

Section III: Reasons Advanced for the Recent Decrease in the Crime Rate, with Commentary and Conclusions

Introduction

The United States Crime Index Rate and the California Crime Index Rate presented in Section II provide historical context for the recent decline in the crime rate. It is clear from both sets of data that it is more the duration of the recent crime rate decline than its rate of decrease that is historically unique. The current section will return the focus of this paper to the factors which have been described as influencing the recent crime rate decrease.

The reviewed articles and books offered a wide variety of reasons for the recent decline in the crime rate. Support, and in some cases opposition, was found for nine of the FBI's 13 categories of factors affecting crime and both of this author's additional categories, making a total of 11 categories.

No articles were found which addressed the following categories (with commentary by the author of this review):

- Stability of population with respect to residents' mobility, commuting patterns, and transient factors.
 - The recent robust economy probably increased population stability. The same robust economy probably increased legal and illegal immigration.
- Modes of transportation and highway system.
 - Use of Sport Utility Vehicles greatly increased. No national surge in highway building or mass transit occurred.
- Climate.
 - El Nino and La Nina caused unusual weather patterns, leading to flooding in the plains states, drought in the southeast, and a large number of powerful hurricanes.
- Crime reporting practices of the citizenry.
 - Cell phones became common, allowing individuals to call police from almost anywhere.

The 11 factors were each addressed in varying numbers of articles, reflecting the intensity of support or opposition the factor generated. Despite the strident support given to individual factors, none was shown, unequivocally, to fully explain the recent decline in the crime rate.

It is possible that some factors were influential in a limited number of situations, and some were influential across a wide variety of situations. In addition, a factor might have had varying degrees of impact in different situations. Some factors which had little or no relevance to one group of individuals (defined by age, gender, location, prior criminal history, etc.) may have been highly relevant to other groups. Support for one factor does not preclude support for a seemingly contradictory one if each is seen as having been valid in different situations.

Dilulio (1999) discussed two underlying, crime-affecting phenomena, re-norming and re-administering. Re-norming holds that the recent decline in violent crime and progress with other social ills reflected the "rebirth of certain social

norms (e.g., communal well-being over individual self-interest, group cooperation over group conflict, moral standards over moral relativism)." Re-norming is guided by the negative social consequences of prior experiences and by our innate sociability. It argues that the social disruption of the 1960s has run its course, and that the process of re-norming has already begun.

Dilulio (1999), indicated that re-administering claims that specific policy changes affect the conditions under which individuals "receive public support or suffer public penalties." Crime decreased because violent criminals were incarcerated with higher probabilities and for longer periods. Police got involved with community leaders and dealt with criminals who committed quality-of-life offenses such as public drunkenness. The continued re-administering of social programs will lead to continued desirable social outcomes for a long time.

A deeper understanding of the 11 categories of factors affecting crime follows from considering how each reflects re-norming and re-administering. Social and cultural processes involved in reestablishing previously held societal values (re-norming) and public policy changes which force desired societal outcomes through a modified system of rewards and punishments (re-administering) are apparent among the 11 categories of factors. The views expressed in the reviewed articles about each factor follow.

Factors Cited as Affecting the Recent Decline in the Crime Rate

1. Effective strength of law enforcement agencies

Anderson (1997) cited the decrease in crime in New York City as evidence that increased community policing has contributed to the decreasing crime rate. Police Commissioner William Bratton ordered a citywide campaign against minor offenses, such as drinking in public. He ordered police to request identification from anyone suspected of committing an infraction, taking into custody anyone without acceptable identification. The homicide rate immediately began declining steeply, with the largest decrease in homicides committed with guns and out-of-doors. Homicides decreased as both patrol strength and misdemeanor arrests for quality-of-life offenses increased. These measures have also been successful in Boston, Houston, Dallas, and San Diego.

Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998) wrote that police programs to remove guns from kids have had some positive effect. These programs include "stop and frisk" detentions in New York City, bounty for reports of illegal guns leading to confiscation in Charleston, South Carolina, and "voluntary" searches of homes with suspected illegal weapons leading to confiscation without criminal charges in St. Louis. Carrying weapons decreased which reduced concern for self-protection. This led to a declining spiral in carrying and using guns. A decreased homicide rate followed. Police enforcement of gun confiscation policies along with community-based policing



appear to have contributed to the recent decrease in the homicide rate in specific localities. However, decreases seen elsewhere in the absence of such activities (e.g., Los Angeles) make the extent of this effect difficult to measure.

Kelling and Bratton (1998) related an “insiders’ view” of the decrease in crime in New York City. Kelling was one of the architects of the policy that New York City adopted and Bratton was the Chief of Police who made the policy a reality. The policy had its origin in a magazine article by Wilson and Kelling (1982) which stated that police had shifted their focus from maintaining order in neighborhoods to solving crime. The authors found that city dwellers (in Newark, NJ) assigned a high value to public order. At the community level, disorder and crime are tightly linked. They literally found that if a window in a building is broken and left unrepaired, it won’t be long before other windows are broken. This will happen in all neighborhoods, but not because of an innate desire of residents to break windows. It will happen because one unrepaired window is a sign that no one cares and that breaking windows has no consequence, and, after all, it is fun. The authors felt that the link between “order-maintenance” and “crime-prevention” should be reestablished by police who should return to the view that they ought to protect communities as well as individuals. After this link was restored, the spiraling crime rate was brought under control.

Wilson and Kelling (1982) drew on experiments reported by Philip Zimbardo, a Stanford psychologist, in 1969 (Zimbardo, 1969). Zimbardo, who had grown up in the Bronx and knew the ways of city life, arranged to have a car parked with no license plates and its hood up in the Bronx and another in Palo Alto, California. The stripping of the car in the Bronx began within 10 minutes, initially by a family consisting of a father, mother and young son. Within 24 hours, almost everything of value had been removed from the car. Then windows were smashed, parts torn off, and upholstery ripped. Zimbardo reported that most of the “vandals” were well-dressed, seemingly clean-cut whites. The Palo Alto car was untouched for a week, at which time Zimbardo smashed part of it with a sledge hammer. People walking by soon began to damage the car, and within a few hours the car had been turned over and destroyed. As in the Bronx, the “vandals” appeared to be mainly respectable whites. Zimbardo concluded that property which appears to be abandoned or neglected becomes fair game for fun or plunder, even for otherwise law-abiding people who are not inclined to do such things. A further conclusion was that the standards for defining deserted property vary from community to community.

Wilson and Kelling (1982) extended Zimbardo’s findings by stating that “untended” behavior also leads to the breakdown of community controls, to an escalation of increasingly rowdy and inhospitable behavior, and inevitably to serious crime and violent behavior.

Kelling and Bratton (1998) argued that the links between disorder and crime could be diagrammed as follows:

“Disorder—> Citizen Fear—> Withdrawal (Physical & Social)—> Increased Predatory Behavior—> Increased Crime —> Spiral of Decline.”

This theory was first tested with success in the New York City subway system by the New York City Transit Police Department. Later, the New York City Police Department began a policy of foot patrols which dealt with damaged property, as well as disorderly conditions and behaviors. Together with neighborhood residents, police reasserted control over youth and disorderly conduct. Police developed local plans for dealing with specific problems such as guns, youth violence, domestic violence, quality of life, vehicle crimes, etc. The authors contended that the policy of policing (instead of law enforcement) and prevention (instead of case processing) resulted in the steep drop in crime in New York City.

Wilson (1998) stated that the decline in property crime in the U.S. has been due to three factors. First, the number of inmates in state and federal prison increased more than four times (from 1970 to 1995). This incapacitated many of the six percent of young males who regularly become chronic offenders. Second, the power of family, the control of conventional religion, and the responsiveness of neighborhoods have been reasserted. Third, the probability of going to prison after committing a crime has been increased. The author noted that the victims of juvenile homicide were usually not innocent bystanders but other juveniles also engaged in crime. The author stated that the decline in the juvenile homicide rate occurred because “predatory attackers” were killing one another, leaving fewer to continue the killing. He viewed this decline as a short-term drop in youth homicide. He envisioned the replacement of perpetrators by another generation of youth coming out of overcrowded schools and the same city conditions that spawned the last generation. Wilson ended on a slightly positive note by stating that gang and truancy control, along with drug and gun monitoring, might reduce future violent youth crime.

Fagan, Zimring, and Kim (1998) evaluated the effectiveness of recent New York City policing efforts on the city’s 52 percent reduction in the homicide rate from 1991 to 1996. Looking at the period from 1985 to 1995, they found that gun homicide rates increased until 1991 and then decreased, while non-gun homicide rates declined steadily during the entire time period. Reciprocal displacement, that is, that the choice of weapons was simply changing, was not supported. Trends in larceny and non-firearm robbery were similar to non-gun homicide, reflecting a general long-term downward decline in crimes not involving firearms. The authors concluded that it was incorrect to attribute decreases in non-gun homicides to law enforcement efforts. They attributed 60 percent of the decline in the rate of gun homicides from 1991 to 1996 to cyclical variation (a repeat of historically seen decreases), social trends in risk and exposure (related in part to levels of drug use), and law enforcement changes. They stated that the amount of the decrease in gun homicides due to law enforcement alone cannot be determined.

Donohue (1998) identified long-term trends in the rate of homicide. The recent steep drop in the homicide rate may be a blip in the more modest long-term decrease (1977 to 1997) or a new trend. The author stated that the recent steep decrease in the crime rate cannot be attributed to the new

policing strategy used by New York City and elsewhere, because Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. did not change their policing policies and crime dropped considerably in both cities.

Harcourt (1998) criticized the effectiveness of the “broken-windows” approach to order-maintenance policing. He stated that existing data do not unequivocally support the reduction of neighborhood disorder as deterring serious crime. He noted that the cost of order-maintenance in New York City involved a 50 percent increase in misdemeanor arrests (133,446 in 1993 vs. 205,277 in 1996). The author cited alternative explanations for the large decline in violent crime in New York City. These included an enlarged police force, a shift from crack cocaine to heroine, computerized tracking systems to speed up police response to crime, demographic changes, increased incarceration of hard core offenders and gang members, and possible changes in adolescent behavior. The author concluded that the police department’s “quality-of-life initiative” has had some effect on the recent reduction in serious crime in New York City, but only as one of many contributing factors.

Community policing has been extremely successful in some cities and has approached social work in its style (“Defeating the bad guys,” 1998). The most successful such effort against juvenile crime in the country is generally credited to the Boston Police Department. Their campaign involved cooperation between police and citizens to scrub off graffiti, run youth clubs, provide tutoring and counseling, and look out for truants. A dramatic decrease in juvenile murders followed.

Witkin (1998) stated that no factor has been cited to explain the decline in crime more than better policing. Researchers are beginning to think that more police do help decrease crime. Virtually all experts agree that smarter policing has been a major factor in the decrease of violent crime in New York City. Yet, violent crime has dropped dramatically in Washington, D.C. where police have not been highly functional. In addition, homicides have increased by 50 percent in Nashville despite a 16 percent increase in police. Therefore, while smarter policing has been an effective crime deterrent in some cities, it probably has not been a key factor across the nation.

Roberts (1999) reviewed the broken windows hypothesis and discussed the related social norm theory. Social norm theory states that communities, especially inner-city neighborhoods, benefit from policing that maintains order because promoting orderliness norms deters crime. The author argued that identifying individuals as being “visibly lawless” promotes racism and gives legitimacy to police harassment of blacks.

In contradiction to social norm policing, Roberts (1999) cited statistics showing gang homicides in Chicago increasing disproportionately in 1994. She stated that the gang homicide decrease seen in 1997 only mirrored the decreases seen in other large cities and was possibly related to unexplained national trends. The author stated that the large decline in serious crime in New York City may reflect the shift from crack cocaine (whose trade is associated with violence) to heroine (whose trade is not associated with violence). Roberts

concluded that social norm theorists misjudge the social-influence of order-maintaining policing and misinterpret empirical data on its efficacy.

Tonry (1999) noted that the United States imprisonment rate is six to 12 times greater than rates in other Western countries, that the safeguards of criminal defendants are being reduced, and that sanctions applied to criminal convictees have become increasingly harsh. He concluded that “crime rates rise and fall over extended periods for reasons that have little to do with crime control policies.” He cited historical evidence which shows repeatedly over the last two centuries that by the time harsh crime control measures are enacted crime rates are already falling. The author stated that this happened, again, during the recent crime rate decrease and that zero-tolerance policing in New York City in the 1990s did not cause the decreasing crime rate. In fact, zero-tolerance policing followed the decreasing crime rate.

Taqi-Eddin and Macallair (1999) described how San Francisco attained reductions in crime comparable to other large cities, including New York City, while adopting less harsh law enforcement policies. San Francisco’s approach stressed alternative sentences and community involvement. Between 1992 and 1998, San Francisco experienced a 42 percent decrease in total reported crime compared to an average decline of 24 percent in 10 comparison cities. San Francisco, unlike New York City, had declining misdemeanor and felony arrest rates and prison commitments. In recent years, San Francisco’s crime rate decrease was similar to or greater than those of California’s largest counties. (San Francisco is both a city and a county, and was compared to both types of governmental entities in this article.) More reliance was placed on diversionary programs which emphasize prevention and not detention. Accordingly, San Francisco had a greater decrease in commitments to the California Youth Authority from both juvenile and adult courts than most comparison counties. Also, San Francisco abandoned its juvenile curfew law in 1989. The authors concluded that San Francisco’s use of an alternative crime policy resulted in crime decreases similar to and exceeding those of comparable cities.

McDowall, Loftin, and Wiersema (2000) analyzed the effect of youth curfew laws on juvenile crime rates from 1985 to 1996 (exception: homicide was analyzed from 1976 to 1995) in all 57 U.S. cities with a 1980 population of at least 250,000. The authors found limited evidence that curfews were effective in preventing burglaries, larcenies, and simple assaults. However, all of these decreases followed other revised laws and none of the decreases followed a new curfew law alone. The authors also found a statistically significant increase in homicide arrests which they felt balanced the three decreasing crimes mentioned above. They concluded that their findings provide little support that youth curfews help prevent juvenile crime, with any impact being small and affecting only a few offenses. Thus, the decrease in the crime rate in recent years was, at best, only very slightly due to youth curfews.

Hoover (2000) indicated that aggressive policing had a considerable effect on the recent decrease in the crime rate.



He noted how Houston, alone among major Texas cities, experienced a sharp decline in the crime rate in 1992. The decrease occurred at a time when Houston was dramatically increasing arrests, and correlated on a month-by-month basis with arrests. A decline in crime occurred two years later in New York City when the same policies were put into place there. The author especially noted the effect that enforcing vice and narcotics offenses had on decreasing serious crime, including murder. He indicated that the logical connection between these arrests and the immediate decrease in serious crime suggests a causal relationship, not just a correlational one.

Commentary: Increased proactive community policing, including a citywide campaign against minor offenses, led to a steep decline in the homicide rate (especially those committed with guns out-of-doors) in New York City and other large cities.

The link between maintaining order and preventing crime was reestablished by a fundamental change in police policy involving a shift from focusing only on crime to focusing on maintaining order in neighborhoods. Aggressively confronting low-level criminal activity successfully decreased the occurrence of more serious crime. The upward spiral of individuals to serious and violent crime was deterred by community policing which focused on guns, youth violence, domestic violence, quality of life, vehicle crimes, and more. This policing policy made a very substantial contribution to the decline in crime rates in New York City, Houston, Boston, and elsewhere.

Most researchers agree that smarter policing has been a major factor in decreasing violent crime in New York City and elsewhere. However, similar decreases were found in other large cities which did not adopt smarter policing, and increases in crime were observed in at least one city that enlarged its police force. This suggests to some that smarter policing is not a key national factor in the recent decline in the violent crime rate. While smarter policing has not been necessary for a decline in the crime rate of all cities, it has been effective where applied.

New York City's zero-tolerance, order-maintenance policing began after the crime rate began decreasing. It did not cause the initial decrease. The crime rate dropped in cities which did not adopt zero-tolerance policing, such as Washington, D.C. and San Francisco, because of other factors.

The contention that San Francisco's law enforcement policies caused a decline in crime rates similar to New York City is highly suspect because the period analyzed was one of considerable gentrification of San Francisco neighborhoods. Many lower income areas were transformed into wealthy neighborhoods with new residents. Dwellings were remodeled with wealth derived from the computer industry in and near San Francisco. Since higher income areas tend to have lower crime rates than lower income areas, the gentrification of San Francisco's neighborhoods likely contributed substantially to the declining crime rates.

Conclusion: The use of zero-tolerance, order-maintenance policing by New York City was adopted in 1994 and began to impact the homicide rate in 1995 or 1996 (per the New York City Chief of Police at the time). Thus, adoption of this policing policy followed the beginning of the decline in violent crime in New York City in 1992. The real impact of the policy did not occur until the violent crime rate decrease was well underway.

The argument is correct, therefore, that New York City's order-maintenance policing began after the declining trend in serious and violent crime had started. Also correct is the observation that cities, such as Washington, D.C., which did not adopt order-maintenance policing (or particularly effective policing of any type), experienced declining crime rates. These observations, however, tend to obscure both the success of New York City's zero-tolerance policing and the national trend of decreasing crime in which it occurred.

Based on data in Taqi-Eddin and Macallair (1999) (source: FBI 1990-1998), Figures 5 and 6 compare crime rate decreases in New York City and Washington, D.C. Figure 5 shows changes in all Part 1 offenses, while Figure 6 presents changes in total violent crime. All changes are relative to crime rates in 1990. Data in Taqi-Eddin and Macallair were only given for 1990, 1992, 1995, and 1998. Straight lines connecting values for these years should not be construed to mean that values for intervening years fell along the straight lines. The lines connect the values for the four years without regard for intervening year values.

Most important for evaluating the effectiveness of New York City's aggressive policing policy is the actual numerical comparison of decreases in the crime rates of New York City and Washington, D.C. This is important because New York City's policing policy has been described as either not a factor or not a key factor in the decrease of New York City's violent crime rate since Washington, D.C., which did not adopt the same policy, had a similar decline. Figures 5 and 6 show that, from 1990 to 1998, New York City had greater decreases than Washington, D.C. in rates of all Part 1 offenses (55 percent vs. 18 percent) and total violent crimes (51 percent vs. 30 percent). Thus, the crime rate declines in the two cities were, in fact, not similar.

It is not possible to state with certainty that New York City's greater decreases in these two crime rate measures were completely due to its policing policy. However, the relatively close geographical, cultural, and market similarities between these two Eastern cities suggest that New York City's policing policy accounted for a substantial part of each difference.

The effectiveness of New York City's aggressive zero-tolerance, order-maintenance policing is both the most widely accepted and most hotly debated factor affecting the recent decline in the crime rate. In the context of a decreasing national crime rate caused by other factors, order-maintenance policing appears to have been highly successful in decreasing the crime rate further in New York City.

Only time will tell if order-maintenance policing is successful in New York City and elsewhere when the national crime rate is steady or increasing. These findings tend to reinforce Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998), who stated “Our view is that policy can make a difference [in reducing violent crime], but the difference it makes is highly dependent on existing levels and trends in violent crime.”

2. Administrative and investigative emphases of law enforcement

The use of geographical information systems to analyze major crime statistics and to display where and when crimes

occurred on color-coded maps has contributed to the decrease in crime (“Defeating the bad guys,” 1998). Prior to installing these systems, companies selling the systems required police to rid themselves of corruption, become more efficient, and have more contact with the public. The police then used these maps to monitor crime trends and to locate high-crime areas. Mapping systems have become an integral part of policing in New York City, Philadelphia, Newark, and New Orleans, and are in great demand elsewhere. The policy changes preceding installation of the mapping systems and the mapping systems, themselves, probably contributed to declining crime rates.

Figure 5
Comparison of New York City and Washington, D.C. - All Part 1 Offenses Relative to 1990

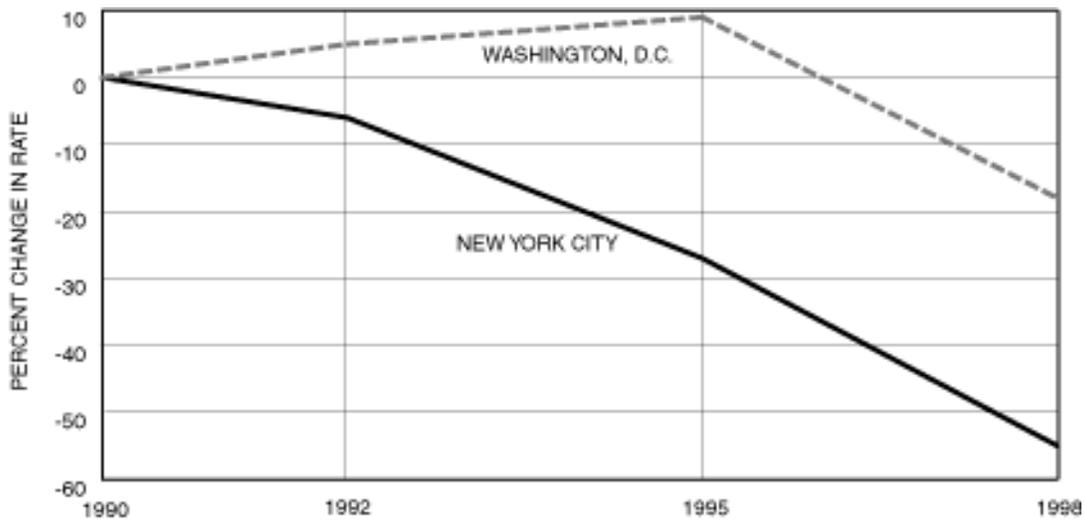
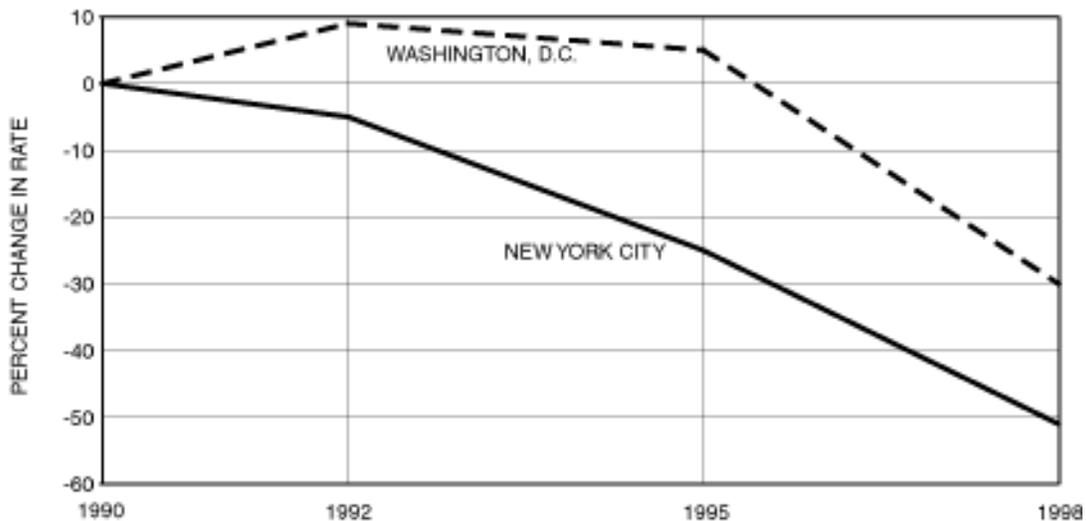


Figure 6
Comparison of New York City and Washington, D.C. - Total Violent Crime Relative to 1990





Snyder (1999) speculated that a component of the decrease in the crime rate was the large increase in domestic violence arrests as required by state statutes which became effective between 1980 and 1997. Police were required to make arrests in domestic violence cases that had been handled informally in the past. These arrests have prevented the commission of many subsequent domestic partner homicides by the arrested individuals.

Commentary: Mapping systems have been a valuable tool for police departments which first rid themselves of corruption, became more efficient, and adopt community policing. In the context of these prior changes and previously decreasing crime rates, it isn't surprising that mapping systems would contribute to the declining crime rate.

Conclusion: Use of mapping systems by efficient, aggressive community-oriented police departments aided in the recent decline in the crime rate, while state statutes which increased domestic violence arrests contributed to a substantial decline in domestic partner homicides.

3. Policies of other components of the criminal justice system (i.e., prosecutorial, judicial, correctional, and probational)

Anderson (1997) wrote that earlier intervention by lower courts, sentencing offenders to drug-treatment programs, community service, victim restitution, electronic monitoring, work release, and boot camp programs, have decreased the crime rate in New York City and elsewhere. He referred to these interventions collectively as a front-end, proactive approach to preventing crime. Goals of this approach are to aggressively break the cycle of crime early, while criminals are committing relatively minor crimes, and to show an intent to react repeatedly to these offenses. Much crime could be avoided if courts enacted more meaningful sanctions and treatment requirements after the first or second minor offense. However, most jurisdictions do not have the resources or the will to improve the lower courts which deal with these cases. New York City, on the other hand, set up a community court to arraign low-level offenders, sentence them to community service, and refer them to a well-staffed social service office. The author stated that effective, creative probation departments enhance the front-end approach. This strategy led to a decrease in major crimes, such as homicide.

Reynolds (1997) asserted that the rate of serious crime leveled off and then declined as the punishment expected by criminals increased. Expected punishment is a function of the probabilities of arrest, conviction after arrest, and imprisonment after conviction, as well as average or median time served by those who go to prison. The author stated that expected punishment for serious crime decreased from the 1950s until its low point in the mid-1980s, when expected punishment was less than 10 days. By 1995, expected punishment had risen to 22 days (for specific crimes: murder = 32.4 months, rape = 116 days, robbery = 46 days). The author stated that expected punishment increased for several reasons. These included restored trust between neighborhoods and police in some cities, more arrests, aggressive

enforcement of laws against minor offenses, charging suspects with more serious crimes based on outstanding arrest warrants, raised conviction rates, and longer prison time served.

Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998) noted that the huge increase in incarceration began a decade before homicide rates rose in the mid-1980s. However, incarceration has been an important factor in decreasing homicide rates for those over 30 years of age. The homicide rates for these older individuals declined by 40 percent between 1985 and 1997. The incapacitation effect of incarcerating a large number of drug sellers over the last 20 years probably contributed to the decreased rate, to the extent that these individuals might have committed homicides. Decreases in homicide rates among teenagers and youth were much less likely to have been significantly influenced by incarceration effects in the past because of their low rates of incarceration. However, in recent years changes in laws increased the incarceration risk of younger age groups and the decrease in their homicide rates accelerated. This suggests that the overall decline in the homicide rate may not have been as steep if "get tough on kids" sentencing policies had not been enacted.

LaFree (1998) argued that distrust of social and political institutions led to the rapid increase in crime beginning in the 1960s, while increasing trust or acceptance of social and political institutions contributed to the recent decrease in crime. The author defined political institutions as including all branches of government, with their associated functions of crime control, lawful conflict resolution, and social order maintenance. Political institutions can decrease crime by being perceived as less unjust or unfair; by being more able to motivate individuals to follow mutually shared rules, laws, and norms; and by being more able to protect individuals from crimes by others. The author also cited the huge growth of the criminal justice system which augmented functions that political institutions were less able to perform. The continuing large increases in spending for both corrections and police reflect this growth. The author concluded that there is strong evidence for a connection between the increased support for criminal justice institutions and the recent decrease in crime, but less evidence for a connection between more effective political institutions and the recent decrease in crime.

Gibeaut (1998) wrote about the successful use of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act (RICO) and related conspiracy statutes by federal prosecutors against gang leaders and their underlings. As gangs have become more sophisticated they evolved from street gangs into organized crime networks run by adults, such as the 47-year old Larry Hoover, head of Chicago's Gangster Disciples. In California, which has by far the most gang activity in the nation, gangs typically are not as organized and sophisticated as the Gangster Disciples. State and municipal prosecutors in California have used public nuisance laws to get injunctions preventing gang members from congregating in public. According to the head of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Hard Core Gang Division, "A gang can't be a gang if it can't associate in public."

Gibeau (1998) pointed out that federal prosecutors have achieved outstanding victories, convicting street gang leaders from many U.S. cities. In New York City and Chicago alone, federal prosecutors have successfully used RICO and similar federal statutes in recent years to convict 400 defendants. Acquittals are very rare. Federal prosecutors have much greater resources than state and local prosecutors, and the sanctions they can win are swift and severe. They can disperse gang leaders in prisons around the country, and can protect and relocate witnesses. By charging defendants with participating in a conspiracy under RICO, federal prosecutors can use great amounts of evidence describing all of a defendant's prior criminal activities. They use this evidence to show a pattern of criminal activity which is allowed in a trial for conspiracy. Prosecutors are not limited to evidence relating only to the offense being tried. The intensive involvement of federal prosecutors using RICO and related laws has substantially weakened the leadership and organizational structure of gangs and contributed to the recent decline in crime.

Thomas (1998) contended that the simplest explanation for recent decreasing crime rates is the simultaneous increase of incarceration rates. He stated that removal of known criminals from society has to reduce the crime rate. Crime rates fell because those inclined to commit crimes learned that serious crimes were resulting in severe punishments (deterrence) and because criminals were being removed from society (incapacitation). This was especially true for burglaries and robberies, which tend to be serial crimes and for which recidivism could be most reduced by incarceration. The author cited the drop of 44 percent in the burglary rate from 1980 to 1996, a period coinciding with much of the boom in prison building, as evidence that burglary is reduced by incarcerating more burglars and doing so for longer periods of time.

Witkin (1998) noted that from 1924 to 1974, the U.S. incarceration rate remained very stable at about 110 per 100,000 population. Since 1974 the incarceration rate has increased almost fourfold. The author cited "liberal" criminologist Frank Zimring as opposing the increase in drug incarcerations, but conceding that "When you lock up an extra million people, it's got to have some effect on the crime rate." The author also cited the "conservative" social scientist James Q. Wilson as stating "Putting people in prison is the single most important thing we've done." The author noted that the dramatic drop in crime in New York City has been accompanied by only about an eight percent increase in its prison population since 1993. Conversely, Utah boosted its prison population by 19 percent from 1993 to 1996 and its violent crime rate increased. As a result of this evidence, Witkin concluded that imprisonment is an important factor in the decline of crime, but not the underlying cause of the recent decrease in the crime rate.

Izumi (1999) stated that the recent decrease in California's crime rate was due to tougher new laws, including the "three-strikes" law. In the authors's opinion, neither demographic nor economic changes explain the decline.

Zimring, Kamin, and Hawkins (1999) studied samples of felony arrests in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego, both prior to and after the three-strikes law went into effect in March 1994. They found 13.9 percent of adult felony arrests met the second or third strike provisions of the new law prior to its enactment, while 12.8 percent met the provisions after it was enacted. This difference was not statistically significant. They also found no significant change in all felony arrests before and after three-strikes. This is important because it indicates that criminals were not simply switching to felonies not covered by three-strikes. The authors showed graphically that the seven FBI index rate crimes began decreasing in California almost three years prior to the passage of three-strikes. The rate of decrease did not visibly change after passage of the new law. In sum, the authors found that only a small percentage of felons could be affected by three-strikes, that the decreasing rate of FBI index crimes and violent crimes was not affected by three-strikes, and that the increasing rate of incarceration was also not affected. As a result, Zimring, Kamin, and Hawkins concluded that the crime decrease in California in recent years was not due to the three-strikes law.

Tonry (1999) cited historical evidence which shows repeatedly over the last two centuries that crime rates were already falling by the time harsh crime control measures were enacted. The author stated that this happened, again, during the recent crime rate decrease. He stated that the three-strikes law in California in 1994, as well as truth-in-sentencing laws, mandatory minimum-sentencing laws, and increased use of the death penalty in many states in the mid-1990s, did not cause the decreasing crime rate. Instead, these laws and policies followed the decreasing crime rate.

Hoover (2000) claimed that incarceration rates are a factor which contributed to the recent decrease in crime. He noted, however, that there has not been a uniform large decrease in crime in all states which have increased their numbers of incarcerated individuals. He also pointed out that some states which have not increased prison capacity have experienced declines in crime. The author stated that these situations indicate that increased incarceration is not the whole explanation for the recent decrease in the crime rate, but it definitely has had some effect.

Commentary: The cycle of crime can be broken effectively by aggressive early intervention of lower courts with first- or second-time minor crime offenders. Alternative sentences and drug treatment requirements by these courts, with support from effective probation departments and social services offices, have been successful in New York City and elsewhere in contributing to the recent crime rate decrease. Unfortunately, most jurisdictions cannot afford to improve their lower courts or parole departments, or simply haven't the will to do so.

The view that increased expected punishment caused serious crime to decline is consistent with the behavioral finding that punishment is most effective when it is swift, sure, and severe. However, the impact of expected punishment depends on potential criminals evaluating expected punishment prior to engaging in criminal activity. Such thoughtful contemplation



by large portions of a group known to be impulsive is unlikely. None-the-less, for the subgroup of potential criminals who evaluate the risk associated with crime, increased expected punishment probably contributed to the recent decline in the crime rate.

The actions of government during the events surrounding the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Vietnam conflict, and Watergate led to extreme distrust of political institutions, especially by the young and minorities. These actions resulted in the decreased ability of political institutions, at all levels, to provide leadership and motivation for following rules, laws, and norms. Consequently, the criminal justice system (police and corrections) grew and provided motivation for following rules and laws by punitive means. After 1980, the impact of the historical events mentioned above decreased. Those who were in crime-prone ages in the 1960s and early 1970s were older, and the end of the baby boom resulted in a decreasing number of crime-prone age individuals in the 1980s. The gradual, underlying decrease in the rate of crime seen since 1980 reflects both changing attitudes toward political institutions and the enlarged criminal justice system.

The concurrent effects on violent crime rates of locally varying crime-related factors and statewide incarceration rates explain why increasing incarceration rates might not always result in decreasing crime rates. Local crime-increasing factors might offset the crime-decreasing effect of incarceration. Such local variation does not negate the overall contribution of increased incarceration to the recent crime rate decrease, especially when increased incarceration coincides with decreased crime in most cases. It simply reinforces the previously stated view that a crime policy operates within the context of crime trends and other crime policies. While an effective crime policy will coincide with a decrease in crime in most instances, it might coincide with an increase in crime in others due to influential local crime-increasing factors.

No articles were found which presented valid evaluations of truth-in-sentencing laws, mandatory minimum sentencing laws, and the increased use of the death penalty as contributing (or not contributing) to the recent decline in the crime rate. However, to the extent that these policies increased incarceration, they contributed to the recent decrease in the crime rate.

Conclusion: Huge increases in incarceration rates have contributed to declines in property crime rates and older adult violent crime rates since the early 1980s. More recent increases in youth and juvenile incarceration rates have contributed to the recent decline in crime by these age groups. Increased expected punishment probably prevented some risk-averse individuals from committing crimes. However, it is difficult to determine what proportion of potential criminals were sufficiently risk-averse to have been deterred by their expectations of increased punishment. Use of RICO by federal prosecutors contributed to the recent decline in crime because much recent crime was generated by highly organized street gangs whose members could be prosecuted under conspiracy laws.

Proactive intervention by lower courts of low-level novice criminals, especially when supported or backed up by efficient probation departments and social services offices, has proven to be an effective means of preventing the upward criminal spiral. Where used, this strategy has contributed to the recent decrease in the crime rate.

4. Citizens' attitudes toward crime

Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998) explained that community efforts to stop and reverse the escalation of crime, usually independent of the police, include mediation and negotiation between rival gangs, mentoring programs, "hands-are-not-for-guns" campaigns, and various community-centered activities such as "midnight basketball." The authors did not comment on the contribution, if any, of these efforts toward the recent reduction in the crime rate.

Curtis (1998) spent 10 years (1987-1997) performing ethnographic fieldwork in two Brooklyn neighborhoods. He attempted to understand the behavior of research subjects in the context of the community in which they lived. The author felt the decrease in crack and other drug use by inner city youth in the 1990s was due, on one hand, to the natural evolution of a drug use era, and, on the other hand, to fundamental changes in youth culture. Many youths withdrew from the dangers of the drug culture to the safety of family, home, church, and other institutions. Some youths formed into two large gangs whose purpose in the largely Puerto Rican area was to "uplift the Latino community." The gangs provided social support and realistic alternatives to drugs and violence. Some new drug distributors appeared, but they were localized to small areas, treated their workers better, and employed little violence. The author stated that aggressive policing resulted in people being hesitant to remain in public areas, but cannot account for the enormous changes which occurred in the daily lives of inner-city youth. Youth were committed not to succumb to the same violence-ridden, drug-driven, out-of-control lives as the preceding generation. They became agents on their own behalf and contributed substantially to the recent decrease in the crime rate.

Friedman (1998) asserted that the many community anti-crime organizations around the U.S. have made major contributions to the recent national decline in violent crime. He stated that neighborhood groups of "ordinary people" are an important force for safer communities. The author cited a study which found that neighborhoods with cohesive, collective organization had a 40 percent reduction in the expected homicide rate. He cited another instance where a group of citizens were trained to work with community police. The citizens attempted to solve problems which included drug dealing, vandalism, public drinking, loitering, theft, rape, homicide, and gang problems. They succeeded, in part or whole, in solving 26 percent of the problems.

Partington (1998) quoted the director of security for a trucking company as saying that the efforts of commercial security have contributed to the recent decline in crime. He argued "There is no question that the things we do in private security have reduced the number of [crime] incidents." The increased

use of private security reflects the personal involvement of citizens in their own protection from crime.

Individuals are making a much greater effort to protect themselves and their property than ever before (“Defeating the bad guys,” 1998). Due to fear of crime and the perception that there are not enough police to deal with crime, personal security has ballooned. Burglar alarms are in 20 percent of homes, having increased from one percent in 1970. Car alarm sales have increased by 40 times, and private security expenditures have increased by 10 times (to \$80 billion) since 1975. While it is unclear whether property criminals aren’t simply choosing less cautious victims, some credit for the recent decrease in crime has been given to the enormous increase in personal security.

Lardner (1998) interviewed prisoners on New York’s Rikers Island to get their views on why crime is down. The prisoners cited police arresting people for what they considered to be minor reasons, as well as surer and stiffer penalties for crimes. Lardner interviewed former drug dealers and users who cited fear of arrest, the damage drugs do to work and to family life, and the risk of being shot in a drug-related disagreement. The author also interviewed a participant in a residential drug-treatment program who had been arrested on a minor drug charge. His oldest brother was in prison for killing the murderer of his second oldest brother, and two of his brothers had been shot to death. He was well aware what the alternative was to participation in drug-treatment.

Lardner (1998) cited juveniles interviewed in Brooklyn who said “I stay off the streets, ‘cuz the streets gets you nowhere.” “Cut school and stay on the streets, and either you will get locked up, or if you mess with the wrong person, you’ll be 6 feet deep, you know?” Guns were no longer considered cool and juveniles would call the police if they saw someone with a gun. “Everybody’s snitching everybody out.” “That’s how people is these days.” When the leader of their local gang was killed by gunfire, they knew it was “time to slow down.” “People started going to school more [and] people started getting jobs,” they said. Clearly what has been called the “younger-brother syndrome,” the viewing of the self-destructiveness of drugs and violence among older youth, profoundly altered the lives of current juveniles. Their resultant avoidance of crime contributed to the recent declining crime rate.

Commentary: No evaluations were found which showed community efforts independent of the police to be effective in contributing to the recent decline in the crime rate. Community groups working with police have had some success in decreasing crime. Individual efforts involving the increased use of personal security measures stemmed from fear of crime. Burglar alarms, car alarms, and private security surveillance appears to have contributed to the decrease in property crime.

The drug dependency, maiming, and killing of older siblings and friends strongly deterred youth and juveniles from recent involvement in the violent crime culture. Youth and juveniles, aware of the damage drugs do, the risk of being shot, and the

aggressive policing of minor offenses such as truancy, expressed fear for themselves and avoided crime. The recent declining crime rate is a consequence.

Conclusion: Neighborhood organizations working in conjunction with community police have aided the recent reduction in the crime rate. Observing the drug- and violence-destroyed lives of their older siblings and friends has caused youth and juveniles to avoid crime and seek legitimate employment or stay in school. This change in behavior has contributed to the recent decline in the violent crime rate.

The property crime rate has decreased, in part, due to the enormous growth of personal security measures. These measures can often be circumvented by experienced, professional criminals. However, property crimes by novice, casual, or opportunistic criminals can be deterred.

5. Population density and degree of urbanization

Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998) pointed out that the percentage of homicides occurring in large cities decreased from 1991 to 1996. This was largely due to the big decline observed in New York City whose percentage of the nation’s total homicides dropped from 9 percent to 5 percent. The increase and subsequent decline in homicides seen in smaller cities lagged behind those seen in large cities by about two years.

Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998) noted that large cities, probably due to their large, highly concentrated markets, were the first to receive crack cocaine. The demand for crack started, peaked, and declined first in large cities. Thus, the decrease in the crime rate associated with lessened demand for crack cocaine occurred first in large cities.

Commentary: A disproportionately large number of crimes occur in large cities. Changes in the types or rates of crimes committed in large cities greatly affect national statistics and influence crime trends in the rest of the country. The recent huge decrease in New York City’s crime rate, in general, and its homicide rate, in particular, caused national crime rates to decline markedly. Other large cities showed decreases similar in degree and timing to New York City.

The later peaking of crime in smaller cities countered the early decline in large cities to some extent. Crime in smaller cities began declining about two years after the decline began in large cities. Adding the decline in small cities to that already occurring in large cities accelerated the overall national rate of decline. Annual decreases in crime rates tended to increase in succeeding years. This suggests that factors contributing to the decreases were reinforcing themselves and each other. A momentum toward less crime arose. Table 1, based on the United States Crime Index Rate (FBI, 2000) and California Crime Index Rate (California Department of Justice, 1993 and 1999) data, displays this momentum.

Conclusion: The decline in crime rates began in large cities and spread to the rest of the United States. The increase in crime rates which preceded the decline also began in large cities and spread to the rest of the United States. Therefore,



Table 1
Annual Declines in Crime Rates in Recent Years

Years	United States Crime Rate Decline			California Crime Rate Decline*		
	Total	Violent	Property	Total	Violent	Property
1993 to 1994	-2.0%	-4.4%	-1.6%	-6.5%	-6.3%	-6.7%
1994 to 1995	-1.8%	-4.1%	-1.5%	-6.9%	-4.2%	-8.2%
1995 to 1996	-3.6%	-7.0%	-3.1%	-12.6%	-10.8%	-13.5%
1996 to 1997	-3.1%	-4.0%	-3.0%	-6.9%	-7.9%	-6.5%
1997 to 1998	-6.4%	-7.3%	-6.2%	-13.0%	-12.2%	-13.4%
1998 to 1999	-7%	-7%	-7%	-14.9%	-11.0%	-16.8%

*Does not include larceny-theft, which is included in the United States crime rate.

large cities led the way in crime rate trends seen from 1986 to 1999.

6. Variations in composition of the population, particularly youth concentration

Butterfield (1997) quoted Lawrence Sherman, chairman of the criminology department at the University of Maryland, as citing a possible reason for the drop in property crime. Sherman stated that many experienced property criminals have grown old, died, or gone to prison. The allure and money of the drug trade has drawn most potential young property crime apprentices into violent crime. There are few left to become property criminals. Sherman stated “The long-term cumulative effect of this lack of recruitment [into property crime] may be sizable.”

Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998) showed how the peak in the United States homicide rate, which occurred in 1991, occurred because the rate of homicides committed by younger people increased faster than the rate committed by adults decreased. The homicide rate for younger people began increasing dramatically in 1985, with the greatest increases associated with younger ages, down to 15 years. According to Blumstein (1995), between 1985 and 1992 the homicide rate for those 18 years and younger more than doubled while the rates for those 30 years and older decreased by 20-25 percent. Blumstein and Rosenfeld noted that from 1991 to 1993, the homicide rates for young people were fairly steady while the decline in the rate for older groups caused the aggregate rate to decrease. After 1993, the rates for all age groups were declining which caused the overall rate to decrease more rapidly. Total arrests of suspects under 25 years decreased 24.2 percent from 1993 to 1997, while the decrease of arrests of suspects 25 years and older was 18.0 percent. Of the 5,000 fewer arrests for homicide made in 1997 than in 1993, two-thirds were accounted for by persons under 25 years and one-third by older persons. Thus, while younger people contributed most to the decline, age alone did not account for the overall decrease in the homicide rate.

Blumenstein and Rosenfeld (1998) also examined the changing demographic composition of the population. They

stated that the decline in homicide after 1980 was significantly affected by shrinking high crime-age cohorts. In the later 1980s and in the 1990s crime-age cohorts changed about 1 percent per year. Given the increases in crime rates of 10 to 20 percent per year in the later 1980s and similar decreases in the 1990s, annual cohort changes of 1 percent could only be a slight factor affecting the crime rate. Similar patterns were found for blacks and whites, except the rate of increase for young blacks was 2 percent per year. The authors concluded that these small changes in the demographic composition of the population cannot account for much of the decreasing homicide rate seen in recent years.

Steffensmeier and Harer (1999) evaluated the effect of changes in the age structure of the United States population on the recent decreasing crime rate. These changes included not only a decreased proportion of younger, high crime-risk people, but an increased proportion of older, low crime-risk individuals. While the authors focused on the 1992 to 1996 period (with an update to 1998), they covered the entire period from 1980 to 1996 using data from the UCR and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).

Steffensmeier and Harer (1999) emphasized the importance of age in crime by noting that age-specific arrest rates tend to peak in the 15 to 20 year age range for all UCR and NCVS index crimes. Arrest rates drop to half by age 21 for property crimes and by age 28 for violent crimes. The crime rate should, therefore, be heavily dependent on the age composition of the population. Because both the UCR and the NCVS count offenses, neither has offender age information (age becomes available at arrest). The authors found that in recent years the proportion of individuals at crime-prone ages remained relatively stable. They concluded that the recent decline in the crime rate had very little to do with changes in the age structure of society.

Butts (1999) showed that the entire increase in homicide arrests between 1980 and 1994 resulted from the upsurge in homicide arrests among young people. He demonstrated that the increase was due equally to youth, aged 18-23, and juveniles, aged 13-17. The subsequent drop in homicide arrests for these groups accounted for virtually the entire

decrease in the homicide rate seen to 1994. This indicates that the violent behavior of young people changed dramatically after 1994. The author did not address the factors causing that change.

Hoover (2000) stated that steep drops in the crime rate in specific cities, 30 percent in some cities, were not likely to be due to demographic changes. During the 1990s, there were no substantial demographic shifts in the United States. Gradual, long-term trends, which have been occurring for at least the last 25 years, continued to occur. These long-term trends cannot explain the recent decrease in the crime rate.

Commentary: Homicide rates increased between 1985 and 1992, largely due to the increasing criminal behavior of juveniles and youth. The rates decreased after 1993, largely due to the decreasing criminal behavior of juveniles and youth. Neither the increased or decreased homicide rates resulted from changing proportions of crime-prone aged individuals in the population.

Conclusion: The decline in the property crime rate was due, in part, to decreases in the numbers of older and younger property criminals. Violent crime rates did not drop due to fewer crime-prone aged young people, as their number barely changed. Young people contributed substantially to the recent decline (and prior increase) in the homicide rate due to changes in their behavior. The age structure of society did not change enough to account for the recent drop in the crime rate. The decrease in crime in the early 1980s resulted in large part from a decreasing proportion of young people in crime-prone ages. The crime decrease in the 1990s had little to do with such a demographic change.

7. Economic conditions, including median income, poverty level, and job availability

Grant II and Martinez Jr. (1997) looked at the economic restructuring that occurred between 1970 and 1985 in the context of declining capital-labor accord. This indicated possible class linkages to crime. Capital-labor accord refers to the relationship between national industrial unions and large corporations in a cooperative collective bargaining system which evolved after World War II. This relationship began to deteriorate after 1970 as manufacturers moved plants from the "Rust-Belt" to lower-wage, non-union states. The authors found that indicators of employer tactics (unfair labor practice cases) and labor organization (union presence, union organizing success, and strike frequency) were significantly related to the total crime and property crime rates. There was no significant effect on the violent crime rate. The authors concluded that the criminal activity of individuals is not as much determined by class as it is by the injustice of an economic situation, by the attitudes of their main economic adversaries, and by their sense of the effectiveness of collective measures to ensure their economic equity.

Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998) indicated that recent economic gains have been shared by groups at high risk for serious criminal violence, including racial minorities, teenagers, and high school dropouts. They asserted that low-wage jobs have a marked impact on crime when the

availability of illicit income is decreasing. Just as people can turn to illegitimate sources of income when employment opportunities are limited, they can turn to legitimate jobs when the availability of illegitimate income is dwindling. Evidence shows that, in fact, the rate of crime is affected by the relative opportunities for legitimate and illegitimate income. Whichever is more lucrative tends to be pursued by young people. (The risks associated with illegal income are considered in the decision.) Thus, the occurrence of an expanding economy at a time when the crack market was declining contributed to the recent decline in the homicide rate as legitimate jobs replaced illegitimate, drug-related activities associated with carrying weapons.

LaFree (1998) argued that changes in the legitimacy of social institutions offer the best explanation for the changes in trends in street crime seen in the U.S. after World War II and, specifically, in the period from 1990 to 1997. He stated that individuals are dependent on institutions for guidance in all their behavior, including crime. Distrust of these institutions led to the rapid increase in crime beginning in the 1960s, while increasing trust or acceptance of institutions has contributed to the more recent decrease in crime. The author cited stabilization in economic institutions and matured investments in welfare in recent years as engendering trust. Crime rates decreased when the economic structure was able to provide financial stability. As a result, motivation to commit crime decreased and social controls focused on crime reduction became more effective. Not only did a higher degree of economic stability occur, but economic institutions were perceived to be fair, just, and responsive to a greater degree than in the past.

Donohue (1998) identified long-term trends in the rate of homicide. He found an annual increase of 4.4 percent from 1950 to 1977 and an annual decrease of about 0.6 percent from 1977 to 1997. He stated that it is unclear whether the recent steep drop in the homicide rate is a short-term deviation from the 1977 to 1997 long-term trend or a new trend. If the former is correct, then homicide rates would be expected to increase in the future and settle back to the 0.6 percent long-term decreasing trend. The author allowed that the improved economy probably contributed to a small extent to the recent steep drop in crime, but discounted it as the sole cause of the very large decrease seen.

Witkin (1998) wrote that the robust economy is probably a factor in the decrease in crime, but not a key factor. He quoted Philip Cook, a Duke University public policy professor, as stating that robberies and burglaries would be expected to fluctuate with economic conditions, but homicides would not. He cited the precipitous drop in the homicide rate in New York City, in the face of a high unemployment rate of 9 percent, as reflecting these other key factors.

Koretz (1999) cited economist Jeff Grogger of the University of California at Los Angeles as stating that crime dropped because young people were reacting to improved labor market conditions, especially rising wages. Real wages for low-skilled workers declined from the early 1970s to the early 1990s and then began to increase. The use of crack was



declining and the option of making drug-related money was greatly diminished in the mid and late 1990s. While crime laws became tougher, there was more policing, and incarceration increased. “Youths [were] responding not only to the stick of greater deterrence, but to the carrot of rising wages.”

Hoover (2000) asserted that steady economic growth since 1970, and especially since the early 1990s, is part of the explanation for the decrease in the crime rate. The economy has been doing well for a number of years and that explains some of the recent decrease in the crime rate.

Commentary: Over the last 35 years, property crime rates have been affected by workers’ perceptions of economic injustices. The revitalization of collective measures to achieve economic equality and vastly increased individual economic leverage stemming from high demand for workers have resulted in a decrease in perceived economic injustices. These factors, along with a decreased unemployment rate, have contributed to a decline in the property crime rate.

Violent crime rates are said not to be influenced by economic conditions, although such a blanket statement seems extreme. The recent precipitous drop in the homicide rate appears to have been largely due to key or primary factors other than the economy. However, the growth in legitimate jobs for low-skilled workers coinciding with a decline in illegitimate, high-risk drug-trade jobs has been important in redirecting youth and juveniles away from crime.

Conclusion: Economic institutions completed a period of downsizing and plant relocations in the 1980s. This was followed by a recent period during which workers experienced revitalized individual and collective effectiveness in addressing perceived economic injustices. This, along with historical distance from the events that caused broad and deep distrust and disregard for many economic institutions, contributed partly to the recent decline in property crime.

On the other hand, violent crime decreased in part because of a fundamental shift in youth employment opportunities. The illegitimate, high-risk crack market was dwindling at the same time that low-skilled workers were increasingly finding relatively high wage opportunities in the legitimate economy. While not fully accounting for the drop in either property or violent crime rates, this changing aspect of the robust United States economy of the 1990s was a key factor enabling the decline of both crime measures.

8. Cultural factors and educational, recreational, and religious characteristics

Gergen (1999) contended that the recent decrease in the crime rate is one indication, among the five set forth by William Bennett as the “Index of Leading Cultural Indicators,” that there is a cultural renewal taking place. The other four indicators are family and children (divorce rate low, abortions decreasing), education (SAT scores up slightly, standards movement gaining momentum), youth behavior (teen pregnancy dropping), and popular culture and religion (charitable giving increasing, more interest in religion). The

author concluded that U.S. society is showing great resiliency and bouncing back from bad times.

Males (2000) asserted that youth access to violent entertainment media will not make today’s teens more violent. Excluding the exceptional disturbed individual who would be incited to violence by many things, evidence indicates that juveniles are not warped by violent media. Assault rates in California peaked in 1992 and then plummeted after violent interactive video games such as *Mortal Kombat* (1992), *Doom* (1993), and *Quake* (1996) were released. Along with these video games, the 1990s saw an increase in gangsta-rap music, R-rated movies, and Internet use. Yet, in California teen murder rates decreased by 60 percent and other violence declined by 20 percent. Thus, according to the author, the decline in the juvenile crime rate has not been impeded by violent entertainment media.

Commentary: The concept of an Index of Leading Cultural Indicators presupposes that these indicators reflect the future national cultural condition. While a decrease in the crime rate is clearly desirable, it is probably more an indication of current rather than future culture. This is especially true given the historical volatility of the crime rate and the demographic factors which have usually affected it. In the past, the crime rate has increased when the proportion of crime-prone age individuals has been high. It is difficult to accept the contention that the proportion of the population between 14 and 24 years of age (the high crime-prone years) reflects the present or future cultural condition of the U.S.

Conclusion: The recent crime rate decrease has been cited as an indicator of a future increase in national civility. Determining if the crime rate and level of national civility are related causally or are both the result of a third factor is difficult and as yet unresolved. However, this conjecture is interesting as it suggests an impending change in national mood and conscience.

Virtually all juveniles can distinguish between the fantasy world of violent media and the real world. Violent media do not appear to incite these young people to commit violent and criminal acts. Those few juveniles who are affected by such media are, unfortunately, sufficiently disturbed so that they would be affected by any number of events in their lives.

9. Family conditions with respect to divorce and family cohesiveness

LaFree (1998) continued to argue that distrust of social institutions led to the increase in crime beginning in the 1960s, while increasing trust or acceptance of social institutions contributed to the recent decrease in crime. As an example, the author cited the relationship between families and schools. Families can decrease crime by shaping motivation, providing social control, and giving protection from the criminal activity of others. The author contends that various alternative family structures have become more routine and, as a consequence, their effectiveness in preventing crime and deviance has increased. In addition, the increasing reliance on educational institutions to carry out responsibilities formerly performed by

families has grown enormously. A growing proportion of people of all ages spend a considerable amount of time in school where values contrary to those associated with crime are espoused. The author concluded that increased support for educational institutions and stabilization of family structures have contributed to the decline in the crime rate seen in recent years.

Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998) observed that there has been a sustained decrease in homicides involving intimate partners, including spouses, ex-spouses, and others. They stated that this decrease was the result of a drop in “domesticity,” defined as declining marriage rates, older age at marriage, and high divorce rates. This ironic set of events implies that an effective way to decrease the rate of homicides of intimates (generally a large component of the overall homicide rate) is simply to decrease the number of intimates. The authors suggested that a role in the decrease of homicides may have been played by legal advocacy and other domestic violence services which enabled women to more easily leave violent relationships.

Witkin (1998) quantified the steady 20-year decline in domestic murders, which decreased from nearly 3,000 in 1976 to slightly over 1,800 in 1996 (a 40 percent decrease). Recently, this decrease has been due mainly to the decline in the killing of men, especially black men, by their female partners. The decline has been partly due to fewer young people having spouses, and partly due to women being more financially independent and having more options for leaving bad relationships. However, only nine percent of the homicide reduction from 1993 to 1996 was accounted for by decreased domestic murders. Therefore, this was a substantial but not a major factor in the recent decline in the homicide rate.

Commentary: Educational institutions have been much maligned in recent years, a period during which they have been required to assume or assist with many functions formerly carried out by families. There appears to be limits on the ability of educational institutions or any other public or private entity to replace parents and family. The need for strong families is not more apparent than in the reasons often given for gang membership; to belong and to be cared about. Gang members often refer to their gang as their family.

Conclusion: Educational institutions, in their considerably expanded role, have provided support and guidance to juveniles and youth not otherwise provided by families. This has contributed to the recent crime rate decrease. Alternatively structured families may be more effective in decreasing criminal behavior among their children than in the past. The decline in marriages and increased availability of resources for women wanting to escape violent relationships have lowered the rate of domestic homicides. This has made a substantial contribution to the recent decline in the homicide rate.

10. Drug use

Baumer, Lauritsen, Rosenfeld, and Wright (1998) stated that the appearance and widespread use of crack cocaine was at

least partly responsible for the increase in violent crime and the decrease in property crime seen during the 1980s. They found that higher levels of crack cocaine use were associated with increases in the robbery and homicide rates and with decreases in the burglary rate. The authors attributed the robbery and burglary trends to robbery being a more direct and sure way to acquire the cash needed to purchase crack cocaine than burglary. This was especially true in neighborhoods already flooded with stolen merchandise whose price had been driven down due to oversupply. Other factors contributing significantly to all three crime trends were resource deprivation (below poverty level, unemployed, female led households with children under 18 years, and receiving public assistance), divorce, and population size.

Baumer et al. (1998) stated that their findings may help explain the recent decrease in the violent crime rate seen in many cities. They indicated that the early, precipitous decrease in New York City’s crime rate, which has been attributed to law enforcement measures, follows from New York City being among the first cities where crack use appeared and, in turn, where its use first plateaued. The authors suggested that the abatement of the “crack epidemic” decreased the need for quick cash to purchase crack, which lessened the need to engage in violent crime. No reasons were offered to explain why the use of crack decreased.

Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998) stated that the increase in handgun homicides was probably associated with the increase in crack use and related drug violence. They attributed the rise in handgun homicides to the following sequence: “introduction of crack in the mid-1980s; recruitment of young minority males to sell the drugs; arming of the drug sellers with handguns; diffusion of guns to peers; irresponsible and excessively casual use of guns by young people, leading to a ‘contagious’ growth in homicide.” The authors suggested that the decline in handgun homicides followed the decrease in new crack users. A more private, off-street drug market ensued that did not require the continued recruiting of violent young people. During the period when crack use was increasing, youths needed to arm themselves for protection in the increasingly violent drug environment. Firearm violence eventually came to exist outside of drug markets. The authors described the process as involving a “contagious” arms race with an epidemic-like process accounting for the increase and decline of homicide. They implied that the factors which caused the decreased demand for crack led to a decreased need by youths to arm themselves for protection.

After reviewing and discounting other causes for the recent decrease in crime, Witkin (1998) concluded that the spread of crack cocaine beginning in 1986 led to a huge crime wave. He asserted that prior to 1986 crime rates followed demographics, with the murder rate rising from the late 1950s to 1980 “in lock step” with the increasing number of baby boomer youth. From 1980 to 1985, the homicide rate decreased by 23 percent, as the baby boomers grew older. When crack appeared, it created unstable street-corner markets for a drug with a 10 minute “high” that made it necessary for users to get money quickly and repeatedly. Disputes escalated.



The large volume of transactions made it necessary for drug organizations to recruit large numbers of juveniles to carry drugs and cash. Guns became necessary to secure retail turf and for the juvenile workers to protect themselves against robbery. Those not involved in the drug trade began carrying guns to protect themselves from those who were trafficking drugs. Guns began to confer status and power. Homicides escalated as minor disputes increasingly were settled with guns. The author contended that “the entire violent crime wave of the late 1980s and early 1990s can be blamed on young people with guns.”

Witkin (1998) stated that young people turned away from crack after seeing older siblings ravaged by addiction to the drug or paralyzed by a bullet fired in a drug-related dispute (“younger brother syndrome”). Youth developed a strong value against crack use, and decided that “crack is not cool.” In addition, a settling out process occurred after the battles over turf had been fought and territories had been established. Many individuals who had been reckless were dead or in prison, and those remaining had learned peaceful ways to resolve disputes. This was the story in big cities, but in smaller cities like Indianapolis where crack arrived later, crime has increased. Violent crime rates will decline in these smaller cities when their residents go through the same cycle that the residents of big cities have gone through.

Parker and Cartmill (1998) explored the possibility that one reason for the recent decline in the homicide rate may be the decrease in alcohol consumption during the same period. They cited analyses of American cities in which associations have been found between blocks that have bars located on them and the occurrence of violent crimes. Two reasons given for this relationship are selective disinhibition of violent behavior and the attraction of many people to these places. The authors found that decreased consumption of spirits by whites and beer by nonwhites is significantly related to the recent declining homicide rate. The authors concluded by citing other studies which have shown significant impacts of beer consumption on youth homicide.

Donohue (1998) identified long-term trends in the rate of homicide, including an annual increase of 4.4 percent from 1950 to 1977 and an annual decrease of about 0.6 percent from 1977 to 1997. The recent steep drop in the homicide rate may be a blip in the 1977 to 1997 long-term trend or a new trend. The author stated that the long-term gradual decline in the crime rate is probably related to the decrease in alcohol consumption, as both trends began at the same time. However, the recent steep drop in the crime rate is probably not due to this relationship, with the presence of liquor stores and bars in high crime neighborhoods possibly being purely correlational and reflective of social decay. Other indicators of social decay, such as the number of potholes in the street or the number of check-cashing stores, may also correlate with the homicide rate. The author asserted that the most likely explanation for the recent steep drop in the homicide rate is the reduced demand for crack cocaine which followed a period of a run-up in demand. The whole cycle was a short-term phenomenon. The author also noted that the decrease in demand for crack began before the homicide rate’s steep

decline, so the drug rationale does not offer a simple explanation for the decrease.

Hoover (2000) stated that drug use trends do not explain the decrease in crime. He noted that the use of some drugs decreased in the early 1990s, but others did not. In addition, surveys of high school students in the mid-1990s indicated that drug use, or at least experimentation, increased. Also, continued levels of drug seizures indicates that trafficking has not decreased. The author concluded that the war on drugs has not led to the large decline in crime.

Commentary: A crack cocaine epidemic occurred in the United States from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. Large crack-related increases in homicides and robberies occurred. Homicides declined with the abatement of the crack epidemic. Robberies declined as fewer drug users needed quick cash to buy crack.

During the crack cocaine epidemic, large numbers of youths and juveniles working in drug trafficking carried weapons, usually handguns, and used them excessively and with bravado. This forced others not in the drug business to carry handguns for protection. Reckless and violent individuals killed each other. Minor disputes were increasingly settled by killings. When use of crack declined about six to eight years after it began, the drug market stabilized and private, off-street, peaceful trafficking ensued. Large numbers of violent youth and juveniles were not needed for this type of drug trade. Weapons became unnecessary and violence decreased.

The violent crime wave of the late 1980s and early 1990s can probably be blamed on young people with handguns. A more entrepreneurial drug culture followed in which disputes were resolved peacefully and violence was seen as undesirable.

The use of some drugs such as marijuana has actually increased in the late 1990s. Marijuana is associated with relatively little violence. However, inner-city open-air street corner crack markets, the source of so much violence, have decreased. Therefore, overall drug consumption could increase while crime decreased. Comparing overall drug consumption to the crime rate obscures the relationship between drugs associated with violence and crime rates. The availability of drugs associated with violence tends to be controllable by gangs (almost anyone can grow marijuana). Control of supply confers the ability to set highly profitable market prices and this led to violence among groups wanting to control the supply of crack cocaine.

Conclusion: In 1986 a controlled (prohibited) substance appeared in large United States cities. It was highly addictive, produced a very short-duration period of euphoria necessitating frequent purchases, was inexpensive (\$5-\$20 per bag, depending on quantity), and became accepted among some segments of society. The prohibited substance spawned an extremely profitable industry, with total annual sales in the billions of dollars. Production (which was overseas), distribution (which involved smuggling), and marketing enterprises competed fiercely and violently to obtain and retain control of markets. Street gangs, often highly

organized, controlled markets in cities or parts of cities. Distribution occurred at many sites and required a large cadre of underlings to transport the prohibited substance and collect money. While all gangs were not involved in drug trafficking, Los Angeles city and county had an estimated 118,000 gang members and Chicago had an estimated 33,000.

Gang leaders carried weapons, mainly concealed handguns. Their underlings carried handguns for protection from members of rival gangs, customers with whom they had disputes (use of the substance caused irrational behavior), and others seeking to rob them of either the money or drugs in their possession.

The underlings were largely juveniles who were subject to relatively minor juvenile sanctions if caught with the prohibited substance by law enforcement. These juveniles, in expressions of bravado, flashed their guns to intimidate others and gain respect. Other juveniles, even those not involved with a prohibited substance enterprise, began carrying handguns for protection. Many murders occurred among the more violent and reckless drug traffickers and users. In 1990 and 1991, cocaine was found in 31 percent of the 4,298 people murdered in New York City (Tardiff, et al., 1994). About three-quarters of all these murders involved firearms. Many innocent people were killed by being in the line of fire in drive-by shootings.

A major impact on the drug supply and distribution hierarchy was made by the Federal government through the interdiction of supply and by successful prosecution of gang leaders and their lieutenants. Federal prosecutors relied on RICO and related conspiracy statutes to win convictions against leaders of highly organized, disciplined enterprises whose activities could cover large areas of cities, states, or regions. The most prominent such leader is Larry Hoover, leader of the Black Gangster Disciple Nation. Intensive and aggressive local prosecutions and police actions were also brought to bear on crack cocaine trafficking.

The decline in the crack cocaine market began when the number of new users began to diminish in the early 1990s. According to the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NIDA, 1999), United States crack cocaine use in 1997 was the same as in 1988 (604,000 users). This suggests that use of crack cocaine was greater at the peak of the crack “epidemic” in the early 1990s than in years before and after the peak. It also indicates that there is still a large market for crack cocaine. In most cases, crack dealers also sold powdered cocaine and other drugs. Cocaine use in all forms decreased by 78 percent from 1985 to 1997 (5.7 million users to 1.5 million users). The overall drop in drug demand, the maturing and stabilizing of peaceful drug markets, and other factors led to the end of the reckless, violent crack cocaine market. The crack market reverted back to a “cottage industry” of small-group and freelance distributors (Publishers Group, 1996), and violence greatly diminished.

This recent violence- and crime-filled period in United States history, most concentrated in cities, was built around an illegal, mood-enhancing substance which was inexpensive

enough to allow many individuals to purchase it. Crack generated large amounts of money for those who controlled its production, distribution, and marketing. The characteristics of this period and its stimulation of violent crime resembled that of the era of Prohibition which began when the Eighteenth Amendment was implemented on January 17, 1920 and ended with the ratification of the Twenty-First Amendment on December 5, 1933 (Behr, 1996).

Prohibition, in which alcohol was the prohibited substance, involved an illegal, prohibited, mood-altering, inexpensive substance whose effect could be intensified by repeated doses consumed at relatively short intervals. The prohibited substance (alcohol) became accepted among some segments of society and a highly profitable industry arose. Producers and suppliers made fortunes. Suppliers of Haig and Haig, Pinchbottle whiskey, Gordin’s gin, and Seagrams were the Medellin and Cali Cartels of the 1920s. Distributors and controllers of retail markets made fortunes. Al Capone was the Larry Hoover of the 1920s.

Authorities have said that not since Al Capone ruled Chicago in the 1920s had the city experienced a more sophisticated group of criminals than the Black Gangster Disciple Nation street gang. Larry Hoover was even described as being like Capone, a criminal who was gregarious and who courted politicians, police, and the press. Hoover fostered a bigger than life mystique about himself in the South Side neighborhoods his gang controlled.

Different Prohibition gangs controlled the sale of liquor in different cities, with larger cities usually being controlled by more than one gang. This was also the case in the recent crack epidemic. The gathering place for use of the prohibited substance, the speakeasy, was the crack house of the 1920s.

Crime increased during Prohibition as indicated by an almost doubling of the rate of male prisoners (Landesco, 1932), just as crime and the prison population increased dramatically during the crack epidemic. The homicide rate was highest early in Prohibition (in 1923) and decreased to below pre-Prohibition levels later (in 1928). This parallels homicide rate trends early in the crack epidemic (in 1991) and later (in 1995).

The intervention of Federal agents and prosecutors, using Internal Revenue Service laws not originally intended for use against Prohibition gangsters, was necessary to imprison Al Capone on tax evasion. Similarly, intervention of Federal prosecutors using RICO laws, which were not conceived for use against street gangs, was necessary to break the back of organized drug gang leadership.

The crack epidemic, with the binge of violent crime it precipitated, has not ended neatly and cleanly like Prohibition. Alcohol became legal after Prohibition ended and its consumption grew, while crack cocaine and other drugs remain illegal and consumption continues. Mature, stable, entrepreneurial markets arose in the mid-1930s for alcohol and in the mid-1990s for crack and other drugs. Competition continued to exist in both periods, but peaceful resolution of



differences became the norm. The violent excesses of the past were largely rejected. Law enforcement and prosecutors got smarter and more aggressive.

The decline of the crack cocaine epidemic in the United States and California resulted in violent crime rates dropping to levels of the late 1970s. The United States violent crime rate for 1999 was 9.4 percent greater than its historic mean (1960 to 1999), while California's violent crime rate for 1999 was 2.9 percent greater than its historic mean (1952 to 1999). Again, it should be noted that laws and crime reporting practices changed at various times during these years.

The next violent crime binge in the United States is likely to be associated with the widespread use of another illegal, mood-enhancing, inexpensively priced substance whose production, distribution, and marketing lead to great wealth. Memories of the personal destruction and killings associated with the heyday of crack cocaine will probably have to fade before such a binge can occur.

11. Weapons

Blumstein and Rosenfeld (1998) examined trends in the use of handguns, other guns, and non-guns (which includes no physical weapon) in homicides from 1977 to 1995. They found little change in the use of handguns by adults (25-45 years), but considerable growth in the use of handguns by youth (18 -24 years) and juveniles (17 years and under) beginning in 1986 and peaking in 1993 (1994 had a similar level of use). Compared to 1985, the increase was 100 percent for youth and 300 percent for juveniles. A sharp decline in handgun use was seen for youth and juveniles in 1995 and the decrease in homicide arrests for these age groups in 1996 indicated a continuation of the decline in handgun use. No appreciable increase was found in the long-gun (rifle, shotgun) and non-gun categories for any age group. The growth in homicides by young people, especially black youth, from 1985 to 1994, was due to the increased use of handguns. The decline in youth homicide rates through 1996 was associated with the decrease in handgun use by young people. The authors concluded that the consistently aggressive police policy toward illegal weapons before and after 1993 (a factor

which affects the rate of weapons arrests) indicates that the decrease in youth homicides seen recently was associated with a decrease in the carrying of handguns.

Izumi (1999) asserted that there is no connection between gun ownership and crime. He cited as evidence the large decreases in the violent crime rate in Los Angeles (1997 to 1998) and in California, as a whole (1996 to 1997), which occurred at the same time that there were more gun owners in the state. The author concluded that the recent decrease in the crime rate in California, and nationally, was not related to the number of guns legally owned.

Snyder (1999) stated that the drop in the rate of homicides committed by juveniles since 1993 has been due entirely to the drop in homicides they committed with firearms, primarily handguns. He concluded that the recent decline in the juvenile homicide rate is probably due to recent law enforcement efforts to take guns from juveniles.

Commentary: Increases of 100 percent and 300 percent in handgun use by youths and juveniles, respectively, paralleled increases in handgun homicides during this period. The decrease in homicides and violent crime by young people in recent years has been due to a reverse of the handgun trends. The drop in juvenile homicides since 1993 is due entirely to the drop in juvenile homicides committed with firearms, primarily handguns. The decrease is probably due more to a change in attitudes toward guns and violence by young people than to a change in policing.

Declines in violent crimes in Los Angeles and in California, as a whole, occurred at the same time as there were more legally owned guns in the state. This suggests that during the period of decreasing violent crime juveniles and youth chose not to carry guns even though there were more gun owners from whom weapons could be stolen.

Conclusion: Much of the recent decrease in the homicide rate, and the increase that preceded it, was related to the number of young people who were carrying and using handguns.