

Speech to the Citizens Crime Commission of New York City
“New Approaches to Juvenile Violence”

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Thank you.

This is a special honor for me to appear before the Citizens Crime Commission, and to share the podium with Congressman Schumer. Throughout his tenure in the Congress, and particularly as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Congressman Schumer has been a staunch advocate for crime control policies that rise above ideological debates to appeal to the common sense of the American people. The agenda he shaped through that committee provided the foundation for the historic 1994 Crime Act -- the Brady bill, the assault weapons ban, the violence against women act, the cops on the beat program to fund 100,000 police officers engaged in community policing, the drug court program and residential substance abuse treatment. These innovations are changing the direction of our crime control policies. I was privileged to serve as his Chief Counsel during the formative period of his chairmanship and sincerely believe that he deserves much of the credit for the successes of the Crime Act.

Throughout my criminal justice career, the Crime Commission breakfasts -- we always referred to them in shorthand as the Reppetto breakfasts -- served as an important forum for the exchange of ideas. I am honored to be invited here this morning, back home.

I am in many ways deeply indebted to the criminal justice community of New York City. This is where I cut my teeth and came of age. Yet I didn't know the extent of my indebtedness -- nor the extent of the Police Department's new willingness to take credit for all good things happening in the Big Apple -- until a recent conversation over dinner in Washington with Chief Louis Amenone. I told him that Susan and I had had the good fortune to sell our loft in Chelsea right after the election. "Did you make any money?" he asked. "In fact, yes," I replied, reflecting my surprise. "You owe it all to Compstat", he responded.

I would like to talk to you about youth violence. Youth violence is one of those issues that generates overheated debate. Some commentators warn that we are facing a "bloodbath" as the next birth cohort enters the crime-prone years. Some

describe a generation of remorseless “superpredators” unlike any young criminals we have seen before. On the other end of the spectrum, commentators of different persuasions observe that only a small percentage of young people engage in crime, decry any increase in criminal penalties as misguided retributivism, and draw lines in the ideological sand at any mention of curfews, truancy enforcement or metal detectors in schools.

I have three objectives this morning: (1) to share with you some data that shed light on the nature of the juvenile crime problem; (2) to pass along the experiences of other cities that are having success in reducing juvenile violence; and (3) to offer some thoughts on new ways to conceptualize our policies in this arena. As the head of a research agency, I now come equipped with charts and graphs and ask you to refer to them.

DATA ON JUVENILE VIOLENCE

The first task, of course, is to define the problem. Let’s put juvenile crime in context. America’s crime problem, as James Q. Wilson once observed, is actually two problems -- violent

crime and everything else. As the first chart shows, over the past decade, America has experienced first a sharp increase, and now a sharp decrease, in violent crime. As the second chart shows, the property crime rates in the United States have been steadily declining for over twenty years. In fact, there are fewer burglaries per capita in New York than in London. The violent crime story over the past decade -- rapid rise and now rapid decline -- is, in turn, best understood by looking at the story within the story -- this is the story of juvenile violence.

Criminologists have long known that criminal behavior peaks in the late teenage years. Yet juvenile offending patterns have shown some atypical phenomena recently. Over the past twenty years, robbery and burglary rates for juveniles have remained basically the same, but something significant has happened with violence committed by juveniles. As the third chart shows, between the years 1985 and 1992, after fifteen years of relative stability, the homicide rate for defendants 18 and younger doubled -- while homicide rates in other age groups remained the same. As the fourth chart shows, during the same seven year period, the number of juvenile homicides committed with guns also doubled. Finally, during the same period, the

arrest rate for nonwhite juveniles for drug offenses more than doubled. (Blumstein; NIJ Journal)

What happened in the mid-80's in dozens of American cities to explain these unprecedented changes in behavior? Clearly the answer is the introduction of "crack" cocaine. I vividly recall, when I was Special Counsel to the Police Commissioner, sitting in Ben Ward's office after he returned from a trip to Los Angeles. We were feeling confident about crime rates then. Our mood resembled the optimism New York has experienced over the past few years. We were watching crime rates fall. Operation Pressure Point had been a major success in disrupting open air drug markets on the Lower East Side. Domestic violence initiatives had just been launched. Community policing was getting started in the 72nd Precinct in Brooklyn. But Ben reported that he had just seen something called "rock" on the West Coast -- a form of smokeable cocaine -- that, he predicted, would sweep New York City and undo all the progress we had made. He was right.

Saying that "crack" is the answer still does not provide an explanation for the surge in youth violence. Prof. Alfred

Blumstein of Carnegie Mellon University has developed a hypothesis that, to me, has great facial validity, called the "diffusion hypothesis:" that as new crack entrepreneurs were setting up business, taking over turf previously dominated by others, they recruited young people as sellers and middle managers, then these low level dealers needed guns to defend themselves, and the guns, once in the hands of impulsive adolescents, quickly "diffused" into the youth culture so that garden variety adolescent squabbles over girlfriends and valued clothing got settled by gunfire.

This theory strikes me as reasonable -- and we are funding research to test it in a number of cities. The deadly mixture of kids, guns, drugs, gangs leads quickly to senseless killings, drive-by shootings, guns in schools -- all the horrifying images and realities of the peak violent crime years of the early 1990's -- in New York City, the years when the Post screamed at Mayor Dinkins, "Dave, Do Something", the evening news showed that unforgettable picture of a bloody babystroller next to an ambulance and the Citizens Crime Commission called for 5,000 additional police officers.

The challenge facing the nation today is not merely explaining the past, but envisioning the future. If Blumstein's theory reasonably explains the past, must we regard our violent past as prologue? Why do we assume that the crime wave of violent juveniles we experienced in the 1980's will be followed by another wave of ever more violent kids?

It is certainly true that the number of juveniles in the crime-prone years will increase -- in fact, these kids are already born. By the year 2005, the number of teenagers between 14 and 17 will increase by 14 percent, with greater percentage increases among minorities living in inner cities. Those who have predicted a dire future have assumed that the RATE of juvenile crime will increase -- or remain constant -- and the increased NUMBER of teenagers engaging in violence at these higher rates will cause a "bloodbath."

Yet demography is not destiny. Indeed, I think the only responsible position for public officials is try to defeat these pessimistic prognostications. Certainly the experiences of New York City and other urban areas that have shown major reductions in crime provide grounds for optimism.

A closer look at recent national data make the point. Over the past two years, juvenile crime has fallen substantially, seven percent in 1995, alone. As Prof. Franklin Zimring has pointed out, if this trend continues, much of the increase in juvenile violence we witnessed during the beginning of the Crack Decade will be eliminated within a few years. With this positive news, the question we face, I submit, is not how to prepare for a bloodbath, but how to accelerate this decline.

Allow me to make three sets of observations -- centered on the deadly trilogy of guns, drugs and gangs.

GUNS

Our most pressing challenge is to get guns out of the hands of kids and keep kids from using the ones that are already in circulation. As a nation, with major credit to Congressman Schumer, we have seen the emergence of a more rational policy on the gun issue -- hopefully one that will last. The Brady Act has been highly successful at keeping guns out of the hands of felons. [BJS] As important, law enforcement agencies report that the Brady Act has cut down on the phenomenon of

interstate gun running that relied on straw purchasers, phony identification, gun shows and criminal enterprises. Waiting periods are an anathema to these criminal schemes. The ban on assault weapons is keeping those instruments of death from our streets. The crackdown on federal firearms licenses -- FFLs -- that used 800 numbers and the UPS to move boxes of guns into the hands of gun dealers is having remarkable results. The number of federally-licensed firearms dealers has decreased 57 percent in the last three years, and is now at the lowest rate since 1975, when ATF first began keeping records of licenses.

Smarter policing is also reducing gun trafficking and gun violence. In New York City, Prof. Jeffrey Fagan, who is conducting NIJ-funded ethnographic research on youth violence, reports that, largely as a result of aggressive police strategies, young people are telling us that are now less likely to carry and use guns. In Boston, the police department conducted an analysis of their juvenile gun violence problem and found that three quarters of victims and offenders had been on juvenile court probation. The Police Department there teamed up with the Probation Department and started Operation Nightlight in which gang-involved young people on juvenile court probation

were subjected to targeted, enforceable and enforced conditions of probation including curfews, orders to stay away from certain street corners, prohibitions on associating with certain gang members. As the fifth chart shows, the phenomenal news from Boston is that they have not had a single young person killed by a gun in the entire city for more than a year and a half.

DRUGS

Another ingredient in the combustible mix of juvenile violence is drug use and drug markets. A study conducted by Prof. Andrew Golub at John Jay, and funded by NIJ, shows that the levels of cocaine use within the adolescent arrestee population are declining dramatically. In Manhattan (see last chart), the number of eighteen to twenty year olds arrested in that county testing positive for cocaine (which is mostly crack) has declined from about 70 percent in 1988 to about 30 percent in 1994, while cocaine use in older defendants remained constant. This dramatic reduction is mirrored in several other cities around the country, although it is far from universal. Other research evidence shows that crack markets are changing, partly in response to police enforcement pressure, and moving

inside, with less reliance on street sellers and the attendant risks of violence.

Our understanding of drug use and drug markets is very primitive. We know little about what enforcement strategies have what effects and why. We know less about why drug epidemics wax and wane. Why is juvenile cocaine use declining in this population of young arrestees? Are young people scared by the experiences of their older siblings? Has crack lost its allure? What are the policy implications for this decline?

But we do know that drug treatment, particularly under criminal justice coercion, can be effective at reducing drug use and crime. Yet we have focussed precious little attention on ways to use the juvenile justice system to stop the onset of drug addiction. Over the next year, the National Institute of Justice, in collaboration with General McCaffrey, Director of the President's Office of National Drug Control Policy, will be mounting a number of research demonstration projects -- called *Breaking the Cycle* -- to test the proposition that juvenile drug use and juvenile crime can be reduced if every juvenile arrested is tested for drugs, and, if positive, is subjected to a rigorous

regimen of continued testing, graduated sanctions, and treatment for the entire period of criminal justice supervision.

GANGS

Finally, we have just begun to develop an objective understanding of the role of gangs in the juvenile violence phenomenon. The general public's view of gangs is often colored by a fascination with the names, the insignia, the rituals, the surrogate family that gangs provide. Our research is showing the criminogenic power of gangs. According to a study conducted by Terrance Thornbury of the Program in Criminal Justice at SUNY Albany and confirmed by other research, gangs are accelerants of criminal behavior. Young people who join gangs are four to six times more likely to engage in criminal behavior when they are gang members than when they are not. Analysis conducted in Chicago showed that 74 percent of violence among gang members is intergang activity, ten percent is intragang, and only 14 percent was non gang related. (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority; Chicago Police Department).

This understanding of the criminogenic consequences of gangs is matched by commitment and creativity at all levels of government. In his State of the Union address last week, President Clinton said that his administration would place a high priority on funding anti-gang strategies in the second term. The President's budget released on Thursday calls for a 600 % increase in funding to reduce gang violence -- \$230 million in FY 1998. The youth violence legislation now being developed by the administration will have gang violence as a special focus. The National Institute of Justice recently published a report on gang violence and the particularly pernicious problem of witness intimidation -- with model policies and statutes to assist jurisdictions in addressing this problem. The Office for Victims of Crime has instituted a new program to assist the victims of gang violence. Prosecutors have been successful at breaking up gangs by using RICO statutes and other targeted investigations. In Connecticut, the Department of Corrections, which had been tolerant of gang membership within the prison population, instituted a policy of requiring renunciation of gang membership, and controlling communication between members inside and outside, and the results were startling -- of 195 men who have been through the in-prison gang renunciation

program, only 4 have resumed their prior gang membership, and, as the *New York Times* reported, the corrections system has gone through its “longest period of tranquility in quite a while.”

But much more remains to be done. We need to find ways to help young people resist the allure of gangs -- and to speed up their desistance from gang involvement and the related criminal activity. We need to focus more attention on early childhood experiences. We especially need to develop policies and programs that respond to the chilling research finding that children who are abused or neglected are forty percent more likely to be criminals when they grow up. These children are in our system twice - first as victims, then as criminals, and we have failed, in my view, to take adequate steps to place them on the path toward a safe and responsible adolescence. We need to design intervention strategies to break this cycle of violence.

So these three areas - guns, drugs, and gangs - are ripe for innovation, creative problem-solving, and partnerships between the agencies of government at all levels. In all three areas, communities around the country are demonstrating that American ingenuity, solid analysis, and vigorous

American ingenuity, solid analysis, and vigorous implementation can reduce juvenile violence. We are not irreversibly headed for a bloodbath. We simply have more work to do.

Thank you.

Citizens Crime Commission of New York City

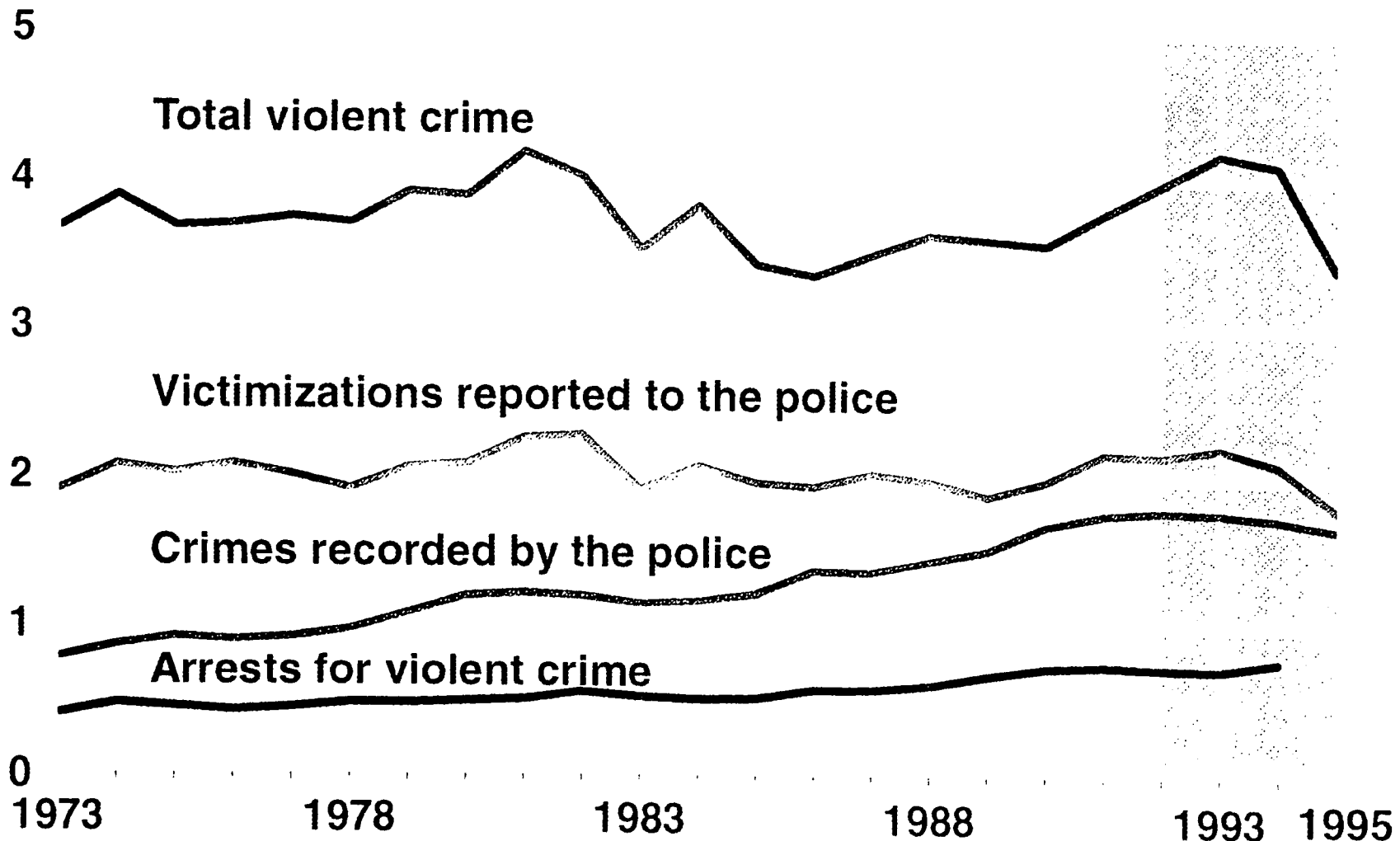
**Breakfast Forum, February 10, 1997
Presentation of Jeremy Travis
Director, National Institute of Justice**

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Chart #	Title	Source
1	Four Measures of Violent Crime	Bureau of Justice Statistics
2	Property Crime Rates	Bureau of Justice Statistics
3	Age-Specific Murder Rate: 1965-1992	Uniform Crime Report, FBI
4	Juvenile Homicides by Weapon	Supplementary Homicide Reports, FBI
5	Homicide Totals, City of Boston	Harvard University
6	Cocaine Use Among Arrestees in Manhattan	National Development and Research Institutes, Inc.

Four measures of violent crime

Offenses in millions

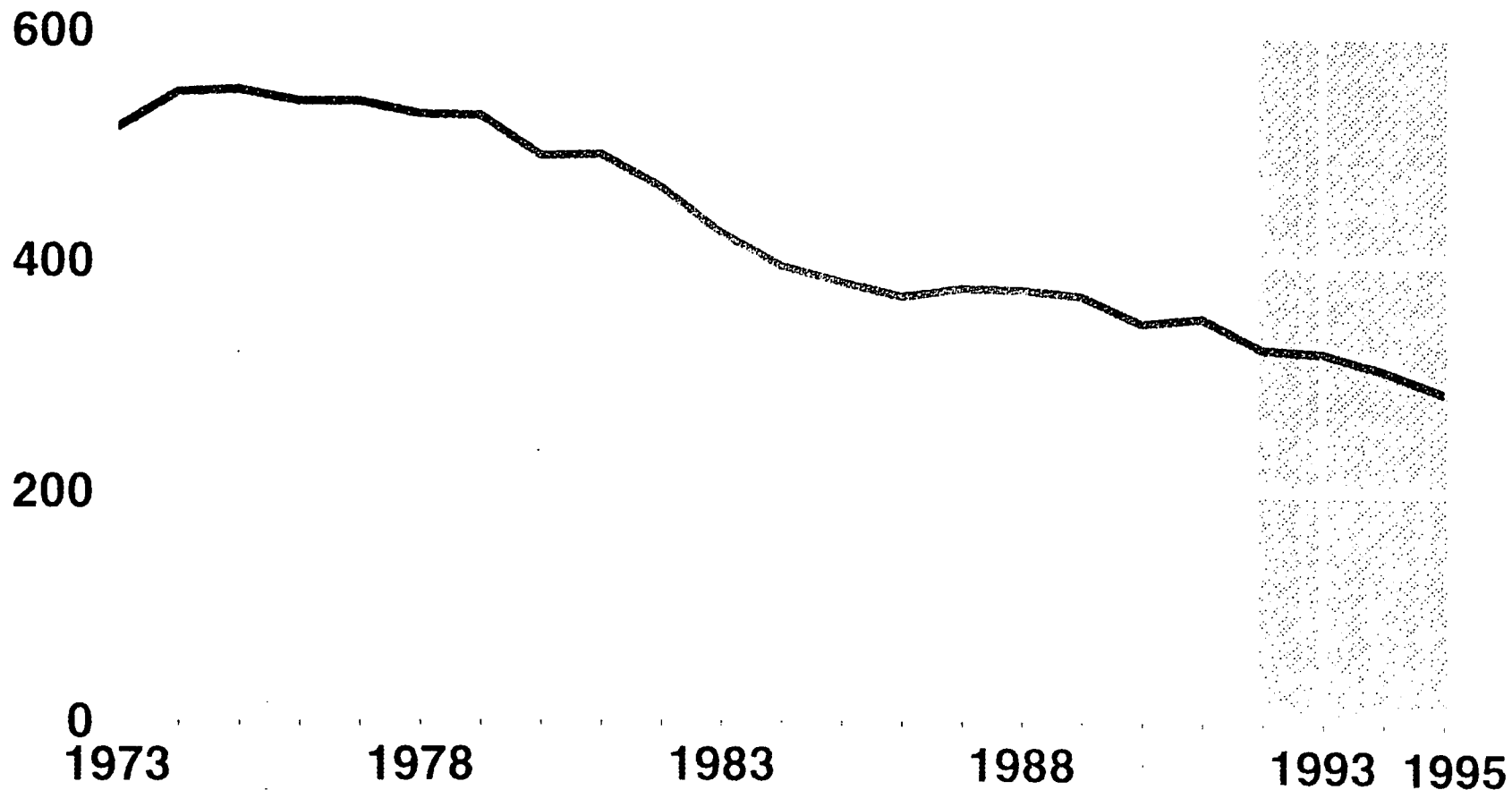


Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics, The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)

Note: The violent crimes included are rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and homicide. The dark gray area indicates that because of changes made to the victimization survey, data prior to 1992 are adjusted to make them comparable to data collected under the redesigned methodology. Data for 1995 are preliminary estimates.

Property crime rates

Adjusted victimization rate
per 1,000 households

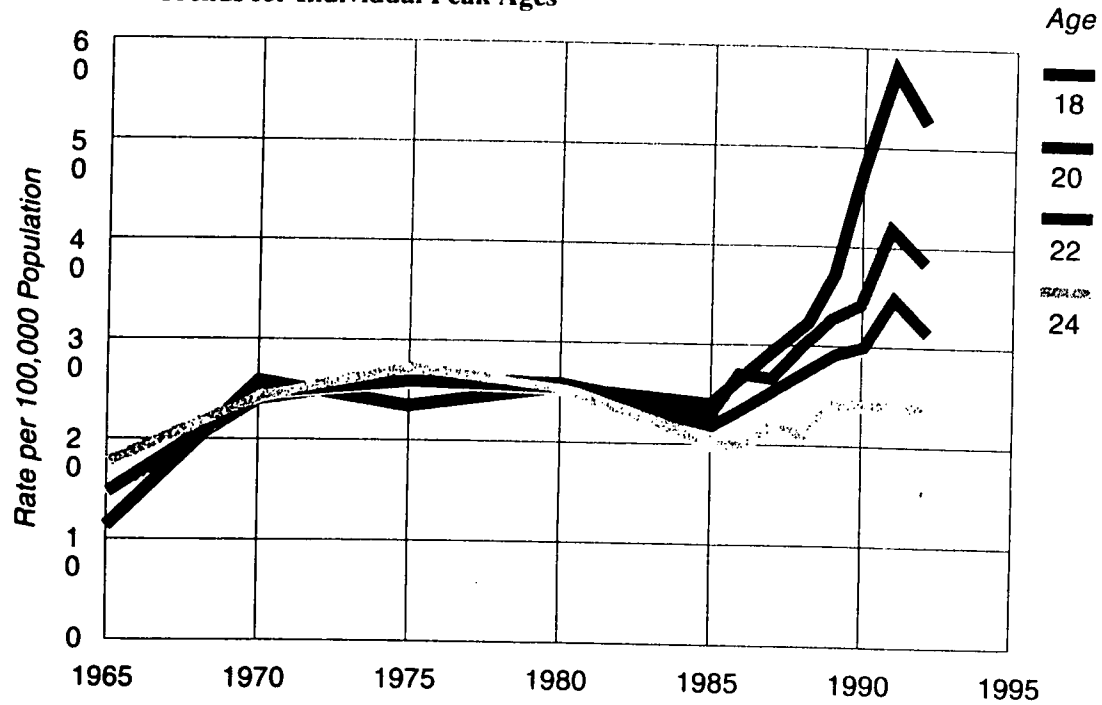


Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)

Note: The property crimes included are burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft.

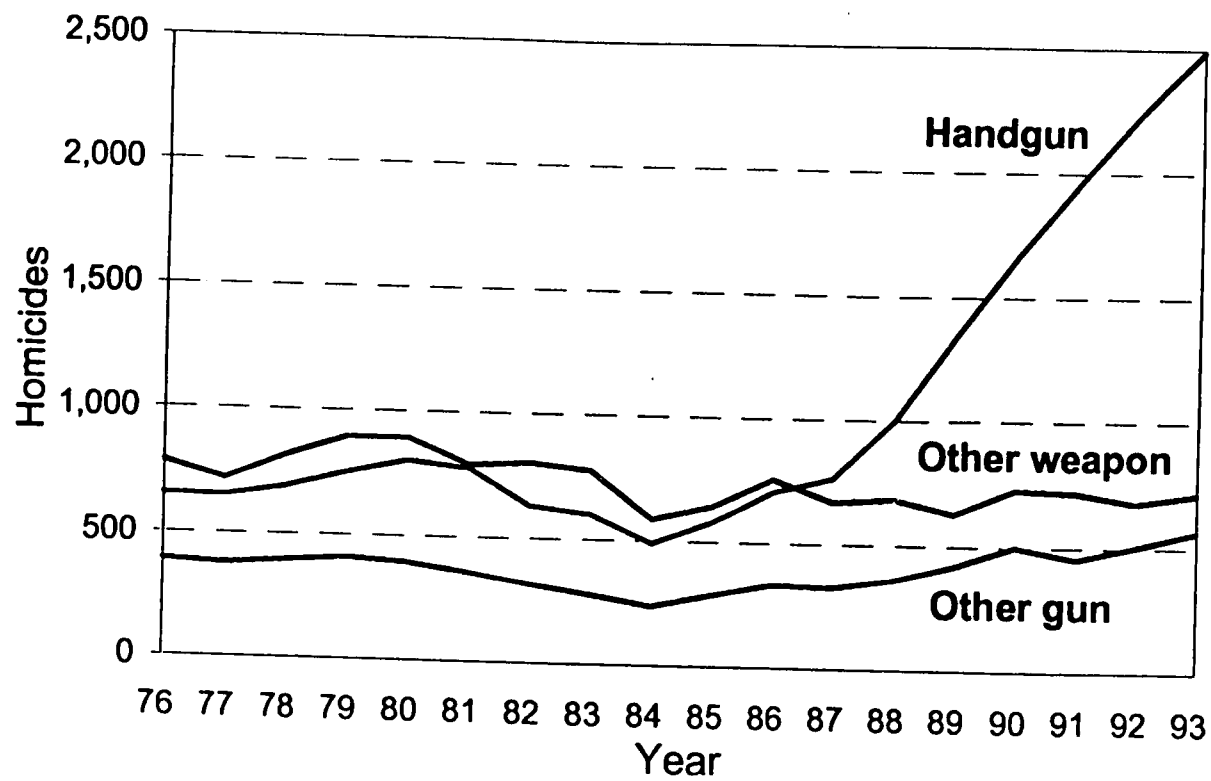
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Trends in Age-Specific Murder Rate
Trends for Individual Peak Ages



Source: *Age-Specific Arrest Rates and Race-Specific Arrest Rates for Selected Offenses, 1965–1992*, Uniform Crime Reporting Program, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C.: December 1993.

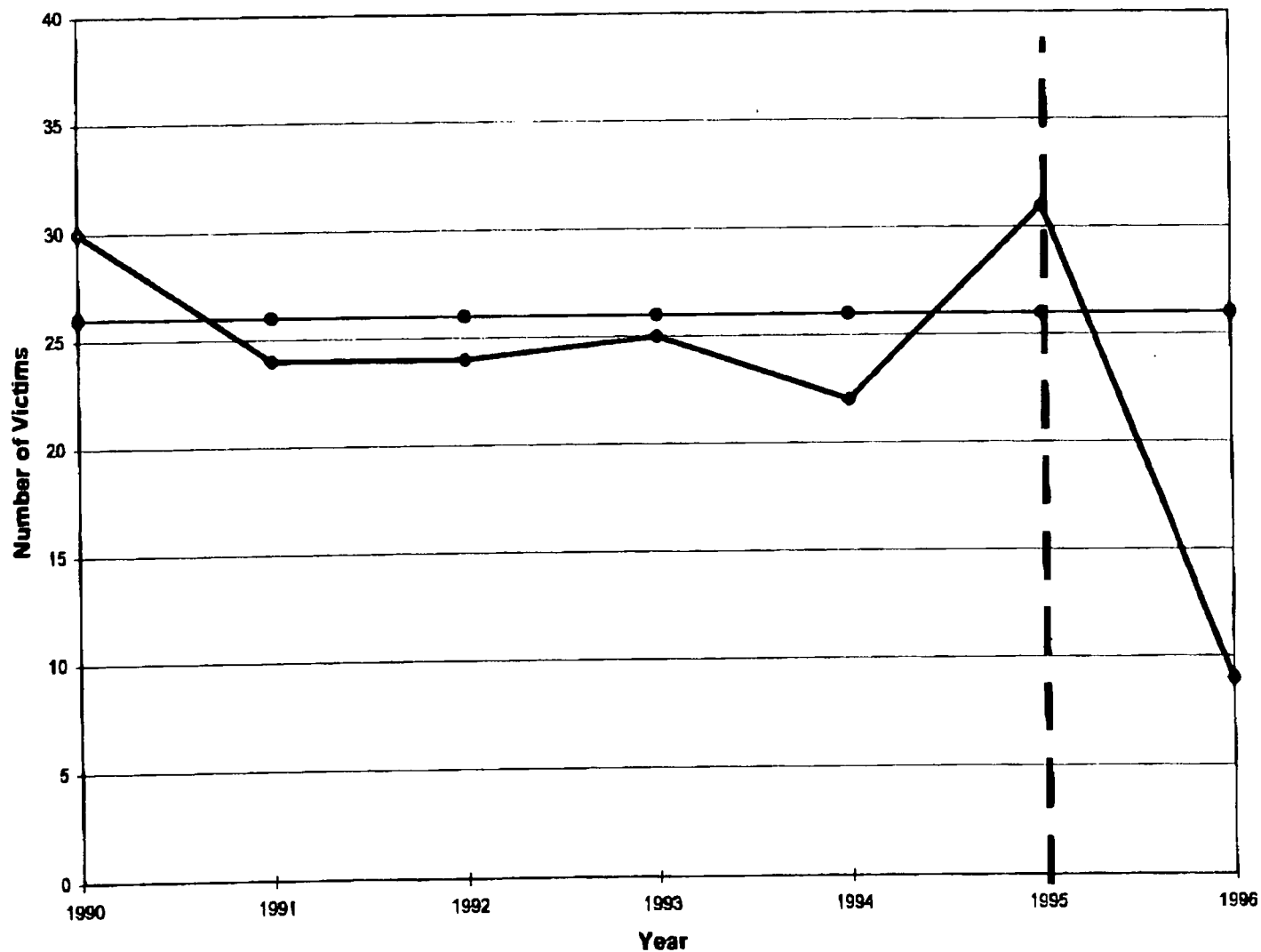
Juvenile Homicides by Weapon



Source: *Supplementary Homicide Reports*

June to November Homicide Totals City of Boston, Victims Ages 24 and Under

INTERVENTION



—●— Number of Homicide Victims —●— Mean

Cocaine Use Among Arrestees in Manhattan

