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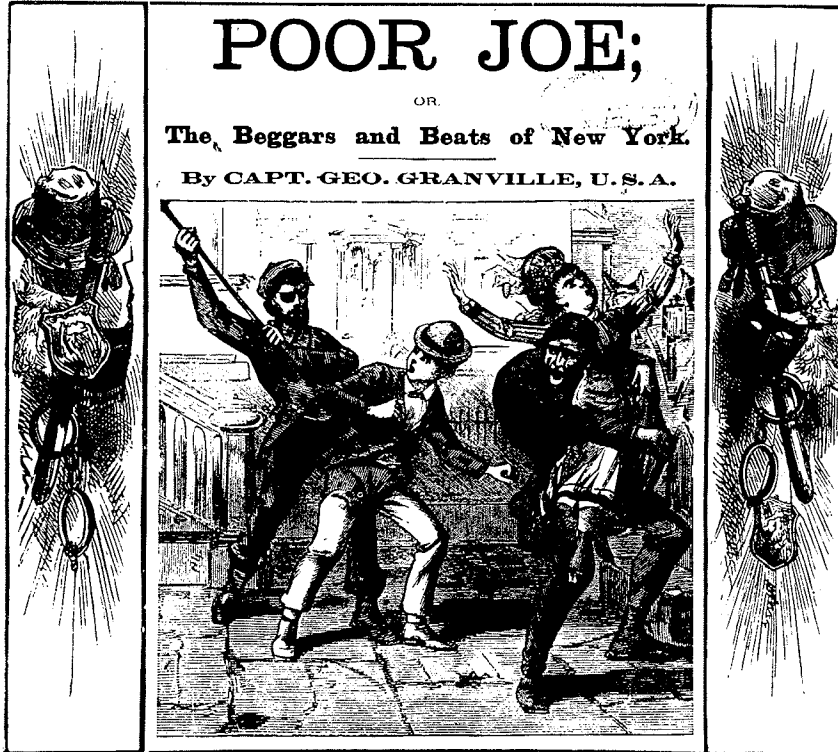
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*When this issue of Detective Library appeared in 1883, the term "mugger" had already replaced "footpad." One hundred years later, the nature of crime has changed less than our thinking about crime. The 19th-century views of Cesare Lombroso—that criminals are born, not made—gave way in the mid-20th century to a critique of society itself. "The underlying causes of crime," former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark wrote in 1970, "will crumble before the forces of social change." Others are doubtful.*

# Crime

Is there a solution to the problem of crime? During the mid-1960s, politicians, police officers, and academic researchers were more confident of the answer than they are today, even as their proposed solutions varied from the harsh to the paternal. Two decades, hundreds of experiments, and billions of dollars later, high rates of crime persist—resistant, it seems, to wars on poverty, tougher sentencing, or serious attempts at offender “rehabilitation.” In *Crime and Public Policy*, to be published in May by the Institute for Contemporary Studies, Harvard’s James Q. Wilson stresses that “we offer no ‘magic bullet’ that will produce safe streets or decent people.” What Wilson and his 10 contributors do offer is some fresh thinking. They also puncture a few strong myths. We draw from their work in the essays that follow on crime trends and types of offenders, on the criminal justice system, and on the relationship of crime to family life.

## TRENDS AND TARGETS

*by Jan M. Chaiken and Marcia R. Chaiken*

Fifty years ago, crime was not regarded by the average urban American as a chronic threat to his family and his property.

The wanton disorder in U.S. cities during the last half of the 19th century had steadily declined. Immigrants, impoverished but more or less peaceable, had occupied once-dangerous hell-holes, places like Buffalo’s Canal Street or Manhattan’s notorious Five Points. There were still areas, of course, in both town and country, that had a deservedly evil reputation. Here there was no lack of pickpocketing, prostitution, or predatory violence. But if one kept away, one was reasonably safe. The most dangerous criminals, and the most professional, might prey on the rich, or on banks, or on each other, but the ordinary city-dweller did not feel he was taking his safety into his own hands every time he walked outside at night, and he did not necessarily lock his door when he did so. When newspaper headlines trumpeted “Crime Wave,” they were referring to warfare among gangsters. On such occasions, the city morgue might fill up, but not with law-abiding friends and relatives.

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Since World War II, all that has changed. Crime, like television, has come into the living room—and into the church, the lobbies of public buildings, the parks, the shopping malls, the bus stations, the airport parking lots, the subways, the schools. In 1981, 25 million American households were touched by crime. Crime and the fear of crime have spread from “traditional” high crime areas into once-serene urban neighborhoods, from the central city to outlying suburbs and towns, and into summer resorts and college campuses. One Florida village, Golden Beach, preyed on by car-borne youths from nearby Miami, recently erected permanent barriers on all but one of the public roads giving access to the community. On the one open road, it installed a metal gate manned by security guards 24 hours a day. “We’re circling the wagons in case of attack,” Golden Beach’s mayor explained. Many Americans have altered their behavior in less drastic ways, but in the big cities, vigilance is often the price of safety—at home and in the streets.

There is little comfort in the knowledge that, when viewed over a long stretch of time, crime rates in the United States (as in the rest of the developed world) have been trending downward for more than a century. The homicide rate in this country in 1960 was *one-fifth* the rate in 1860. In Boston, between 1849 and 1951, crimes that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) today characterizes as “major” declined by two-thirds. Of course, the descending slope has been marked from time to time by reversals of about a decade’s duration—after the Civil War, for example, and during the 1920s. The most recent eruption has had Americans worried, judging by the polls, since the early days of Lyndon Johnson’s administration, and that fear has not abated. If anything, it has grown.

Thus, the 1981 report of the U.S. Attorney General’s Task Force on Violent Crime—the latest of many such blue-ribbon

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Crimes of theft—personal larceny, household larceny, and household burglary, in that order—are by far the most common types of criminal offenses.

Robbery and burglary are more likely to strike black households than white households, and burglary disproportionately afflicts households with incomes less than \$7,500.



commissions—noted that “millions of our fellow citizens are being held hostage” by an epidemic of crime. The United States, its authors warned, faced a “crisis situation.” In that same year, the Gallup Poll asked: “Is there more crime in [your] area than there was a year ago, or less?” Some 54 percent of the respondents said more, up 11 points since 1977. Only eight percent said less. In 1982, as during the late 1960s and '70s, the large number of “law and order” candidates in state, local, and congressional races demonstrated once again that crime and the fear of crime had yet to lose their salience as campaign issues.

There is no question that Americans are worried about serious crime, and they may well be more worried now than they were a decade ago. Whether they *ought* to be is another matter. Perceptions often lag behind the data. Today, the academic specialists who study crime, while not denying that fear does exist or that a considerable degree of fear is warranted, are taking a more sanguine view of what is happening to actual crime rates. They caution that statistics in general can easily be mishandled, even by well-intentioned users; that crime statistics in general are more flawed than most; and that American statistics, as one

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scholar has lamented, are "the least reliable crime data of all western societies." Most of the scholars contend further that actual crime rates have probably leveled off during the past five or six years, and may even have begun to decline.

### Counting Victims

Since 1932, the FBI has annually published a Uniform Crime Report (UCR), the standard source for U.S. crime statistics. If one reads, for example, that between 1977 and 1981 the murder rate per 100,000 inhabitants climbed by 11 percent, the robbery rate by 22 percent, and the burglary rate by 16 percent, one is looking at UCR data. The chief flaw in the report is that local police departments, which provide the information to the FBI, do not have uniform "recording" practices. An increase in the UCR's count of forcible rapes may mean an increase in the number of actual rapes, or an increase in the number of rapes reported to the police, or an increase in the number of rapes recorded as rapes (rather than, say, as aggravated assault). As Josiah Stamp observed in Britain long ago, "The government are very keen on amassing statistics. They collect, raise them to the nth power, take the cube root and prepare wonderful diagrams. But you must never forget that every one of these figures comes in the first instance from the village watchman, who just puts down what he damn pleases."

Though today's police are more methodical than village watchmen, their reports do skew U.S. crime data. A study conducted in Chicago by statisticians Richard and Becky Block found that during the mid-1970s only 50 percent of noncommercial robbery incidents were reported to the police. Only 73 percent were initially recorded as robberies. And just over a quarter of those incidents were ultimately considered "founded" (i.e., to have been crimes actually committed) by the police and were reported to the FBI as robberies.

Theoretically, a change in the reporting habits of local citizens and police could prompt a 350 percent increase in the robbery rate in Chicago without another person being mugged. And those habits do change. For example, more and more burglaries are being reported as more people buy insurance against theft. This is because insurance companies require a report to the police before they will cover the loss.

Partly to overcome such problems of reporting, the U.S. Justice Department launched a National Crime Survey in 1973. Every six months, some 132,000 individuals in 66,000 households are interviewed. "Crime histories" are taken, the results

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tabulated, the final figures extrapolated to the nation as a whole. There are obvious technical reasons why the "victimization survey" and the UCR are not directly comparable in terms of volume, but the casual reader might expect that, though specific rates for specific crimes would vary, the basic *trends* in crime rates would at least be parallel. This, however, is not always the case.

Thus, in the period from 1974 to 1978, the National Crime Survey's victimization rate for aggravated assault declined by 6.7 percent, while the UCR showed an increase of 13.5 percent. The survey's victimization rate for forcible rape declined by one percent, while the rate reported in the UCR increased by 11 percent. Both sources did agree that the rates for auto theft and burglary had declined.

### No Epidemic

The situation, in sum, is slightly confusing, but there is no way to look at the data and find evidence of a worsening "epidemic" of crime. Indeed, the latest UCR figures released by the Justice Department show a five percent drop in the number of "serious" crimes (e.g., murders, robberies, rapes) reported during the first half of 1982 over the corresponding period of 1981. No one doubts, of course, that crime is extensive in the United States. Scholars agree that, during the 1960s and early 1970s, the United States *did* experience a sharp rise in the incidence of all types of criminal activity—as did Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, Sweden, and most of the rest of the industrialized world. The increase in reported crime during these years was simply too great to be explained away by "better reporting" or statistical flukes. The fact remains, however, that one can assess all of this criminal activity only imperfectly.

Given the soggy nature of the numbers, how can specialists argue with any assurance that crime rates may have leveled off? The answer is that, while the Uniform Crime Report is an inadequate barometer of what is happening in the country *as a whole*, we can elicit important information by comparing its component parts. For example, the difference between crime rates in rural areas and in urban areas is so great and shows up in so many data sources that we can be sure that the difference is not just a fluke. The same goes for crimes committed by adults versus crimes by juveniles, crimes by whites versus crimes by blacks. Once we know this, we can deduce a lot more.

*Urbanization:* Big cities, not surprisingly, have substantially higher crime rates than smaller cities, which in turn have

### THE SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL COSTS OF CRIME

The "multiplier effect" of government spending is a commonplace notion in economics; it is also useful in considering the social and economic impact of crime.

Where property crimes are concerned, the cost of any criminal "transaction" may drain the resources not only of the intended target but of insurance companies, credit card companies, police departments, and court systems; a full reckoning of the cost would have to include such things as repair bills for windows and doors and the price of new locks. Where crimes against people are involved, the price paid in fear is never confined solely to the victim.

According to the 1980 *Figgie Report on the Fear of Crime*, 41 percent of Americans surveyed evinced a "high" or "very high" fear of becoming a victim of violent crime, more than 80 times the proportion who will actually be so victimized in any given year. Women are more frightened than men, older people more than younger people, blacks more than whites. Yet relative degrees of fear do not necessarily reflect actual victimization. While blacks do suffer disproportionately from most crimes, women (except for rape) and the elderly (except for purse-snatching) have substantially lower-than-average victimization rates.

Fear exacts not only an emotional toll but a toll in freedom, in money—and, ultimately, in more crime. More than 50 percent of Americans surveyed in the *Figgie Report* say that they now dress more plainly than they once did to avoid attracting attention. Nine out of 10 do not open their doors unless the caller identifies himself. FBI Director William Webster recently cited cases of mothers routinely giving young children pocket money so that they might have something to give up if threatened. According to *Insurance Magazine*, individuals paid \$127 million in premiums for insurance against burglary, robbery, and theft in 1977. One-half of all adult Americans are believed to own handguns.

In the nation's urban areas, the growing dispersion of crime since the 1950s has added to whites' fears of blacks, especially young black males who as a group commit a disproportionate share of mayhem. A 1982 Justice Department study of eight Chicago neighborhoods found that those homeowners (of both races) whose fear of crime was the greatest also believed that their neighborhoods were becoming increasingly black—even when this was not the case. Fear has prompted middle-class blacks and whites alike to flee to the suburbs, leaving the black "underclass" behind to dominate once-tranquil neighborhoods.

Survey data reveal that the public believes too little is being spent on combating crime. Yet state, local, and federal spending on criminal justice cost taxpayers \$26 billion in 1979, a 147 percent increase over 1970. Total government spending rose by only 109 percent dur-

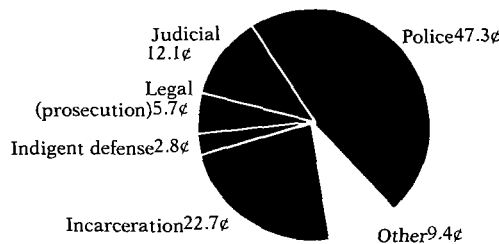
ing the same period. Local police forces absorbed about half of that sum (see chart), but their efforts are not sufficient. Thus, spending on alternative crime prevention services has also been on the rise. Detective agencies along with companies providing uniformed security guards to office buildings, warehouses, and shops reported a revenue increase of 84 percent between 1972 and 1977 alone.

The cost of trying to prevent or punish criminal activity is dwarfed by the impact of the activity itself. The most lucrative form of crime—white-collar crime—also happens to be the least feared, yet the American Management Association in 1977 estimated the cost of white-collar thefts such as fraud and computer crime to be \$44 billion annually. While bank robbers grabbed \$22 million during the first six months of 1980, bank *embezzlers* pilfered upwards of \$103 million. Drug trafficking holds the No. 2 spot. The illicit drug trade is now thought to be a \$30-billion-a-year industry, and it is the main reason why Florida, a major drug entry point, contains six of the nation's 10 most crime-ridden cities—Miami, Gainesville, West Palm Beach, Orlando, Fort Lauderdale, and Daytona Beach. Across America, motor vehicle theft and burglary each netted about \$3.5 billion in 1981; larceny, \$2.4 billion; and robbery, \$382 million.

While crime is commonly characterized as a purely parasitic enterprise, the relationship between offenders and the larger community of law-abiding citizens is in many respects complementary. So entrenched has criminality become in the United States that many legitimate social and economic activities, and not a few jobs, depend on it. Nearly 100,000 people work in state prisons and other detention facilities. Some 440,000 men and women earn their living as police officers, and almost 1.4 million work as private security guards (often part-time). One must not leave out judges, probation

officers, attendants in hospital emergency rooms, locksmiths, lawyers, police reporters—and, of course, academic experts. The number of colleges and universities offering B.A.s in criminal justice rose from 39 in 1967 to 376 in 1977. The 1983 edition of *Books in Print* offers 17 small-type pages of works on crime-related themes, three pages more than are devoted to sex.

**HOW THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE DOLLAR WAS SPENT IN 1978**



Source: *Expenditure and Employment Data for the Criminal Justice System* (1981), U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.



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higher rates than rural areas. In 1981, there were more than 322 robberies per 100,000 inhabitants in large metropolitan areas, more than 60 in other cities, and fewer than 21 in rural counties. The pattern is strongest for property crimes, but it holds for all types of crime except homicide (where rural counties have a higher rate than small cities). The higher the proportion of the nation's population living in big cities, then, the higher the rate of crime nationwide.

One of the major demographic turnabouts of the 1970s was the steady depopulation of major American cities—in no small measure due to fear of crime. Many Americans are finding that smaller cities and towns are more “livable.” The semirural public schools are better—and far less dangerous. There is a feeling of neighborliness and “community.” Since 1950, the share of the nation's total population inhabiting the 32 largest U.S. cities has declined from 20 to 14.4 percent. “Will this deconcentration continue?” ask William P. Butz and his colleagues in a recent Rand Corporation study. “No one really knows, but, on balance, the evidence suggests that it will.” If the Rand study is right, a clear implication is that, all other factors held constant, the national crime rate will decrease in the years ahead.

### Age and Race

*Age of Population:* Most crimes are committed by young people, usually males, under the age of 20. As Northwestern University sociologist Wesley Skogan notes, “crime is a young man's game.” It is therefore tempting to blame the sharp increase in reported crime that began during the 1960s on the “coming of age” of the postwar baby-boom generation.

The truth may not be quite so straightforward. The 1967 report of President Lyndon Johnson's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice puzzled over the fact that the rise in reported crimes was substantially larger than the growth in the size of the crime-prone age groups in the U.S. population. The authors of the report showed, for example, that if the arrest rate for teenagers had been the same in 1965 as it was in 1960, the total number of teenager arrests in 1965 would have come to 536,000. The actual figure was 646,000.

What this really shows, however, is that changes in the crime rate cannot be simplistically explained by isolating one variable or another. Yet, a correlation between rising crime and a rising proportion of young people in the population is too clear to be dismissed. Moreover, mathematical models incorporating rather basic demographic information have, as we shall see,

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proved to be highly accurate in predicting future crime-rate trends. Suffice it to say that the current decline in the teenage population probably portends (other factors again held constant) a decline in the crime rate as a whole.

*Race:* Virtually all recent scholarly studies, regardless of locale or time period, show that arrest rates of blacks for almost every offense are considerably higher than those for whites. (Some exceptions: liquor-law violations, vandalism, running away from home.) Victimization surveys and victims' descriptions of those who "got away" tell the same story. At the neighborhood level, the volume of crime is strongly correlated with the size of the local black population. The reasons for this link are many and complex, and they have less to do with race per se—or racism—than with the conditions in which millions of young blacks are growing up: in poverty, in broken homes, in decaying schools. Such circumstances are "criminogenic" for all groups in the population. The fact remains, as Skogan has remarked, that "the fear of crime and concerns about race have become virtually indistinguishable in the minds of many whites."

### Looking Ahead

The relationship of race coupled with age to overall crime rates is so overpowering that Northeastern University criminologist James Alan Fox was able to project crime rates into the future with a model that employed only three "exogenous" variables. These were (a) the percent of population that is nonwhite and age 14 to 17, (b) the percent of population that is nonwhite and age 18 to 21; and (c) the Consumer Price Index.

Fox's model is not really all that simple. In constructing it, he employed other pertinent data, such as previous local crime rates and the size of area police forces. But the three variables highlighted above are important because they are the only factors that have to be estimated for the future in order to make forecasts.

The accuracy of the Fox model has been high. Thus, Fox estimated that the increase in the UCR violent crime rate in cities between 1972 and 1978 would be between 36.7 and 39.7 percent. The actual figure occupied the middle ground almost exactly: 38.5 percent. He predicted an urban violent crime rate for 1980 of between 735.9 and 752.4 crimes per 100,000 population. The actual figure: 745.9. Fox's extended forecast shows the violent crime rate beginning to decline in the early 1980s (as, apparently, it has already begun to do) and reaching in 1992 a new

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low about 19 percent below its current level.

If Fox's analysis is correct, then a great deal will be owed to the so-called "baby bust," the precipitous decline of fertility—among both blacks and whites (although the decrease has been considerably larger among whites)—from the postwar peak of 3.8 children per woman during the late 1950s to fewer than 1.8 in 1976, the lowest recorded level in American history.

### Equal Opportunity

Not everyone agrees that the long-range forecast is favorable, however. As University of Texas sociologist Lawrence E. Cohen has noted, whatever the demographic portents may be, two factors will continue to encourage criminal activity. First, the increase in lightweight durable goods since World War II—televisions, radios, stereos, microwave ovens, video cassette recorders—has vastly increased the number of suitable targets for theft.\* Second, a change in the pattern of family life—largely the result of an influx of women into the work force—means that more homes are being left empty for longer periods of time. Women today also have more opportunity to commit crimes. Since 1953, their arrest rates have shot up by 2,600 percent for larceny and 2,700 percent for fraud and embezzlement—far higher than the corresponding increases for men.

Then, too, there is the inescapable matter of biology. The period between physical maturity and social maturity has been noted throughout history as a troublesome interval. In the words of the Shepherd in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, "I would there were no age between ten and three-and-twenty . . . for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancients, stealing, fighting." During the past few decades, children's improved nutrition and health have contributed to sexual maturation at relatively young ages. In the 1970s the onset of puberty for American boys occurred as early as 9.7 years of age. Meanwhile, American youths have been required to stay longer and longer in school, delaying their entry into the labor market and the discipline of a job. In sum, youngsters are spending twice as long in adolescence, with all that this entails, as they once did.

One of the more frustrating conclusions one might be tempted to draw from what we have said thus far is that the fluctuation in crime rates seems to depend on phenomena be-

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\*In devising a model for predicting burglary rates, one of the variables Cohen included was the diminishing weight over time of the TV sets advertised in the Sears Roebuck catalog. The lightest television set available in 1960 weighed 38 pounds (versus 15 pounds in 1970).

*Lurid coverage of sensational local crimes—such as the 1976–77 New York murder spree of David (“Son of Sam”) Berkowitz—often finds a national audience, raising fears even in relatively trouble-free communities. On local TV news, crime gets twice as much attention as local government gets.*

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# 'NO ONE IS SAFE' FROM SON OF SAM

## GIRL VICTIM NEAR DEATH



FULL COVERAGE BEGINS ON PAGE 2

yond the control of those who make and enforce the laws. There is little anyone can do, in a democratic regime, to shape the age structure of the population to one's liking, to ensure that one parent is always at home (or that each child lives with two parents), or to further disperse large urban populations. While we know that crime increases during spells of good weather and decreases during bad, state legislatures remain unable to control the climate. Crime, it might appear, is at the mercy of broad, uncontrollable forces, even as many Americans are at the mercy of criminals.

To some degree, that conclusion is valid, but it is perhaps not entirely so. Consider the kind of misbehavior of which the average American is really afraid. It is certainly not “white-collar” crime, even though this is the most financially costly kind. It is not organized crime, which deals in gambling, drugs, and other illegal commerce. It is not car theft or prostitution or shoplifting. It is *predatory* crime: the muggings on a quiet street, the repeated burglaries, the senseless, unforeseen assaults like one that occurred in New York City last year: a young lawyer, walking with a girlfriend in Riverside Park, beaten and stabbed to death by three teenagers, then robbed. Detectives called it “random murder.”

There are many types of criminals with differing propensities, but the so-called *violent predators* account for a disproportionate though not precisely quantifiable amount of all criminal

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activity. If there were some way of identifying these people early in their careers, we might have a valuable tool for minimizing the worst kinds of mayhem. So far, however, scholars have had better luck describing those we know to be violent predators than in predicting, from among a group of offenders, which ones are likely to join that category.

### Tracking Them Down

In a recent study of 2,200 inmates at jails and prisons in California, Texas, and Michigan, we classified offenders according to the combinations of crime they had committed. The violent predators, the most dangerous category, were those who had committed at the minimum robbery, assault, and drug dealing; usually they had committed burglary, theft, and other crimes as well. We applied the term not to those who had merely committed each of these crimes at some point in their lives, perhaps at widely spaced intervals, but to those for whom such offenses were part of their annual repertoire. They were the most accomplished and versatile criminals. And they were busy.

Thus, the worst 10 percent of violent predators committed more than 135 robberies per year, 250 percent more than those who were exclusively robbers. Other "worst tenth" figures are: 18 assaults per year, five times more than for mere assaulters; 516 burglaries per year, three times as many as for burglars who do not commit robbery; and 4,088 drug deals per year, higher than for those who "specialized" in that crime.

Who are the violent predators?

We found that they typically begin committing crimes, especially violent crimes, before age 16. They are more likely than other offenders to have received parole and had parole revoked, and to have spent considerable time in state juvenile institutions. They are also more socially unstable than other types of criminals. Few of them are married or have any other kind of family obligations. They are employed irregularly and have trouble holding jobs. They also have characteristic histories of drug use. Most of them began using several types of "hard" drugs, and using them heavily, as juveniles. Although they are more likely than other offenders to have high-quantity, high-cost heroin addiction, their most distinctive trait is *multiple* drug use—heroin with barbiturates, heroin with amphetamines, barbiturates with alcohol, barbiturates with amphetamines, amphetamines with alcohol.

One might think, given this information, that violent predators would be rather easy to identify from their official criminal

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records. In fact, they are not. An immediate problem is their youth (most are 23 or under). Because they are so young, their *adult* criminal records may not reveal a sufficient array of activity. Indeed, 91 percent of those we identified as violent predators did not have prior conviction records for robbery, assault, and drug dealing. (We learned what we did about them from "self-reports.") Many of the violent predators we surveyed did not have official *juvenile* criminal records. In some cases, juvenile records do exist, but varying degrees of confidentiality, depending on the jurisdiction, envelop these records, the idea being that juveniles should not be stigmatized for life by youthful misbehavior. For this and other reasons (including bureaucratic sloth), juvenile records are often unavailable to judges and prosecutors. That fact was driven home to much of the public by the widely reported 1976 Timmons case. Ronald Timmons, 19, arrested in New York for beating and robbing an 82-year-old woman, was released on \$500 bail by a judge who was unaware that Timmons had appeared in juvenile court 67 times and was suspected of murdering a 92-year-old man.

Needless to say, if the task of a priori identification remains elusive, so do the answers to some important questions. What triggers the flurry of crimes by the novice predator? Will prison cut short or merely postpone his criminal career? Is incarceration itself criminogenic for less serious offenders? These are not questions that should interest only scholars. They have an impact on our daily lives.

The fact remains that a relatively small number of potentially identifiable criminals are responsible for a large volume of crime. The chief task of law enforcement must be to deal with them as best it can. It is heartening to note that police, prosecutors, and judges have picked up on the implications of the research that is being done—research that in some respects simply confirms their instincts. While the task of accurate, "fail-safe" identification continues to frustrate researchers, it may be that law enforcement officials, combining what scholars have learned with an intuition gained from years "on the street," will be able to improve their crime-fighting performance. The evidence suggests that they are at least beginning to do so.