

Crime in the United State: Cause and Consequences

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to show consequences and reasons of crime and violent acts in the United States, which have risen rapidly in the twentieth century. Not only has the crime rate increased sharply, but the character of criminal acts committed has also changed. Therefore, crimes have transformed into more vicious, hurtful and purposeless.¹ The main questions that are to be asked in this paper are about the stimulus of violent acts and the most effective ways of preventing crime.

Keywords: crime and violent acts; United States; effective ways of preventing crime

1. INTRODUCTION

Contrary to a popular belief, there is a high crime rate in highly urbanized countries. Moreover, poverty, unemployment, racism as well as alcohol and drugs are some of the most common roots of violent acts. By understanding the mechanism which causes, for example, gang wars and drug sales, people are better equipped and prepared to fight against those problems.

In view of this statement, this paper is organized into three main parts. One of the purposes of chapter 1 is to present social causes of violence. United States of America is a multiracial and multicultural society. Therefore, such a big number of differences in races, culture, religion and beliefs may awaken some disagreements and disorder in the society.² Additionally, the United States is considered, by many people, to be the land of plenty, as a paradise. Indeed, it is the country of huge possibilities, splendor and luxury, however, it is not for everyone. A colossal economic discrepancy is observable in American society. People, especially minorities, are located in ghettos, and live separately in poverty.³ Therefore, it is

¹ Gary Kleck. *Point Blank: Guns and Violence in America*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991, p. 15.

² Byron M. Roth. *Prescription for Failure: Race Relations in the Age of Social Science*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994, p. 23.

³ John Hagan, Ruth D. Peterson. *Crime and Inequality*. California: Stanford University Press, 1995.

worth considering, what serious consequences may follow from this social and economic inequality, and what repercussions will be felt among the young Black Americans, who very often suffer from scarcity of opportunities, unemployment and lower education.

What is more, chapter one focuses on many other factors causing crime, such as historical background of racial inequality or geographical differences. Additionally, means of media, alcohol and drugs are presented as cultural factors causing delinquent behavior. Needless to say, means of media may show different features and details of the same piece of information and in that way they are able to manipulate public opinion. They exert a particularly strong influence on the society, especially children and teenagers.⁴ Moreover, drugs and alcohol are also extremely important factors causing violence, and especially drugs, are significantly dangerous and widely used.

Another theme related to crime is the availability of firearm in the United States. This paper explains the affiliation between availability of firearm and the rise in crime rate. What is more, there is an answer to the question, whether the Americans support the gun control, and what the 2nd amendment implies to the American citizens.

Chapter two describes not only the most common crimes, but also presents data on crimes committed. Crimes in this section are divided into violent crimes, property crimes and juvenile delinquency. Indeed, the analysis of crime rate may be a good tool to improve effective methods to reduce crime and delinquency and improve the quality of justice system and police.⁵

Crime prevention is necessary in any society because without it crime would escalate widely. Thus, chapter three covers methods and contribution to prevent crime by American justice system and police. Furthermore, this chapter also focuses on the role and position of those institutions in the American society.

John Hagan and Ruth D. Peterson consider the problem of inequality in the United States. Ronald D. Hunter and Mark L. Dantzker also discuss the problem of discrepancies in American society, while Hagan and Peterson mainly focus their attention on problems of the young, Black Americans. Many authors, for example Karen Boyle or Paul Mason, describe the influence, that media exert on the Americans.

Searching the information about the problem of a firearm, a major difference between the ways the right to possess a gun is understood by Americans and Europeans has been found. European writers discern the danger that may follow on from using gun, while American authors usually concentrate on potential benefits that accurate from the 2nd amendment.

Data presented in chapter two, have been acquired from two sources: the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). It should be added here, that the major sources of criminal data in America are the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the Bureau of Investigation and the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. BJS releases the following reports: Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, Criminal Victimization in the United States, Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions, Census of Jails and Survey of Jails and Survey of Jail Inmates, Parole in the United States, Capital Punishment, and the annual Expenditure and Employment Data for the Criminal Justice System. Such annual reports as Crime in the United States, Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted, and Hated Crimes are prepared by FBI.

⁴ Karen Boyle. *Media and Violence: Gendering the Debates*. London: Sage Publications, 2005.

⁵ Daniel Gilling. *Crime prevention: Theory, Policy and Politics*. London: Routledge, 1997, p. 19.

2. MAJOR CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

2. 1. Introduction

This chapter considers the realities surrounding the concept of crime and seeks to understand how changing social, political and economic conditions may cause violent acts.

Thinking about crime, people have deviant behavior in mind, that violates prevailing norms, especially, cultural criteria prescribing how humans ought to behave. Ronald D. Hunter and Mark L. Dantzker define crime in those words: “crime is that which a democratically selected legislative body has determined to be unlawful activity (commission) or inactivity (omission), for which there is a proscribed legal sanction”.⁶ This definition opens complex issues for understanding crime and deviance.

However, crime may be considered for many different ways. For example, taking of another’s life is called murder, whereas not everybody would agree that smoking marijuana or taking other drugs is causing death and should be illegal. Thus, crime is sometimes really difficult or even impossible to define or detect. According to Hunter and Dantzker, there are three distinguishable views of crime: ‘consensus’, ‘interactionist’ and ‘conflict’. As far as *consensus aspect* is concerned, crime is a behavior that is harmful and prejudicial to the majority of people. What is more, such violent and delinquent behaviors should be controlled and prohibited by the current criminal law. The *consensus* view contemplates the criminal law not only as a set of rules that disclose the norms of society, but also provides a social control function. From the *interactionist perspective* the law does not represent the will of a majority of society. Instead, the interactionists believe that the criminal law is affected by people who devolve the social power to change the law to reflect their interest. The *conflict* perspective accepts the criminal law as a tool to protect the power of the upper class at the expense of the poor. The main purpose of the conflict view is that society is divided into diverse social groups which are in conflict. In addition to this, the certain groups are capable of using their power to adapt the criminal law to thrive their interests⁷

2. 2. Social circumstances of violence

The Americans are proud of their freedom and equal opportunities for every citizen. However, does the American dream still exist? Statistics show that there is a huge rate of violent crime, high level of fear of crime among Americans and one of the largest prison population in the world.⁸ Contemporary level of imprisonment in America is six to ten times higher than in European and Scandinavian countries.⁹ Michael Torney describes crime problem in the United States by contributing those, quite frightening and alarming, facts:

“No other Western country still uses the death penalty except the United States: 3300 prisoners were on death row in 1997 and more people were executed – 76 - than in any year since 1955. No other Western country routinely sentences offenders to prison terms longer than two years except the United States: 39 percent of state prisoners in 1991 had been sentenced to ten years or longer. No other Western country on an average day holds more than 125 per 100,000 of its residents in jail or prison except the United

⁶ Ronald D. Hunter, Mark L. Dantzker, *Crime and Criminality, Causes and Consequences*. Monsey: Criminal Justice Press, 2005, p. 3.

⁷ Hunter, Dantzker, *Crime and Criminality*. p. 22-23.

⁸ Hagan, Peterson. *Crime and Inequality*. p. 1.

⁹ David Garland. *Mass Imprisonment: Social Causes and Consequences*. California: Sage Publications, 2001, p. 1.

States: in 1998 nearly 700 per 100,000 Americans were behind bars on a typical day. And, most importantly, in no other Western country except the United States are crime and punishment central issues in partisan politics.”¹⁰

Thus, what circumstances stimulate such a vast crime rate and are all people exposed to violent acts in the same extent?

There is a big social inequality and hierarchical differentiation in America, therefore, groups of persons are socially stratified into ‘superordinate and subordinate groups’. As a result, older, more affluent, and white males have got much more considerable chances to improve their social and economic position than members of subordinate group, that are young, poor, minorities, and women.¹¹ In addition to this, nowadays, stratification in American society is also stimulated not only by differences in income levels, but also by “the rise of gated housing communities, the increasing flight of the middle class from the public school system, and the technological divide in regard to computers and high technology.”¹²

The problem of social inequality and poverty in America, ‘the land of plenty’, is frightening and alarming. Poverty is the status of the person or family, whose income declines below a settled level, called the poverty level. It is surprising, that the discrepancy between the rich and the poor American citizens has become much wider than in other Western democratic countries. In addition to this, there is an essential difference between various groups in their level of poverty, for example, Blacks and Hispanics are a group with the lowest income.¹³

John Hagan and Ruth D. Peterson direct attention to the fact that race-related inequality is a formidable problem. Indeed, Hispanic Americans, American Indians and especially Black Americans, are committing the most common crimes, such as murder, assault, robbery, rape, burglary and larceny. In addition to this, arresting and imprisonment are common and frequently appearing burdens for young Black males, who additionally have problems with education and employment. Hagan and Peterson also point to those facts:

- “Overall, African-Americans account for one-third of all arrests and one-half of all incarcerations in the United States.
- About one-fifth of all 16- to 34-year-old black males are under justice system supervision.
- One-half of all African-American school drop-outs, and three-quarters of drop-outs who are between 25 and 34 years old, are under justice system supervision.
- Three-quarters of all black prison inmates have less than twelve years of schooling.
- African-American prisoners between 25 and 34 years of age report pre-prison incomes that average \$ 11,368, compared with \$ 20,175 for this age group in the general population.
- Homicide is the leading cause of death among African-American youth.”¹⁴

Needless to say, poor education, unemployment and economic disadvantage are main factors, which cause contact with crime and criminal justice system among young, Black

¹⁰ Michael H. Tonry. *The Handbook of Crime and Punishment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 1.

¹¹ Hagan, Peterson. *Crime and Inequality*. p. 2.

¹² Garland. *Mass Imprisonment*. p.10.

¹³ Parviz Saney, *Crime and Culture in America*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986, p. 62-63.

¹⁴ Hagan, Peterson. *Crime and Inequality*. p. 15-16.

Americans. Hagan and Peterson present two explanations to those aspects. In the first place, they direct the attention to the fact that discrimination, race segregation and poverty may reveal not only educational and employment difficulties but also delinquent and criminal behavior. Secondly, it is possible that young black males experience more frequent arrests, prosecutions and punishment caused by discrimination and prejudice.¹⁵ Furthermore, racial stereotypes exert influence on many other social aspects, for example, “almost half the Americans surveyed recently believed that store owners should be able to refuse to let young African Americans enter their stores at night.”¹⁶ It should be added here that those real life realities awaken distrust to the justice system among American society, which will be explained in details in chapter three.

As one of the several influences on crime, Hunter and Dantzker also suggest geographical differences. They claim that crime and violent acts in such places as large urban areas are more frequent than in rural and suburban ones¹⁷, what is demonstrated in Table 1. below.

Table 1. Crimes and Crime Rates by Type and Area in 2003*

Type of crime	United States		Metropoli-tan areas		Other cities		Rural areas	
	Total	Rate	Total	Rate	Total	Rate	Total	Rate
Violent crime	1,381	475	1,244	517	76	385	61	202
Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter	17	6	15	6	1	4	1	4
Forcible rape	93	32	79	33	8	38	7	23
Robbery	413	142	397	165	12	60	5	16
Aggravated assault	853	295	754	313	56	283	48	159
Property crime	10,436	3,588	9,108	3,783	819	4,148	508	1,677
Burglary	2,153	741	1,824	758	161	816	168	555
Larceny-theft	7,022	2,415	6,102	2,534	619	3,132	301	994
Motor vehicle theft	1,260	433	1,182	491	39	200	39	129

Source: U.S Federal Bureau of Investigation (quoted in U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Washington DC, 2006).

* Thousands represent millions (e.g. 1,381 represents 1,381,000), except rate, which is per 100,000 population.

Table 1. presents diverse types of crime in metropolitan areas and rural areas in year 2003. This table clearly shows, that in rural areas crime rate was lower than in urban ones. It is also notable here, that violent crime rate was higher in metropolitan areas (that is 517 per 100,000 population) than crime rate in the whole country (475 per 100,000 population). Additionally, violent crime rate in other cities (385 per 100,000 population) was higher than in rural areas (202 per 100.000 population). The most common violent crime in metropolitan areas in 2003 was aggravated assault, which crime rate was 313 per 100,000 population. The

¹⁵ Hagan, Peterson. *Crime and Inequality*. p. 17.

¹⁶ Tonry. *The Handbook of Crime and Punishment*. p. 38.

¹⁷ Hunter, Dantzker, *Crime and Criminality*. p. 38.

highest property crime rate (4,148 per 100,000 population) was in other cities. There was higher crime rate in metropolitan areas (3,783 per 100,000 population) than in the United States (3,588 per 100,000 population). And similarly to violent crimes, the lowest property crime rate was in rural areas (1,677 per 100,000). The most common property crime was a larceny-theft. Indeed, those statistics suggest that such factors as poverty and economic instability, inequality, racial conflict, drug use and overcrowding (that exist in large urban areas) exert a strong influence on delinquent behavior and crime rate.

In addition, Hagan and Peterson add historical factors, as the ones, which have imposed a significant impact upon minorities, especially African-Americans. During the times of slavery, which was common especially in the South, torture, lynching by white mobs and very often applied by white juries death penalty, were all very frequent and popular. Regardless of the fact that civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s brought some important changes in American society, black people are still under the strong impact of racial inequality.¹⁸

2. 3. Cultural background of violence

Mass media are not only a developing and spreading sector of economy in every advanced and well developed country, but also one of the main aspects which create social and cultural values and believes. The main purpose of all means of media have always been how to attract audience and readers. Therefore, media construct and create the world for people in such terms as '*normal versus deviant, or militant versus moderate*'. Media are often contemplated to be people's window to the world. This statement means, that modern communication technology is the main source of information about the world.¹⁹

As consumers, every day, we are exposed to colorful covers of newspapers and magazines, which are not only full of absorbing, colorful and piquant headlines, but also brutal and bloody stories about crime. They are designed to shock, interest and frighten. Moreover, we are surrounded by drastic and gory movies as well as video and computer games, which give the receivers an opportunity to take part in violent crime acts, for example in a street fight. In addition to this, modern and fashionable music, such as rap or hip-hop, reflects crime and violence not only in lyrics but also in a street gang style, appropriated by artists. Internet remains contaminated with various forums for people related to crime, where many things connected with violence may be found. What is more, a huge number of television programs appear to be variations on a central theme, that is crime. Those are different reality shows, programs about detective stories or police work. Up to a point, mass media are brimming over with topics related to crime, not to mention the fact that the audience is fascinated with this topic. Thus, are means of media able to manipulate the audience and exert influence on its behavior and way of thinking? What relationships are there between crime, deviance and mass media?²⁰

Broadly speaking, pressure which media apply on audience is tremendous. For example, some of writers claim that the killers in Columbine High School massacre^{inf} would take the inspiration from Marilyn Manson's music or The Matrix.²¹ The influence that media exert on the audience is subdivided by Paul Mason into two categories. First, Mason tells about the

¹⁸ Hagan, Peterson. *Crime and Inequality*. p. 17.

¹⁹ B. McMair. *News and Journalism in the UK*. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 15- 21.

²⁰ Yvonne Jewkes. *Media and Crime*. London: Sage Publication, 2004, p. 3.

^{inf} During the Columbian massacre, on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, two boys opened fire and killed 13 people and wounded 23 others before killing themselves.

²¹ Karen Boyle. *Media and Violence*. p. 2.

concern, that “media cause deviant behavior in society”. It is firmly believed that some news, films or programs from mass media may create criminal behavior. It means, that children, who watch vicious and cruel films and television programs are more likely to be aggressive and belligerent. Secondly, he brings the attention to the fact, that media may be a form of social control. He explains it in those words: “amplification of deviance by media, caused moral panics, which in turn would lead to more state control in the form of increased criminal justice measures”.²²

Mass media have also always been highly attracted by crime stories and television relations from a courtroom. In effect, there is a presence of television cameras in courts in the United States, while in many other countries (for example Canada), it is forbidden. What is more, there are also repeats of the most important and interesting trials on television. This brings the attention to the fact, that Americans are extremely interested in the topic of crime.²³

However, media is not the only one cultural aspect causing violence and deviancy. Drugs and alcohol are also very important factors that should be noted for causing crime and violent behavior.

Attitudes among society towards drugs and alcohol are remarkably different than in the past. For instance, in the eighteen and nineteenth century, alcohol use was common and widespread. Consumption of alcohol was considered as something normal and this act was not punishable and forbidden, evening in public places or in the street. Nowadays, however, such practices are judged as problematic and appropriate for regulation by the criminal justice system. Similarly, drug use was average, frequent and popular even among housewives in the late 19th century. Because of very little concern and knowledge about consequences exerted from taking drugs, people openly and legally were using drugs such as marijuana, heroin and cocaine.²⁴

2. 4. Availability of firearms

Availability of firearms in America have been mentioned as a main theme by many criminologists. However, Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins convince that, American criminologists’ concern about firearms seems to be slightly different from foreign criminologists. Non-American criminologist talking about violence and extremely high crime rate in the United States, indicates gun ownership and its use as a major and basic factor. Americans very often focus on this subject, however, they concentrate the attention on many other aspects, such as poverty, unemployment, racial prejudice, and many others. They do not push the availability of firearms to a position of central importance.²⁵

2nd amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which says: “a well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed”, gives the Americans the right to possess a gun. There are opponents of those rights, nonetheless, most American citizens ally themselves with 2nd amendment. In the United States it is popularly believed that, “an unarmed citizenry is nothing more than sitting

²² Paul Mason. *Criminal Visions: Media Representations of Crime and Justice*. Devon: Willan Publishing, 2003, p. 5-7.

²³ Tonry. *The Handbook of Crime and Punishment*. p. 32.

²⁴ Robert M. Regoli, John D. Hewitt. *Exploring Criminal Justice*. Sudbury: Jones & Bartlett Publishers, 2007, p. 7-8.

²⁵ Franklin E. Zimring, Gordon Hawkins. *Crime is Not the Problem: Lethal Violence in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 106.

ducks for criminals”²⁶. It means that people deserve the right to protect themselves from delinquency. In addition to this, opponents of gun control claim that, if criminals obeyed the law, that would not make them criminals! According to this statement, strict gun control has got no sense, because criminals would find another way to commit crime and lethal violence or they would still use a firearm.

Conversely, it is often alleged that firearm is the most dangerous and destructive kind of weapon, which used by ordinary citizens, in most cases leads to death. In fact, some murder situations ensue from strong irritation and exasperation, and are rather unpremeditated and spontaneous than planned. In addition to this, a lot of cases of lethal violence is domestic. Thus, availability of a firearm causes rise of crime rate and should be forbidden and controlled.²⁷

The main purpose of the second amendment is to give people right to self-defense. At the same time, a firearm is a highly destructive device, that may be used for committing crime. It is worth considering here, whether American citizens own a gun for protection and how many of them have used it against offenders. With reference to data from the National Crime Victimization Survey²⁸, there are about 68,000 defensive uses of guns every year. This statistic includes only such crimes as assault and robbery, but by adding here household burglary, the number rises to about 80,000 to 82,000 uses annually.

The exact number of firearms in the United States is unknown. Nearly a half of American households possess firearms. However, gun is used in many purposes, for example hunting or target shooting. Statistics show, that under 30 percent of gun owners mention self-defense as a major reason for firearm ownership.²⁹

American society is concerned about the necessity of gun control. However, the majority of people is against strong control, for example, bans on possession of the most common types of gun. Nevertheless, moderate laws such as waiting periods, registration, purchase permits, owner licenses or carry permits have all received an expression of support from most of society.³⁰

Considering all causes of violent acts and crime, one may come to conclusion, that problem of crime in the United States is immense and seems to be particularly relevant to minorities.

3. FIGURE AND CLASSIFICATION OF THE MOST COMMON CRIMES

3. 1. Introduction

The main purpose of the second chapter is to classify and describe the most common crimes, which occur in the United States. This part also to presents data on crimes committed, victims of those crimes, and arrests. Crimes are divided into three main categories: juvenile delinquency, violent crimes and property crimes. Due to the many violent and brutal acts committed by young people, that have recently flown to the public, juvenile delinquency should be discussed separately.

²⁶ *Consent of the Governed* <http://yedies.blogspot.com/2007/09/gun-control-failure-in-preventing-crime.html>

²⁷ Ronald V. Clarke, Marcus Felson. *Routine Activity and Rational Choice*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publisher, 1993, p. 18.

²⁸ Armed Resistance to Crime: The Prevalence and Nature of Self-Defense with a Gun. <http://www.guncite.com/gcdgklec.html>

²⁹ *ibidem*

³⁰ Kleck. *Point Blank*. p. 368-369.

3. 2. Juvenile Delinquency

There are about seventy-three million children in the United States, what makes about 25 percent of the American population. It is popularly believed, that children are innocent and naturally good and pure. However, nowadays children's attitude to the world and life has been moderately changed. Those changes in children behavior and way of thinking have been widely researched recently, after some drastic incidents, which shocked and horrified not only the American society, but also the whole world. Some of the examples of brutal and criminal acts committed by young people are described below.

On October 11, 2007, a 14-year-old boy was taken into custody, after police found a number of weapons in his house in Plymouth Township near Philadelphia. Deputy Chief Joe Lawrence said, that police found 'a 9mm rifle with a laser scope and dozens of air guns, an operational hand grenade, three other hand grenades in the process of construction, bomb-making equipment, manuals and 30 powered weapons that fire BBs'. District Attorney Bruce Castor added, that police found not only great number of weapons, but also hand-painted Nazi flag and a video about the Columbine massacre. Thus, he was suspected of planning the same shootings at Pennsylvanian high school.³¹

In West Palm Beach, Florida, a 14-year-old boy, Nathaniel Brazill, killed his arts teacher at Lake Worth Community Middle School. On the final day of classes of the 2000 school year, he brought the .25-caliber handgun, pulled it out of his bag and pointed at his teacher, who would not let him speak to two girls during the classes. He was finally sentenced to 28 years in prison.³²

Those examples are only a few from a surprisingly huge number of such cases. For the above mentioned accidents, what adverse circumstances are able to change young, innocent people into beasts? What kind of punishment should be inflicted on them. Should youngsters be treated as adults?

Juvenile delinquency has begun in the mid 1980s, and has been rising rapidly. Since then, the American society was gripped by deep fear. It led to implementation of many changes in policy and law by federal, state and local government. Many programs and institutions to prevent delinquency and violence have been established and adjusted. For example, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Education, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation have sponsored a National Research Council panel. Its aim was to check the situation in preventing and controlling juvenile crime. Moreover, data were checked and analyzed, to monitor and control crime rate, and to observe and diagnose impacts exerted on youngsters.³³

Having been acquainted with the stated research results, the National Research Council reached several conclusions. They mainly concerned the trends and reasons for breaking the law by adolescents:

- "Most juveniles break laws, such as shoplifting or minor vandalism, but only a small proportion commits serious crimes. In 1998, only 4 percent of juvenile arrests

³¹ *Police: Pennsylvania boy planned 'Columbine' event at high school.*

<http://edition.cnn.com/2007/US/10/11/student.arsenal/index.html#cnSTCText>

³² *Teen who killed teacher sentenced to 28 years in prison.*

<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/LAW/07/27/brazill.sentencing/index.html>

³³ Joan McCord, Cathy Spatz Widom, Nancy A. Crowell. *Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice*. Washington DC: National Academy Press, 2001, p. 1.

were for the violent crimes of homicide, rape, robbery, or aggravated assault and less than one-tenth of one percent of juvenile arrests were for homicide.

- There was, however, a surge in serious juvenile crime rates beginning in the late 1980s through the early 1990s. The juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes began decreasing in 1994 almost as rapidly as it had increased, and by 1999, was back to the rate of late 1980s.”³⁴

The National Research Council not only illustrates the sudden rise and fall in juvenile violent crime rates in the United States, which also occurred among youth and adults in other countries, but also explains, that although a number of theories have been put forth, the causes remains uncertain and difficult to specify . It also adds, that most of increase in youth homicides in the United States from 1987 to 1993 involved homicides committed with firearms.³⁵

The biggest group of juveniles arrested for crimes committed in the United States are Blacks. Moreover, while not the major focus of this report’s discussion of race and crime, bias in the wider society, which distributes opportunities and resources to youth as they grow up, contributes to the risks of minority youth involvement in the juvenile justice system.³⁶

As it has been pointed out, number of arrests for violent crimes was rising rapidly since 1980 till middle 1990s, than it began decreasing. Those evidences concerning not only violent crimes, such as murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault or usage of weapon, but also drug abuse and possession, have been clearly illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Juvenile Arrests for Selected Offenses: 1980 to 2003.

Offense	1980	1990	1995	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<i>Number of contributing agencies</i>	8,178	10,765	10,037	9,472	9,589	9,502	9,904	10,281	10,946	11,368
<i>Population covered (1,000)</i>	169,439	204,543	206,762	194,925	194,612	195,324	204,965	215,380	220,157	219,562
NUMBER										
Violent crime, total	77,220	97,103	123,131	100,273	90,201	81,715	78,450	78,443	71,059	69,060
Murder	1,475	2,661	2,812	1,887	1,587	1,131	1,027	1,069	1,014	960
Forcible rape	3,668	4,971	4,556	4,127	3,988	3,544	3,402	3,504	3,553	3,195
Robbery	38,529	34,944	47,240	36,419	29,989	26,125	24,206	23,408	19,491	18,950
Aggravated assault	33,548	54,527	68,523	57,840	54,637	50,915	49,815	50,462	47,001	45,955
Weapon law violations	21,203	33,123	46,506	39,358	34,122	31,307	28,514	29,290	26,786	29,512
Drug abuse total	86,685	66,300	149,236	155,444	148,066	138,774	146,594	146,758	133,557	134,746
Sale and manufacturing	13,004	24,575	34,077	30,761	29,312	26,134	26,432	24,649	22,086	21,987
Heroin/cocaine	1,318	17,511	19,187	15,855	15,094	12,686	11,000	10,535	8,832	7,848
Marijuana	8,876	4,372	10,682	11,208	10,808	10,770	11,792	10,552	9,962	10,463
Synthetic										

³⁴ McCord, Spatz Widom. *Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice*. p. 2-3.

³⁵ ibidem

³⁶ ibidem

Offense	1980	1990	1995	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
narcotics	465	346	701	671	813	722	945	911	974	1,043
Dangerous non-narcotic drugs	2,345	2,346	3,507	3,027	2,597	1,956	2,695	2,651	2,318	2,633
Possession	73,681	41,725	115,159	124,683	118,754	112,640	120,432	122,109	111,471	112,759
Heroin/ cocaine	2,614	15,194	21,253	18,328	16,278	13,445	12,586	11,734	10,969	9,932
Marijuana	64,465	20,940	82,025	94,046	91,467	89,523	95,962	97,088	85,769	87,909
Synthetic narcotics	1,524	1,155	2,047	1,987	1,916	1,581	2,052	2,237	2,805	2,872
Dangerous non-narcotic drugs	5,078	4,436	9,844	10,322	9,093	8,091	9,832	11,050	11,928	12,046

Source: U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States*, annual (quoted in U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Washington DC, 2006).

Table 2. uncovers juvenile arrests for common crimes, such as violent acts, weapon law violations, and selected drug abuse and possession. The juvenile offender is classified by most states and FBI as a person under 18 years old, who committed a crime³⁷. It is notable here, that arrest rate for violent crimes was increasing from 1980s to 1995. Then, it started to decrease, and nowadays it is comparable with the year 1980. Number of arrests for possessing and using drugs was the lowest in 1980 and was rising till 1997. Since then, it is quite stable, so drugs are still very popular among adolescents. The most frequently used and possessed drug in year 2003 was Marijuana.

Speaking of the factors causing delinquency, it is extremely difficult to specify who becomes a criminal. However, researches and attempts to perceive those influences may lead to understand which children are exposed to the biggest danger of becoming delinquent.³⁸

Thus, not only family patterns exert impact on children, but also peers and a neighborhood. Resent researches reveal that parental neglect may cause serious problems with children's development. At first, the neglected child may have got a deficient language, that may cause later difficulties at school, pending the results of delinquent behavior. In addition to this, if children are exposed to seeing quarrels and violent acts in their families, they are more likely to copy those behaviors in future.

What is more, it is extremely important, how parents treat their children. Many researches have proved, that children from happy, quiet, emotionally warm and full of love households do not become criminals as often as children from houses full of strict rules, quarrels and misunderstanding.³⁹

Peer pressure and environment are also very important and dangerous factors, especially in the age of adolescence. Youngsters, who spend time with peers involved into crime, very often make an example of them. If children live in poor areas, particularly jobless, they think they are left with no alternative but to commit crime.⁴⁰

³⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. *Statistical Abstract of the United States:2006*. Washington, DC, p. 193.

³⁸ McCord, Spatz Widom. *Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice*. p. 3.

³⁹ McCord, Spatz Widom. *Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice*. p. 28.

⁴⁰ McCord, Spatz Widom. *Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice*. p. 6.

3. 3. Violent crimes

Violent crimes – as defined by Hunter and Dantzker, are viewed as “any type of [...] an action that causes some form of bodily injury or death to another”⁴¹

In general, a violent crime is a crime in which the offender uses or threatens to use violent force upon the victim. Murder is the most serious and dreadful crime, however, it is certainly not the only one. Sexual assault is another well known violent crime, which includes sexual abuse of children, the elderly, the mentally incompetent, the physically challenged, acts of serial rapists, pedophiles, and sexual sadists. This kind of crime very often ends with death. Another violent crime is assault, that is “any unwanted, intentional contact made by one person against another”. When robbery is compared to murder or assault, it seems not to be a violent crime. Alternatively, “the act of robbery requires the physical taking of property from another by threat of or by use of force”, neither, it is done in economic purpose. For this reason, it is classified as a violent crime.⁴²

It is worth asking a question, who might be exposed to violent acts the most? At first, it should be explained, that “a victimization, basic measure of the occurrence of crime, is a specific criminal act as it affects a single victim. The number of victimizations is determined by the number of victims of such acts. Victimization counts serve as key elements in computing rates of victimization. For crimes against persons, the rates are based on the total number of individuals aged 12 and over or on a portion of that population sharing a particular characteristic or set of traits. As general indicators of the danger of having been victimized during the reference period, the rates are not sufficiently refined to represent true measures of risk for specific individuals or households”.⁴³ Table 3. clearly states victimization rates by gender, age, race and household income.

Table 3. Victimization Rates by Type of Violent Crime and Characteristic of the Victim: 2003.

Characteristic of the victim	All crimes	Crimes of violence						Personal theft
		Total	Rape/ sexual assault	Robbery	Assault			
					Total	Aggravated	Simple	
Total	23.3	22.6	0.8	2.5	19.3	4.6	14.6	0.8
Male	26.7	26.3	0.2	3.2	23.0	5.9	17.1	0.4
Female	20.2	19.0	1.5	1.9	15.7	3.3	12.4	1.1
12 to 15 years old	53.1	51.6	1.2	5.2	45.3	8.9	36.4	1.5
16 to 19 years old	54.4	53.0	1.3	5.1	46.6	11.9	34.7	1.4
20 to 24 years old	45.0	43.3	1.7	6.4	35.3	9.8	25.5	1.6
25 to 34 years old	27.4	26.4	1.6	2.5	22.3	6.0	16.3	1.0
35 to 49 years old	19.0	18.5	0.6	1.7	16.1	3.8	12.3	0.5
50 to 64 years old	10.5	10.3	0.4	1.4	8.5	1.6	7.0	0.3
65 and over	2.5	2.0	0.1	0.7	1.2	0.1	1.1	0.5
White	22.1	21.5	0.8	1.9	18.8	4.2	14.7	0.6
Black	30.7	29.1	0.8	5.9	22.3	6.0	16.3	1.7
Other	16.9	16.0	0.2	3.4	12.4	5.4	7.0	0.9
Hispanic	25.3	24.2	0.4	3.1	20.8	4.6	16.1	1.1
Non-Hispanic	23.0	22.3	0.9	2.4	19.0	4.6	14.4	0.7
Household								

⁴¹ Hunter, Dantzker, *Crime and Criminality*. p. 11.

⁴² ibidem

⁴³ U.S. Census Bureau. *Statistical Abstract of the United States:2006*. Washington, DC, p. 192.

income:	51.1	49.9	1.6	9.0	39.3	10.8	28.5	1.2
Less than \$7,500	31.9	30.8	1.8	4.0	25.3	7.9	17.0	1.1
\$7,500-\$14,999	27.0	26.3	0.8	4.0	21.5	4.5	17.0	0.7
\$15,000-\$24,999	25.8	24.9	0.9	2.2	21.8	5.0	16.9	0.8
\$25,000-\$34,999	22.0	21.4	0.9	2.1	18.3	4.8	13.5	0.7
\$35,000-\$49,999	23.3	22.9	0.5	2.0	20.4	5.2	15.2	0.5
\$50,000-\$74,999	18.5	17.5	0.5	1.7	15.4	2.7	12.6	1.0
\$75,000 or more								

Source: U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Criminal Victimization*, annual; and series NCJ-199994 (quoted in U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Washington DC, 2006).

As it is shown in Table 3., women are less disposed on violent crime than men. Youngsters between 16 to 24 years old are potentially most often liable to be victims of violent crime. However, the crime rate of elderly people is the lowest, and makes 2.0. No other race is as much exposed on violent crime as the black people. Their victimization rate of violent crimes is 29.1. What is more, if household income is bigger, the victimization rate is lower. One disadvantage of households with a low income is the fact, that they are situated in poor and more dangerous areas. As a result, they are much more exposed on violent acts. Another disadvantage is, that such houses are not as equipped with security systems as households with higher income, so they are less safer.

2. 4. Property crimes

According to Hunter and Dantzker, “property crimes are any crimes in which one person has [...] deprived another person of his or her right to that property by either destroying or taking the property.”⁴⁴ It does not involve force or threat of force against victims.

Household and personal larceny, burglary and motor vehicle theft, as well as robbery, is measured by National Crime Victimization Survey, which includes both: offenses reported to the police and those not reported.⁴⁵

Table 4. Robbery and Property Crime by Type and Selected Characteristic: 1990to 2003.

Characteristic of offenses	Number of offenses (1,000)				Rate per 100,000 inhabitants			
	1990	2000	2002	2003	1990	2000	2002	2003
Robbery, total	639	408	421	413	256.3	1.449	146.1	142.2
Type of crime:								
Street or highway	359	188	180	179	144.2	66.7	62.5	61.7
Commercial house	73	57	61	60	29.5	20.1	21.3	20.8
Gas station	18	12	11	11	7.1	4.1	3.9	3.9
Convenience store	39	26	27	26	15.6	9.3	9.4	8.9
Residence	62	50	57	57	25.1	17.7	19.7	19.5
Bank	9	9	10	10	3.8	3.1	3.4	3.3
Weapon used:								
Firearm	234	161	173	174	94.1	57.0	60.1	59.7
Knife or cutting instrument	76	36	37	36	30.7	12.8	12.8	12.5
Other dangerous weapon	61	53	44	39	24.5	18.9	15.2	13.4

⁴⁴ Hunter, Dantzker, *Crime and Criminality*. p. 12.

⁴⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. *Statistical Abstract of the United States:2006*. Washington, DC, p. 192.

Strong-arm	268	159	167	164	107.7	56.4	57.9	56.5
Burglary, total	3,074	2,050	2,151	2,153	1,232.	728.4	747.0	740.5
Forcible entry	2,150	1,297	1,346	1,339	2	460.7	467.3	460.6
Unlawful entry	678	615	662	677	864.5	218.7	229.7	232.7
Attempted forcible entry	245	138	144	137	272.8	49.0	50.1	47.2
Residence	2,033	1,335	1,416	1,418	98.7	474.3	491.6	487.4
Non-residence	1,041	715	736	736	817.5	254.1	255.5	253.1
Occurred during the night	1,135	699	731	719	418.5	248.3	253.7	247.2
Occurred during the day	1,151	836	902	889	456.4	297.2	313.4	305.8
Larceny-theft, total	7,946	6,972	7,057	7,022	462.8	2,477.	2,450.	2,414.
Pocket picking	81	36	32	32	3,185.	3	7	5
Purse snatching	82	37	39	42	1	12.7	11.3	11.0
Shoplifting	1,291	959	986	1,013	32.4	13.2	13.5	14.5
From motor vehicles	1,744	1,754	1,867	1,856	32.8	340.7	342.5	348.2
Motor vehicle accessories	1,185	677	756	781	519.1	623.3	648.3	638.3
Bicycles	443	312	277	272	701.3	240.6	262.6	268.5
From buildings	1,118	914	884	868	476.3	110.9	96.2	93.4
From coin-operated machines	63	46	52	52	178.2	324.6	306.9	298.5
Other	1,940	2,232	2,163	2,106	449.4	16.2	18.2	18.0
Motor vehicles, total	1,636	1,160	1,247	1,260	25.4	793.0	751.2	724.2
Automobiles	1,304	877	920	927	780.0	412.2	432.9	433.4
Trucks and buses	238	209	230	229	655.8	311.5	319.4	318.7
					524.3	74.1	79.9	78.9
					95.5			

Source: U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Population-at-Risk Rates and Selected Crime Indicators*, annual (quoted in U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Washington DC, 2006).

Table 4. (presented below) exposes, that the rate of all property crimes was the highest in 1990. For example, the crime rate for burglary was 1,232.2 per 100,000 inhabitants, while ten years later, in 2000, was the lowest and amounted 728.4. Then it rose slightly. The most frequently, burglary acts happen during the day. Larceny-theft rate has decreased from 3,185.1 in 1990, to 2,414.5 in year 2003. The most frequent larceny-theft crime is a theft from motor vehicles. Shoplifting, larceny-theft of motor vehicles accessories and theft from buildings are another common and extremely frequent property crimes.

4. WAYS OF PREVENTING CRIME

4. 1. Introduction

While American society is facing alarmingly high crime rate, crime prevention seems to be the central problem confronting politicians and media. It should be stated here, that such a high number of homicides as in American cities is not observed nowhere else in the world. For example, for the year 1989-90 the number of violent deaths among youngsters between 15 and 24 was 73 times bigger than their counterparts in Austria, 44 times bigger than in Japan, and 24 times bigger than in Britain. It means, that for young African-American males living in city areas, homicide is the most common cause of death.⁴⁶

Hence, what is the role of the police and American justice system to solve a problem of crime? Moreover, what should be done to reduce social fear of crime and improve community safety?

⁴⁶ Kevin Stenson, David Cowell. *The Politics of Crime Control*. London: Sage Publications, 1991, p. 1.

4. 2. The Criminal Justice System

According to Robert M. Regoli and John D. Hewitt, “The criminal justice system defines the rules that govern social interactions, enforces the standards of conduct necessary to protect individuals and the community, and establishes the punishment for violating those rules in an effort to help people live together in peace and unity.”⁴⁷ In other words, in the criminal justice system includes different agencies and procedures, which aim is to investigate criminal conduct, make arrests, gather evidence, bring charges against alleged offenders, conduct trials, impose sentences, and carry out punishments to battle the problem of crime.

The structure of the criminal justice system is divided into three principal components: law enforcement, courts and corrections. Those major components function independently across federal, state and local levels, what is illustrated in table 5 below.

Table 5. Criminal Justice System Agencies.

	Federal	State	Local
Low enforcement	Federal Bureau of Investigation Drug Enforcement Administration Secret Service U.S. Marshals	State police Highway patrol State bureau of narcotics State fish and game agency	Municipal police County police Town constables
Courts	U.S. Supreme court U.S. Courts of Appeal U.S. District Courts Federal Magistrates Courts	State supreme court State court of appeals	Criminal court City or town court Justice of the Peace court Traffic Juvenile
Corrections	Federal Bureau of Prisons Federal probation Federal parole	State department of corrections State parole	County jail City lock-up County probation Community corrections

Source: Robert M. Regoli, John D. Hewitt. *Exploring Criminal Justice*. Sudbury: Jones & Bartlett Publishers, 2007, p. 14.

- Federal Level – the Federal criminal code defines federal crimes. Dozens of federal government law enforcement agencies enforce laws, such as the FBI and the Drug Enforcement Administration. The federal government also has a system of courts, including District Courts, Courts of Appeals, and the U.S. Supreme Court, as well as a system of corrections, including the Federal Bureau of Prisons and federal probation and parole agencies.
- State Level – each state has a criminal code that defines state crimes and provides statutes setting punishments for offenders. Every state also has its own system of law enforcement, courts, and corrections for both adults and juvenile offenders.

⁴⁷ Regoli, Hewitt. *Exploring Criminal Justice*. p. 6-7.

- Local Level – counties and cities have sheriff’s departments and municipal police agencies, city lock-ups and county jails, community corrections programs, and city and county criminal courts, Justice of the Peace courts, and town courts.⁴⁸

It should be added here, that federal, state and local levels are closely interrelated and work together properly. What is more, a high level of cooperation among their officials is considered extremely important.⁴⁹

The role of the criminal justice is to protect and enforce law and order within citizens, control crime, apprehend offenders, determine guilty or innocents, sentence the guilty people, and to protect constitutional rights.⁵⁰ However, the concern of the American society about criminal justice system is extremely negative. Most people claim, that the system is too lenient and indulgent. The most popular opinion among Americans, asked in a 1995 pool to identify the cause of increased crime rates, was “leniency on the part of the courts and the correctional system”.⁵¹

4. 3. The Role of the Police

Many people claim, that the main purpose of the police is to keep society safe. Police officers are the first institution, which responses to calling for help. They investigate crimes, make arrests, patrol the streets or manage the traffic.⁵²

Alarming high crime rate of all types indicate the need for crime prevention. However, nowadays, the role of the police is not only to detect and investigate crime, but also to prevent it. Thus, police have made many important steps toward prevention by for instance, supporting Neighborhood Watch and helping it to cover over four million households, supporting adult and youth Crime Prevention Panels. What is more, police forces have organized major youth activity programs during the school holidays, some involving up to 20,000 young people, and most forces have improved liaison between schools.⁵³

Television dramas, comic strips, and newspapers articles have created an image of a police as crime-fighters doing a dangerous job, that requires them to outshoot, out punch and outwit dangerous criminals. However, for most American police officers, that myth has got a little correspondence between reality. In a major metropolitan areas, where the highest crime rate appears, half of the officers usually do not make a felony arrest during a year.⁵⁴

5. CONCLUSIONS

All things considered, the scale of the problem of crime in the United States is truly serious and enormous. Additionally, every day media are brimming with brutal and bloody scenes and descriptions. Thus, the problem of crime is becoming a common concern to the American society. According to Gallup’s annual Crime pool, the public perceptions of crime problem were much more optimistic a few years ago than they are today. Current researches,

⁴⁸ Regoli, Hewitt. *Exploring Criminal Justice*. p. 13.

⁴⁹ Philip P Purpura. *Criminal Justice: An Introduction*. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1997, p. 83.

⁵⁰ ibidem

⁵¹ Tonry. *The Handbook of Crime and Punishment*. p. 33.

⁵² Regoli, Hewitt. *Exploring Criminal Justice*. p. 113.

⁵³ Stenson, Cowell. *The Politics of Crime Control*. p. 73.

⁵⁴ *The nature of Police Work*. <http://www.cliffsnotes.com/WileyCDA/CliffsReviewTopic/The-Nature-of-Police-Work.topicArticleId-10065,articleId-9948.html>

that have been conducted on October 22, 2007⁵⁵, demonstrate how much negative outlook about crime the Americans have. The analysis of the pool uncover, that about half of the society claims, that crime has risen in their local areas. In addition to this, about 7 in 10 people estimate, that crime has increased nationally. Those facts reveal, that there is a high level of fear of crime among American citizens.

There are several aspects causing crime, that were examined in chapter one. Firstly, American society is facing a high social and racial inequality, which leads to increase in crime rate. Racial discrepancy is evidently visible in arresting and sentencing rate. Those circumstances are conceivably reflected in higher crime rate among African Americans. Statistics show, that nonwhites are more likely to be arrested and incarcerated than whites. In addition to this, nonwhite citizens receive longer sentences. Apart from this, historical facts show, that black inmates have been much more often sentenced to death than whites.⁵⁶

Secondly, another issues of inequality, such as poverty, unemployment, poor education, may also cause delinquent and violent behavior. Additionally, African Americans are more often afflicted with those discrepancies.⁵⁷

Geographical differences may also influence crime rate. Statistics show, that criminal behavior is more likely to appear in metropolitan and highly urbanized areas, than in rural ones.⁵⁸

Chapter one reveals also cultural aspects that cause extremely high crime rate in America. Mass media, one of the stimulus, create social and cultural values and believes. They not only report, but also shape people's view of the world in often insidious way. The influence of media remains a contentious issue. Every time a crime or violent act is committed, there are those who blame the effects of the media. As a example, cinema, television, video and rock music have been indicated as a major stimulus of the massacre at Columbine High School.⁵⁹ Moreover, drugs and alcohol are also extremely important factors causing increase in crime rate.⁶⁰

Compared with other developed nations, the United States is unique in its high rates of both, gun ownership and murder. Although widespread gun ownership does not have much effect on the overall crime rate, gun use makes criminal violence more lethal and has unique capacity to terrorize the public. Thus gun policing in the United States is necessary to reduce the flow of guns to the highest-risk groups and to preserve access for most people.⁶¹

The most common crimes in United States are violent crimes, property crimes and juvenile delinquency. Statistics reveal, that the crime rate of almost all kinds of crime was increasing since 1980s till 1995. Since that time, the crime rate has been slightly decreasing. The analysis of crime rate and factors that may cause rise of it, could be an effective and useful technique for finding functional methods to reduce crime and delinquency and to improve the quality of justice system.⁶²

⁵⁵ *Perceptions of Crime Problem Remain Curiously Negative.*

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/102262/Perceptions-Crime-Problem-Remain-Curiously-Negative.aspx>

⁵⁶ Marvin D. Free. *African Americans and the Criminal Justice System.* New York: Garland Publishing, 1996, p. 9-11.

⁵⁷ Hagan, Peterson. *Crime and Inequality.* p. 15-17.

⁵⁸ Hunter, Dantzker, *Crime and Criminality.* p. 38.

⁵⁹ Martin Barker, Julian Petley. *III Effects: The Media/ Violence Debate.* London and New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 27-31.

⁶⁰ Regoli, Hewitt. *Exploring Criminal Justice.* p. 113.

⁶¹ Jens Ludwig, Philips J. Cook. *Evaluating Gun Policy: Effects on Crime and Violence.* Brookings Washington, D.C: Institution Press, 2003, p. 41-53.

⁶² Gilling. *Crime prevention.* p. 19.

The main purposes of criminal justice system and the police is to guarantee public safety, and respond to crime by making arrests, gathering evidence, imposing sentences, and carrying out punishments.⁶³

The United States become the world leader in incarceration. Nowadays, more than 2 million American citizens are locked in prisons and jails – this is a rate unsurpassed anywhere else in the world. The United States is considered as a leader in the highest rates of homicide, assault, rape and robbery among modern democratic nations. This high level of crime and violence is dangerous to American society and has recently become a major problem confronted by American authorities.⁶⁴

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⁶³ Regoli, Hewitt. *Exploring Criminal Justice*. p . 6-7.

⁶⁴ Kelvin Stenson, David Cowell. *The Politics of Crime Control*. London: Sage Publications, 1991, p. 22-36.

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