

U.S. Department of Justice  
Bureau of Justice Statistics



# Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

## Criminal Victimization 1986

October 1987

Criminal victimizations in the United States dropped by nearly 750,000 to about 34.1 million in 1986 for persons age 12 and older, according to the National Crime Survey (NCS). This 2% decline in overall crime continued a trend that has reduced criminal victimizations to their lowest level in the 14-year history of the NCS, about 18% below the 41.5 million victimizations reported in the peak year of 1981 (table 1).<sup>1</sup>

The victimization rate for crimes of violence declined about 6% during the year to a new low; this rate was about 20% lower than its peak in 1981 (figure 1). The victimization rate for assault dropped about 8%, reaching a new low.

The National Crime Survey obtains information on criminal victimizations, whether or not the crime was reported to the police. About 37% of all crimes

<sup>1</sup>For definitions of the crimes measured by the National Crime Survey and a description of NCS operations, see *Measuring Crime*, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-75710, February 1981.

The data in this bulletin update the preliminary estimates of victimization in 1986, which were released in April of this year. For the fifth year in a row, the overall level of crime decreased, bringing the number of crimes in the United States to the lowest level in the 14-year history of the National Crime Survey (NCS).

The NCS measures both crimes reported to the police and crimes

not reported. Although nearly two-thirds of all NCS crimes, including about half of all violent crimes, are not reported to police, this year's survey indicates that reporting rates have increased significantly since the survey first began.

Steven R. Schlesinger  
Director

measured by the NCS were reported to the police, an increase of about 4% between 1985 and 1986.

### Personal crimes decline

The overall victimization rate for personal crimes--crimes of violence and theft--declined about 4% in 1986, resulting in approximately half a million fewer crimes in 1986 than in 1985 (table 2).

The victimization rate for assault declined after 3 years of stable rates (table 3). The rate in 1986--22.3 victimizations per 1,000 persons--was 18% lower than its high point in 1979 and the lowest in NCS history (figure 2). The rate of simple assault dropped about 9% between 1985 and 1986, from 15.9 to 14.4 per 1,000 persons. The decline in the simple assault rate is primarily due to a decrease in the rate of attempted assaults without a weapon. The victimization rate for

Trends in victimization rates for selected crimes, 1973-86

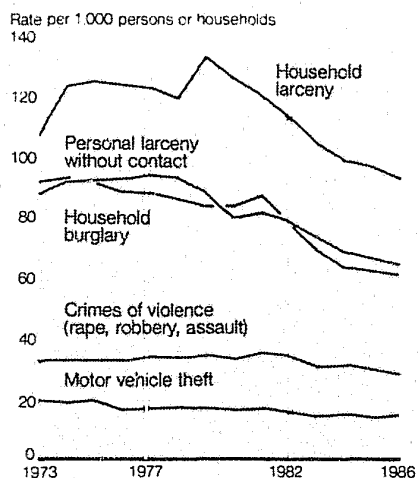


Figure 1

Table 1. Victimization levels for selected crimes, 1973-86

	Number of victimizations (in 1,000's)			
	Total	Violent crimes	Personal theft	Household crimes
1973	35,661	5,350	14,970	15,340
1974	38,411	5,510	15,889	17,012
1975	39,266	5,573	16,294	17,400
1976	39,318	5,599	16,519	17,199
1977	40,314	5,902	16,933	17,480
1978	40,412	5,941	17,050	17,421
1979	41,249	6,159	16,382	18,708
1980	40,252	6,130	15,300	18,821
1981	41,454	6,582	15,863	19,009
1982	39,756	6,469	15,553	17,744
1983	37,001	5,903	14,657	16,440
1984	35,544	6,021	13,789	15,733
1985	34,864	5,823	13,474	15,564
1986	34,118	5,515	13,235	15,368
Percent change, 1981-86 <sup>a</sup>	-17.7% <sup>b</sup>	-16.2% <sup>b</sup>	-16.6% <sup>b</sup>	-19.2% <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Total victimizations peaked in 1981.

<sup>b</sup>The difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

**Table 2. Changes in victimization levels and rates for personal and household crimes, 1985-86**

	Number of victimizations (1,000s)			Victimization rates		
	1985	1986	Percent change, 1985-86	1985	1986	Percent change, 1985-86
All crimes	34,864	34,118	-2.1% <sup>a</sup>	...	...	...
<b>Personal crimes</b>	19,296	18,751	-2.8% <sup>a</sup>	99.4	95.6	-3.9% <sup>a</sup>
Crimes of violence	5,823	5,515	-5.3% <sup>b</sup>	30.0	28.1	-6.3% <sup>b</sup>
Completed	2,060	2,049	-0.5	10.6	10.5	-1.6
Attempted	3,762	3,466	-7.9% <sup>a</sup>	19.4	17.7	-8.8% <sup>a</sup>
Rape <sup>c</sup>	138	130	-6.2	0.7	0.7	-7.3
Completed	71	46	-35.4	0.4	0.2	-36.0
Attempted	68	84	24.4	0.3	0.4	23.2
Robbery	985	1,009	2.5	5.1	5.1	1.4
Completed	652	622	-4.6	3.4	3.2	-5.6
With injury	211	234	10.7	1.1	1.2	9.5
From serious assault	120	110	-8.5	0.6	0.6	-9.4
From minor assault	92	124	35.8	0.5	0.6	34.1
Without injury	440	388	-11.9	2.3	2.0	-12.9
Attempted	333	387	16.3	1.7	2.0	15.1
With injury	83	117	40.8	0.4	0.6	39.1
From serious assault	41	54	31.2	0.2	0.3	29.4
From minor assault	41	62	50.4	0.2	0.3	48.8
Without injury	250	271	8.2	1.3	1.4	7.1
Assault	4,699	4,376	-6.9% <sup>a</sup>	24.2	22.3	-7.9% <sup>a</sup>
Aggravated	1,605	1,543	-3.9	8.3	7.9	-4.9
Completed with injury	508	562	10.6	2.6	2.9	9.4
Attempted assault with weapon	1,097	981	-10.6	5.7	5.0	-11.5
Simple	3,094	2,833	-8.4% <sup>a</sup>	15.9	14.4	-9.4% <sup>a</sup>
Completed with injury	830	820	-1.2	4.3	4.2	-2.2
Attempted assault without weapon	2,264	2,013	-11.1% <sup>a</sup>	11.7	10.3	-12.0% <sup>a</sup>
Crimes of theft	13,474	13,235	-1.8	69.4	67.5	-2.8
Completed	12,764	12,402	-2.8	65.8	63.2	-3.9% <sup>b</sup>
Attempted	709	833	17.5% <sup>a</sup>	3.7	4.3	16.2
Personal larceny with contact	523	536	2.6	2.7	2.7	1.5
Purse snatching	106	163	53.7% <sup>a</sup>	0.5	0.8	52.1
Completed	83	134	62.0% <sup>a</sup>	0.4	0.7	60.3
Attempted	24	29	24.4	0.1	0.2	23.0
Pocket picking	416	373	-10.4	2.1	1.9	-11.4
Personal larceny without contact	12,951	12,699	-1.9	66.7	64.7	-3.0
Completed	12,265	11,895	-3.0	63.2	60.6	-4.0% <sup>b</sup>
Less than \$50	5,918	5,516	-6.8% <sup>a</sup>	30.5	28.1	-7.8% <sup>a</sup>
\$50 or more	5,778	5,731	-0.8	29.8	29.2	-1.9
Amount not available	569	648	14.0	2.9	3.3	12.8
Attempted	686	804	17.2% <sup>b</sup>	3.5	4.1	16.0
<b>Household crimes</b>	15,568	15,368	-1.3	174.4	170.0	-2.5
Completed	13,244	13,064	-1.4	148.4	144.5	-2.6
Attempted	2,324	2,304	-0.9	26.0	25.5	-2.1
Household burglary	5,594	5,557	-0.7	62.7	61.5	-1.9
Completed	4,354	4,307	-1.1	48.8	47.7	-2.3
Forceful entry	1,827	1,813	-0.8	20.5	20.1	-2.0
Unlawful entry without force	2,527	2,494	-1.3	28.3	27.6	-2.5
Attempted forceful entry	1,240	1,249	0.7	13.9	13.8	-0.5
Household larceny	8,703	8,455	-2.8	97.5	93.5	-4.1
Completed	8,067	7,869	-2.5	90.4	87.1	-3.7
Less than \$50	3,886	3,434	-11.6% <sup>a</sup>	43.5	38.0	-12.7% <sup>a</sup>
\$50 or more	3,758	3,884	3.4	42.1	43.0	2.1
Amount not available	424	551	30.2% <sup>a</sup>	4.7	6.1	28.6% <sup>b</sup>
Attempted	636	586	-7.8	7.1	6.5	-9.0
Motor vehicle theft	1,270	1,356	6.7	14.2	15.0	5.4
Completed	823	888	7.9	9.2	9.8	6.5
Attempted	447	468	4.6	5.0	5.2	3.3

Note: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. Percent change is based on unrounded figures. Victimization rates are calculated on the basis of the number of victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 and older or per 1,000 households. The population age 12 and older grew from 194,096,700 in 1985 to 196,160,200 in 1986, an increase of 1.1%. The number of households grew from 89,262,800 to 90,394,700 between 1985 and

1986, an increase of 1.3%.

...Not applicable.

<sup>a</sup>The difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

<sup>b</sup>The difference is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

<sup>c</sup>The victimization rate for female rape (the number of rapes per 1,000 women age 12 and older) was 1.3 in 1985 and 1.2 in 1986.

aggravated assault remained essentially stable between 1985 and 1986.

The robbery rate for 1986 was lower than that for any year between 1973 and 1983 (table 4). There has been no measurable difference, however, in the rate for robbery since 1984.

There was no measurable change in the overall rate of personal crimes of theft between 1985 and 1986. The 1986 rate, however, was about 31% lower than its peak in 1977 and lower than for any time between 1973 and 1984. The rate of completed thefts declined between 1985 and 1986, from 65.8 to 63.2 per 1,000 persons. This decrease is primarily due to a decline in the rate of completed personal larceny without contact.

There were no measurable changes in the rates for rape and for personal larceny with contact, which consists of purse snatching and pocket picking. These crimes occur far less often than other categories of crimes of violence or theft; consequently, actual changes in the levels or rates of rape or personal larceny with contact are much more difficult to measure.

#### Household crimes stable

Rates for the three household crimes measured by the NCS—burglary, household larceny, and motor vehicle theft—remained basically unchanged between 1985 and 1986. The rate for completed household larcenies with a loss of less than \$50, however, declined by nearly 13%, from 44 to 38 per 1,000 households.

The rate for burglary was 61 per 1,000 households. Household larceny occurred at a rate of 94 per 1,000 households, and motor vehicle theft occurred at a rate of 15 per 1,000 households. The burglary rate was lower than for any year between 1973 and 1983, though not measurably different from the 1984 and 1985 rates. The overall household larceny rate was lower than for any time between 1973 and 1984.

#### Police reporting increases

About 37% of all NCS crimes in 1986 were reported to the police, a 4% increase over the 1985 rate. The 1986 reporting rate for all NCS crimes was the highest ever recorded by the NCS and was 15% higher than the 1973 reporting rate (table 5 and figure 3). About half of all violent crimes, two-fifths of all household crimes, and slightly more than one-fourth of all crimes of personal theft were reported.

**Table 3. Victimization rates for personal and household crimes, 1973-86**

	Victimization rates per 1,000 persons age 12 and older or per 1,000 households													
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
<b>Personal crimes</b>														
Crimes of violence	32.6	33.0	32.8	32.6	33.9	33.7	34.5	33.3	35.3	34.3	31.0	31.4	30.0	28.1
Rape	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.7
Robbery	6.7	7.2	6.8	6.5	6.2	5.9	6.3	6.6	7.4	7.1	6.0	5.7	5.1	5.1
Assault	24.9	24.8	25.2	25.3	26.8	26.9	27.2	25.8	27.0	26.4	24.1	24.7	24.2	22.3
Aggravated	10.1	10.4	9.6	9.9	10.0	9.7	9.9	9.3	9.6	9.3	8.0	9.0	8.3	7.9
Simple	14.8	14.4	15.6	15.4	16.8	17.2	17.3	16.5	17.3	17.1	16.2	15.7	15.9	14.4
Crimes of theft	91.1	95.1	96.0	96.1	97.3	96.8	91.9	83.0	85.1	82.5	76.9	71.8	69.4	67.5
Personal larceny with contact	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.7	3.1	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.1	3.0	2.8	2.7	2.7
Personal larceny without contact	88.0	92.0	92.9	93.2	94.6	93.6	89.0	80.0	81.9	79.5	74.0	69.1	66.7	64.7
<b>Household crimes</b>														
Household burglary	91.7	93.1	91.7	88.9	88.5	86.0	84.1	84.3	87.9	78.2	70.0	64.1	62.7	61.5
Household larceny	107.0	123.8	125.4	124.1	123.3	119.9	133.7	126.5	121.0	113.9	105.2	99.4	97.5	93.5
Motor vehicle theft	19.1	18.8	19.5	16.5	17.0	17.5	17.5	16.7	17.1	16.2	14.6	15.2	14.2	15.0

Note: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. Statistically significant differences between the rates for 1986 and each preceding year are identified in table 4.

**Table 4. Comparison of changes in victimization rates for personal and household crimes, 1973-86**

	Percent change in victimization rates												
	1973-86	1974-86	1975-86	1976-86	1977-86	1978-86	1979-86	1980-86	1981-86	1982-86	1983-86	1984-86	1985-86
<b>Personal crimes</b>													
Crimes of violence	-13.6%	-14.7%	-14.4%	-13.7%	-17.1%	-16.6%	-18.6%	-15.5%	-20.4%	-17.9%	-9.3%	-10.4%	-6.3%
Rape	-30.5	-32.7	-27.5	-21.4*	-25.8*	-32.0	-38.9	-29.8	-30.5	-18.5*	-18.5*	-29.8	-7.0*
Robbery	-23.7	-28.4	-24.0	-20.4	-17.4	-12.7	-17.9	-21.6	-30.6	-27.4	-14.8	-10.0*	1.4*
Assault	-10.3	-10.1	-11.4	-11.7	-16.7	-16.9	-18.0	-13.4	-17.2	-15.4	-7.6	-9.7	-7.8
Aggravated	-21.8	-24.3	-18.1	-20.2	-21.1	-18.8	-20.7	-15.0	-18.4	-15.5	-1.1*	-12.6	-4.8*
Simple	-2.4*	0.0*	-7.2	-6.3*	-14.1	-15.9	-16.5	-12.4	-16.6	-15.5	-10.8	-8.1	-9.4
Crimes of theft	-25.9	-29.1	-29.7	-29.8	-30.6	-30.3	-26.6	-18.7	-20.7	-18.2	-12.3	-6.1	-2.8*
Personal larceny with contact	-11.1*	-12.2*	-11.7*	-5.5*	3.0*	-12.5*	-4.9*	-9.9*	-16.0	-10.8*	-7.5*	-1.1*	1.5*
Personal larceny without contact	-26.4	-29.6	-30.3	-30.5	-31.6	-30.9	-27.3	-19.1	-20.9	-18.5	-12.5	-6.3	-3.0*
<b>Household crimes</b>													
Household burglary	-33.0	-34.0	-33.0	-30.9	-30.6	-28.5	-26.9	-27.0	-30.1	-21.4	-12.2	-4.1*	-1.9*
Household larceny	-12.6	-24.4	-25.4	-24.5	-24.1	-22.0	-30.0	-26.1	-22.7	-17.9	-11.1	-5.9	-4.1*
Motor vehicle theft	-21.4	-20.3	-23.0	-8.9*	-11.6	-14.3	-14.4	-10.1	-12.3	-7.2*	2.8*	-1.4*	5.4*

Note: Percent change was calculated using rates that were rounded to the nearest hundredth. \*The difference is not statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

The 1986 reporting rates did not change measurably for any of the individual crimes measured, although the overall rate for household crimes increased to 41%, from 39% in 1985. As in the past, motor vehicle theft, with roughly 7 in every 10 incidents reported to the police, had the highest rate of reporting; personal larceny without contact and household larceny, both with about 1 in every 4 cases reported, had the lowest police reporting rates.

**The National Crime Survey**

The NCS measures selected personal and household offenses, including crimes not reported to the police, through interviews at 6-month intervals with the occupants of housing units that make up a representative national sample. During 1986 some 101,000 persons--occupants of about 49,000 housing units--participated in the survey. Interviews are administered monthly to one-sixth of the sample

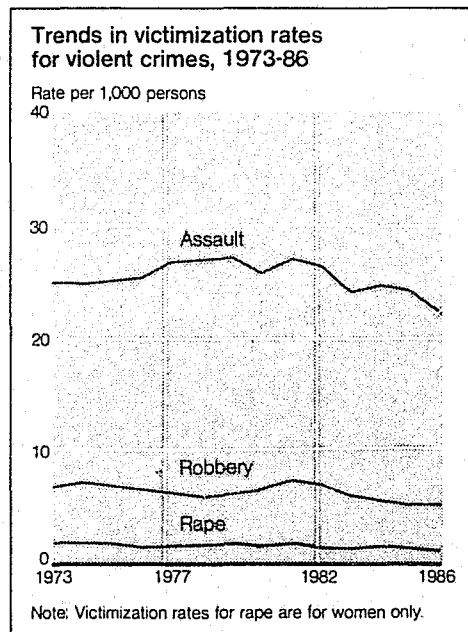


Figure 2

according to a rotation schedule. Information pertaining to the previous 6 months is gathered at each interview.

**Preliminary estimates and sampling error**

In April 1987 the Bureau of Justice Statistics released preliminary NCS victimization levels and rates as well as police reporting data for 1986. When levels and rates of victimization for the early 1986 estimates are compared to the final 1986 results, the procedure used in calculating the preliminary estimates appears to have yielded reliable indicators of both magnitude and change in criminal victimization during 1986 (table 6). For example, the 1986 preliminary rate for crimes of violence was 28 per 1,000 persons; the final rate was 28.1.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>For a complete discussion of preliminary estimation procedures, see *Criminal Victimization 1983*, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-93869, June 1984.

**Table 5. Reporting victimizations to the police, 1973-86**

	Percent of victimizations reported to the police													
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
<b>All crimes</b>	32%	33%	35%	35%	34%	33%	33%	36%	35%	36%	35%	35%	36%	37%
<b>Personal crimes</b>														
Crimes of violence	46	47	47	49	46	44	45	47	47	48	47	47	48	50
Rape	49	52	56	53	58	49	51	41	56	53	47	56	61	48
Robbery	52	54	53	53	56	51	55	57	56	56	53	54	54	58
Assault	44	45	45	48	44	43	42	45	44	46	46	45	46	48
Aggravated	52	53	55	58	51	53	51	54	52	58	56	55	58	59
Simple	38	39	39	41	39	37	37	40	39	40	41	40	40	41
Crimes of theft	22	25	26	27	25	25	24	27	27	27	26	26	27	28
Personal larceny with contact	33	34	35	36	37	34	36	36	40	33	36	31	33	38
Personal larceny without contact	22	24	26	26	24	24	24	27	26	27	26	26	27	28
<b>Household crimes</b>	38	37	39	38	38	36	36	39	39	39	37	38	39	41
Household burglary	47	48	49	48	49	47	48	51	51	49	49	49	50	52
Household larceny	25	25	27	27	25	24	25	28	26	27	25	27	27	28
Motor vehicle theft	68	67	71	69	68	66	68	69	67	72	69	69	71	73

**Table 6. Preliminary estimates and final results for 1986 victimization levels and rates**

	Number of victimizations (in 1,000s)			Victimization rates		
	Preliminary	Final	Percent change	Preliminary	Final	Percent change
<b>Personal crimes</b>						
Crimes of violence	5,501	5,515	0.3%	28.0	28.1	0.4%
Rape	154	130	-15.4	0.8	0.7	-15.3
Robbery	1,005	1,009	0.4	5.1	5.1	0.6
Assault	4,345	4,376	0.7	22.1	22.3	0.9
Aggravated	1,459	1,543	5.8	7.4	7.9	5.9
Simple	2,887	2,833	-1.8	14.7	14.4	-1.7
Crimes of theft	13,225	13,235	0.1	67.3	67.5	0.2
Personal larceny with contact	602	536	-10.9	3.1	2.7	-10.7
Personal larceny without contact	12,632	12,699	0.5	64.3	64.7	0.7
<b>Household crimes</b>						
Household burglary	5,728	5,557	-3.0	63.3	61.5	-3.0
Household larceny	8,475	8,455	-0.2	93.7	93.5	-0.2
Motor vehicle theft	1,271	1,356	6.7	14.1	15.0	6.7

Note: Numbers and rates may not add to totals shown because of rounding.

Percent changes were calculated based on unrounded numbers.

Data collected in the National Crime Survey are obtained from a sample and not from a complete enumeration. Consequently, a sampling error (standard error) is associated with each number in the report, including the numbers measuring change. In general, if the difference between two numbers is greater than twice the standard error for that difference, we can say that we

are 95% confident that the two numbers are in fact different—that is, the apparent difference is not simply the result of surveying a sample and not the entire population. If the difference is greater than 1.6 standard errors, we are 90% confident that the two numbers are different. All comparisons made in the text are at or above the 90% confidence level. When differences between two numbers are below the 90% confidence level, the two numbers are described in the text as "not measurably different."

Bureau of Justice Statistics bulletins are prepared principally by the staff of BJS. This bulletin was written by Marshall DeBerry and Catherine J. Whitaker. Frank D. Balog edited the bulletin. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administered production, assisted by Tina Dorsey, Jeanne Harris, Arlene F. James, and Sara E. Smith.

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The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program offices and bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

**Trends in reporting to the police for selected crimes, 1973-86**

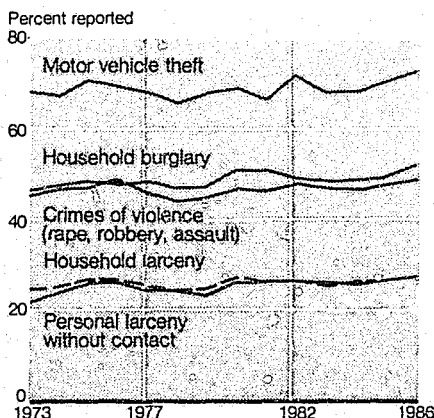


Figure 3

# Crime and Older Americans

## Information Package

- Are older Americans more likely to be victims of crime than younger age groups?
- Are the elderly being arrested for certain crimes more frequently than in the past?
- Are offenders in crimes against the elderly more likely to be strangers or nonstrangers compared to other age groups?

A new information package available from the Justice Statistics Clearinghouse answers these and other questions about crime and the elderly. Drawing from national sources for crime statistics—including the BJS National Crime Survey, the FBI Uniform Crime Reports, and the BJS National Corrections Reporting Program—the 34-page package discusses the types of crimes in which older Americans are most likely to be victims and offenders, and the types of crime prevention they use.

As the elderly population has grown, so has concern about the effects of crime on this age group.

Population statistics indicate that older Americans are fast becoming a large segment of the total U.S. population. In 1985, Americans 60 years and older totaled 39.5 million—a 21-percent increase over the past 10 years.

This package also includes the names and addresses of associations and organizations that are sources of information about crime and older Americans and a list of further readings.

Crime and Older Americans costs only \$10.00.

Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ copies of the Information Package on Crime and Older Americans (NCJ 104569) at \$10.00 each.

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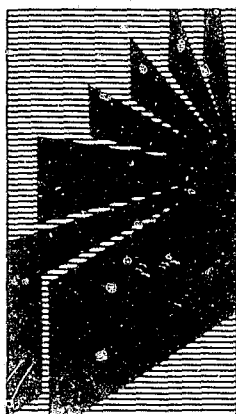
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