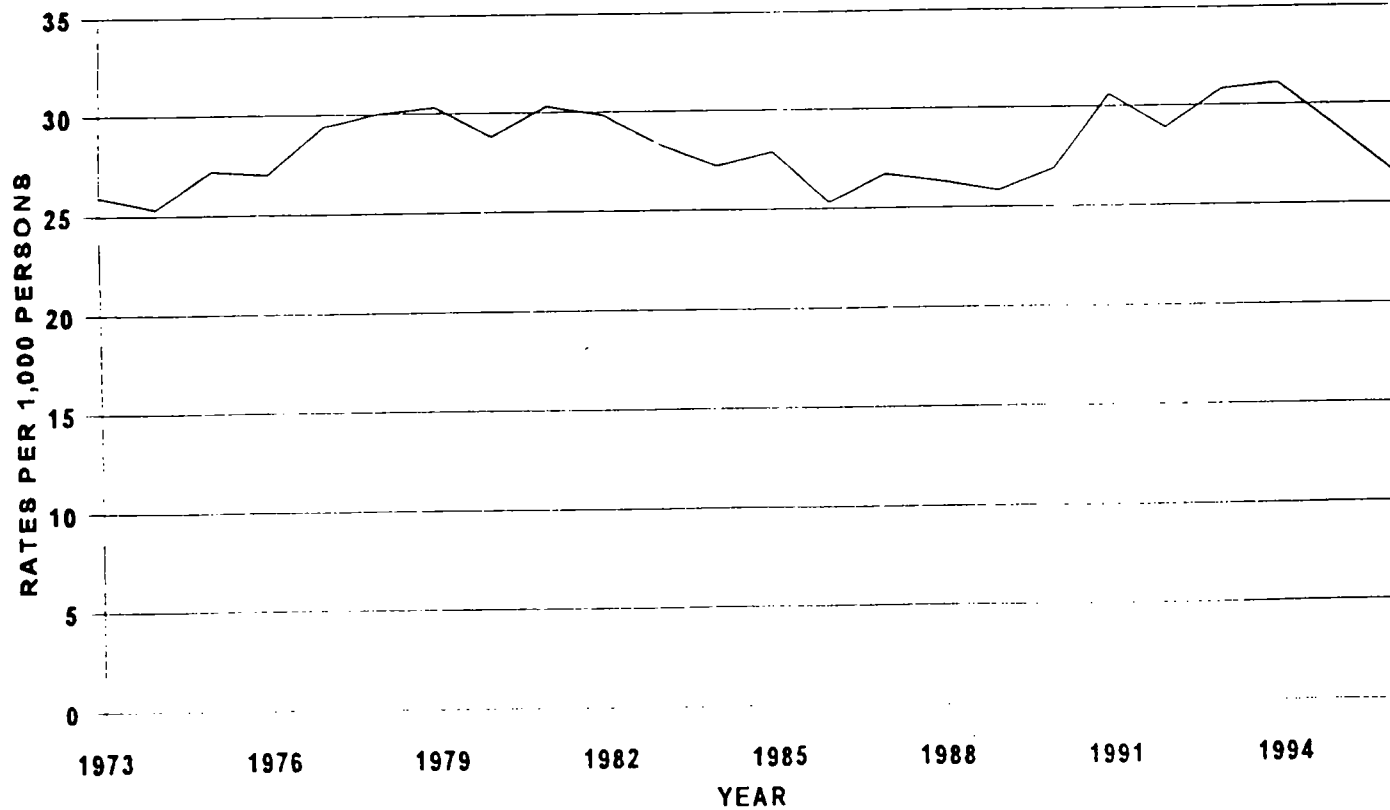
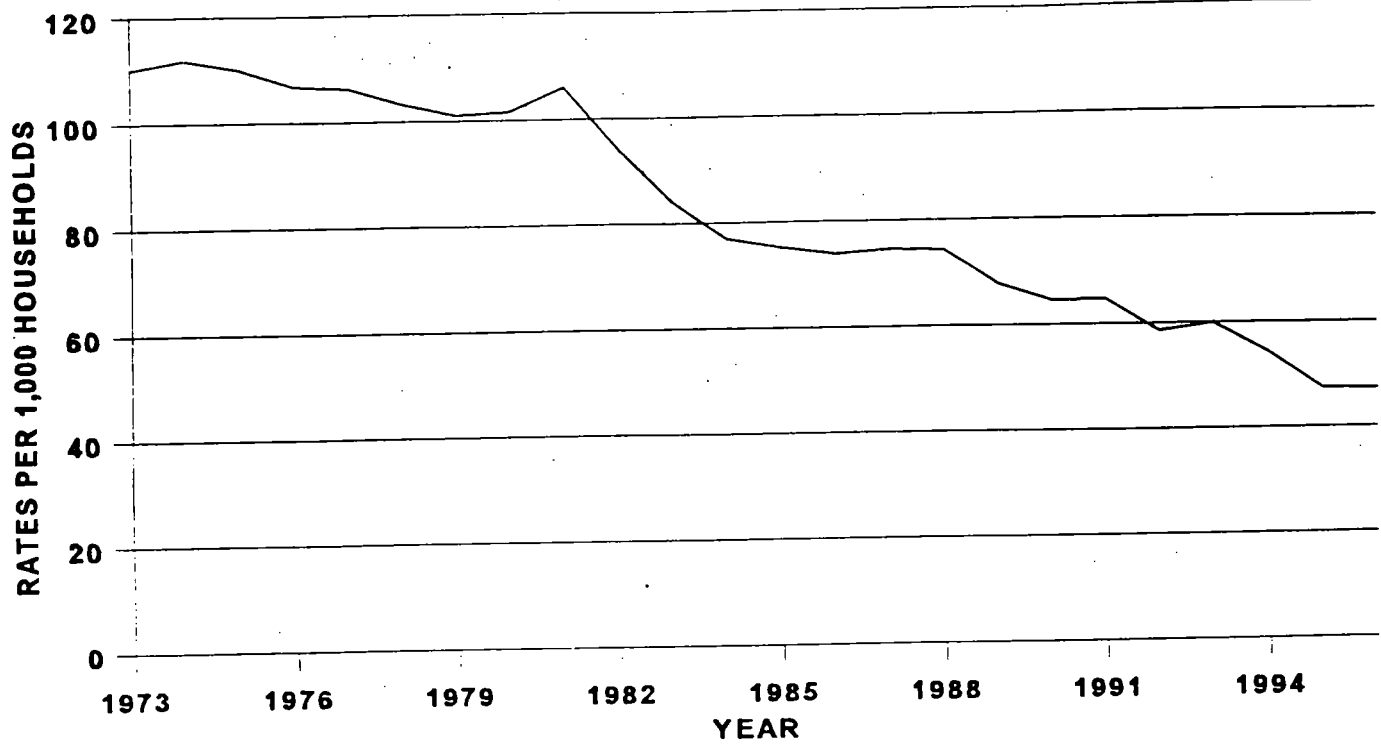
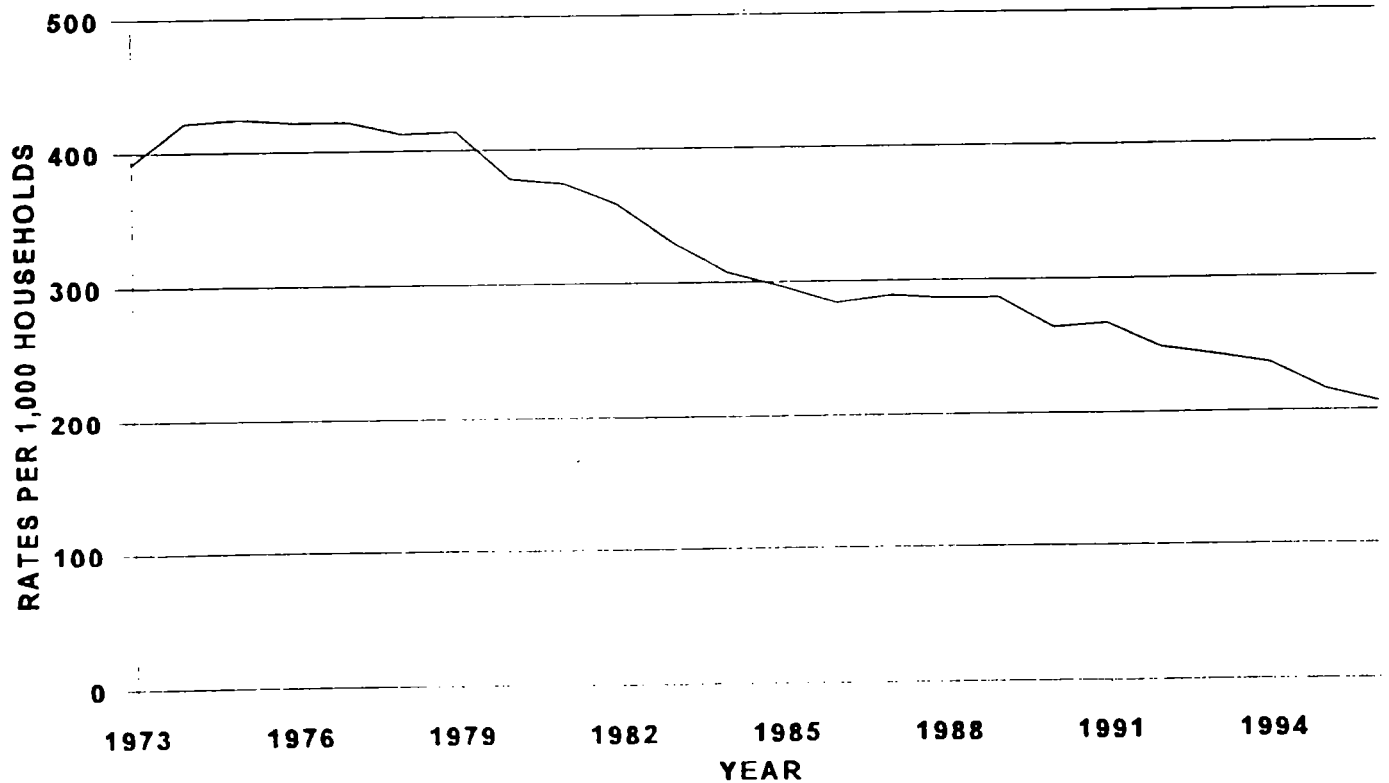


FIGURE 2. PROPERTY VICTIMIZATION RATES, 1973-1996.

BURGLARY



THEFT



MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT

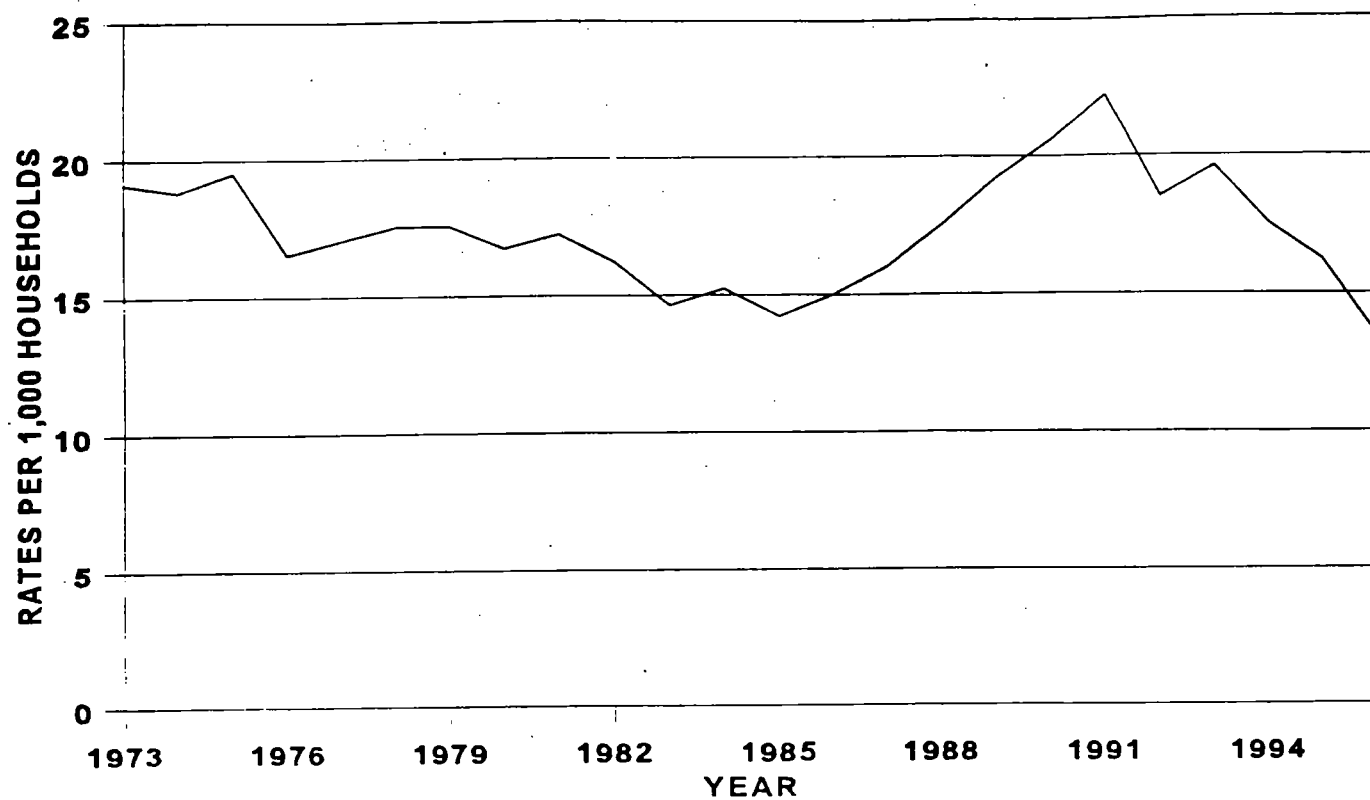
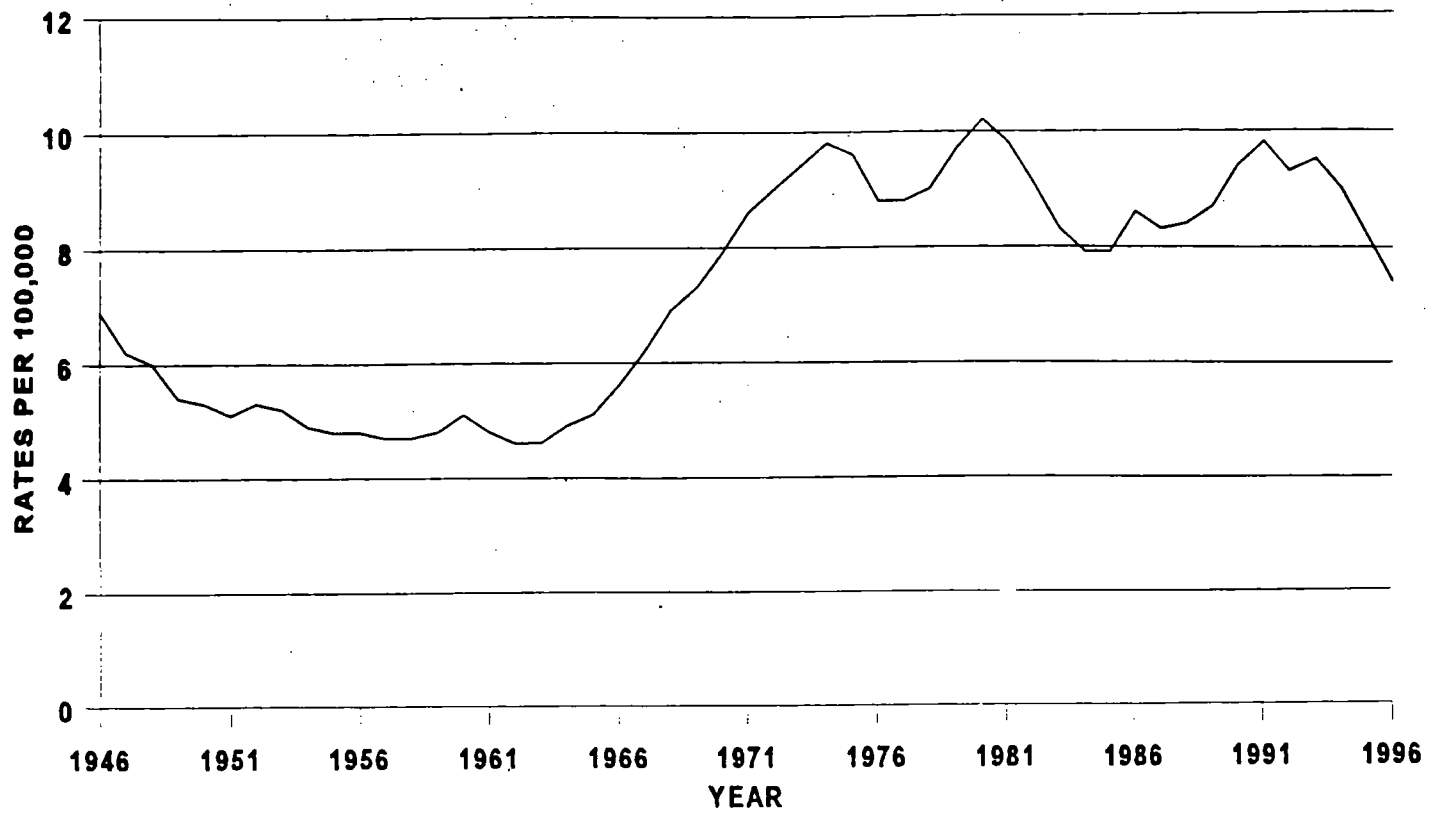
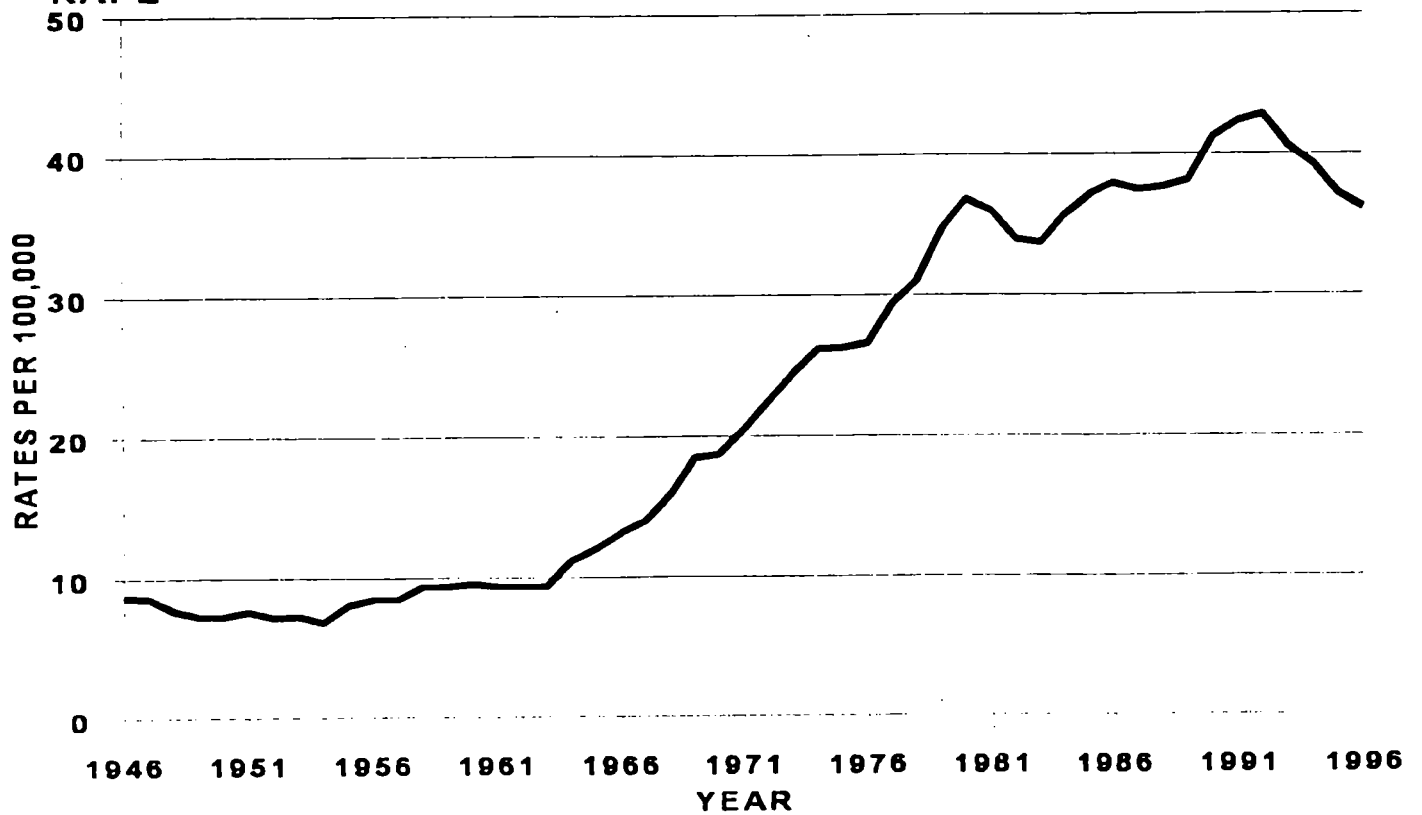


FIGURE 3. VIOLENT CRIME RATES, UCR, 1946-1996.

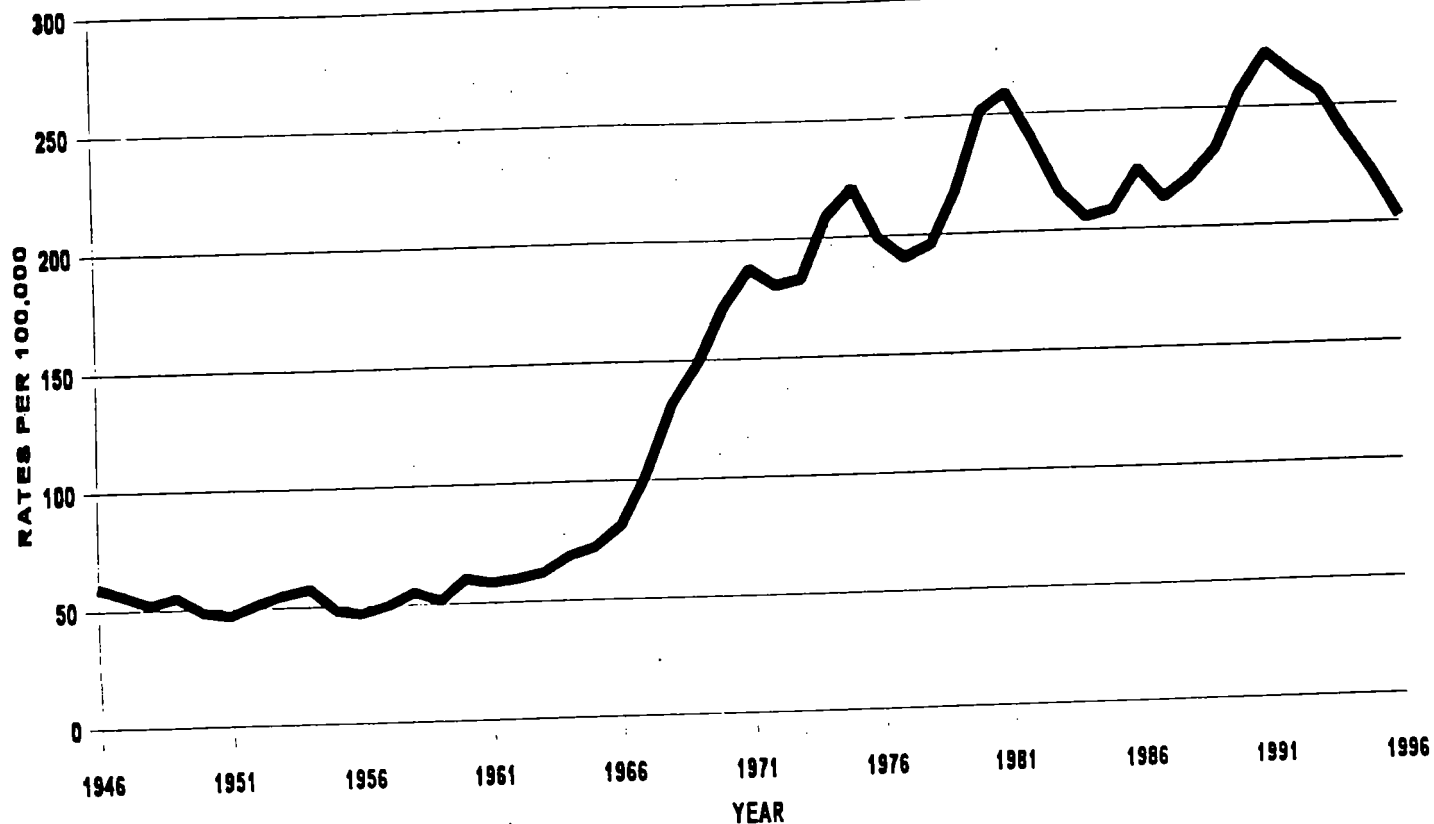
MURDER



RAPE



ROBBERY



AGGRAVATED ASSAULT

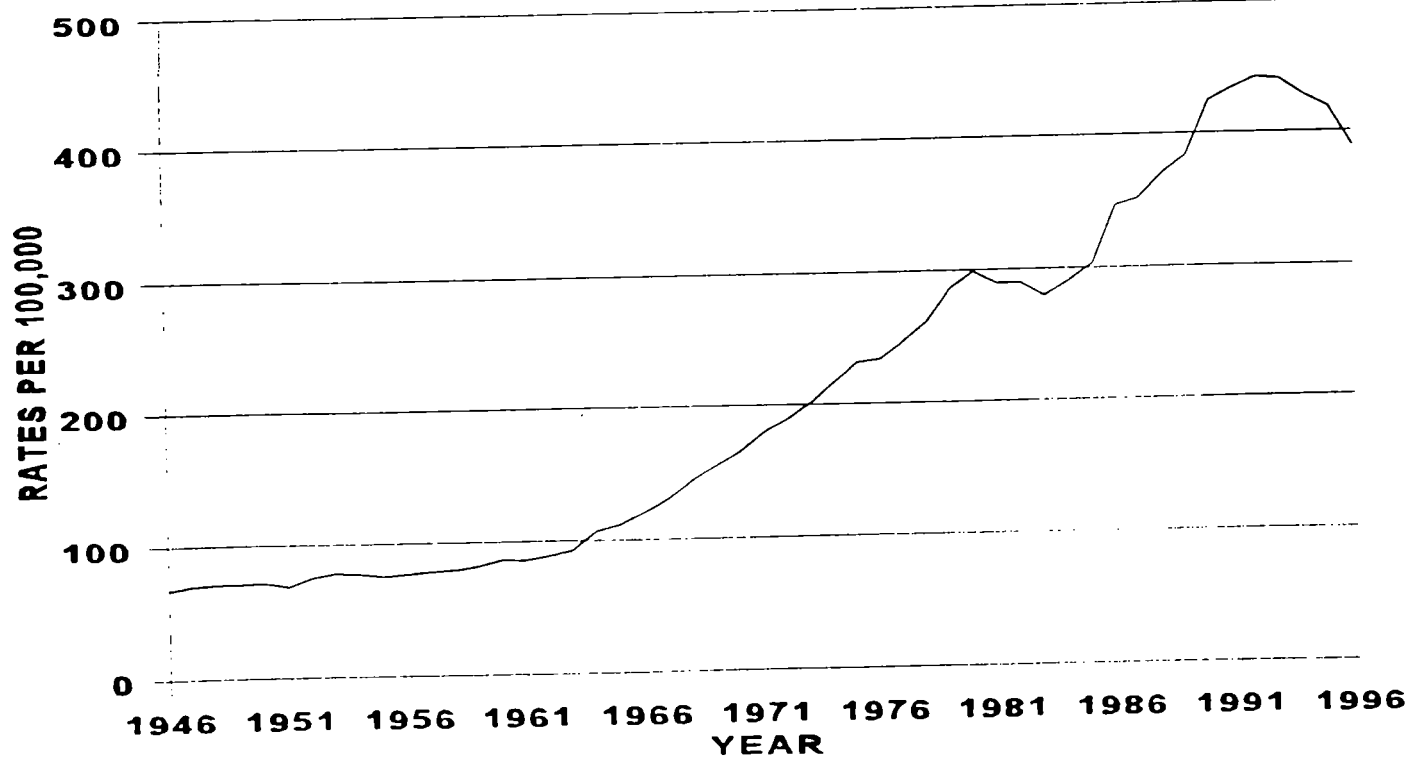
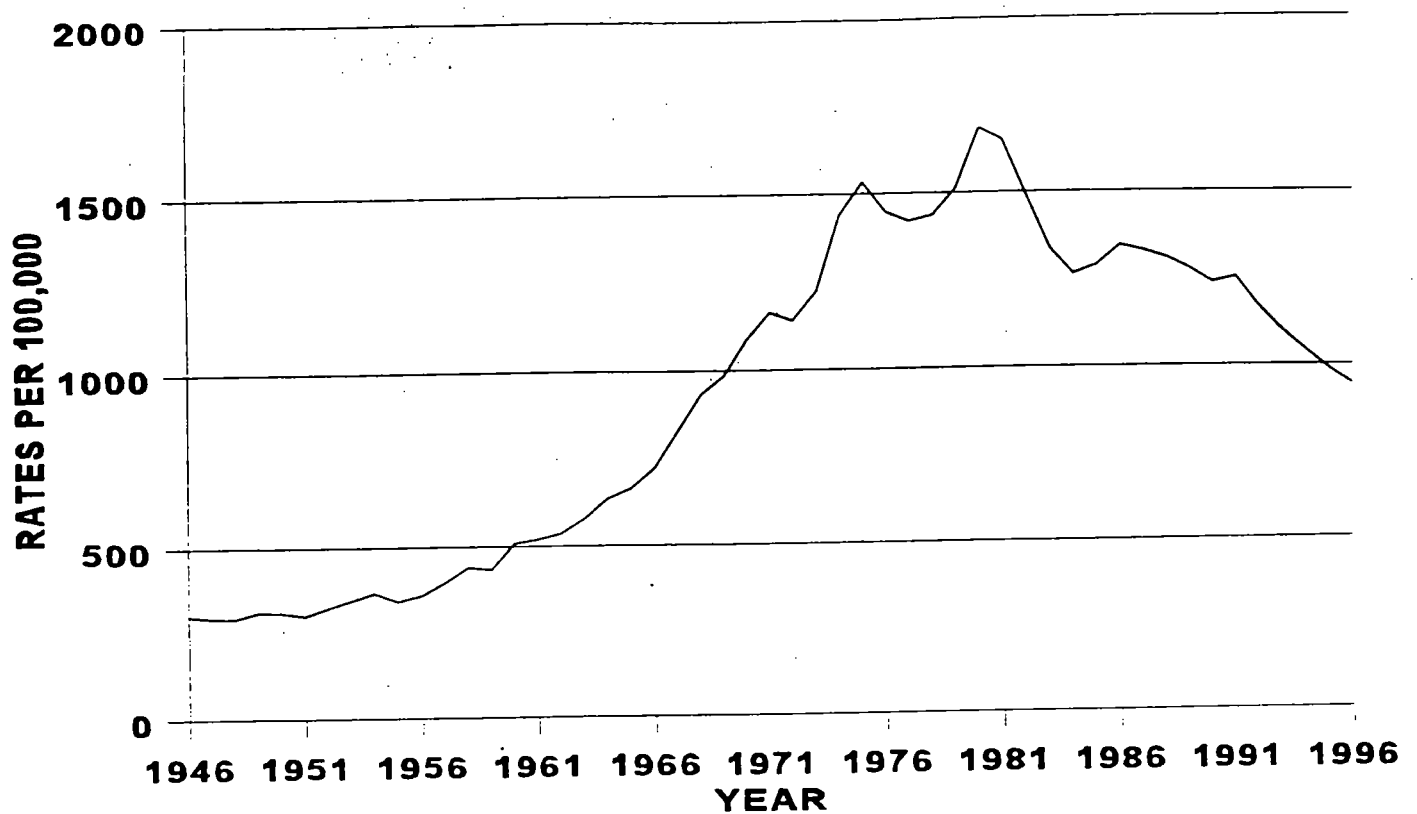
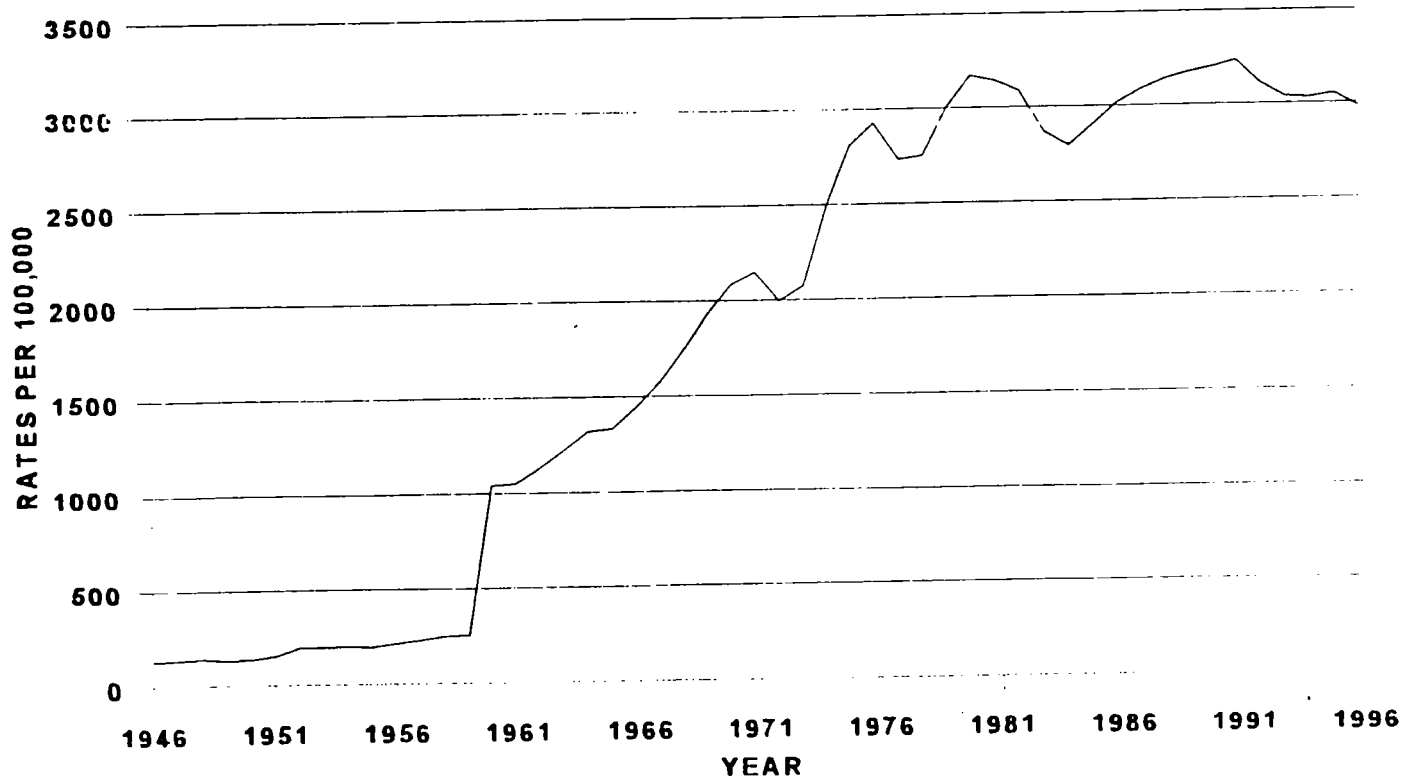


FIGURE 4 PROPERTY CRIME RATES, UCR, 1946-1996.

BURGLARY



LARCENY



MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT

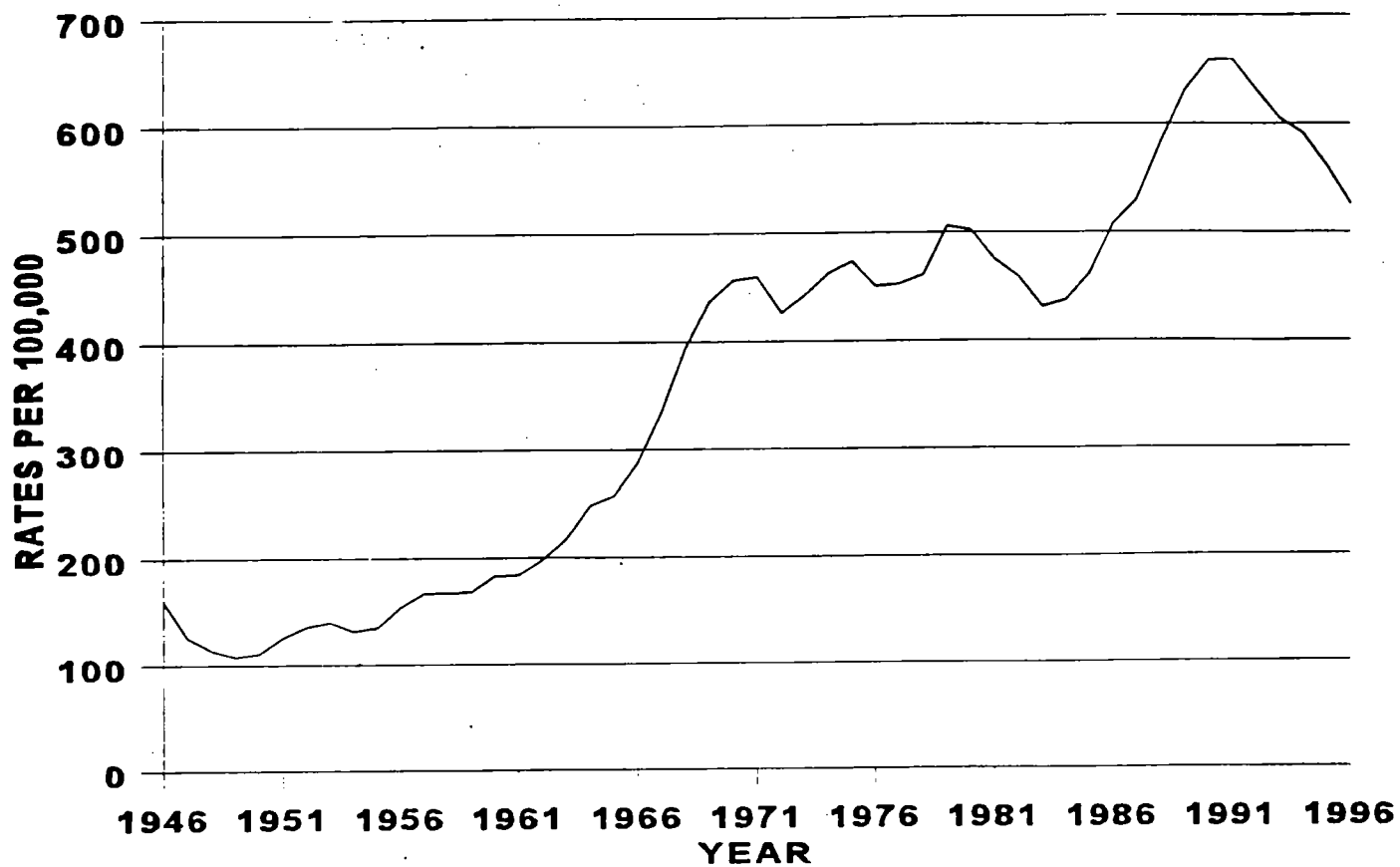


**FIGURE 5. EXPECTED LINKS BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL LEGITIMACY
AND DECREASING CRIME RATES.**

Political trust	Increasing
Criminal justice support	Increasing
Economic well being	Increasing
Welfare support	Increasing
Family organization	Increasing
Educational support	Increasing

**The Improbable Transformation of Inner-City Neighborhoods:
Crime, Violence, Drugs and Youth in the 1990s**

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Introduction

At the peak of the crack epidemic in many American cities -- when people seemed ready to write off inner cities as hopelessly lost -- a remarkable transformation began to take place. In a global economy where the gap between the haves and the have nots continued to increase at an alarming rate, inner city neighborhoods defied nearly all expectations and with minimal outside intervention, mounted an improbable comeback (Johnson 1997). The most visible and trumpeted manifestation of this rebirth was a plummeting crime rate which, in the latter half of the 1990s, fell to lows not seen in more than 30 years (Butterfield 1997, Krauss 1996). Incumbent politicians and law enforcement officials rushed to take credit, while the media and social scientists scrambled to explain how this seemingly unlikely turn of events could have happened in cities that had been unflinchingly described as being undermined and overrun by drugs, crime and violence (see e.g. Anderson 1990, Bennett et al 1996, Chitwood et al 1996, Fagan 1989, Inciardi et al 1992, Johnson et al 1990, Mieczkowski 1990, Padilla 1992, Reuter 1990, Skogan 1989, Taylor 1990, Wallace 1985, Wallace and Wallace 1986).

The reduction of crime was startling because it contradicted two powerful assumptions about life in the United States. The first was that cities were becoming progressively more dangerous places to live. In this formulation, not only were Americans more at risk for becoming victims of violent crime, they were also more likely to become perpetrators of crime as a result of the deterioration of civil society and greater exposure to violence and an unsavory environment (see e.g. Bennett et al 1996, Cloward and Ohlin 1960, Martinez 1996, Miller 1958, Widom 1989). With great alarm, the media, social scientists and policy makers proclaimed that the hegemony enjoyed by white middle class culture was being steadily eroded by the insidious spread of an amoral lifestyle characterized by crime, violence and drug misuse that percolated out from inner city neighborhoods to infect suburbs and rural America (see e.g. Elliott et al 1985, Gladstein et al 1992, Hagedorn 1988, Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1982). In the drive to overtake the hearts

and minds of America's youth, this self-destructive city-born subculture violated the taboo boundaries of race/ethnicity, gender and age. The threat to mainstream America was no longer exclusively embodied by black urban males, but increasingly included whites, females, country folk and, most disturbingly, children (Adler 1975, Baskin et al 1993, Bourgois 1989, Campbell 1984, 1990, Cohen and Felson 1979, Cooley-Quille et al 1995, Dembo et al 1990, Dunlap and Johnson 1992, Inciardi et al 1993, Klein 1995, 1984, McCoy et al 1979, Spergel 1990, Weisberg 1985).

The second assumption was that children, the least prepared to withstand the rigors of life in a postmodern world, were becoming more violent (Blumstein 1995, Fox 1996, Wolfgang et al 1987). Forced to grow up too soon, kids could no longer be kids and the critical period of adolescence was squeezed out as they transitioned directly into adulthood. Rushed along by care givers who force fed them in preparation for the working world or, alternatively, ignored by self-absorbed parents and left to fend for themselves, children experienced puberty at a much earlier age and the powerful hormonal cocktail that coursed through their bodies was left unregulated by the missing reins of moral reasoning or tempered by the calming influence of family and community. Bereft of guidance and safe passage to adulthood, children were increasingly cast adrift to define themselves in a hostile world (Collison 1996, Giddens 1991, Miller 1994), and found that they must "pack guns instead of lunches" (Bennett et al 1996:25) to fight their way out of childhood in an upward spirial of violence that ran incrementally from "fist, stick, knife, gun" (Canada 1995) to the latest in cyber-violence. Some researchers maintained that the "concentration effect" of living in inner city environments greatly increased the likelihood of using violence to resolve disputes and that exposure to "deviant models" characteristic of inner city life invariably led to greater drug abuse, violence, alienation and apathy (e.g. Bernard 1990, Dohrenwend et al 1992, Fitzpatrick and Boldizar 1993, Osofsky 1995, Velez and Ungemack 1989, Wilson 1987). As Sullivan (1996:5) notes, however, very little research has been done on the impact of growing up in a violent environment and how it may

contribute to greater or less violent behavior as an adolescent and later in life. Clearly, social and/or environmental factors shape developmental trajectories, but increasingly, researchers are interested in what people do and the choices they make within the parameters that bound their everyday lives. Ethnographic research has shown that people, even drug users (Friedman et al 1993), have agency and possess the capacity to intervene meaningfully in their own lives, though not always in ways that they intend (see e.g. Maher 1997, Willis 1977). Young people, in particular, are noted, on one hand, for their malleability and capacity to adapt in novel ways to their environment, but they have also been recognized as possessing the ability to alter the status quo (see e.g., Farber 1987).

While the inner cities of many large metropolitan areas in the United States have experienced severe social and economic problems since at least the 1960s, case studies and comparative analyses -- cornerstones of anthropological inquiry -- have shown remarkable variation between cities and neighborhoods that are divided by race/ethnicity, class, immigrant status, housing patterns, crime, violence, employment opportunities, and many other factors, including the prevalence and tolerance of drug use and distribution (see e.g. Adler 1985, Bourgois 1989, Maher 1997, Mieczkowski 1986, Moore et al 1978, Sullivan 1989, Williams 1989). Neighborhoods and communities are important to examine because they are, in addition to family contexts, where people learn to be human. They form the crucible where orientations, outlooks, behaviors, and lifestyles are forged (Arensberg and Kimball 1965). To understand neighborhood variation, as the substantivist school of economic anthropology insists (Dalton 1969, Polanyi et al 1957), economic behavior, indeed all behavior, must be situated in a local community which renders it intelligible. As Sullivan (1989:108) has pointed out with respect to crime, including drug dealing:

criminal economic activity is embedded in community context to a far greater extent than other kinds of economic activity. The risks of regular business activity depend primarily on markets and competition. The risks of criminal



activity depend on these factors *and* on the relative positions of victims and offenders in the community.

To understand how and why inner city life has changed in the 1990s and the relationship between drugs, crime, violence and youth development, it is helpful to examine specific examples. This paper, which focuses on two Brooklyn, New York, neighborhoods, seeks to add to our understanding of the local-level processes which contributed to the remarkable transformation of the inner city in the 1990s and the people who live there. By examining the lives of different groups of young people -- a household sample, gang members, and drug dealers -- it will show that the urge to invest explanatory power in structural (e.g., demographic, economic) or institutional (e.g., police, courts) factors to explain the turnaround witnessed in inner city neighborhoods, especially plummeting crime rates, is tempered by a close examination of the lives of people who live there, the very people who have agency and must ultimately decide whether or not to use a drug, pick a fight or commit a crime.

Methods

This study is based upon 10 years (1987-1997) of ethnographic fieldwork spanning nine different research projects conducted in several Brooklyn neighborhoods.¹ Though

¹ These projects include: Community AIDS Prevention Outreach Demonstration (National Institute on Drug Abuse #DA06723), The Community Effects of Street-Level Narcotics Enforcement: A Study of the New York City Police Department's Tactical Narcotics Teams (National Institute of Justice), The Ecology of Crime and Drug Use in American Cities: Social Structure and Neighborhood Dynamics (Social Science Research Council), Social Factors and HIV Risk (NIDA #DA 06723), HIV Risk Among Youth (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases #A134723), Latin Kings and Gang Violence (Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation), The Natural History of Crack Distribution (NIDA #DA05126-

each of these projects focused on different topics and/or populations -- for example, social networks among injecting drug users, crack markets, or the risk behaviors of local youth -- the one enduring feature of the ethnographic effort in each project was an attempt to situate the observed behavior of research subjects in the context of a wider community. As such, neighborhoods as a whole were examined, and the direct observation and analysis of behaviors and practices at both the individual and group level were thus able to be placed in the context of a community which gave them meaning. Research participants were observed in public and private domains, allowing for descriptions of the intimate, mundane or extraordinary details of their everyday lives, the social contexts which framed them, and manner by which they comported themselves and constructed identities.

For example, in one project (SFHR, 1990-93), hundreds of hours were spent observing injecting drug users (IDUs) in local settings where they interacted with each other. This included extended observations in shooting galleries, crack houses, shanties and shacks, streetcorner hang-outs, abandoned buildings, vacant lots, rooftops, cars, trucks, public parks, fast food restaurants, and apartments. Many hours were spent observing injection events and discussing the procedures and protocols surrounding those events with individuals and groups. Observations were also made of the interactions between IDUs and drug distributors, family members, neighborhood residents, and various types of law enforcement personnel, including beat officers, members of the Tactical Narcotics Team (TNT), and the Warrant Squad. After three years of ethnographic fieldwork, several hundred pages of observational notes had been written and more than 210 open-ended interviews with drug users in the neighborhood were conducted. In addition, formal interviews with 767 IDUs were completed in the project's storefront. Ethnographic interviews were designed to elicit information on a wide range of topics including demographics, childhood and family background, education and work history,

05), Drug Use and HIV Risk Among Youth (NIDA #DA10411) and Heroin in the 21st Century (NIDA #DA10105-02).

drug use history, current drug use, social networks, knowledge of distribution and sales, income generation and expenditures, participation in criminal activity, impact of law enforcement, injecting practices, knowledge of HIV and other blood-borne viruses, and experiences of treatment and/or quitting.

One strength of ethnography is that it allows for the combination of different data sources and permits information to be cross-validated and targeted for follow up and/or clarification. For this research, the combination of data from several studies provided widely divergent outlooks and orientations toward such topics as crime, violence and drugs, and helped strengthen the process of triangulation between individuals and groups. Space does not permit a review of each of the research projects which contributed to this paper, however, what has hopefully emerged from this synthesis is a more sophisticated understanding of the people who have so remarkably changed their lives.

Drugs and Inner City Deterioration

For many Americans, drug use by inner-city residents was responsible for the demise of once proud cities. Drugs, they said, devastated neighborhoods as swiftly and certainly as a wrecking ball and, in their wake, entire swaths of cities resembled “Dresden after the war.” Drugs were also seen as a contagious virus which eroded the flesh of communities and turned domestic and communal spaces meant for sociability and recreation into danger zones which needed to be quarantined from uninfected areas (see, Crane 1991, Peterson and Harrell 1992:7). Parks were transformed into drug bazaars rendering them unsuitable for children. Mothers feared pushing baby carriages along streets resembling Serejevo’s “sniper alley” where even the police would not drive. Local businesses were systematically driven out by mounting losses as goods mysteriously flew off shelves and landed on street corners. Others were coopted by nefarious war-lords who callously inverted once-legitimate enterprises into thinly-disguised shelters for drug profits, personnel and product. Hearty entrepreneurs who attempted to defy the trend invested heavily in bullet-proof glass, video cameras, industrial-strength locks, vicious dogs, and

private security guards, but still found themselves waging a losing battle against thugs who encircled the neighborhood to intimidate customers and choke off commerce. Drugs were also said to deplete a neighborhood's human capital by ruining once-promising lives and forcing productive members of the community to move elsewhere. As the social life of neighborhoods visibly shriveled up and constricted, public services also withered: garbage piled up uncollected as sidestreets became dumping grounds for all manner of refuse, firehouses were closed as beleaguered firefighters conceded ground to the arsonists and drug vultures who scavenged over the bones of abandoned buildings, public transportation lines were cut back as fewer people had reason to come to or leave the neighborhood, taxi sightings became as rare as spotting a bald eagle, ambulances careened through the potholed streets but traveled long distances further endangering lives, as schools were neglected staff became demoralized and children fell further behind developmental milestones, after-school programs were curtailed, libraries fell into disrepair as they tumbled further down on the hierarchy of spending priorities, and pools, basketball courts and other recreational facilities were transformed into fortresses which did little to insulate residents from the encroaching urban jungle. Replacing these hallmarks of community viability and vitality were institutions which supported and fed the ultra-violent, cancerous drug culture that spread like wildfire, consuming inner cities throughout the United States and, increasingly, in urban centers around the globe.

This focus on drugs as the root of the problem plaguing cities was a new, more clever variation on a decades-old theme of blaming the decline of aging industrial centers on newly arrived minority populations (Greenbaum 1993:140). In the older version, the afflictions and miseries associated with inner city life were said to be the outcome of a "culture of poverty" or a "deviant subculture" in which poor people sought out, enjoyed and perpetuated destructive lifestyles (see e.g. Banfield 1970, Glasgow 1980, Lewis 1966, Suttles 1968). The new, less overtly racist variation on this theme -- that drugs and the weak-willed racial/ethnic minorities who cannot resist them are responsible for the decline

of cities -- is a conviction which the crack discourse planted deeply in the American consciousness during the 1980s. It exempted the socioeconomic mainstream from responsibility for multiple inner-city crises. Within the social sciences, variations on the “deviant subculture” theme sealed off the inner-city drug economy as if it were in a virtual vacuum, impervious to all forces from the surrounding local, national, and global economies. In this school of thought, such an environment produced “superpredators” who grew up surrounded by “deviant, delinquent, and criminal adults in a practically perfect criminogenic environment -- that is, an environment that seems almost consciously designed to produce vicious, unrepentant predatory street criminals” (Bennett 1996: 14). Even some drug researchers who make reference to the role of larger structural forces in recent urban decline rely uncritically upon the analytically specious idea of a “criminal underclass” (Johnson et al 1990: 10). At its most extreme, this ideology of individual blame revived long-discredited theories of “genetic predisposition” as the cause of criminal activity (Wilson & Herrnstein 1985, Rowe and Osgood 1984).

Contrasting with those who blame the deterioration of the inner cities on the attitudes and norms of newly arrived minority populations or as a consequence of the drugs they used, another school of social scientists convincingly showed that structural factors played a decisive role in the degradation of inner city neighborhoods (see e.g. Kasarda 1992, Peterson 1991, Portes 1983, Sassen-Koob 1988, Wallace 1985, Wallace and Wallace 1986, Wilson 1987). To these scholars, the destruction had far more to do with the absence of legitimate employment opportunities than with the presence of hard drugs. The major “destroyers” were those who, following the age-old pursuit of profit maximization and capital accumulation, made economic and political decisions in boardrooms and bedrooms far away from the inner city. The decline of the cities in the Northeast was the result of the regional de-industrialization of the 1960s, when manufacturing capital fled and relocated in the non-unionized South and West of the country, before moving on to Central and South America and the Pacific Rim. Most of the loss of manufacturing jobs and the

subsequent increase of inner city poverty was concentrated in four Northern "frostbelt" cities: New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Detroit (Peterson and Harrell 1992:5). Kasarda (1992:71) notes that "between 1967 and 1987, Chicago lost 60 percent of its manufacturing jobs, Detroit 51 percent, New York City 58 percent, and Philadelphia 64 percent." The conjoined effect of these structural forces over three decades had affected the availability of housing, real estate values and money flows, producing the neighborhood contexts for the sorts of drug-using and drug-selling markets found in inner city neighborhoods, each of which was accompanied by a different set of psychosocial outcomes (Fagan 1992:103, Sullivan 1989). These studies demonstrated that the destructive behavior of inner-city residents did not simply result from their use of illegal drugs, but originated in social-structural conditions.

Explanations which draw attention to the structural conditions underlying urban decay are an important corrective to those which interpret the problem as one of "deviant" norms, attitudes or lifestyles, but a macrostructural perspective suffers from at least two weaknesses: 1) it has difficulty accounting for neighborhood variation, and 2) people are afforded little agency in such formulations; they are seen as simply reacting in predictable ways to their misfortunes (Greenstone 1991:403). With the exception of neighborhoods that are gentrifying (Marcuse 1986, Smith 1986) the structuralist's portrayal of the conditions that serve to undermine inner city life is unflinchingly bleak, and the expectation is that social conditions will follow suit. To adherents of this school of thought, the current drop in crime and drug use defies the logic of their model, they cannot adequately explain it. And yet, crime and hard drug use continued to decline, and, as of the end of 1997, had not bottomed out.

Northeast Brooklyn in Transition

In the early 1960s, many New York City neighborhoods experienced a radical transformation which originated in the period's restructuring of global, national and regional socio-economic arrangements (see e.g. Braverman 1974, Dumin 1987, Mandel

1975, McCullough 1983, Monti 1991, Phillips 1990, Ross and Trachte 1990, Sutton 1979). Neighborhoods which had once been populated by European-Americans were rapidly evacuated and repopulated by migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, where U.S.-directed modernization and development programs had transformed indigenous economies, causing malintegration between economic sectors, unemployment and new waves of migration (see e.g. Koslofsky 1989, Sassen-Koob 1989, Wallerstein 1976). But as European-Americans deserted the city, over 500,000 manufacturing jobs also fled the city, and as the city's tax base shrank, expenditure on public services was sharply reduced (Kasarda 1992, Mollenkopf and Castell 1991). Although a few large manufacturers remained, the typical poor-neighborhood company in the 1980s and 1990s intermittently employed workers in non-union, low-skill, low-wage, and high-risk jobs. The economy had stopped guaranteeing economic prosperity and security and offered high unemployment and underemployment instead. Thus, on arrival in cities in the United States, a significant proportion of new immigrants were trapped in steadily deteriorating neighborhoods by unemployment and the lack of low-income housing.

The changes which took place in Northeast Brooklyn were, in many ways, typical of what happened elsewhere. In Williamsburg, reform, conservative and orthodox Jews fled to the suburbs beginning in the late 1950s, abandoning apartment buildings on the Southside of the neighborhood while Italians on the Northside entrenched themselves, fiercely clinging to neighborhood traditions (Curtis and Maher 1992, Trebay 1990). Bushwick, an adjacent neighborhood to the southeast, emptied out in a rash of arson-related house fires as homeowners who could not sell attempted to collect insurance monies instead. Where there were once bustling, viable neighborhoods which thrived on stable manufacturing jobs nearby, there were now shuttered factories and block after block of abandoned buildings and empty lots (Glatzer 1993, Oser 1994). The section had become an urban wasteland whose charred, derelict landscape was matched by a frontier mentality

where confrontation and violence were commonly used to impose order and resolve disputes (Tabor 1992).

The high turnover of tenants and homeowners weakened voluntary associations, if they were not completely discontinued, and disinvestment in schools and community depleted PTAs, clubs, church groups and grassroots political groupings. The informal controls which defined and protect neighborhoods were thus slackened, opening the door for organized drug distribution and a steadily increasing crime rate (Curtis and Maher 1992, Wallace and Wallace 1986). Below, the former wife of a Puerto Rican drug distributor in Williamsburg describes how, even by the 1960s, their neighborhood lacked structure and how the absence of formal organization among neighborhood residents was partially compensated for by the existence of family-based drug distribution networks.

We never had any block associations. No, not in this neighborhood. This neighborhood wasn't together. One reason, I think, is because a lot of these people had a son or somebody bringing in some type of (illegally earned) money. Even grandmothers used to be lookouts. Whole families used to be into selling drugs. Yeah, from the 70s on; when they started selling drugs in the streets, they needed lookouts. It was like a family affair.

These nascent organizations acted as springboards to political and/or economic power within the neighborhood, and for newly arriving minority youths, aside from family connections, there were few enduring community ties to which they pledged loyalty. Lacking significant economic opportunity and entering an urban terrain where neighborhood conditions and controls were crumbling, many newcomers found themselves pulled into the orbit of drugs, either as distributors and/or users (Curtis and Maher 1992, Preble and Casey 1969). Drugs and the "fast" money circulating in drug markets proved more attractive to them than the seemingly bankrupt ideas of previous generations which believed it possible to climb the ladder to economic success and achieve the American dream through hard work.

Drug Markets in Northeast Brooklyn

An enduring theme of illegal drugs in New York City is that although distribution has been vertically organized since the prohibition of alcohol, control over it has shifted from one ethnic population to another. In Northeast Brooklyn, Puerto Rican freelance distributors and family businesses filled the vacuum left by the withdrawal of Italian retailers in the early 1960s. As the popularity of heroin skyrocketed in the mid 1960s, they quickly cornered street-level sales in many neighborhoods and their incipient organizations grew in size and complexity (Curtis and Maher 1992, Preble and Casey 1969). When the heroin epidemic ended in the 1970s, just a few Puerto Ricans "owners" had consolidated the market and formed monolithic enterprises which tightly integrated wholesale, mid-level and street-level markets. Located in selected Latino neighborhoods, these businesses remained an exclusively Puerto Rican enterprise. In Williamsburg, four Puerto Rican "owners" employed a street-level staff of Puerto Ricans exclusively (Curtis and Maher 1992).

When the popularity of crack skyrocketed in New York City in the mid-1980s, the owners of heroin and cocaine businesses in Williamsburg resisted adding crack to their menus despite increasing numbers of customers who were asking for it, and only grudgingly allowed fledgling (Dominican) crack distributors to operate on the edge of their turfs (Curtis and Maher 1992). Even though crack eventually made inroads into Williamsburg in the late 1980s, the antipathy which heroin and cocaine distributors, shooting gallery operators and drug injectors held toward crack users initially kept the crack scene on the neighborhood fringe. But in passing on the opportunity to diversify their tightly controlled market, the owners of drug businesses in Williamsburg emboldened competitors who eventually usurped Puerto Rican dominance over the market.

Throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s, Bushwick was a second-tier drug market in comparison with Williamsburg. Located immediately southeast of the latter and further into Brooklyn, Bushwick is more isolated and inconvenient for drug users from

outside the neighborhood to reach via car or public transportation. In Bushwick, territory was much less rigidly controlled than in Williamsburg and crack, cocaine and heroin distributors, many of them newly arrived Dominicans, were able to make significant inroads into the neighborhood in the late 1980s. By 1988, fueled by aggressive crack sales and offering an entire range of street-level drugs to consumers, drug markets in Bushwick began to rival those in Williamsburg. Still, their location was bad and many drug users continued to utilize Bushwick as a secondary market, a place they would go only when no drugs could be found elsewhere. But if Bushwick's location was inconvenient, Williamsburg's was good, too good. In the mid-1980s, gentrification in lower Manhattan began to drive many young artists and professionals to the outer boroughs and Williamsburg became an increasingly attractive option to many of them. A housing shortage in Williamsburg, which was already bad given rapidly expanding Latino and Hasidic communities (Goldman 1990, Hornblower 1988), was thus exacerbated by an influx of Manhattanites. Suddenly, buildings which had been abandoned since the early 1970s and were the sites of shooting galleries and hideouts for drug dealers were valuable property. They were sealed up, cleaned up, and completely transformed within the space of a few years. Many factory buildings near the waterfront, especially those with a view of Manhattan, were turned into lofts and sold for handsome profits. Apartment buildings were rehabilitated and rented out to local low- and middle-income families who waged spirited battles to gain entry.

For Bushwick, the city-wide blackout of August 1977, when many businesses and homes were burned, represented a low point. Throughout the 1980s, like Williamsburg, Bushwick too began to experience renewal, though much more modest in scope (Oser 1994). Small industries reclaimed many vacant factories and New York City, in partnership with landlords, slowly began to rehabilitate some of the apartment buildings which had gone untended for many years. But when Williamsburg began to gentrify, drug markets were displaced to Bushwick, aided by a crackdown on street-level drug markets in

Williamsburg by the Tactical Narcotics Team in 1989 (Curtis and Sviridoff 1994). Robert, a 41 year old African American from Newark, NJ, discussed his reasons for coming to Bushwick in 1990:

I started copping at Alphabet City [Manhattan's Lower East Side]. When [Operation] Pressure Point started [in 1983-84], the boys told me things had moved over to Williamsburg, South Second Street. Then they cracked down over there and unless you actually know someone or something like that, because of the new housing, the place is virtually cleaned except for a few bodegas up and down Broadway that you can buy cocaine from, and stuff like that. So then that whole scene closed down and I started coming down here.

Thus, the modest recovery mounted by Bushwick was promptly stalled by a steady increase in the amount of street-level crack, heroin and cocaine trafficking which drew participants from throughout the New York metropolitan area (Curtis et al 1995). By 1990, a street-level drug “supermarket” had formed in the northern tier of Bushwick and within a four block area, more than two dozen different “stamps” of heroin were aggressively hawked by street-level sellers who called out the name of their product like Coney Island carnival barkers. Between February 1991 and May 1992, the number of distributors and users at the largest street-level market in Bushwick doubled (Curtis et al 1995).

The police, and Tactical Narcotics Teams (TNT) in particular, enjoyed a great benefit from the contraction and concentration of street-level cocaine (crack) markets throughout New York City. They were able to focus their efforts on fewer precincts and still maintain the same high number of arrests (about 400 per month per unit) previously achieved within a much larger geographical area. For example, over 8,200 persons were arrested between 1988 and 1992 in Bushwick alone. A common joke was that Rikers Island, the city jail, had turned into “a Bushwick block party” (Curtis and Hamid 1997) where young women and children sat in the waiting room exchanging gossip about recent

arrests, sentences received, and mounting family pressures, while young men gathered on the other side of the bars in anticipation of visits by family and friends.

The city-wide conversion of more decentralized drug markets to a few supermarkets in Bushwick, East Harlem and a few other neighborhoods also precipitated greater tumult. Drug distributors have long commanded attention (Fagan 1989, Goldstein 1984, Hamid 1990, Skolnick et al 1989) for their unprecedented levels of and novel approaches to violence, including the infamous “Colombian necktie,” the use of boxcutters to slash faces, and their promotion of the 9mm pistol to the status of cultural icon. Goldstein (1984) has noted that “systemic” violence accounts for the lion’s share of incidents related to illegal drugs, and nowhere was that more apparent than in Bushwick. While some markets earned reputations for controlling violence (e.g., Hamid’s (1991) marijuana distributors, Williams’ (1989) crack dealers), distributors in Bushwick employed it regularly and systematically (Curtis and Maher 1992, Maher and Curtis 1994, Maher 1997). There, large corporate-like organizations effected street-level drug sales, and since institutional and neighborhood-level restraints had already vanished, they completely disregarded the sensibilities of residents in doing so. They also undermined the prosperity of the community which hosted them, just as their counterparts in the formal economy had done. While their sole benefit consisted of low-level, dead-end jobs for youths, the damages included plummeting property values, a greater incidence of drug misuse and high rates of incarceration and AIDS. But their most crippling legacy was violence. As one college student from the neighborhood wrote in 1991, “Nights here are like the Fourth of July, but all year round. There are always guns being fired.” Another noted that there were few public places that were safe any longer:

It was the summer of 1989 and I was together with my best friend from high school, Julio, and we were going to the park to play some ball and catch up on old times. All of a sudden we heard gun shots from an Uzi machine gun. I yelled, “get down,” and took cover behind a tree. My

friend, on the other hand, panicked and ran. I couldn't believe that I was witnessing an actual drug war over territory in my neighborhood. I was shocked and amazed. I wondered where and how my friend was doing. I looked and saw him lying on the ground, bleeding from his left leg. The whole thing must have lasted only a few minutes, but it seemed like forever. Today, I can no longer go to the park where I used to run track and field for fear of such episodes. I either drive to another track or just run through the neighborhood in the early morning, which can also be dangerous.

Corporate Distributors and the Legacy of Violence

By 1992, one Puerto Rican and three Dominican "owners" ruled over crack distribution at the northern end of the Bushwick. Each had a trademark, or the color of the "tops" of the crack vials they sold: white, blue, brown and pink. Dominican families monitored the day to day operations of the largest three. Younger family members and close non-kin "associates" directed street sales, while older family members, entirely removed from the street scene, were the "executives." When there were not enough family members, owners employed persons who shared a similar background. The practice earned them the resentment of street-level workers, particularly among the Puerto Ricans who had controlled distribution throughout the 1970s and early 1980s (and had similar policies), only to be toppled by the Dominicans in the late 1980s. The rivalry which had long existed between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in New York City was thus sharpened in the drug business:

Henry (Puerto Rican heroin seller, 1992): The Puerto Ricans and Dominicans are pretty separate. They got their own clubs, you know, their own crew. Some of them socialize, you know ...people that are not in the drug business. They might work together in the same factory, same jobs. Some I could say they're tight. But when it comes to the drug business, they're not tight, you know. There's no trust whatsoever, you know; and

it's always remorse and always backbittin' and they're always tryin' to get over on each other.

As arrests by the war on drugs daily depleted the supply of eligible Latino street-level dealers, African Americans, European Americans and heavy drug users, who were marginalized and victimized even more severely by these organizations, replaced them (Maher and Curtis 1992). The gulf separating management from labor widened and their already contentious and adversarial relationships turned even more distrustful and violence-prone. Resenting their harsh and dangerous conditions of labor, and the disrespect their managers showed, many street-level sellers took every opportunity to abscond with the drugs. They fully expected physical punishment for the transgression.

Doc (African American heroin seller, 1992): I haven't been down here recently because well, 'cause I ain't got they money yet. And the last guy I seen that had got busted, or jettied, or whatever, he came back months later and he didn't have the money, and I seen them bat him down. They broke his ribs, they broke his lungs.

Jose (Puerto Rican heroin seller, 1991): If they catch the people that are cuttin' out with their product they either make them work for nothing or they'll break their arm, or break their leg. Forget it, man. They hurt ...they get a beating. They break their legs or an arm. But now if anyone hits you, they all hit you. They all hit you.

While brute force or the threat of it is the ultimate means distributors have to enforce rules, a business is ruined when it invites police attention too frequently. Accordingly, sensible or successful distributors avoided or minimized its use. But Bushwick's corporate "owners" were reckless. Violent acts were more common in their markets because of the divisions and animosities that rigidly separated different levels of the organizations, because the owners did not live in the neighborhood and did not have to witness or confront the aftermath of their deeds, and because they could easily relocate supplies to

outlets they maintained in other neighborhoods. Indeed, owners encouraged their managers to regularly use public displays of force as a way of intimidating customers, untrustworthy employees, and to send the message that they should not be crossed. For example, one owner hired an “enforcer” who strolled around the neighborhood with a baseball bat on which he wrote the names of his targets. After punishing them, he rubbed off their names.

In the Bushwick of the early 1990s, “face to face” or “man to man” confrontations between individuals were replaced by humiliating group beatings, or “beatdowns.” Their unrestrained brutality affected local adolescents, who were its daily witnesses. Sometimes they too participated gratuitously in beatdowns and other bloody episodes in which they had no stake: they simply saw someone being chased and, with malicious smiles on their faces, picked up their baseball bats or bicycle chains and joined the chase. For them, “fun” was no longer spraying graffiti, playing ball, or dancing: it was the number and severity of beatdowns they administered daily, and they became so frequent that the sight of blood stopped being a cause for alarm to researchers and local residents alike:

Looking out the storefront’s picture window, I saw my old neighbor George this morning. He was all beaten up and his nose was all bloody. He said that some “dope fiends” had jumped him this morning and tried to take his money. I don’t know whether this is true or not, but suspected that he might have been the one who tried to take someone’s money. He came inside the storefront and wiped his face off with some paper towels. We hadn’t seen him for several months, at least since New Year’s. He said that today was the first time that he had come down here in a couple of months. So I asked him what he’s selling out here today. He said he was going to be selling “brown tops” [crack]. Apparently, brown tops is an organization where somebody can just show up on their door step all beaten up and say, “yo, I want to sell for you today,” and they will put him out there on the street, bloody nose and all. (fieldnotes 1992)

Drug supermarkets made these atrocities an unremarkable commonplace feature of everyday life. While police operations which target street-level drug markets may anticipate the use of force, perhaps as people resist being arrested or during their attempts to flee, some members of the New York City Police Department were innovative, and conceived many unusual applications which deeply alienated neighborhood residents. For example, when "sweeping" the main drug selling areas, they would cordon off both ends of a street and require everyone in between to lie down, regardless of who they were. While this tactic sometimes yielded a handsome body count of arrests, it also obliged elderly grandmothers and young children to grovel on the asphalt while being roughly searched -- and it enraged many residents.

When the police could not find drug distributors to arrest, they went to well-known shooting galleries. But officers loathed going into them. They believed that too many hiding places lurked in their dark and sometimes labyrinthine constructions and that they were an obstacle course of discarded HIV-infected syringes. To flush the drug users out instead, some officers used to throw large rocks through the windows. They were caught in the act by a prize-winning reporter for the Los Angeles Times, who had been interviewing heroin injectors when the projectiles whizzed by his head (Bearak 1992). Drug users also showed the research team large welts across their torsos which officers had inflicted with whips of thick television cable as they fled the galleries.

In the summer, local police officers mercilessly and systematically harassed drug users who loitered near the major drug selling locales. Early in the morning when they had fallen asleep on the sidewalk, foot patrol officers would routinely rouse them with kicks and order them to move. Sometimes the kick simply nudged the unfortunate awake, at other times it was meant to cause pain. So habituated were they to the pastime that the police officers continued it even when video cameras were brought to photograph them. They also responded with an overwhelming show of force at almost any infraction, be it a drug user's, dealer's or passerby's.

Pablo (1991): A young Latino, about 25 or 30 years old and weighing about 120 pounds, was being arrested by two officers. They had him in a choke hold and he started bleeding through his nose. I informed the police officer that the guy was bleeding through his nose and he couldn't breathe. His reaction to me was, "hey, I can't breathe either." As the crowd got bigger, they started to notice the guy was bleeding through his nose, and people were saying things [addressing insults at] to the cop. He sent some sort of message into his walkie talkie, and within 30 seconds there were dozens of cops on the corner. They were all there to arrest one guy who apparently had attempted to steal a bicycle. It just looked ridiculous, but the situation could have easily gotten out of control.

By late summer 1992, the populace was close to insurrection and television and newspaper crews came to interview unruly crowds who were protesting the mounting number of police shootings and beatings of youths. Police had responded in full riot gear, and other residents had pelted them from the rooftops with bottles, debris and hateful epithets. Apparently thinking that beleaguered drug distributors were fomenting the neighborhood's growing hostility towards them, and immediately following a sensationalizing article in the New York Times (Tabor 1992), the police mounted yet another major offensive against street-level drug markets in September 1992. They stationed a mobile trailer in a nearby park to serve as the base of operations for more than 300 additional uniformed officers. These were positioned around the park and on each corner of drug "hot spots." Mounted police trotted by to discourage trafficking or "loitering." Officers stopped and questioned all pedestrians and asked for their identification and destination. Non-residents were told to stay out. The heaviest drug trafficking streets were sealed with wooden barricades and police vans, and traffic was diverted to other streets. When evening came, they drove in large flat-bed trucks with gas-powered generators and klieg lights which, parked at strategic corners, illuminated entire

blocks. Police painted the street numbers of buildings on rooftops to enable helicopters to give additional support to officers pursuing suspects on foot. For the next 18 months, Bushwick was virtually occupied by a small army of police.

Growing Up in the 1990s: Violence, Crime and Drugs

For Bushwick youth, it would not have been unreasonable to expect that rates of crime and violence would continue to increase throughout the 1990s, and that it was only a matter of time before a new breed of superpredators made their ominous presence felt. Much evidence seemed to suggest that the dominant models of urban decay and worsening youth violence were correct. Many youth had grown up in dysfunctional multi-problem families, without positive role models, and left unchecked by the informal controls which had defined and protected previous generations. The lack of order and structure worsened as youth turned into adolescents. Where there was typically a diffusion of responsibility for social control shifting away from parents and onto societal institutions, especially schools, in Bushwick, these societal checks had been largely missing and young adults had to forge their own solutions to problems.

The daily occurrences of violence and crime etched deep furrows on the bodies and psyches of Bushwick youth. A representative household sample of Bushwick youth 18-21 conducted in 1994-95 (Friedman et al 1997b:120) noted the pervasiveness of violence:

Violence has been an important part of their lives: approximately 10% report having been physically abused by a police officer, 30% have been threatened or stabbed with a knife, 27% have been caught in a random shoot-out, 22% have been threatened or shot at with a gun, 33% have been mugged or robbed with a threat of violence, and 14% of the women and 5% of the men report having been sexually abused. Over half (51%) report having carried a weapon such as a knife, club or gun.

But far from becoming superpredators as an outcome of this exposure, many youth withdrew from social life, afraid of lingering in public spaces for fear of violence. Violence

had become so commonplace that they often listened in near disbelief to stories about when fighting was fair, and done for reasons that were righteous or virtuous. Walter (17 years old when interviewed in 1993) discussed his reasons for avoiding spending time on the street:

Like the stories I heard about when my uncles were growing up: if there was a problem between two gangs, those two gangs would kill each other. It's not like that anymore. They try to hit you...if there's ten people there, they're just gonna come and spray the whole block and whoever gets caught gets caught. They're not even aiming at you, they're just...that's the crowd, he's in there somewhere, let's knock everybody. It's crazy. And they don't care if there's children, older people. They don't even respect cops anymore. They don't respect anybody.

Many youth who were interviewed between 1993-95 said that they were so fearful of random and/or police violence that they no longer spent much time in parks, playgrounds, stoops or the other places where youths had traditionally “hung out.” Indeed, the question, “where do you hang out?,” seemed to offend them. When pushed to explain, Harv (19 years old when first interviewed in 1993), a former cocaine and heroin dealer on Fishman Street who had renounced his violent past and tried to distance himself from peers who continued to commit crimes and sell drugs for corporate owners, said that hanging out was for “hoodlums.”

What makes one a hoodlum? It's a kid who runs around doing stupid, ignorant things, like hanging out late at night, getting drunk, startin fights, wanna do crime, steal...that's a hoodlum. Somebody who's always in the streets and he's very streetwise. It's someone who does vandalism like shooting in the air or breaking bottles in the street.

Javier (16 years old when first interviewed in 1993) grudgingly admitted that he sometimes spent time with age-mates who were involved with drugs, violence and crime, but he preferred to avoid them in favor of a more mature crowd.

Some of the people I grew up with are getting killed, like about 10 of them got killed. For me, I think I grew up ahead of time. I'm more or an adult than anything else. OK, I hang out. I chill out now and then with the young guys, but it's rare. Most of the time, during the week you find me with people like 30, mid 30s, 40 years old and I'm chilling with them. I feel safer, you know. I don't have to deal with what's going on in the street. Once in a while I'll hang out with one of the fellas I grew up with. Maybe if I bump into him. Like if I'm walking down the street, and I haven't seen him for a while or I'd see what he was doing and I was avoiding him. Maybe I'd hang with him for a couple of minutes, or at the most for an hour. But then, you try and draw back, 'cause you don't want to get caught up in what he's doing especially if the police are looking for him.

Violence and crime did not disappear overnight or entirely from the lives of this generation of youth, but in moving away from exposure to high-risk settings and the performance of violent acts in public spheres, the intimate contexts of private, and especially family, life became the arena where violent episodes found their expression. In the mid 1990s, social service providers throughout Bushwick reported significant increases in the amount of domestic violence cases that had gone, for the most part, unreported to the police and which there were precious few community resources to handle. The director of one social service program said that between 1995 and 1997, the number of phone calls, referrals and cases of domestic violence they handled more than doubled, compelling the agency to hire a social worker who handled only such cases (personal communication, Jose Olmo, Director, Family Dynamics).

Many youth had intimate experience with the variety of problems that afflicted their elders as an outcome of involvement with cocaine, crack or heroin, and they made a conscious attempt to avoid similar fates. Bubbler (17 in 1996), for example, had witnessed his mother's despair after two older, heroin-using brothers who worked for the corporate owners on Fishman Street became casualties of the war on drugs and were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Bubbler smoked only marijuana, and though he had intermittantly sold crack in his middle-teens, by 17, he had stopped selling and moved in with his girlfriend, attending high school regularly and seeking legitimate employment.

The impact of parental drug misuse on family life was deeply felt by many young Bushwick residents, often narrowing the parameters of their own drug use. Victoria (25 in 1997) had extensive involvement with drug distributors and users as a child and a teenager, but she remained steadfastly abstinent, chastened by her mother's experience.

My mom used dope, crack and other drugs for many years. She used to make deliveries for big-time dealers. One guy was Puerto Rican and his partner was Colombian. Sometimes, she'd take dope and coke to Puerto Rico for them. They would strap the packages to her body. Somebody would come to the house and do it for her. She'd make these runs for them about once a month -- to San Juan -- and never got caught. I'm not sure how much money she made each time, but once, I know, she made \$15,000. She still sniffs and shoots dope.....mostly shoots it. She's a client of ADAPT's needle exchange.

Victoria never divulged whether her mother had contracted HIV from her many years of injecting, but Bushwick had one of the highest rates of HIV and AIDS in New York City -- double the rate of the city as a whole -- and the threat of contracting the virus was never far from the minds of youth. Bolo, the owner of a crack business in the neighborhood (see below), shook his head in sorrow when talking about his mother's sister who lived next door, a 43-year old drug injector and crack smoker who had been

diagnosed with AIDS. Macho (born in 1978), an abstinent youth who occasionally sold crack to make money, talked about the the impact of AIDS on his life:

My mom, who's dead now, grew up on Knickerbocker Avenue in Bushwick. She died last year (1996), on June 12th, of AIDS. My little sister's father gave it to her and she died 3 months after she was diagnosed with the disease. He had the virus and never said anything to her. Eventually, she began to wonder why she was getting sick all the time and when we found out the truth, she was shocked.

Given the AIDS epidemic, a growing body count in the war on drugs, and the many adverse psychosocial outcomes that follow drug misuse, many Latino and African American youth throughout New York City began to avoid heroin and crack in the 1990s (Hamid et al 1997). In Manhattan, for example, "the rate [of cocaine/crack use] among youthful arrestees went from 70 percent in 1988 down to 31 percent in 1991, where it remained through 1995. It declined further to 22 percent in 1996" (Golub and Johnson 1997:6). In place of hard drugs, they consumed only marijuana, and viewed even cigarettes and malt liquor, which had been aggressively marketed in their neighborhoods (Marriott 1993, Meier 1997), with disfavor. This generation of youth put tremendous pressure on their age mates to eschew stigmatized substances.

You don't get no respect [if you use drugs]. See, the in-thing is the weed or drinking, but if you start messing with the dope, that's bad, you're a crackhead now.

Bushwick youth were nearly unanimous in their opinion that their peers would not be proud of using heroin or crack. When asked where people their age might be using heroin or crack, one said, "Hiding somewhere on the down low. Probably in the bathroom. Only the oldtimers do those things where others can see them." Another said that he knew only one peer who used heroin or cocaine:

The reason I found out [a friend was using drugs] was by accident. I'm walking in the back of the building in the dark and I just happened to ...oops. But now, he has to keep it on the hush-hush, you know. Its not something that [he's] proud of.

In a neighborhood which had become nearly resigned to the presence of brazen street-level drug markets, successive generations of youth who participated in them, and high rates of HIV/AIDS (Jose et al 1993), it initially came as a surprise when Friedman et al (1997a) discovered that less than 3% of their sample of youth said that they had used heroin, only 9% said that they had ever used cocaine, and none were infected with HIV, syphilis, or HTLV-2. After all, most models of adolescent development had suggested that inner city youth were at progressively greater risk of drug abuse and contracting pathogens like HIV (see e.g. Aral et al 1991, Ellen et al 1995, Kandel and Yamaguchi 1993, Rolfs et al 1990). Even worse, models of the likely progression of the AIDS epidemic had predicted that the virus would increasingly spread via heterosexual contact - the province of sexually active youngsters (Alexander 1996, Bowler et al 1992, CDC 1997, Gayle and D'Angelo 1991, Keller et al 1991, Van De Wijgerd 1993, Walter et al 1992). But clearly, this generation was not using hard drugs at rates characteristic of earlier generations, and given the low rates of HIV and other markers of risk that were discovered, Friedman et al (1997b) concluded that their drug use and sexual networks overlapped little with those already infected. Even the handful of young people interviewed in Bushwick who admitted that they had used heroin confessed that they were terrified to try it. For example, Boo (born in 1971, interviewed in 1997) had sniffed heroin, but said that the drug had taken a terrible toll on her family and she was petrified of becoming addicted:

In '95, I tried dope for the first time. I was in my mom's house. I had recently moved back there after having broken up with an abusive boyfriend. Anyway, I was there and feeling achey. I have a bad hip from an accident long ago, and it was painning me on this day. A guy friend (he was

around 29) said that he had something that would take the pain away. When he told me that it was dope, I didn't want to do it because I was afraid of becoming addicted and had seen what it did to some of my older brothers and sisters. But he talked me into it, saying that a little bit wouldn't get me addicted. I did a two and two and threw up all over the place.

The widely reported drop in crack and other hard drug use among inner city youth in the 1990s (Golub and Johnson 1997) was, on one hand, an outcome of the natural progression of drug eras (Hamid 1992, Johnson et al 1992), but changes in drug preferences coincided with and were deepened by more fundamental changes in youth culture. Where crack in the 1980s had emptied out the inner city and left neighborhoods and their residents looking like skeletons, the anti-crack/heroin generation of the 1990s sought to fill out their bodies, and they visually displayed this attitude in the too-large designer clothing they wore, and through the language of "living large" where everything good was "phat" (fat) and "butter." Still, their style was very much muted, devoid of the garish clothing and gaudy accessories that characterized the crack-era "gangsta" persona.

The Significance of Gangs in the 1990s

Rather than fulfilling the prophesy of becoming addicted and remorseless "superpredators," the overwhelming majority of kids who grew up in Bushwick in the late 1980s and early 1990s responded to the multiple threats of violence, crime, AIDS and addiction -- as most Americans would likely do -- by recoiling and withdrawing from the danger to the relative safety of family, home, church and other sheltering institutions which persevered during the most difficult years. But not all youths were scared into avoiding public spaces and hiding behind closed doors. As an unintended consequence of the war on drugs, gang life of a type never encountered before revived among a population of convicted drug distributors and users after a long dormancy. Following the massive police initiative that began in September 1992 in which hundreds of neighborhood youth were jailed, sizable chapters of the Latin Kings and Ñetas formed and asserted their control over

some blocks, especially those where there had been large street-level drug markets and unchecked violence. Predominantly of Puerto Rican descent, they reported that they had experienced a genuine rebirth, and in attempting to reconstitute their lives, their new goal was to “uplift the Latino community.” As former street-level drug workers who had suffered at the hands of their Dominican bosses and the police, they were disillusioned. Though they had long realized their limitations in American society, the sweeping arrests had also taught them the shallowness of the drug distribution organizations which had employed them but had ultimately harmed their families and neighborhoods. The Dominican “owners” did not bail them out of jail, hire lawyers, look after family or compensate them for the time in prison. They remained indifferent to Puerto Rican sensibilities, although mainly Puerto Ricans suffered the brunt of the war on drugs.

Ariel (1995): During my time on Rikers Island, I was going to court. My bail was only \$5,000. My foster mother spoke to the [Dominican] owner and asked if he could bail me out. At that time, I had \$10,000 out there in the streets that different people owed me. He said, “well, whoever works for me and gets arrested has got to be a man. Do the crime, do the time.” That right there pissed me off. Eventually, I came home. I wanted to get even with this guy ‘cause he played me. All that time, I could have been at home. I could have fought the case outside. Five thousand dollars, you’re telling me that you couldn’t bail me out? I don’t want to hear that.

For many former street-level drug distributors like Ariel during this period, going to jail -- Rikers Island -- capped many years of frustration, victimization and abuse. In jail, membership in the Latin Kings offered them repudiation of the past and redemption.

Ariel (1995): Before I was a King, I was a knucklehead. My temper got me kicked out of school. I used to fight a lot with teachers. I used to sell drugs a lot inside school. During my time on Rikers Island, I was in the

position of changing myself: stop selling drugs. I started seeing the light more and wanted to follow a more spiritual path. It's not all about selling drugs anymore. It's not all about taking. It's all about giving back to the community. I took so much, now, it's time to give back. I want to stay in the young tribe to help my younger brothers, to let them know that gang banging is not the way of life. Believe me, I experienced it, I know it, I lived it, and it's time for another path. I tried that path and I failed. Now let me try this one.

The Latin Kings solved many of the difficulties of young Puerto Rican men and women who were incarcerated. The most pressing was protection from other inmates. For a first-time arrestee, membership in an organization which applied blanket protection throughout the prison system was a blessing. It bestowed status and prestige, prevented victimization and allowed disputes with other members to be arbitrated peacefully.

Gang membership was also advantageous on return to civilian life. Where many members' households were chaotic, the gang functioned as an alternative family which prescribed rules and justifications for behavior, thereby bringing order and structure into potentially unmanageable social and emotional situations. The gangs imposed organization, government and order on atomized, marginalized individuals. To break the hold which drug distributors and their lifestyle had held on local youth for so long, the leadership provided realistic alternatives and a strong social support network. Clave, a leader of the Ñetas, spoke about the lure of drugs on local youth:

Like myself, I sold, I used. We recognize the difficulty that some people have had and what leads them to these things. So, before they go and fall, we go and pick them up as quick as possible. In order to help somebody, you've got to be more than concerned.

Tapping into the overwhelming sense of chaos, powerlessness and fear which had gripped neighborhood youth, Latin Kings and Ñetas projected an unabashedly Puerto

Rican image and solution to the problem. The organizations became the rage among Bushwick youth in 1993-94 and membership soared, even among those who had not been front-line participants or victims of the war on drugs. Youth who did not embrace the Latino cause as feverently as Latin Kings and Ñetas, still found themselves attracted to the nationalist symbolism and ideas that percolated through the neighborhood, especially those regarding the importance of family and community, and the long-term destructive effects of violence and drugs. Not coincidentally, the summer of 1993 marked the appearance of the Puerto Rican flag necklace (made from plastic beads) as the must-have clothing accessory among local youth throughout the city. Teaching youths a relatively safe passage through neighborhood mine fields, organizations like the Latin Kings and Ñetas may well have lowered the level of violence that might have existed in their absence. Paul, a leader of the Ñetas, explained how they kept members in check.

Whatever the problem is, I'll talk with them and after that they'll say, "you're right, it's not worth it" and they'll leave. And I feel like I've done my job, I've stopped a brother from making a wrong decision and probably end up hurting somebody and going to jail because he forgot for a moment that he's a Ñeta, that there's other ways to handle things. This is what we're taught. We're taught to avoid problems at all costs. If someone is going to hurt you, then you have a right to defend yourself. 'Cause that's all we are, we're just people like everybody else. But the way we fight is with our mouths. We talk our way out of situations. 'Cause that's not what we're about, we're about living in peace and harmony and improving our lives.

In these forms of grass roots socio-cultural and political organizing, lower class/"underclass" youths adapted progressively and more or less composedly to pressures of adolescent development, alterations of family structure and in legal/illegal labor markets (Brake 1985; Conquergood 1992). Latin Kings and Ñetas set new standards of behavior

for many neighborhood youth, but with swarms of adolescents clamoring for entry, the organizations had become too popular and unwieldy, and in 1995, they took steps to limit membership.

Clave (1996): Ñetas became very popular out here a few years ago and a lot of young people joined at that time. But a lot of them got taken out of the association because they were too young. Others got taken out because they weren't up to our standards. There's still great interest in the community in becoming a Ñeta. A lot of people want to join. Every day, about 10 or 20 people ask me about it. We deny a lot of people entry. Because first we have to find out about them. We first find out where they live, we go and investigate, we watch them, we see the things that they do, we see if they go to school. If they're young, they've got to go to school. We don't accept any youth who's not in school. If they're not in school, they've got to get into school. Just like an adult, you've got to work. You have to do something. Because if he's not doing it, we know that sooner or later he's going to be fucking up. And he's going to be getting into drug selling or whatever. If a member loses his job and become unemployed, we help him look for a job. We're all over the place, so usually we bump into opportunities, job openings and stuff like that.

Despite the stated goals of Latin Kings and Ñetas to uplift the community and transform the lives of young people, violence continued to be an integral part of neighborhood life, and for many youth, selling drugs remained one of the only ways to earn money. But even those who continued to sell drugs found that their routines had been dramatically transformed by an altered neighborhood terrain; drug markets were now much more integrated into the community and less violent.

The New Drug Distributors: Bolo's Block:

Attacked by the occupying army of police in September 1992, drug business “owners” initially responded by simply replacing low-level workers who were arrested, but greater business losses and violence followed as antagonism between Dominican management and Puerto Rican labor worsened. Most disbanded, while the remainder downsized and moved off the street. New distributors were soon challenging them. As one of the latter commented: “The police made my business. They created it. Before, there was a line of people standing on the street waiting to cop out of the door of a building, look-outs up and down the block. Who’d bother to call me on the beeper? Wouldn’t have to. You could buy it like it was a supermarket. [But when the police destroyed them] they created my business.” Many of the new drug selling organizations which formed or flourished when the monopoly enjoyed by the corporate owners was broken were not simply smaller, more discreet versions of the supermarket vendors, they were qualitatively different. Characterized by transactions that were dependent upon familiarity and trust between participants, undercover police were less able to make drug buys and were forced into tedious surveillance of suspected street-level drug markets (from rooftops, apartment windows or parked vehicles) in the hope of witnessing a sale.

One such business was run by Bolo, a 30 year old Puerto Rican who grew up in Bushwick and ran a crack selling operation on the corner of his block from 1990 to 1996, located about six blocks from the main drug supermarket discussed earlier. His business, which employed about 25 people, generated about \$5,000 per day in sales; average sized by Bushwick standards. Bolo's business had both local and drive-through customers, most of whom were quickly recognized by the workers. The business operated 7 days a week, from around 10 a.m. until 1 or 2 a.m. or whenever business got slow, but not around the clock as was the case with corporate sellers.

Bolo and his “associates” were well aware that their business was quite different from the corporate sellers who had dominated street-level sales several blocks to the north. Below, he characterizes the corporate distributors:

Fishman [Street] is the only international spot where they have Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and whites, where everybody's working. Other areas they do not. The guys who run Fishman are good, but they're sloppy. So many of those guys are in prison from Fishman. Nobody with a mind [works there]. All they care is "hey, fuck the workers. As long as my money comes...." that kind of attitude.

Several of Bolo's associates had formerly worked for the corporate "owners" on Fishman Street. For EZ, a father of five young children, it had been an embittering experience:

I came home [from prison] about a month ago. While I was gone, my wife survived with the help of her mother and stepfather. She was also on public assistance. The guys who I worked for had said that if I got locked up that they'd look out for her, but they never even gave her a quarter for her to call me. They never helped her with anything. She struggled on her own until I got home. It's lucky that I money put away to allow her to cope with the first few months. If not, we'd probably be living in the street right now. As soon as I came home they asked if I wanted to work. I told them that I didn't want to work and that since they hadn't helped me while I was in prison I knew that they wouldn't help me if I got locked up again.

Cibo, a manager for Bolo's business, talked with regret about his prior experience working in the area dominated by corporate sellers. The violence and fear that were part and parcel of that arena had turned him into a person that his wife and family scarcely recognized:

Too many people started coming on that block. The block, you know, the street was changing. It wasn't fun anymore. It was getting too dangerous. I got stopped twice. I didn't want nobody hanging out in front

of the spot. I didn't want the police there ever again. You got to protect what is yours, man. I had a big disagreement with the Dominicans, so I ran upstairs and pulled out a .30- .30, a Winchester, and chased them out to, what is the name of that club again?... I got shot right in front of it. It went through my leg. If it wasn't for my daughter's Godfather to jump on top of me and cover me, they would have fucked me up. I left. I went to Puerto Rico, for like two weeks. I came back, and I started staying home. My wife wouldn't let me go out.

Bolo and his associates were careful to be respectful of neighborhood residents, acutely aware that the success of their business was dependent upon their integration into the neighborhood rather than their alienation from it as was the case with the corporate distributors. As Bolo noted:

This is the suburbs. That's [Fishman St.] like New York, and this is the suburbs, do you know what I'm saying? It is quiet, its peaceful. You got people walking....people who do not buy drugs. I mean, you have people walking, you know, shopping. Just mind your business, stay clean, and you are okay. So, you don't see no bums or burnt down houses or shit like that over here like you do over there. Yeah, you get beautiful girls over here. You have to dress nice because you want to pick up girls. You've got nice guys, they park their cars here. They go to work over there, and you see the block. There is not that many abandoned cars here. This is the suburbs, and that is like a pile of shit down there. And, you know, this is like this because I maintain it like this. I demand this to be like this. I don't want my workers fucking around with people. Do you notice how many people walk by, and not one of these people called the police on my guys? You don't disrespect nobody. My guys don't make sales in front of kids or wives. You stop, let the customer wait, let the pedestrian pass by, make

sure it is clear, and then you make your sale. Respect. That is all it is. You have to respect people, especially when you are in a dirty game. You have to. There is no if, or buts or maybes. Work with me, you have to respect, if not, go work for [the owners on] Fishman St. and go to jail.

While corporate distributors had specialized in public displays of violence to keep workers in line, Bolo never used it to reprimand employees. He felt that such dramas were unnecessary because he knew his workers so well (including their families) that it was nearly impossible for them to run away with drugs or money, and public violence had the effect of attracting the police and instilling fear rather than building respect among other residents on the block. Below, he describes how he handled problems with workers:

When Cibo ran off with the profits the other day, I understood why he did it. But that's ok. You got to learn to accept it and just carry on. You can't get mad. You can never show people you get upset. I tell people, "hey, what do you want to do now? You had a good time, and now its time to pay, right?" He said "yeah, yeah." "Are you going to come Friday?" "Yeah, I'll be here." He's there. He was a little embarrassed, but he's got to do what he's got to do. Better to be embarrassed than dead. That is a very ugly word. Being dead is an ugly word. You only get one chance to die.

Unlike corporate owners, Bolo cared about his workers and the neighborhood. He hired only people who lived in the area with their families and carefully scrutinized their motives for wanting to join his organization. He made a conscious effort to stay away from young drug sellers who publically announced their intention to buy fancy clothes, jewelry or expensive cars with drug profits.

Most of the fellows who work for me need the money. I mean, I'll be honest with you, I'm not going to bring in a kid who just needs money to buy a pair of sneakers. I will bring a guy with me that has to support his family in one way or another. I mean, I told everybody, "nobody is here

getting rich. All we are doing is surviving. If you know how to save and cut corners, you can have all the money to save.

In interviews with his street-level workers, they all voiced similar motivations for working -- and none of them sported flashy clothing, jewelry or other consumer display items which many people thought were characteristic of drug dealers. For example, Robert (19 years old in 1995) cited the need to support his mother who lived on welfare as his primary purpose for working.

It's fucked up because I'm the one . . . I knew that my brother really wasn't going to take care of my family, you understand, take care of my moms and my father. It's that, damn, you know, if she fuckin' put food in your mouth, fuckin' 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 years -- that's your mother! She brought you into this world. You're supposed to help her when she needs it. He doesn't help her; that's my brother and everything, he's a selfish bastard! He only thinks of himself.

An 18 year old worker, Mano, also contributed heavily to his family's household income. His unemployed father, Manuel, feared for Mano's safety and often sat nearby whenever Mano worked to "watch his back."

I live in an apartment in this building with my wife and two kids. I seen 'em grow here. Two boys, 15 and 18. You interviewed the 18 year old. He gets hung up with all this (pointing to the street). I try to keep my eye on him. They don't steal it from nobody, that's one thing. It's [dealing drugs] still bad, you know. The only thing I say [to the police is], "take him if he's done something wrong." But you don't have to beat on him, knock him all silly.

The guys that work out here work hard in a way, but it's still wrong. I got my own opinions. Nobody puts a gun to nobody to use drugs. But the law says that's a law.... I just say not to mistreat them, that's all.

That's the only thing that gets to me, the hitting, the way they treat them. If they've got them, put the handcuffs on them and take them away and do what you have to do. But why abuse them, start punching on them, kicking them on the floor? I don't know what to do. I'm here (sitting on the stoop) because of him. I know they're gonna take him on me, sooner or later.

By 1996, with crack sales continuing to decline throughout the neighborhood, Bolo decided to get out of the drug business. With a wife and 18 month old son, he wanted a life for his family that did not include the constant threat of arrest or violent confrontation in the street. His wife found an office job in Manhattan and he found a security job in the neighborhood. Giving up his claim to the corner, he advised his younger associates to get out of the business and pursue legitimate jobs or complete their education. When Dominican crack dealers moved in to assert control over his once-lucrative spot, several of Bolo's workers signed on with them for a short period of time. Frenchy was arrested within one week and plea-bargained a sentence of 2-4 years in prison. After getting arrested and spending a short time in jail, Robert found a job as a messenger on Wall Street and then shocked his friends by falling into a well-paying job at a brokerage house. Mano, after one arrest, and under pressure from his parents, girlfriend and probation officer, gave up dealing drugs and began to spend increasing amounts of time inside the house, watching tv and listening to music. Cibo moved out of the neighborhood and took a construction job. Twin, a beefy 17 year-old, had sold part-time for Bolo when he was laid off from his job as a stockboy in a shoe store on Grand Street in Williamsburg, but when Bolo quit, he went back to searching for legitimate employment.

Even after they quit the business, Bolo and several former associates continued to get arrested. The decline in crime in New York City had not been accompanied by fewer arrests, but paradoxically, by more arrests (Cooper 1996). After having built up armies of specialized squads in the last decade, the police had an empire to maintain, and with fewer criminals to apprehend they nevertheless continued to manufacture "statistics" at an

unprecedented rate. Following Kelling and Cole's advice (1996:248), the NYPD began concentrating on low-level offences as,

a means of restraining "wannabes," the less-dedicated-to-crime friends and associates of repeat offenders. Many in this group, if pressured, or if schools and police pressure their parents, ultimately will change their behavior to conform to more appropriate and decent standards.

Arresting Bolo and his former associates, the police locked up the converted, the "had beens" rather than the "wannabes," and thereby endangered the very transformation they sought to achieve.

The reconfiguration of drug markets in the mid-1990s appreciably reduced the level of neighborhood violence. As distribution retired indoors, turf battles were eliminated, and since organizers of drug businesses hired a few trusted friends rather than easily replaceable workers, there was less conflict between them. Distributors were robbed by users less frequently because they were more protected selling indoors to known customers. Like other neighborhood residents, drug distributors and users had also adapted and contributed to dramatic changes in neighborhood conditions.

Conclusion

The future of inner cities in the global economy of the approaching millenium does not appear particularly bright. The residents of inner city neighborhoods did not share equally in the fruits of the economic revitalization of the 1990s which created new (though less secure and rewarding) jobs and low unemployment, and led to an optimism not seen since the post-WWII economy of the 1950s. For inner city residents, the economy did not promise prosperity, security or upward mobility, but rather, more unemployment, underemployment and substantially less help from local, state and federal agencies to combat poverty and its effects. But in spite of their marginalized status and bleak prospects, many inner city residents not only forestalled their expected slide into economic ruin and social disintegration, they confounded the schools of economic, cultural and genetic

determinism that had predicted a steady march toward oblivion and showed a new vitality, graphically illustrated by precipitous drops in crime and violence.

Yet many scholars, journalists and policy makers continue to believe that poor people are incapable of helping themselves much less their communities, and the urge to explain their turnaround on external factors is great. The most popular of these unidimensional explanations is that innovations in policing (especially in the area of technology) are driving the extraordinary transformation of inner city neighborhoods (see e.g., Anderson 1997). With great fanfare Mayor Giuliani and the New York City Police Department introduced their “quality of life” campaign as the keystone ingredient in turning the city around, and they hammered this message home to the public and the media, but most urgently, to rank and file police officers who were instructed to aggressively pursue even the most petty offense, like jaywalking, riding bicycles on sidewalks, loitering, trespassing, or drinking beer in public. They contended that by concentrating on the “little things, the big things will take care of themselves,” but with fewer serious crimes occurring and drug distributors more difficult to catch, police were simply left with the lesser ones. As one journalist (Cooper 1996) had noted, “Statistically speaking, you are more likely to be arrested these days. Although major crimes are down in the city, arrests are up, way up. Under Mayor Giuliani’s crackdown on “quality of life” crimes, the police have arrested 21 percent more people this year than last year. Mostly for the little things.” While aggressive policing certainly resulted in a reluctance by many people to linger in public spaces, including the reviled “obstreperous youth” who were said to spoil neighborhood civility (Kelling and Coles 1996), it can hardly account for the profound changes which occurred in the daily lives of inner city residents.

The combination of factors which precipitated inner city change vary from city to city and neighborhood to neighborhood. In New York City, for example, rapidly declining rates of crime and violence, the hallmarks of this urban renaissance, have been observed in every neighborhood, not simply those where conditions had become intolerable. To

disentangle and account for the multiple influences which frame behavior and the choices people make, it is useful to examine the intimate contexts where people learn to become human and construct their lives -- families, social networks, workplaces and communities. But regardless of the constellation of variables which precipitated the startling turnaround observed in inner city neighborhoods, the capacity of people to alter their everyday lives and confound the "experts" has been highlighted in the current period. After being socially, culturally, economically, politically and physically stripped, demolished and deconstructed for more than 30 years, Northeast Brooklyn was ripe for rebuilding in the 1990s. In Bushwick, where neighborhood conditions had become intolerable, young people were at the forefront of this effort, and they responded to the multiple threats against their daily lives and futures by repudiating those elements which endangered them: unchecked street-level drug markets, out-of-control violence, and hard drugs. The palpable change which washed over the neighborhood beginning in 1993 was initiated and carried through by young residents who, though far from uniform in their responses to those dangers, shared a conviction that they would not succumb to the same fate that nearly erased the preceeding generation. In altering their own lives, they shattered the myth that they were powerless against a "criminogenic" environment which was said to mass-produce superpredators, and threw into question the canon that violence must beget violence.

Life in the postmodern global economy is one in which identity formation is less dependent upon the influence of family, neighborhood, race/ethnicity, nationality and history (Giddens 1991, Hebdige 1979, Miller 1994), and more than anywhere else, the inner city is an empty canvas, an urban frontier where new structures, institutions and conventions are waiting to be built. Where the unprecedented changes that the current generation have begun are going and whether they can be sustained is uncertain, but the outcome is by no means predetermined. In the face of the many obstacles which inner city residents must still overcome, our failure to recognize and reward their struggle to build a better world may yet prove the naysayers right.

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