VIOLENCE CERTAINLY IS THE PROBLEM—AND ESPECIALLY WITH HAND GUNS

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INTRODUCTION

Zimring and Hawkins[1] have added one more extremely important and very well done book to an impressive series. Their cross-national comparisons highlight the point that, even though the United States is obsessed with its "crime" problem, its crime rate for most types of crime is not dramatically different from that of other industrialized countries. Others have made this point,[2] but Zimring and Hawkins have developed it much more fully. Their dominant theme is that our rates of violent crime, and especially of lethal violence, are dramatically out of line often by an order of magnitude or more. Of course, this is not to say that crime is not a problem in the United States. It certainly is, and the fear of crime and the anxiety over the possibility of being victimized certainly fuels the public concern and the political rhetoric—each of which, in turn, fuels the other. The last two decades have seen an increasing focus on violence in the political discussion. This has been reflected in the sharp growth in incarceration for violent offenses, the principal form of political response to those concerns. The dominant growth in incarceration has been for drug offenses, and even there the most powerful rhetoric has linked drug offending with violence. Aside from drug offenses, the incarceration growth has been strongest in murder,

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1. *See* FRANKLIN E. ZIMRING & GORDON HAWKINS, CRIME IS NOT THE PROBLEM: LETHAL VIOLENCE IN AMERICA (1997).

2. *See, e.g.*, James Lynch, *Crime in International Perspective*, *in* CRIME 11 (James Q. Wilson & Joan Petersilia eds., 1995).

assault, and sexual assault, well in excess of any growth in the rates of offending for these crimes.

In this paper, I would like to explore in more detail than is done by Zimring and Hawkins some of the factors that have contributed to very sharp changes—both up and down—in the rates of violence in the United States since the mid 1980s. These changes have involved a much greater use of handguns, especially by young people. The growth has been most pronounced among African-American youth in the largest cities.

I. MEASURING VIOLENCE

A. The Mix of Violent Crimes

The rate of violent crime in the United States is typically measured as the sum of the number of the following crimes reported to and recorded by the police: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. These rates are reported annually by the FBI in the Uniform Crime Reports ("UCR").[3]

If we examine the number of these offenses in a typical year, using the 1996 UCR,[4] we see the large disparity in their numbers:

Homicide	19,650
Forcible Rape	95,770
Robbery	537,050
Aggravated Assault	1,029,810

The ratio among these is approximately 1, 5, 25, and 50. It is evident that even minor fluctuations in the reports of aggravated assault will overwhelm significant changes in the number of murders. For example, if there is a 2% decrease in aggravated assault, even a doubling of the murder rate will lead to no change in the reported rate of violent crimes. Thus, just as the total crime index[5] is dominated by larcenies (of which there were

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3. *See, e.g.*, FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES 1996, at 1 (1997) [hereinafter UCR]. The UCR is published annually in the fall of the year after the year being reported on by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C.

4. *See id.* at 62.

5. The total crime index is calculated as the sum of the offenses of murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault (with these

7,894,600 reported in 1996[6]), so can the violent-crime index be distorted by fluctuations in the reports of aggravated assault.

Since there tends to be a strong correlation among the various index offenses, these distinctions are often not serious. But there can be occasions when the distinction among them is of serious concern. Thus, it is more appropriate to deal with the various violent crime types individually in order to avoid the problem of distortions caused by changes in either robbery or aggravated assault. Forcible rape has been the most difficult of these offenses to measure because so many cases are not reported to the police. Also, the National Crime Victimization Survey, which samples about 40,000 households to ask about their victimization experiences, has discovered that typically there are too few cases of rape reported to provide precise measures of the rate of that offense.[7]

B. Homicide and Robbery Rates

Probably the two crimes that are best measured in the UCR are homicide and robbery, largely because the definition of these offenses is reasonably well defined and stable over time. Also, homicide tends to be very well reported to the police, and the rate of reporting of robberies has been very stable over time.[8]

Figure 1 provides a graph of United States homicide and robbery rates from 1972 through 1996.[9] From the graph it is clear that these two well-measured offenses have tended to follow each other rather closely. There was a peak in about 1980 and then a decline until about 1985, then a new peak in 1991 followed

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four designated collectively as the "violent crimes"), burglary, larceny-theft, and motor-vehicle theft (with these three designated collectively as the "property crimes"). *See id.*

6. *See id.*

7. The National Crime Victimization Survey ("NCVS"), managed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in the U.S. Department of Justice and carried out by the Census Bureau, samples about 40,000 households annually, and asks all persons aged 12 or above about their victimization experiences. For each such experience, they ask if the victimization was reported to the police. The NCVS does not measure homicides. *See, e.g.*, BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, CRIMINAL VICTIMIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1994 A NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMIZATION SURVEY REPORT 1 (1997).

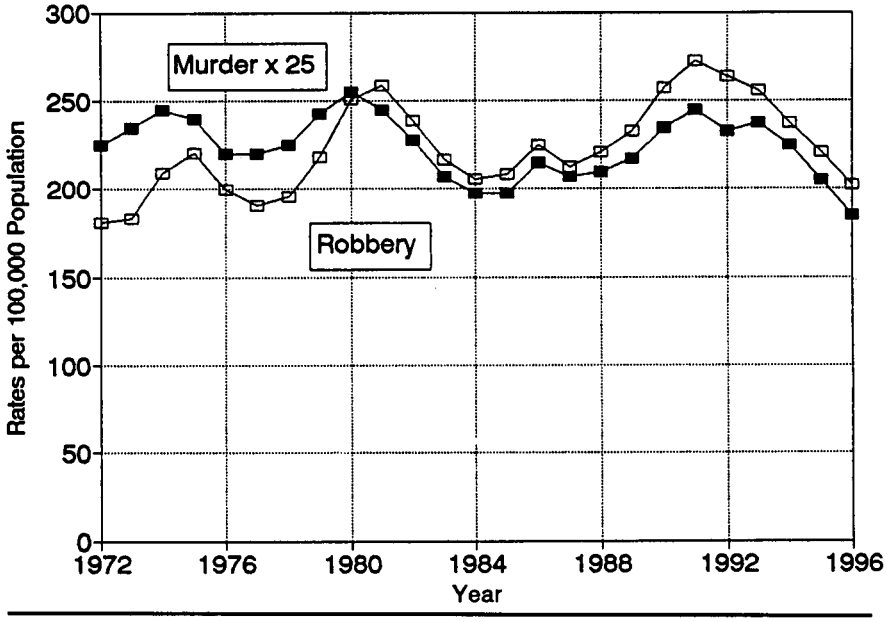
8. For robbery, the rate of reporting to the police has been very stable around 55%. *See id.*

9. In the figure, the homicide rates are scaled up by a factor of 25 to put them on the same scale as the robbery rates in order to permit visual comparison.

by a decline to 1996. Throughout this period, the rate of homicide has oscillated within the range of 8 to 10 per 100,000 population until it broke through this range in 1996 with a rate of 7.4. There is a reasonable expectation[10] that the rate for 1997 will go below 7.0. Similarly, the rate for robbery has been largely confined to the range of 200 to 270 per 100,000, and looks like it may break out below 200 in 1997.

It is striking how trendless both of these series are. The trend line for homicide is slightly negative, but is not statistically significant. For robbery, the trend line is upward (at an annual trend of 0.87% of its mean rate of 223 per 100,000). This stability or relative trendlessness in crime rates is certainly at marked variance with the general view of the American public, which, until the reporting of crime rate declines in recent years,[11] has had a sense of crime rates getting out-of-hand and the crime problem becoming an increasingly serious threat.

Figure 1: UCR Murder and Robbery Rates



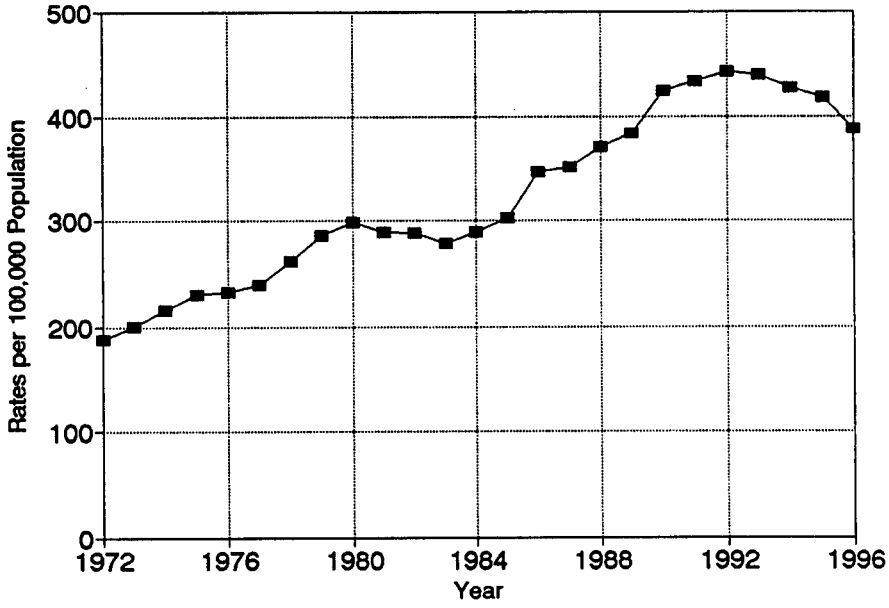
10. The expectation derives from extrapolating to the full year the decline reported by the FBI for the first half of 1997.

11. Even with the widespread reporting of the decline since 1991, it is not clear that those rates have contributed to a widespread feeling of greater safety. The frequency with which individual crimes are reported by the news media, and especially by television news, has certainly gone up, and fighting crime is still an important part of the political rhetoric every fall.

C. Aggravated Assault

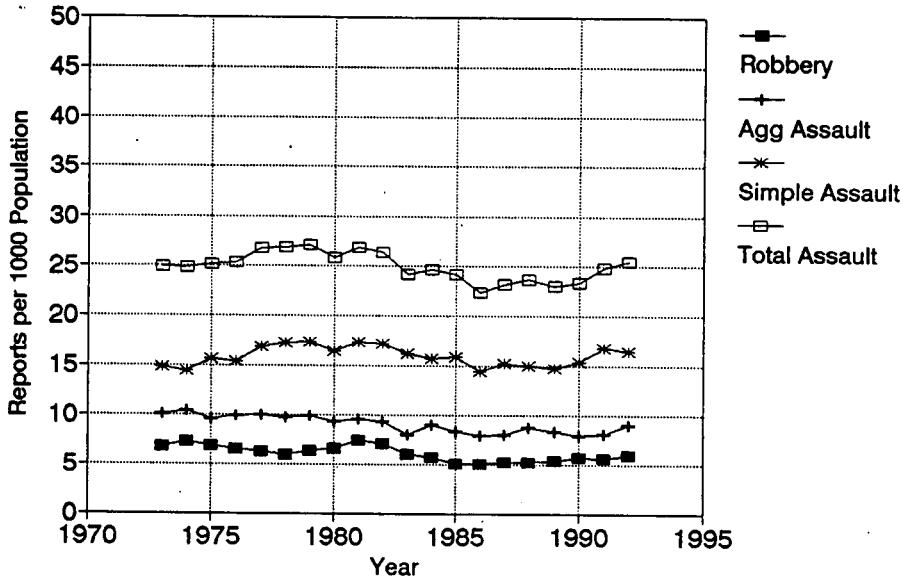
It is possible that this concern results from the growth in UCR aggravated assaults shown in Figure 2. The rate did indeed grow significantly during the twenty-year period from 1972 through 1992 before its more recent decline. But there are reasons to believe that this sharp trend is more artifactual than real. In contrast to murder and robbery, which are relatively well-defined offenses, "aggravated" assault requires discretion on the part of the police taking the report to distinguish it from "simple" assault. Classification is an issue that is not absent from the other violent crimes noted (a murder could be misclassified as a suicide or a street robbery as a larceny), but aggravated assaults do require more exercise of discretion, and there is a good possibility that the nature of those distinctions have been changing over time.

Figure 2: UCR Aggravated Assault Rates



Support for this interpretation of the growth in aggravated assault is provided by evidence from the other principal source of crime data in the United States, the National Crime Victimization Survey,[12] which asks respondents whether they have been a victim of a crime over the past six months. One virtue of the survey is that the form of the questions have been very largely stable over the course of the entire period,[13] and so responses to those questions are likely to be much more immune to the changes in discretion and classification that bedevil data from the police reports.

Figure 3: Violent Victimization Rates
Rates per 1000 Population



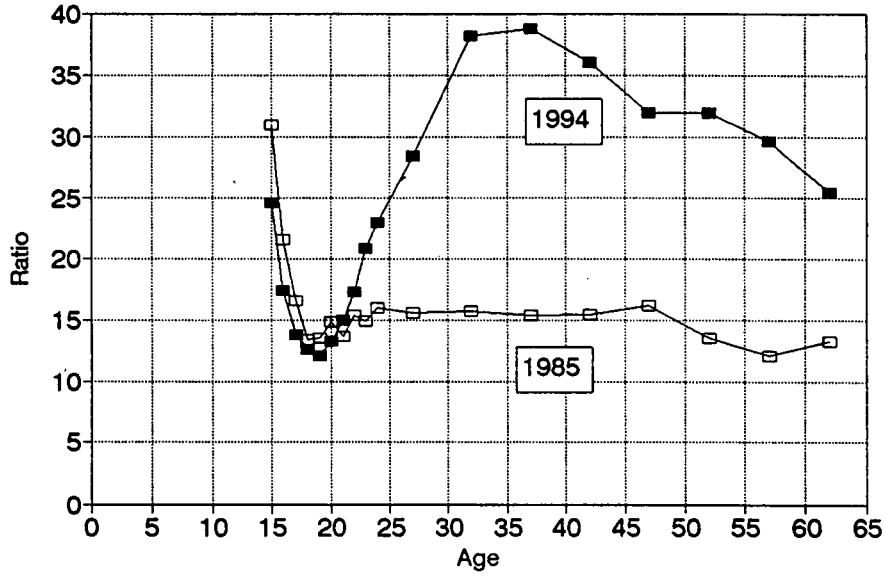
12. The National Crime Victimization Survey was begun in 1973. Every six months, it interviews a probability-sample of households in a rotating panel (rotated after three years) involving about 100,000 individuals at least 12 years old in about 40,000 households. The program is directed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice, and the interviews are conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. *See supra* note 7.

13. There was a significant change in the design of the survey in 1993, and so years subsequent to that have resulted in a significant change in the number of events reported, and requires calibration to make the new survey's results consistent with the earlier years. *See* CRAIG A. PERKINS ET AL., U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, CRIMINAL VICTIMIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1993 A NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMIZATION SURVEY REPORT 2, 2-3 (1996).

Figure 3 shows the responses to those victimization surveys for the 20 years until 1992.[14] Here, one sees both aggravated assault and simple assault with virtually no trend, and even with far less fluctuation than displayed in the police reports. Thus, there is a stark contrast between the rapidly rising trends in aggravated assault based on police reports and the very flat trend based on the victimization survey. The flat trend in the homicide series over this period also suggests that there should be a somewhat stable ratio of aggravated assaults and homicides; that would not be the case if the trend for one was increasing while the other was flat.

The evidence from the victimization survey would appear to be the more compelling. Indeed, if one views the strong trend of the UCR series for aggravated assault as attributable primarily to steady changes over time in recording patterns, and then (to eliminate that trend), detrended the series, the pattern would

Figure 3a: Ratio of Aggravated Assault/Murder Arrest Rates by Age
Arrest Rates in 1985 and 1994



14. In 1993, there was a significant change in the design of the survey, and so the response rates changed significantly. *See id.* During the period shown on Figure 3, the survey instrument remained largely unchanged.

look much more like the homicide pattern (but with a scale factor of about 15 times larger). It is possible that the number of aggravated assaults which turn into homicides has been diminished somewhat because of the improved quality of emergency medical services in the United States over the past twenty years, but it would be surprising if that change could account for the doubling of the number of aggravated assaults as compared to homicides. Rather, it is much more likely that the growing reporting of domestic violence—both to the police and its recording as "aggravated assault" by the police—accounts for a significant fraction of the growth in the that offense.

This hypothesis is supported by Figure 3a, which compares the ratio of the age-specific arrest rates for aggravated assault to murder in two years, 1985 and 1994. It is evident that in 1985, except for ages 15 and 16 (where there were appreciably more than 15 times as many aggravated assaults than homicides), the ratio stayed close to 15 for all ages. In 1994, the ratio continued to be close to 15 until age 23, when it began to grow appreciably. It increased to a ratio more than double the 15 for virtually all the older ages. But these are the ages when domestic relationships, and the potential for assault, are more salient in people's lives. It is also the case that the trend to arrest for domestic assault increased appreciably with the shift in policy that grew out of the Minneapolis Spouse Assault experiment conducted in the mid 1980s.[15] Thus, it is reasonable that the period between 1985 and 1994 saw much greater police recording of incidents of domestic violence as "aggravated assaults" associated with the apparent growth in the rate of arrest for aggravated assault at the ages when domestic relationships were more likely. This could well have been a significant factor contributing to the growth in the UCR aggravated assault rate without comparable growth in the other indicators of serious assault like homicide and victimization reports.

Because of the complexity in accounting for aggravated assault, the remainder of this paper focuses on homicide as a prime indicator of violence in the United States. This is the offense that Zimring and Hawkins emphasize as the most

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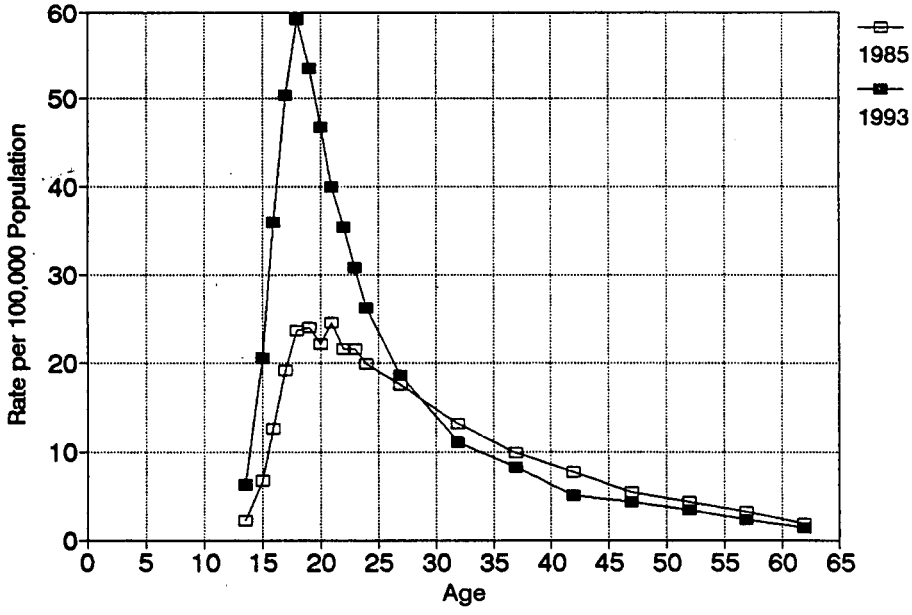
15. *See* Lawrence W. Sherman & Richard A. Berk, *The Specific Deterrent Effects of Arrest for Domestic Assault*, 49 AM. SOC. REV. 261, 261-72; POLICE FOUNDATION REPORTS, NO. 1, THE MINNEAPOLIS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXPERIMENT (1984) (can be obtained from the Police Foundation, Washington, D.C.).

frightening one. In recent years, there has been a degree of jubilation as the homicide rate has declined. We will next examine the factors that have been most influential in its decline following the peak in 1991. That decline has to be viewed in the context of the factors that contributed to its previous rise beginning in the late 1980s.

II. CHANGES IN AGE-SPECIFIC HOMICIDE ARREST RATES

An earlier paper[16] presented the striking changes between 1985 and 1992 in age-specific arrest rates for homicide, where it became clear that the rates for ages 18 and under more than doubled, while the rates for those 30 and above declined by about 20 to 25%. We can now extend those analyses to 1996, and we see some striking changes in the other direction for the young people. Figure 4a presents the age-specific arrest rates for murder for the years 1985, which was the last year of a fifteen-year period of very stable age-specific rates, and 1993, which was the peak year

Figure 4a: Age-Specific Murder Arrest Rates, 1985 and 1993



16. *See* Alfred Blumstein, *Youth Violence, Guns, and the Illicit-Drug Industry*, 86 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 10 (1995).

of juvenile age-specific rates. We see here that, even though the rates for 20 and under had more than doubled over this interval, the rates for those over 30 had indeed declined.

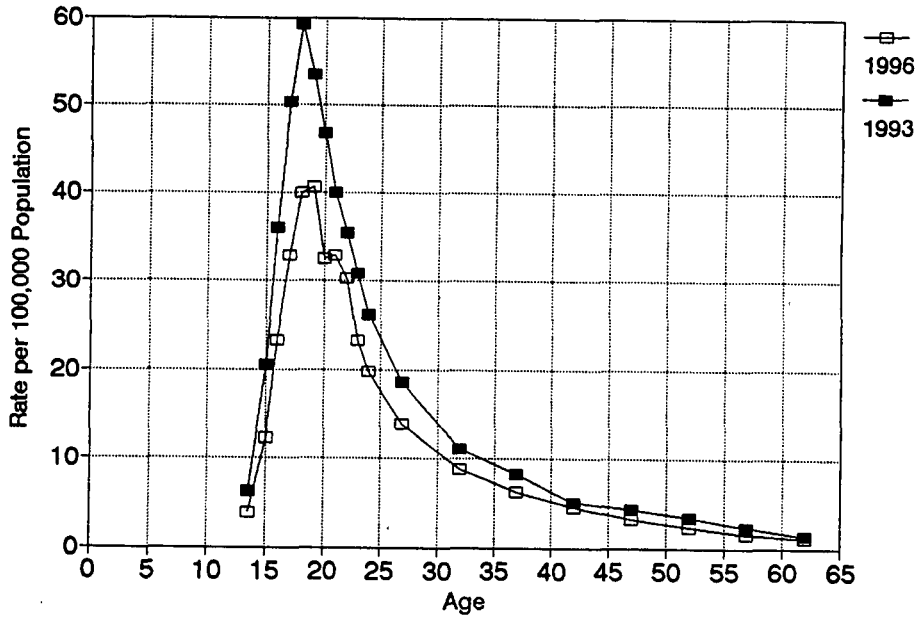
Figure 4b depicts the same 1993 situation along with the figure for 1996, where we see the rates for all ages decline, with the steepest decline around age 18, where the growth from 1985 to 1993 had been greatest.

A. Time Trends in Age-Specific Homicide Rates

We can see these trends in more detail by looking at the time trends for each individual age. Figure 5a depicts the trend for the ages traditionally displaying the peak homicide arrest rates, 18 through 24. Those rates were very close to each other from 1970 through 1985, reflecting the flatness of the peak during that period. Major divergence then began in about 1985. The rate for the eighteen-year-olds more than doubled by 1991, dropped down in 1992, reached a new peak in 1993, and then continued down for the next three years.

The general pattern is similar for the other ages depicted in Figure 5a, but the rise in the late 1980s decreased appreciably as age increased between 18 and 24, and the decline after 1993

Figure 4b: Age-Specific Murder Arrest Rates, 1993 and 1996

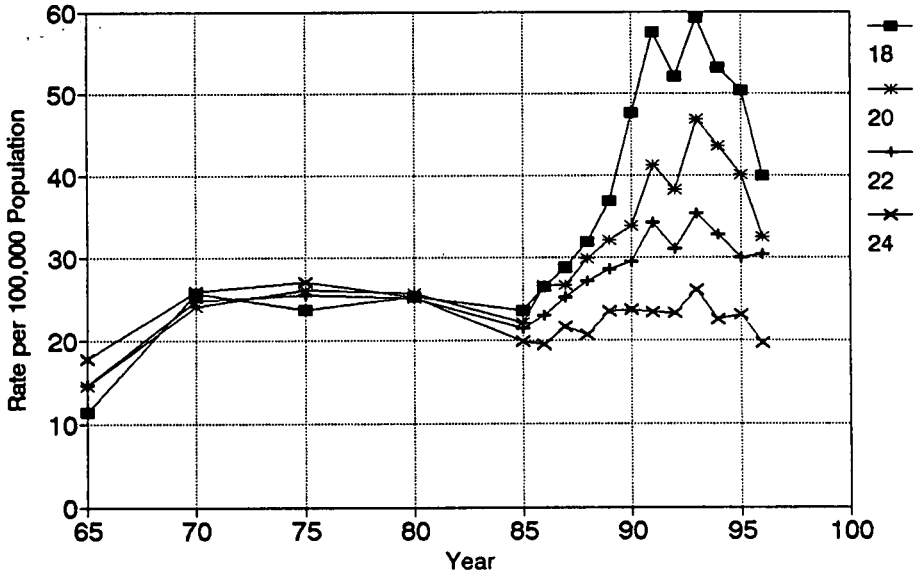


is correspondingly less. For ages of 18 and under, as shown in Figure 5b, the pattern is very similar to that for the eighteen-year-olds. The stable base rate in the 1970 to 1985 period is lower for the younger ages, but in all cases the rate more than doubled by 1993. The pattern for the ages above 24 is similarly flat, but with a steady decline for most of the ages.

These changes for the growth period, 1985 to 1993, and for the decline period, 1993 to 1996, are displayed in Figure 6, which depicts for each age the ratio of the age-specific arrest rate for murder to the rate that prevailed in 1985. Points above the heavy line (at the ratio of 1.0) represent an increase in the rates and the points below that line represent a decrease. The upper graph portrays the ratio reached in the peak year, 1993, and the lower graph portrays the degree to which the ratio had declined by 1996.

Here, we see that the arrest rate for fifteen-year-olds in 1993 was triple the rate that had prevailed in 1985. The growth rate then declined with age, but it was more than double the 1985 rate for all ages of 20 and below. For the older ages of 30 and above, the 1993 rates were actually about 20% lower than the 1985 rates. Thus, this important divergence between the patterns of young and old was already apparent.

Figure 5a: Trends in Age-Specific Murder Arrest Rates
Trends for Individual Peak Ages

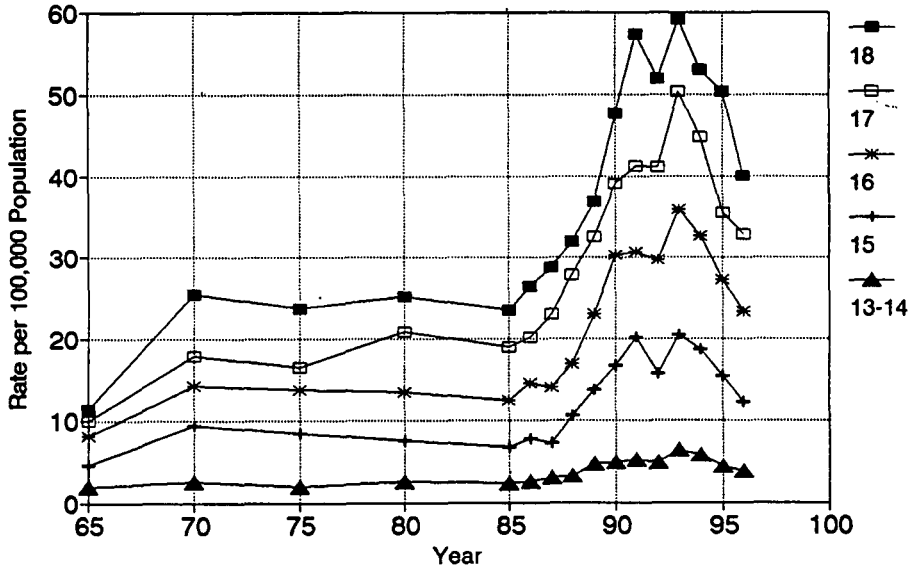


The graph of the 1996-to-1985 ratio is uniformly below that for 1993, and the greatest decline occurred in the teenage years. But it is also important to note that the teenage rates are still 60% to 80% above the 1985 rates that had prevailed since 1970, and so there is still considerable room for improvement to return to the 1985 rates.

Also, we note that there was a continuing decline in the homicide rates for the older ages between 1993 and 1996. By 1996, the post-25 age group had declined from the 1985 rates by about 20%, and all the older groups beyond 35 had declined by about 40%.

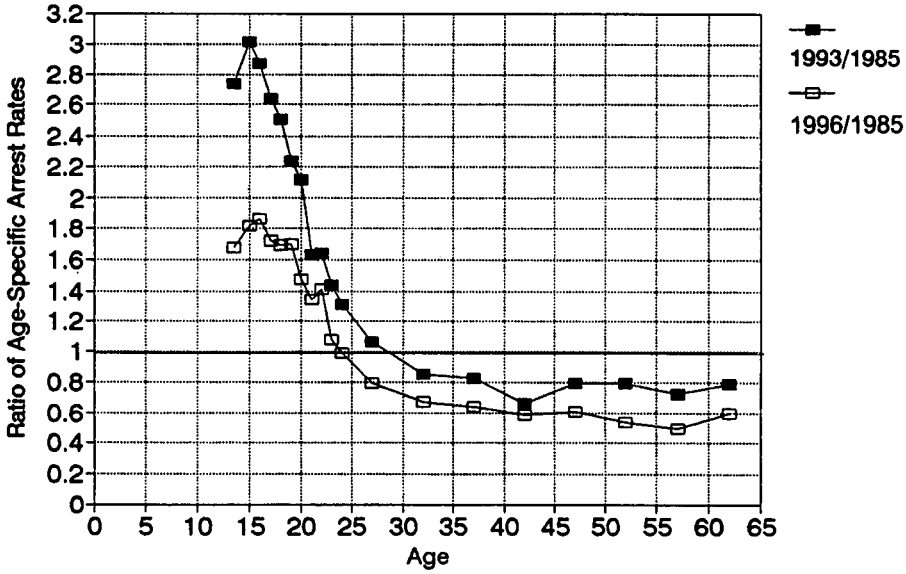
These figures enable us to explain the trends in the aggregate homicide rates since 1985. The growth until the 1991 peak was caused because the rates of the younger people (Figures 4a and 4b) were increasing faster than the rates for the older people were declining. Between 1991 and 1993, the rates for younger people were generally flat (as reflected in Figure 4b), and so the decline by older ages dominated the aggregate, and the downturn began. And, since both young and old were declining after 1993, the aggregate rates continued to decline.

Figure 5b: Trends in Age-Specific Murder Arrest Rates
Trends for Individual Young Ages



The earlier paper[17] examined the growth rate in homicide between 1985 and 1992 and noted that the growth in the aggregate homicide rate was attributable predominantly to very sharp growth in the homicide rate by people under 24. Indeed, that growth was only partially balanced by a decline in the homicide rate by older people of about 20% to 25%, so that the rise among the young people had to be particularly stark. This growth in homicides committed by young people has been of particular public concern because of the differing rates of homicide of strangers (close to 30% for homicides committed by those under age 27 and only half that by offenders over 27) and the greater fear associated with learning about a stranger homicide than one by an intimate.

Figure 6: Ratios of Recent Age-Specific Murder Arrest Rates 1993 and 1996 Compared to 1985



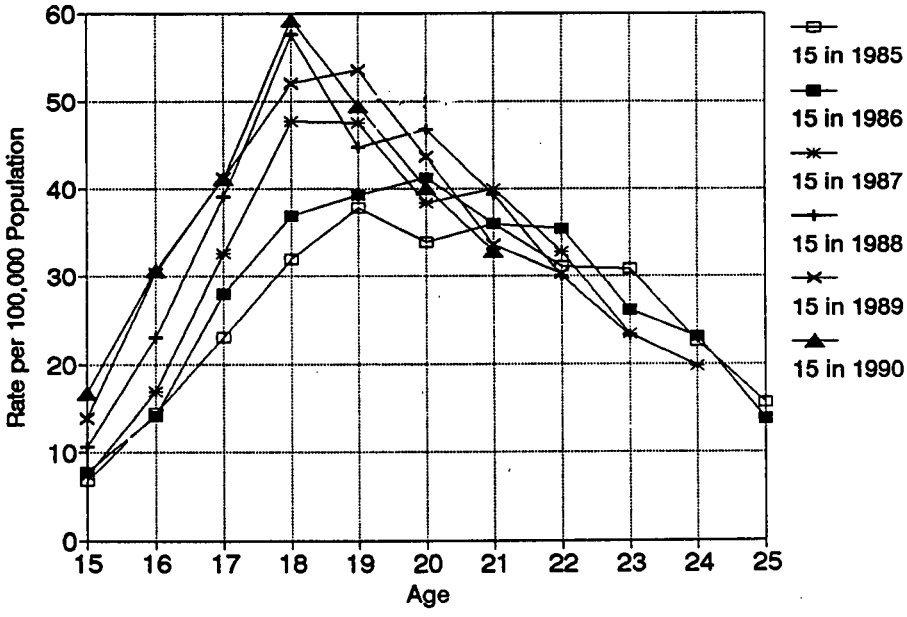
17. *See id.*

B. Cohort or Period Effect

One of the issues that has been of continuing concern is whether the young people who provided the growth in homicides during the late 1980s and the early 1990s would continue to be violent cohorts as they passed the peak-homicide ages. The concern was whether those cohorts would continue their violence into their later ages, as would be the case if the increase in violence were a "cohort effect" (meaning something that these individuals would carry with them as they got older, caused perhaps by some enduring life experiences prior to that time) rather than a "period effect" associated with external circumstances that led to the peaking of the homicide rates, but that would decay as the external conditions faded.

We can examine this issue by examining the change in the age-specific murder arrest rates of a succession of age cohorts. These are presented in Figure 7. The earliest age cohort presented is the one that turned 15 in 1985; this group reached 18 in 1988, in the early stages of the growth in violence, and so displays the flattest age-crime curve in the figure. The following cohort, which turned 15 in 1986 has a slightly elevated age-crime curve. The highest curve is that associated with the cohort that turned 15 in 1990 (and so reached 18 in 1993, the year when homicide by young people peaked).

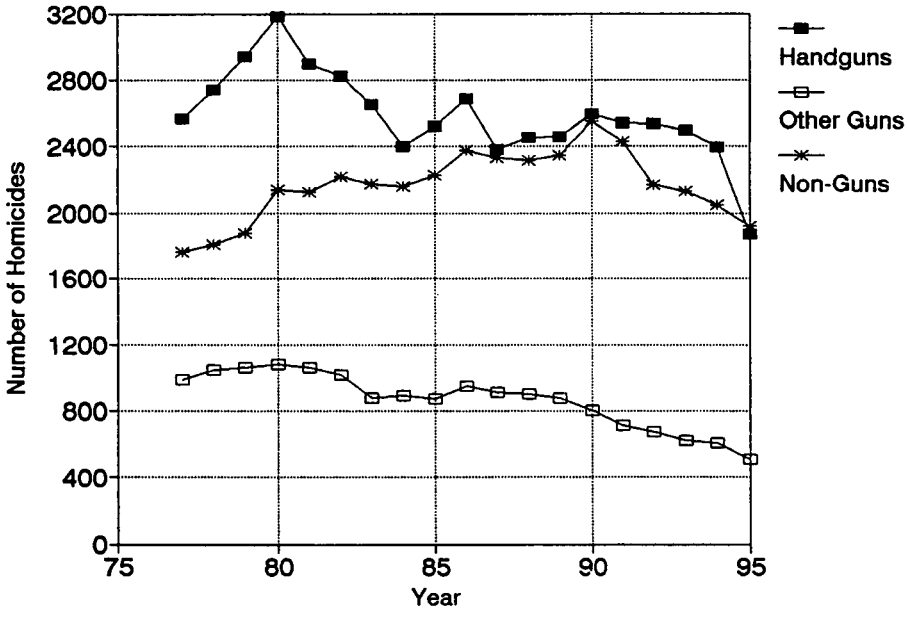
Figure 7: Age-Specific Murder Arrest Rates by Cohort



The striking observation from Figure 7 is the degree to which the age-specific murder arrest rates for all the cohorts converge by the time the cohorts reach their early 20s. This strongly suggests that the phenomenon of the dramatic growth of young people's homicide rate was not a cohort effect. If it were, then the cohorts that displayed the highest peaks at age 18 would persist with higher rates into their 20s, and that is evidently not the case. Rather, it suggests that there was a period effect that prevailed for young people (or an age-period interaction) from 1985 through 1991, worked its way out between 1991 and 1993, and then diminished in subsequent years.

That then opens the question of what factors contributed to that period effect. In the context of the hypotheses presented in the earlier paper,[18] an important factor was the arrival of crack as a product available to a much larger market, primarily poor people who could not afford the minimum available quantity of powder cocaine. That growth in demand resulted in the recruitment of young men, primarily minorities, to be participants in the

Figure 8a: Homicide Weapons Used by Adults (25-45)



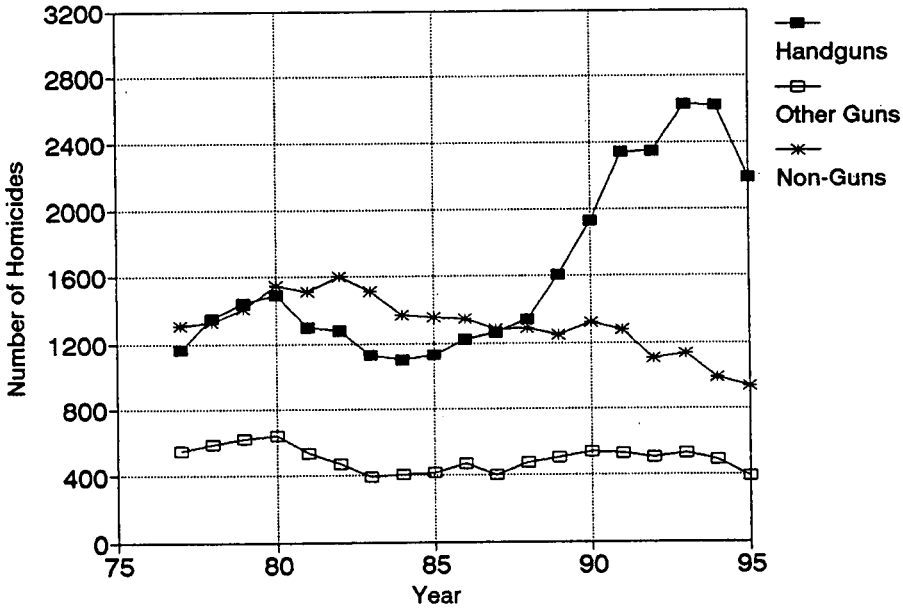
18. *See id.* at 29-32.

supply side of that market. And, because they were carrying valuable wares (the drugs or the money from selling the drugs), and because they could not call the police for protection, they armed themselves with handguns. We hypothesize that there then developed a process of diffusion of guns into the larger community of young people that need not have had any involvement with the drug market. It would be sufficient that they felt they needed the guns as protection from others in their midst who were armed. Thus, it is important that we examine the role of handguns in the rise and decline of homicide by young people.

III. THE ROLE OF WEAPONS

There is widespread recognition of the changing role of weaponry in young people's hands.[19] Over the past decade, the weaponry involved in settling young people's disputes has changed from fists or knives to handguns, with their much greater lethality.

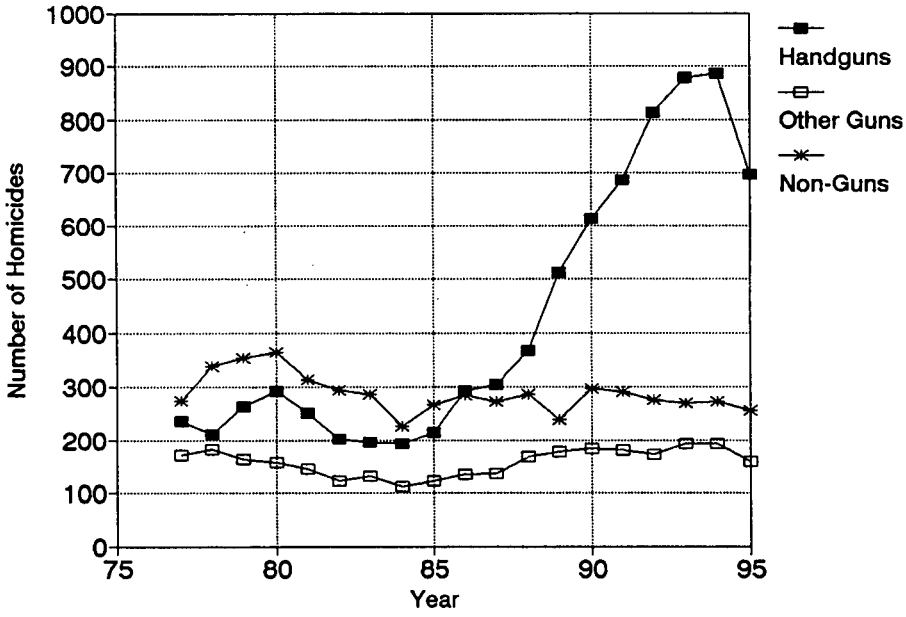
Figure 8b: Homicide Weapons Used by Youth (18-24)



19. *See, e.g., Kids, Guns, and Public Policy*, LAW & CONTEMP. PROBS., Winter 1996, at 1 (1996).

That growth in the use of handguns by youth should be reflected in the changes in the weapons involved in homicides committed by the members of different age groups. The data for such an examination are provided by the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports ("SHR").[20] Those reports are filed by individual police departments providing considerable detail on individual homicide incidents. Each report contains information on the victim and offender characteristics and their relationship, the weapon involved in the homicide, and the circumstances leading up to the homicide (for example, an argument, drug involvement, or gang involvement—but unfortunately, only one of these circumstances can be chosen).

Figure 8c: Homicide Weapons Used by Juveniles (<18)



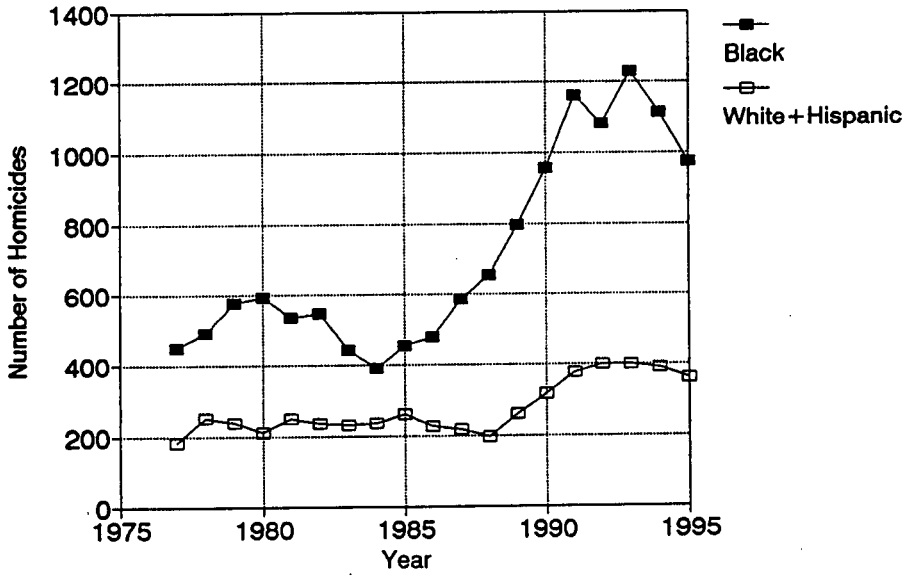
20. The number of incidents reported by a city to the SHR is close to but not identical to the number of incidents reported to the UCR; variation can result from differences in the reporting procedures when different segments of the police department handle the two reporting tasks.

A number of jurisdictions have varied considerably over time in the number of incidents reported to the SHR, including years when they simply submitted no reports at all. Rather than attribute fluctuations in reporting as fluctuation in homicide rates, we have omitted from our analysis those places that display such large fluctuations.

Figure 8 provides information on the time trends of the weaponry used in homicides by offenders of three age categories: adults, aged 25 to 45 (Figure 8a); youth, aged 18 to 24 (Figure 8b); and juveniles, under 18 (Figure 8c). The weapons are classified into three groups: handguns, other guns, and non-guns. We can see that over the time period shown, 1977 to 1995, there was some general decline in the use of handguns and other guns among adults. But the situation for youth and juveniles was quite different. For both these groups, there was no clear trend until 1986, and then a significant growth began. With 1985 as the base year, handgun homicide by youth increased 130% by 1994 and by juveniles increased 316%. In both these groups, there is a leveling out from 1993 to 1994, and a very sharp decline in 1995. We would expect that decline to continue into 1996, consistent with the decline in homicide arrest rates shown in Figures 5a and 5b.

In all these figures, there is no appreciable increase in either the other gun or the non-gun categories. There has been some decline in the use of non-guns by youths committing homicides, but this decline (27% from 1985 to 1994) is small compared to the 130% growth in their use of handguns. Thus, we observe that the growth in homicides by young people, which accounted for all the growth in homicides in the post-1985 period, was accounted for totally by the growth in homicides committed with handguns.

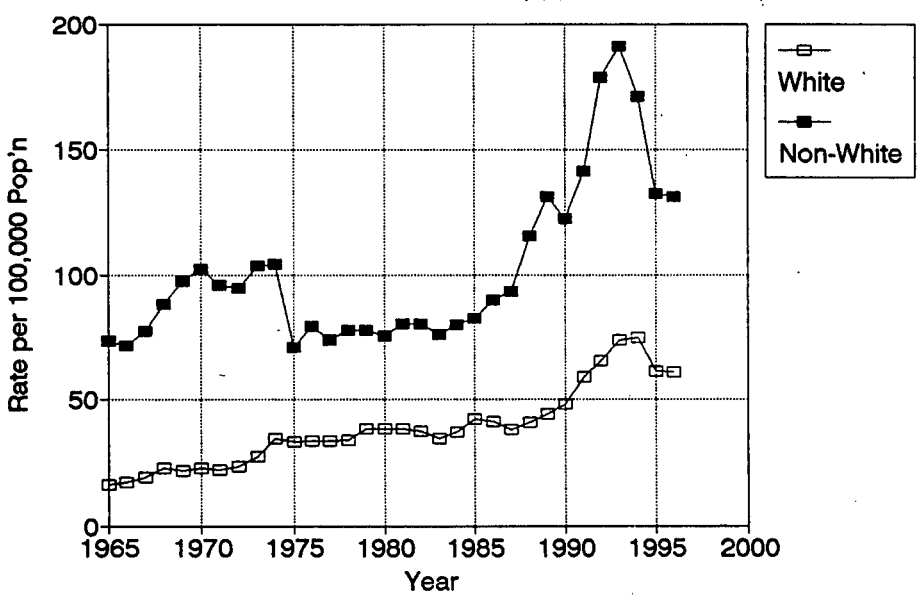
Figure 9: Handgun Homicide by Youth
Cities over 100,000



There were also some important racial differences in the growth of handgun homicides, with the dominant growth being among African-American young people, both as offenders and as victims. Figure 9 compares the number of homicides in cities over 100,000 committed by youth (ages 18 to 24) with handguns for black youth and for the combination of white and Hispanic youth. The figure displays the sharp growth in the handgun homicides for both groups, about double for the white and Hispanics, but about triple for the African Americans. There was no comparable growth in the role of the other weapon types. We also note that the post-1993 decline is much sharper among the black youth than among the others.

The SHR data also indicate the beginning of the decline following the 1993 peak. The graphs in Figure 9 also indicate the flattening of the growth in the handgun homicide rate between 1991 and 1993, and the subsequent decline. This is consistent with the pattern of youth homicide arrest rates shown in Figures 5a and 5b, suggesting that the decline in homicide is also associated with the decline in the use of handguns by young people.

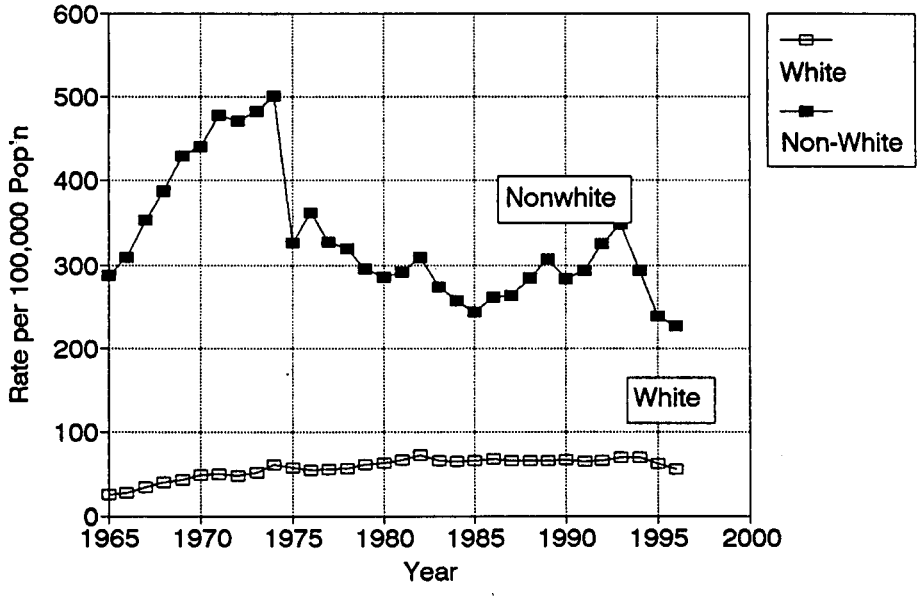
Figure 10a: Weapons Arrest Rate, Juveniles



The pattern of growth and decline in handgun use is also reflected in Figure 10, which depicts the time trend in the rate of weapons arrests for juveniles under 18 (Figure 10a) and adults 18 and above (Figure 10b). The pattern here is very similar to the homicide patterns depicted in Figures 5a and 5b, but there is a much more distinct peaking for juveniles in 1993, with a clear decline subsequently.

Changes in the rate of weapons arrests result from a combination of changes in the presence of weapons in the population and changes in police aggressiveness in pursuing illegal weapons. It is clear from other data that there was considerable growth in weapon prevalence during the late 1980s, and also that police became more concerned about weapons, especially in the hands of young people. That combination is reflected in the rapid rise in weapons arrests until the peak in 1993. There is no indication that there was any abatement by police in their concern about young people's guns after 1993, and so it seems likely that the decline after 1993 is due much more to a diminution in the carrying of guns than to a slackening of police efforts to capture the guns and that the less carrying seems to have contributed to the reduction in homicide by young people.

Figure 10b: Weapons Arrest Rate, Adults



Increased police efforts, undoubtedly augmented by community efforts in many places, contributed to the reduction in the carrying of guns. These efforts at confiscation worked to reduce the carrying both through deterrence and diminishing the incentives to carry. The carrying was deterred because of the threat of confiscation and any further sanctions that might follow. As a result, the incentives to carry were also diminished since there was a reduced likelihood of needing the gun for protection from other gun carriers. Those effects are most evident among the juveniles and among the non-white adults, which includes the 18 to 24 youth whose handgun homicide rate displayed the sharp rise before 1993 and drop after 1993.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The United States experienced a startling growth of violence during the period from 1985 through 1993, and that occurred while the rate of violence by people over 30 years declined steadily. The growth was attributed to more than a doubling of homicide by young people during that period, and that was sufficient to overcome the decline among the older people.

The growth among the younger offenders was associated predominantly with an increased use of handguns, and with no increase in the use of non-handgun weapons. This was likely a consequence of an "arms race" among peers, with mutual arming, probably as protection from each other, but also perhaps because a gun came to represent a status symbol in many groups. This process of diffusion of guns was probably nucleated by the recruitment of young people, primarily minorities without other evident opportunities in the legitimate economy, into the crack markets in the late 1980s. As they armed themselves to protect their wares against robberies, their peers with no involvement in those markets could well have sought out similar weaponry for their own protection against those carrying guns. This gave rise to a contagion process that saw widespread carrying and use of guns by young individuals without the maturity and wisdom to appreciate the harm being done.

It should also be recognized that the national downturn after 1993 is dominated by the effects in the larger cities. New York City alone has been a major contributor to the national decline. In the national net decline in homicides from 1993 to 1994, New York City's drop accounted for 32% of that change. In the net

change from 1994 to 1995, New York City's drop accounted for 22% of the nation's drop. In the decline since 1995, New York City's contribution to the drop has been closer to 10%, still very large, but smaller than in the earlier years, in part because the smaller cities are beginning to catch up. It is thus clear that what goes on in New York City, or the largest cities more generally, can have a very powerful effect on national statistics.

The decline following the 1993 peak is undoubtedly attributable to many factors, some of which worked in some places and others in other places. One strong suggestion is that there were effective efforts to remove handguns from young people. These could have involved aggressive stop-and-frisk efforts, like that in New York City. They could also have involved bounty programs like those initiated in Charleston, South Carolina. The dominant effect of such police efforts was likely through the mechanism of deterrence, inhibiting the carrying of the guns because of the risk that, at the least, the gun would be confiscated, and possibly more severe sanctions would be suffered as a result.

The secondary consequence of such gun-control efforts could well have been even more significant. To the extent that the general level of carrying guns was diminished, that reduced the incentive for others to carry guns, and so a reverse of the escalation process could have been set in motion. Such a process initiated by the police could well have been augmented by community efforts to achieve similar ends. In many cases, community groups provided mediation between battling gangs and took leadership in encouraging the de-escalation of the arms race in their neighborhoods.

There were also other exogenous changes that contributed to the decline that did not represent reactions to growth. For example, there were changes in the demand structure for crack that contributed to more orderly, and perhaps more surreptitious markets instead of the open street markets that characterized the 1980s. The demand by new younger users dried up as they saw the deleterious effects on their parents and older siblings.[21] The domination of the market by the long-time users undoubtedly contributed to a stability as the transactions became more private and individualized. The need for troops of young people with

21. *See* ANDREW LANG GOLUB & BRUCE D. JOHNSON, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE, CRACK'S DECLINE: SOME SURPRISES ACROSS U.S. CITIES 1 (1997).

their irresponsible handling of weaponry would be diminished thereby, since the more senior participants could manage the supply more readily.

Also, as the drug markets matured, those still active in them undoubtedly developed an interest in finding means other than violence for resolving their disputes. In an earlier generation, the Mafia resorted to such methods to both enhance their own longevity as well as to diminish the community's negative response to their activities. This too would diminish the level of violence.

One of the continuing questions relates to the factors that contributed to older people's declining homicide rates while the younger people's rates were increasing. One important effect was associated with the incapacitative effect of the increasing incarceration rate, which more than doubled between 1985 and 1996. About one-third of that growth is associated with drug offenders, and this author has argued[22] that there is little incapacitation or deterrence of drug offending accomplished by that incarceration, largely because those who leave the market will be replaced by new recruits. Nevertheless, since those additional drug prisoners, as well as those incarcerated for other offenses, have some positive likelihood of committing homicide if they were on the outside, there should be some incapacitative effect on homicide.

The fact that incapacitation is largely focused on the older population is a reflection of the fact that the median age of prisoners is typically in the 30s. Relatively few younger offenders other than those who do the most heinous crimes get to prison; it is predominantly those who accumulate enough convictions to have a serious prior record who are finally sent to prison, and by that time they are well past the peak crime ages. This argues for the importance of prevention efforts to diminish the violence propensity of the younger offenders. One salient aspect of that prevention must involve keeping guns away from them. The broader aspects of socialization, especially when their families are not executing that responsibility effectively, eventually demand considerable attention by American society.

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22. *See* Alfred Blumstein, *Making Rationality Relevant—The American Society of Criminology 1992 Presidential Address*, 31 CRIMINOLOGY 1 (1993).