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OJJDP Update on Statistics

Robert W. Sweet, Jr., Administrator

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Arrests of Youth 1990

Howard N. Snyder, Ph.D.

Law enforcement agencies in the United States made an estimated 2.2 million arrests in 1990 of persons under age 18. According to the FBI, these youth accounted for 16 percent of all arrests. They were involved in 14 percent of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter arrests, 15 percent of forcible rape, 24 percent of robbery, 14 percent of aggravated assault, 33 percent of burglary, 43 percent of motor vehicle theft, and 7 percent of drug abuse

arrests. Seventy-one percent of youth arrested were white, 26 percent were black, and 3 percent were of other races.¹

Other findings include:

- In 1990, 77 percent of youth arrested were male, and 23 percent were female.
- Many youth under age 18 are classified by their State statutes as adults and are under the original jurisdiction of the

criminal court. Of those youth under the original jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system at arrest in 1990, 64 percent were referred to juvenile court, and 5 percent were sent directly to criminal court.

- Between 1989 and 1990 the number of youth arrests for Violent Crime Index offenses (murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) increased

From the Administrator

In August 1991, the FBI released *Crime in the United States 1990*, the most recent report in a series dating back to the 1930's. The reports, which provide reported crime and arrest statistics, have become the most widely referenced statistical resource in criminal justice. Policymakers, justice system practitioners, researchers, and the media rely on the annual *Crime in the United States* report and on other reports derived from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program to quantify criminal justice activities and trends. However, data on arrests of juveniles and youth under age 18 have never been highlighted in a way that facilitates its use. This *OJJDP Update* summarizes current statistics on arrests of young people and explains data limitations. We hope it will become a useful reference to monitor juvenile arrest trends in America.

Misconceptions about juvenile crime and the juvenile justice system abound.

Newspaper stories often contain statements that contradict known facts. Regrettably, misstatements that are repeated soon acquire a life of their own. Even professionals in the system may hold misconceptions that may influence their decisions about the system, its programs, and the youth it handles. For example, it is not uncommon to hear professionals debate whether police are arresting more juveniles today than 10 years ago or whether the flow of drug abuse cases into the system is beginning to decline. A network of resources exists that can answer such questions. Greater access to relevant, empirically sound information is critical to improving the juvenile justice system.

This *Update* summarizes and analyzes data on arrests and long-term arrest trends of persons under age 18 as reported in *Crime in the United States 1990* and a companion document, *Age-Specific Arrest Rates and Race-Specific Arrest Rates for Selected Offenses 1965-1988*. It also increases the juvenile justice community's access to the

valuable information compiled by the FBI's UCR Program. Many States prepare local versions of these national reports. Readers are encouraged to obtain copies of these national and State documents and to become educated users of these resources.

This *Update* is the first publication of OJJDP's new Juvenile Justice Statistics and Systems Development (SSD) Program, directed by the National Center for Juvenile Justice. The program provides tools to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the juvenile justice system. It reflects OJJDP's commitment to enhance the quality and utility of information that will improve decisionmaking within the juvenile justice system.

Robert W. Sweet, Jr. **NCJRS**
Administrator

FEB 25 1992

ACQUISITIONS

sharply (16 percent), while arrests for Property Crime Index offenses (burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson) increased marginally (3 percent).

- Between the mid-1970's and the latter part of the 1980's, Violent Crime Index arrest rates for young people remained relatively constant, but increased substantially in 1989 and in 1990. In contrast, arrest rates for Property Crime Index offenses in the late 1980's were lower than in the mid-1970's.

- In 1980 the rate of drug abuse arrests for white and black youth were nearly equal. Between 1980 and 1989, however, the drug abuse arrest rate for white youth declined by 33 percent. Black arrest rates remained relatively constant through 1984. Between 1984 and 1989 the rate of drug abuse arrests for black youth increased by 200 percent, so that by 1989 the black arrest rate had climbed to nearly five times the white rate.

Arrests

Under the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, the FBI requires law enforcement agencies to classify an arrest for reporting purposes by the most serious offense charged. Consequently, the arrest of a youth charged with aggravated assault and possession of a controlled substance would be reported

¹ This work is based on two FBI reports, *Crime in the United States 1990* and *Age-Specific Arrest Rates and Race-Specific Arrest Rates for Selected Offenses 1965-1988*, which classify individuals into two general age groups: (1) persons under 18 years of age and (2) persons 18 years of age and older. The reports are careful not to use the term juvenile in association with the younger age group. The term juvenile describes an individual's legal status. In 38 States and the District of Columbia, persons under age 18 are generally considered to be juveniles. However, in the other 12 States, 17-year-olds are classified as adults and are not, in most cases, under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system. In fact, in three States (Connecticut, New York, and North Carolina), even 16-year-olds generally are viewed as adults by the justice system. Consequently, the term juvenile will not be used in this bulletin to refer to all persons under the age of 18. Members of this age group will be referred to in this report as youth, young persons, and youthful offenders.

as an aggravated assault. It is important to remember this reporting requirement when interpreting the following arrest statistics. For instance, it is estimated that law enforcement agencies made

81,000 arrests of young people for drug abuse violations in 1990; however, while many more arrests may have involved a drug abuse charge, it was the most serious charge in these 81,000 arrests.

Table 1

Estimated Arrests of Persons Under 18 Years of Age, 1990

| Offense Charged | Arrests of Persons Under 18 | Percent of All Arrests | |
|---|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| | | Under 18 | 18 & Over |
| Total | 2,211,000 | 16 | 84 |
| Crime Index | 822,800 | 28 | 72 |
| Violent Crime Index | 114,200 | 16 | 84 |
| Property Crime Index | 708,600 | 32 | 68 |
| Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter | 3,200 | 14 | 86 |
| Forcible rape | 5,900 | 15 | 85 |
| Robbery | 40,600 | 24 | 76 |
| Aggravated assault | 64,500 | 14 | 86 |
| Burglary | 142,600 | 33 | 67 |
| Larceny-theft | 466,100 | 30 | 70 |
| Motor vehicle theft | 91,500 | 43 | 57 |
| Arson | 8,400 | 44 | 56 |
| Other assaults | 150,700 | 15 | 85 |
| Forgery and counterfeiting | 8,600 | 9 | 91 |
| Fraud | 9,900 | 3 | 97 |
| Embezzlement | 1,100 | 7 | 93 |
| Stolen property; buying, receiving, possessing | 42,800 | 26 | 74 |
| Vandalism | 131,800 | 40 | 60 |
| Weapons; carrying, possessing, etc. | 40,200 | 18 | 82 |
| Prostitution and commercialized vice | 1,600 | 1 | 99 |
| Sex offense (except forcible rape and prostitution) | 17,100 | 16 | 84 |
| Drug abuse violations | 81,200 | 7 | 93 |
| Gambling | 1,000 | 5 | 95 |
| Offenses against family and children | 3,400 | 4 | 96 |
| Driving under the influence | 20,500 | 1 | 99 |
| Liquor laws | 158,000 | 22 | 78 |
| Drunkennes | 24,600 | 3 | 97 |
| Disorderly conduct | 121,400 | 17 | 83 |
| Vagrancy | 3,100 | 8 | 92 |
| All other offenses (except traffic) | 316,000 | 10 | 90 |
| Curfew and loitering law violations | 80,800 | 100 | 0 |
| Runaways | 174,200 | 100 | 0 |

Source: *Crime in the United States 1990*, Tables 24 and 33

Note: *Crime in the United States 1990* does not present national estimates of the arrests of persons under age 18. The national estimates presented in this table were derived from data contained in the report. Specifically, the estimated numbers of arrests were developed by applying the proportion of youthful arrests within each offense category in the 1990 reporting sample (Table 33) to the report's national estimates of all arrests within each offense category (Table 24).

Bearing this in mind, it is estimated there were approximately 3,000 arrests in 1990 of persons under age 18 for murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, 6,000 arrests for forcible rape, 41,000

arrests for robbery, and 65,000 arrests for aggravated assault (table 1). Offense categories with the highest estimated volume of arrests were larceny-theft (466,000), running away from home

(174,000), liquor law violations (158,000), nonaggravated assault (151,000), burglary (143,000), and vandalism (132,000).²

Young people accounted for 16 percent of all arrests in 1990. The relative involvement of youth varied greatly with offense category. Young people accounted for more than 30 percent of all arrests for arson, motor vehicle theft, vandalism, and burglary and less than 10 percent of all arrests for vagrancy, drug abuse, gambling, drunkenness, prostitution and commercialized vice, and driving under the influence.

Seventy-one percent of young persons arrested in 1990 were white, 26 percent were black, and 3 percent were other races (table 2).³ Ninety-four percent of youth charged with driving under the influence were white. Other offenses for which high proportions of white youth were arrested include liquor law violations, drunkenness, arson, and vandalism. Offenses with a racial distribution similar to that of the general youth population include burglary, larceny-theft, sex offenses (an arrest category that excludes forcible rape and prostitution), vagrancy, and disorderly conduct. Arrests involving the highest proportions of black youth include gambling, robbery, murder and non-negligent manslaughter, drug abuse, forcible rape, and aggravated assault.

Seventy-seven percent of young persons arrested in 1990 were male, and 23 percent were female. Males were charged in 98 percent of youth arrests for forcible rape. Other offenses with more than 90 percent male arrests were

Table 2

Race and Gender Distributions of Arrests Involving Persons Under Age 18, 1990

| Offense Charged | Percent of Youthful Arrests | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------|-------|------|--------|
| | White | Black | Other | Male | Female |
| Total | 71 | 26 | 3 | 77 | 23 |
| Crime Index | 68 | 29 | 3 | 80 | 20 |
| Violent Crime Index | 48 | 50 | 2 | 88 | 12 |
| Property Crime Index | 72 | 25 | 3 | 78 | 22 |
| Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter | 39 | 59 | 1 | 95 | 5 |
| Forcible rape | 53 | 46 | 2 | 98 | 2 |
| Robbery | 36 | 63 | 1 | 92 | 8 |
| Aggravated assault | 56 | 42 | 2 | 85 | 15 |
| Burglary | 75 | 22 | 3 | 92 | 8 |
| Larceny-theft | 73 | 24 | 3 | 72 | 28 |
| Motor vehicle theft | 59 | 38 | 3 | 89 | 11 |
| Arson | 81 | 17 | 2 | 91 | 9 |
| Other assaults | 62 | 36 | 3 | 77 | 23 |
| Forgery and counterfeiting | 76 | 23 | 2 | 67 | 33 |
| Fraud | 60 | 39 | 2 | 70 | 30 |
| Embezzlement | 67 | 31 | 1 | 62 | 38 |
| Stolen property; buying, receiving, possessing | 57 | 41 | 2 | 90 | 10 |
| Vandalism | 81 | 17 | 2 | 92 | 8 |
| Weapons; carrying, possessing, etc. | 62 | 36 | 2 | 94 | 6 |
| Prostitution and commercialized vice | 66 | 33 | 2 | 46 | 54 |
| Sex offense (except forcible rape and prostitution) | 72 | 26 | 2 | 93 | 7 |
| Drug abuse violations | 50 | 49 | 1 | 89 | 11 |
| Gambling | 20 | 77 | 3 | 95 | 5 |
| Offenses against family and children | 76 | 21 | 3 | 65 | 35 |
| Driving under the influence | 94 | 4 | 2 | 86 | 14 |
| Liquor laws | 93 | 4 | 3 | 72 | 28 |
| Drunkenness | 88 | 10 | 2 | 85 | 15 |
| Disorderly conduct | 67 | 32 | 1 | 79 | 21 |
| Vagrancy | 72 | 26 | 2 | 84 | 16 |
| All other offenses (except traffic) | 70 | 27 | 3 | 79 | 21 |
| Curfew and loitering law violations | 79 | 18 | 3 | 72 | 28 |
| Runaways | 80 | 16 | 3 | 44 | 56 |
| U.S. Population (Under Age 18) | 80 | 16 | 4 | 51 | 49 |

Source: *Crime in the United States 1990*, Tables 34, 35 and 38

² In the Uniform Crime Reporting Program, assaults are divided into two categories, aggravated and other assaults. The tables in this bulletin will use these categories, but in the text the "other assault" category will be referred to as "nonaggravated assault" to avoid possible misinterpretations.

³ In the United States in 1990, 80 percent of the population under age 18 were white, 16 percent were black, and 4 percent were other races. The category "other races" includes American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Asian and Pacific Islander. Youth of Hispanic ethnicity generally were included in the white racial group.

murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, gambling, weapons law violations, sex offenses, robbery, burglary, vandalism, and arson. Females accounted for the majority of youth arrests in two offense categories, running away from home and prostitution and commercialized vice. Other offenses with a relatively high proportion of female arrests were embezzlement, offenses against family and children, forgery and counterfeiting, and fraud.

It is important to understand what these FBI arrest statistics represent. The figures report the number of arrests by law enforcement agencies, not the number of individuals arrested or the number of crimes committed. The number of arrests are not equivalent to the number of people arrested because an unknown number are arrested more than once in the year. Nor do arrest statistics represent an exact count of crimes committed by the individuals arrested, because a series of crimes committed by the same individual may culminate in a single arrest or a single crime may result in the arrest of more than one person.

Another factor is that law enforcement agencies, with jurisdiction over only 78 percent of the U.S. population, reported arrest statistics by age, sex, and race in 1990. The statistics reported above are based on the experience of these law enforcement agencies, which may not be representative of the Nation.

Clearances

A reported crime is cleared when an individual is arrested for the act. Youth consistently account for a smaller proportion of crimes cleared than one might infer from their arrest proportions (figure 1). While individuals under age 18 accounted for 16 percent of Violent Crime Index arrests in 1990, they accounted for only 11 percent of Violent Crime Index offenses cleared (see shaded box on page 9 for a discussion of the crime indices). Similarly, while youth accounted for 32 percent of Property Crime Index arrests, they accounted for only 22 percent of Property Crime Index offenses cleared.

There are several reasons why the proportion of youth arrests is consistently higher than the proportion of crimes cleared by these arrests. One reason relates to the nature of the clearance statistic, while other reasons concern the character of the youth's criminal behavior. FBI coding guidelines dictate that a clearance be attributed to the oldest offender arrested for the incident. Therefore, in situations where an adult and a youth are arrested for the same crime, the clearance is attributed to the adult. While there are no precise statistics, representatives of the UCR Program believe these situations are relatively infrequent and produce only a small bias in clearance proportions.

Differences in arrest and clearance proportions are more directly related to the nature of criminal behavior. Young people are more likely than adults to commit crimes with others.⁴ Also, youth clearances are more likely to have resulted from more than one arrest. Moreover, if it can be assumed that adult criminals commit crimes at greater rates than young offenders and for longer periods of time, the arrest of an adult is likely to clear more reported crimes than the arrest of a youth.

Arrest and clearance statistics provide different information. Arrest statistics indicate the proportion of law enforce-

ment activity triggered by law-violating behavior of youth. Clearance statistics indicate the amount of crime attributable to youth. While there is built-in bias against adults in clearance statistics, it could be argued that the young people are less criminally experienced than the adults and are more likely to be apprehended for the crimes they commit. Because this implies that a greater percentage of crimes committed by young people are cleared, clearance statistics are arguably better indicators of the proportion of crime attributable to youth than are arrest statistics.

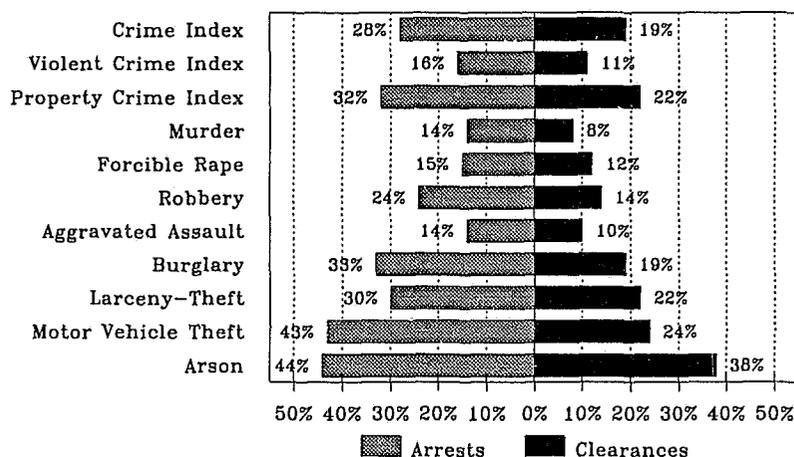
Police disposition of juvenile arrests

Some State statutes define arrested youth as adults and handle them through the adult criminal justice system. Most States, however, initially classify youth as juveniles and place them under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system. The *Crime in the United States* series reports police handling of arrestees legally classified as juveniles. This is the only information in the report that is sensitive to these State variations.

⁴ Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1989*, NCJ-129391, June 1991.

Figure 1

Youth Proportion of Arrests and Crimes Cleared, 1990



Three of every 10 juvenile arrestees were handled within the law enforcement department and then released (figure 2). A small number were referred to a welfare agency or other police agency. The largest proportion (nearly two-thirds) was referred to the juvenile court system for further processing. After reviewing the circumstances of the offense and evaluating the juvenile's amenability to juvenile court treatment, the court may transfer the juvenile to the criminal court for handling as an adult. In many States, however, the district attorney's office is required by law or has the legal authority to file a juvenile's case directly in adult criminal court, depending on the youth's age and the offense. Five percent of all juvenile arrests in 1990 were filed directly in adult criminal courts.

Trends in the number of arrests

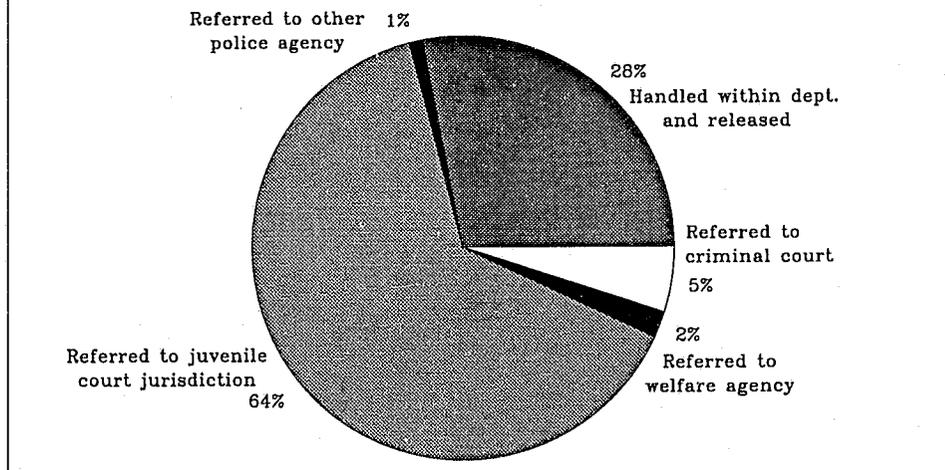
Each year the number of law enforcement agencies providing data to the UCR Program changes. Arrest trends reported in the annual *Crime in the United States* report are based on information from law enforcement agencies that reported in both base years. Accordingly, agencies that provided data for the 2-year trends differ from those that provided data for the 5- and 10-year trends. Understanding these limitations, the authors of the *Crime in the United States* series emphasize that the information presented describes only the activities of the reporting jurisdictions and are careful not to characterize the reported arrest trends as national estimates.

During the first part of the 1980's, there was a general decline in youth arrests for both violent and property crimes, while adult arrests increased. However, in the latter half of the 1980's, youthful arrests increased at a pace greater than that of adults for violent crimes and less than that of adults for property crimes.

More specifically, between 1981 and 1990 the arrests of youth for a Violent Crime Index offense increased by 29 percent (table 3), compared with a 49-

Figure 2

Police Dispositions of Juvenile Offenders Taken Into Custody, 1990



percent increase in arrests of adult offenders. In contrast, the number of youth arrested for a Property Crime Index offense declined by 5 percent over the 10-year period from 1981 through 1990, compared with a 25-percent increase in adult arrests.

Youth arrest numbers varied greatly within offense categories. Youth arrests increased substantially between 1981 and 1990 for motor vehicle theft (73 percent), nonaggravated assault (72 percent), murder and nonnegligent manslaughter (60 percent), aggravated assault (57 percent), weapons law violations (41 percent), and forcible rape (28 percent). There were significant decreases in youth arrests for prostitution and commercialized vice (47 percent), drunkenness (43 percent), burglary (37 percent), driving under the influence (35 percent), and drug abuse (27 percent).

In some offense categories, adult arrests increased substantially between 1981 and 1990, while youth arrests declined. For example, adult arrests for drug abuse increased by 90 percent, while youth arrests declined by 27 percent. Similar patterns were found in arrests for prostitution and commercialized vice, driving under the influence, and robbery. In other categories (such as liquor law violations, vandalism,

nonaggravated assault, and larceny-theft), increases in adult arrests were far greater than increases in youth arrests. In contrast, while youth arrests for murder and nonnegligent manslaughter increased by 60 percent, adult arrests increased by only 5 percent. Other offense categories, where youth accounted for a greater proportion of arrests in 1990 than in 1981, included weapons law violations and motor vehicle theft.

The 1989-1990 arrest trends provide the best indication of recent changes in the character of youth arrests. Offense categories which showed the largest increases in the number of youth arrests were murder and nonnegligent manslaughter (26 percent), gambling (23 percent), robbery (17 percent), curfew and loitering law violations (17 percent), and aggravated assault (16 percent). Offense categories with the largest declines were embezzlement (28 percent) and drug abuse violations (22 percent).

Changes, especially long-term, in the number of youth arrests should not necessarily be characterized as changes in the volume of youth crime. Such a characterization would be possible only if significant factors were constant over the time period in question: (1) willingness of victims to report crimes to law

Table 3

Arrest Trends

| Offense Charged | Percent Change in Arrests | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | 1989-1990 | | 1986-1990 | | 1981-1990 | |
| | Under 18 | 18 & Over | Under 18 | 18 & Over | Under 18 | 18 & Over |
| Total | 5 | 4 | 8 | 21 | 5 | 37 |
| Crime Index | 5 | 3 | 8 | 18 | -1 | 30 |
| Violent Crime Index | 16 | 11 | 38 | 33 | 29 | 49 |
| Property Crime Index | 3 | 1 | 4 | 14 | -5 | 25 |
| Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter | 26 | 9 | 93 | 16 | 60 | 5 |
| Forcible rape | 5 | 8 | 3 | 10 | 28 | 25 |
| Robbery | 17 | 9 | 23 | 18 | -5 | 13 |
| Aggravated assault | 16 | 12 | 49 | 42 | 57 | 69 |
| Burglary | 0 | -3 | -11 | 3 | -37 | -2 |
| Larceny-theft | 4 | 2 | 4 | 16 | 2 | 32 |
| Motor vehicle theft | 4 | -5 | 48 | 26 | 73 | 54 |
| Arson | 5 | 9 | 9 | -2 | -9 | -9 |
| Other assaults | 14 | 11 | 42 | 40 | 72 | 104 |
| Forgery and counterfeiting | 12 | -3 | -1 | 6 | -20 | 9 |
| Fraud | 1 | 7 | 22 | 18 | 16 | 32 |
| Embezzlement | -28 | 0 | 39 | 37 | 21 | 98 |
| Stolen property; buying, receiving, possessing | 2 | -2 | 25 | 23 | 19 | 31 |
| Vandalism | 10 | 10 | 13 | 25 | 8 | 48 |
| Weapons; carrying, possessing, etc. | 10 | 5 | 30 | 7 | 41 | 18 |
| Prostitution and commercialized vice | 5 | 5 | -35 | 13 | -47 | 16 |
| Sex offense (except forcible rape and prostitution) | 3 | 6 | 1 | 10 | 32 | 44 |
| Drug abuse violations | -22 | -13 | -2 | 39 | -27 | 90 |
| Gambling | 23 | 1 | 43 | -25 | -4 | -47 |
| Offenses against family and children | 12 | 19 | 0 | 41 | 9 | 63 |
| Driving under the influence | 3 | 8 | -26 | 3 | -35 | 16 |
| Liquor laws | 6 | 8 | -4 | 37 | 0 | 61 |
| Drunkenness | 14 | 13 | -24 | -2 | -43 | -22 |
| Disorderly conduct | 9 | 8 | 18 | 9 | 13 | 13 |
| Vagrancy | 16 | 4 | 3 | 2 | -22 | -1 |
| All other offenses (except traffic) | 1 | 4 | 6 | 42 | 10 | 88 |
| Curfew and loitering law violations | 17 | NA | 9 | NA | 27 | NA |
| Runaways | 5 | NA | 1 | NA | 21 | NA |

Source: *Crime in the United States 1990*, Tables 27, 29 and 31

enforcement, (2) the aggressiveness with which law enforcement responds to specific offenses, (3) the proportion of lawbreakers arrested, (4) the proportion of persons arrested more than once in a year, (5) the tendency to commit crimes in groups, and (6) the procedures for data collection and reporting. Inferring changes in criminal activity based on changes in the number of arrests is, therefore, precarious.

Arrest rates 1965–1989⁵

While the UCR Program was designed to monitor changes in the workloads of law enforcement agencies, the information reported in *Crime in the United States* often is used to track more general social problems, such as changes in the officially recognized criminal behavior of youth. Data reflecting changes in the number of annual arrests are inadequate for this purpose because the number of youth in the population fluctuates substantially over time. For example, during the 1980's the number of young people aged 15 through 17 declined by more than 25 percent. Based on this substantial decline in the age group that produces two-thirds of all youth arrests, one might expect a decline in the number of such arrests if all other factors remained constant. Converting arrests to arrest rates removes the impact of the changing population on arrest statistics and enables a more direct comparison of the relative number of youth arrests from year to year.⁶

A general picture of long-term arrest rate trends can be developed by considering changes in Violent Crime Index

⁵ At the time of the report preparation, the FBI had not calculated the arrest rates for 1990.

⁶ The FBI reports calculate youthful arrest rates by determining the number of arrests per 100,000 persons aged 0 through 17 in the population. Arrest rates presented in this bulletin have been reconstructed from the FBI reports to use a population base of youth aged 10 through 17. While a small number of arrests involved youth below the age of 10, the 10 through 17 base was chosen because it is more sensitive to changes in that sector of the youth population most responsible for generating the arrest statistics, and because it is more compatible with rates used in other juvenile justice statistical reporting series.

and Property Crime Index arrest rates. The youth arrest rate for Violent Crime Index offenses showed considerable growth between the mid-1960's and the mid-1970's (figure 3). Between the mid-1970's and the mid-1980's, the rate remained relatively constant, but in the late-1980's the rate began to increase, reaching its highest level (388 per 100,000 youth age 10–17) in the 25-year period ending in 1989. In contrast, while the arrest rate for Property Crime Index offenses increased substantially between the mid-1960's and the mid-1970's, it remained relatively constant from the mid-1970's through the late-1980's. In fact, the youth arrest rate for Property Crime Index offenses in 1989 was 2,510 per 100,000 youth, which is somewhat below the levels observed in the mid-1970's.

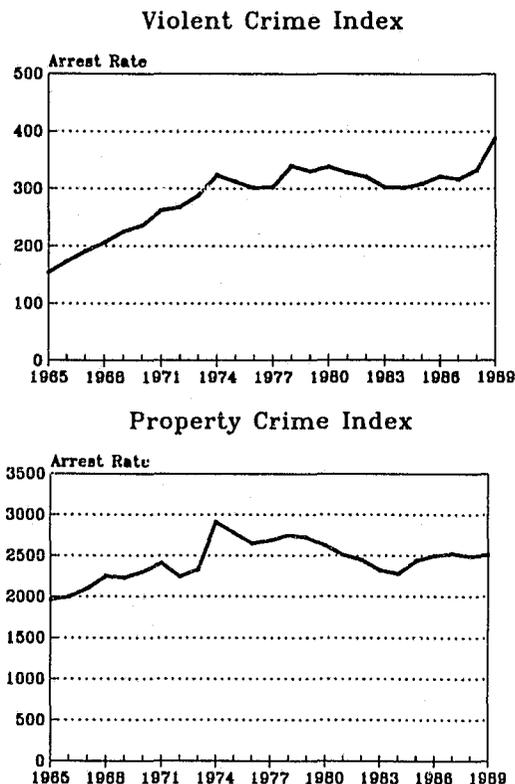
The portrait of youth arrest rate patterns is more complex when attention is

shifted to the individual offense categories making up the crime indices. Within the Violent Crime Index offense grouping, murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, and aggravated assault arrest rates for persons under age 18 all generally increased over the 25-year period, reaching or nearing their highest levels in 1989 (figure 4). In contrast, the robbery rates, which more than doubled between 1965 and 1978, declined significantly through the late 1980's.

Similar to the pattern observed with the Property Crime Index, larceny-theft arrest rates peaked in 1974 and remained relatively unchanged through 1989. Unlike larceny-theft, burglary peaked in the mid-1970's and then declined substantially so that the burglary arrest rate in 1989 was below its 1965 level. In stark contrast to these property offenses, the rate of arrests of persons under age

Figure 3

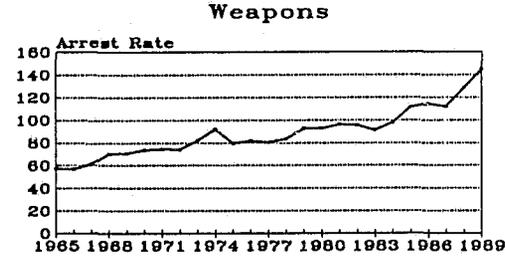
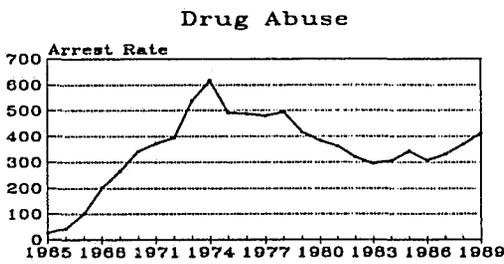
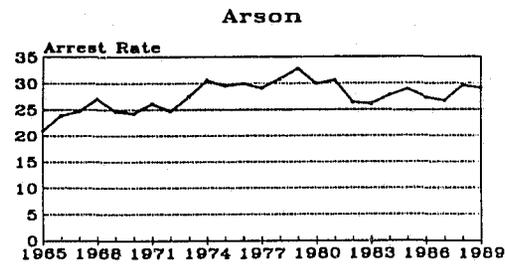
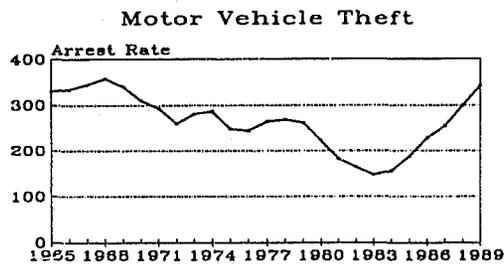
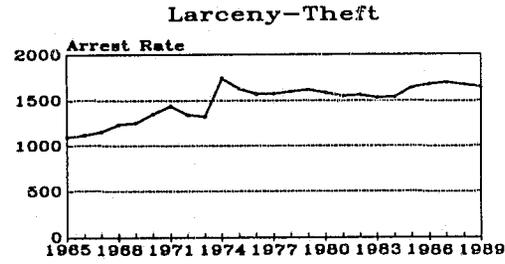
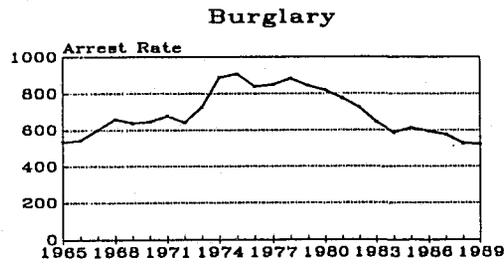
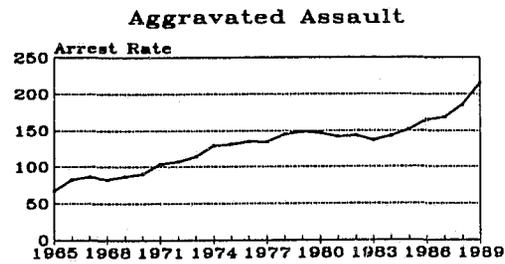
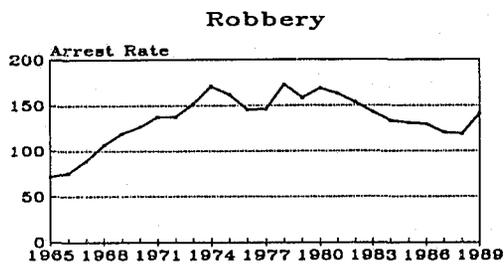
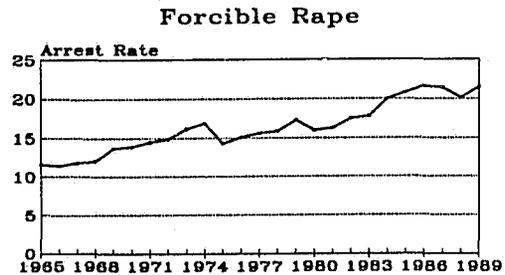
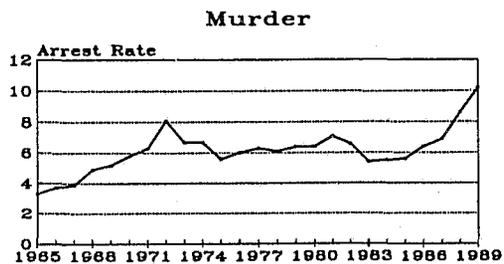
Index Arrest Rates, 1965–1989



Arrest Rate = Arrests per 100,000 youth age 10–17

Figure 4

Arrest Rates, 1965-1989



Arrest Rate = Arrests per 100,000 youth age 10-17

18 for motor vehicle theft declined consistently by more than 50 percent between 1965 and 1983, but then began to increase rapidly, so that by 1989 the rate had nearly returned to the levels of the 1960's.

Two other offenses of major interest are weapons law and drug abuse violations. The arrest rates of youth for weapons law violations show a constant increase over the 25-year period, with the arrest rate in 1989 nearly triple the 1965 rate. Contrary to popular perception, a different pattern was found in youth drug abuse arrest rates. The time period between 1965 and 1974 showed a large growth in drug abuse arrest rates for young people. However, youth drug abuse arrest rates declined substantially between the mid-1970's and the mid-1980's; in fact, the 1986 rate was only half the 1974 rate. However, between 1986 and 1989, the drug abuse arrest rate for persons under age 18 increased by more than one-third.

Male and female arrest rate trends

A study of arrest rates for male and female youth provides insight into changes in their relative involvement in officially recognized criminal activity. Over the 25-year period from 1965 through 1989, the female arrest rates have remained substantially lower than male rates. In 1965, for every female under age 18 arrested for a Violent Crime Index offense, about 11 males were arrested. Female Violent Crime Index arrest rates grew at a somewhat faster pace than male arrest rates through the early 1970's, so that by 1972 the ratio of male-to-female Violent Crime Index arrests was about 8-to-1. Since then, there have been only minor fluctuations in the relative number of male and female youth arrested for Violent Crime Index offenses.

A similar pattern is found with the Property Crime Index arrests. In the mid-1960's, the arrest rate for males for a Property Crime Index offense was nearly seven times the rate for females.

By 1972 the ratio had dropped to 4-to-1, but has since remained constant.

Arrest rate trends within racial groups

Beginning with the 1980 data collection, the UCR Program revised its race designations from five categories (white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and other) to four categories (white, black, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Asian and Pacific Islander). In addition, the law enforcement agencies were asked to report the ethnic designations of Hispanic and non-Hispanic. Annual youth arrest rates by racial categories fluctuated widely prior to 1980. After renewed emphasis on racial coding, arrest rate patterns indicate more consistent reporting and, consequently, the presentations in this section will be limited to the 1980-1989 time period.

The Violent Crime Index arrest rate for black youth averaged about six times the white rate throughout the 1980's, while the rate for youth of other races (American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Asian and Pacific Islander, collectively) averaged about 25 percent less than the rate for white youth (figure 5). In all racial categories, the Violent Crime Index arrest rate declined during the first part of the 1980's, and then rose. For white and black youth the increase was sufficient to raise their 1989 rates above their 1980 levels (14 percent and 9 percent, respectively). For youth of other races, the 1989 rate was 3 percent below the 1980 rate. This pattern was not reflected, however, in the individual offense categories that contribute to the Violent Crime Index (figure 6).

For whites and other race youth, the murder arrest rate remained relatively constant from 1980 through 1989, averaging about 4 arrests for every 100,000 youth aged 10 through 17 in the population. The murder arrest rate for black youth more than doubled over the same time period. In 1980 the arrest rate for blacks charged with murder was four times the rate for whites; by 1989 it was more than eight times the white rate.

Between 1980 and 1989 the rate of aggravated assault arrests increased about 25 percent for whites and other race youth, while black rates increased by 74 percent. As in the murder category, these differential increases expanded the gap between the rates for black youth and other racial groups. In 1980 black youth were being arrested

What are the crime indices?

The committee designing the Uniform Crime Reporting Program in the 1930's wanted to develop indices (similar in concept to the Dow Jones Industrial Average or the Consumer Price Index) that would be sensitive to changes in the volume and nature of reported crime. They decided to incorporate specific offenses into these indices based on seriousness of the offense, likelihood of it being reported to law enforcement agencies, frequency of occurrence, and pervasiveness in all geographical areas of the country. The result was the Crime Index and its two components, the Violent Crime Index and the Property Crime Index. The indices are combinations of offenses that the developers of the reporting series believed to be effective barometers of the concepts they were designed to monitor. The only change in the set of offenses that comprise the indices occurred in the late 1970's when arson was added to the set of property offenses. The components of the indices are:

- *Violent Crime Index*—murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.
- *Property Crime Index*—burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.
- *Crime Index*—murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

for aggravated assault at a rate three times that of whites; by 1989 the rate for blacks was more than four times the rate for white youth.

The rate of forcible rape arrests increased for white youth from 8 per 100,000 in 1980 to 13 per 100,000 in 1989, an increase of 60 percent. The rate for black youth increased from 61 to 67 per 100,000, a 9-percent increase. In 1980 the rate for blacks was seven times the rate for whites; by 1989 it had dropped to five times the rate for whites.

Between 1980 and 1989 the arrest rate for robbery dropped for all racial groups, white youth by 13 percent, black youth by 23 percent, and other race youth by 26 percent. In 1980 the rate for blacks was nearly 12 times the rate for whites; by 1989 the black rate was 10 times greater than for whites.

All three racial groups showed lower rates of Property Crime Index arrests in 1989 than in 1980. The arrest rate for white youth declined by 2 percent, for black youth by 12 percent, and for other race youth by 13 percent. Once again, different patterns were found in the individual components of the index.

Burglary arrest rates declined substantially for all racial groups between 1980 and 1989. The rates for whites and other race youth both declined by one-third, while the black rate dropped by one-half. As a result, in 1989, among blacks, the arrest rate for burglary had declined from two to one and one-half times the rate for whites.

Arrest rates for the high-volume offense of larceny-theft increased overall between 1980 and 1989, but while the rate for whites increased 11 percent, the

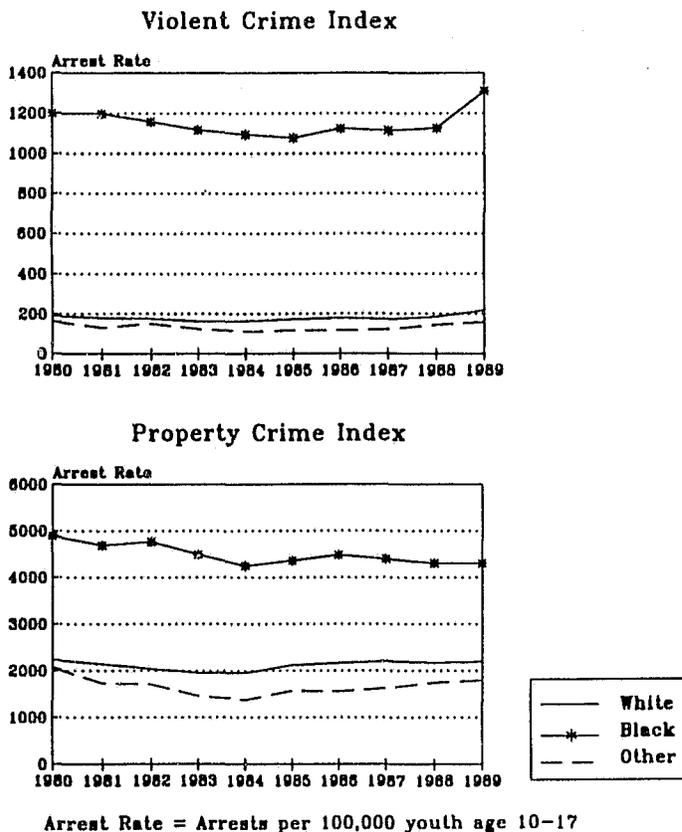
black rate dropped 13 percent. The arrest rates for motor vehicle theft, however, became more disparate. In 1980 the rate for blacks was twice that of whites and other race youth. Between 1980 and 1989 the black rate increased 130 percent, so that in 1989 it was nearly four times the white rate.

Over the 1980's, the rate of arrests for weapons law violations increased 56 percent. The rate increased 32 percent for whites, 109 percent for blacks, and 8 percent for other race youth. In 1989 the black rate of arrest for weapons law violations was three and one-half times the white rate and six times the rate for other race youth.

In 1980 the rate of drug abuse arrests for white and black youth were nearly equal and more than twice that of other race youth. Between 1980 and 1989 the drug abuse arrest rate for persons under age 18 increased 17 percent. However, drug abuse arrest rates declined for whites and other race youth during the 1980's, dropping by 33 percent and 27 percent, respectively. In contrast, drug arrest rates for blacks remained relatively constant through 1984. Between 1984 and 1989 the rate of drug abuse arrests for black youth increased by 200 percent, so that in 1989 the black rate had climbed to nearly 5 times the white rate and nearly 12 times the rate of other race youth.

Figure 5

Index Arrest Rates by Race, 1980-1989

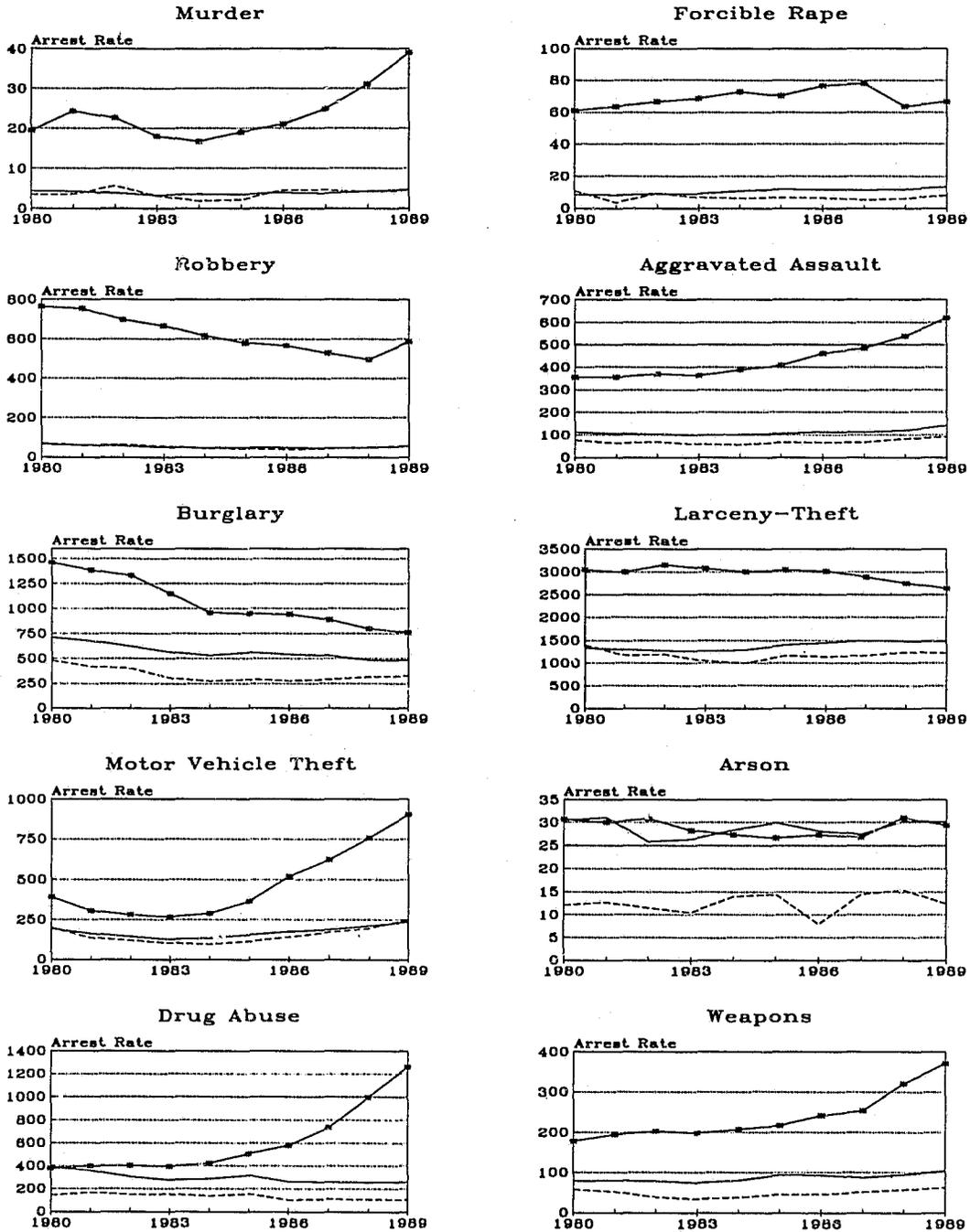


Conclusion

The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program provides the most comprehensive picture currently available on the officially recognized delinquent behavior of America's youth. Although limited in several ways, it provides a useful barometer of trends in arrests of youth. For example, 114,000 arrests of persons under the age of 18 for violent index offenses in 1990 represent the highest figure in more than 25 years. Youth violence, as indicated by arrest rates, remained relatively constant between the mid-1970's and the mid-1980's, after a steady rise from the mid-1960's. The significant growth has occurred only in the past few years. Between 1989 and 1990, the number

Figure 6

Arrest Rate by Race, 1980-1989



Age Rate = Arrests per 100,000 youth age 10-17

— White
 ◆ Black
 - - - Other

of youth arrested for murder and nonnegligent manslaughter increased by 26 percent, arrests for robbery by 16 percent, and arrests for aggravated assault by 17 percent. This information, generated by the Uniform Crime Reporting Program, provides policymakers, juvenile justice professionals, and researchers with the means to monitor changes in the general character and relative volume of youth crime.

Some of the limitations of the UCR Program described in this *Update* may be overcome by the FBI's newly designed reporting effort. Instead of requesting summary counts of arrests made monthly by each law enforcement agency, the new program, the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), asks agencies to describe in detail each arrest and its associated criminal incidents. Not only will this system permit law enforcement agencies to report more extensive information on the offender, but it will also provide information on the victim, the victim-offender relationship, all the charges involved in the arrest, the circumstances of the incident, and measures of the seriousness of the crime(s).

This *Update* summarizes current information on youth arrests. Future reports will expand the analysis to compare State arrest rates and incorporate new data from NIBRS. As available information improves, this series will

provide a more comprehensive picture of the officially recognized criminal behavior of youth.

Suggested readings

Crime in the United States 1990, a publication of the FBI, U.S. Department of Justice, can be obtained (1) at a Federal book store, (2) by calling the Government Printing Office at 202-783-3238, or (3) by writing the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The report *Age-Specific Arrest Rates and Race-Specific Arrest Rates for Selected Offenses 1965-1988* may be obtained by calling 202-324-5015 or by writing to the Uniform Crime Reporting Program, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC 20535.

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