



Al Blumstein: 40 Years of Contributions to Criminal Justice

edited by Nancy Ritter

He brings reason and practicality to scientific discussions—and an ability to examine evidence that is the envy of prosecutors.”

This is how a former director of the National Institute of Justice described Alfred Blumstein, Ph.D. From crime trends to sentencing guidelines, the impact of Blumstein’s work is evident in the criminal justice policies and practices of 21st century America. His research has covered a stunning range of criminal justice phenomena and policy: crime measurement, criminal careers, sentencing, deterrence and incapacitation, prison populations, demographic trends, juvenile violence, and drug-enforcement policy. Put simply, few in the Nation possess Blumstein’s understanding of the links between violence, public health, and criminology. In the mid-1960’s, Blumstein was asked to lead a task force on science and technology for a presidential commission

that produced *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*, a 1967 report that shaped criminal justice agendas in this country for years. Now, on the 40th anniversary of that landmark report, Blumstein is receiving the 2007 Stockholm Prize in Criminology, given for significant contributions to criminological research or practices that combat crime and promote human rights. He shares this award with Terri E. Moffitt, Ph.D., currently at the University of London, whose social, psychological, and biological studies of crime and human development have had international impact.

Blumstein has been instrumental to our understanding of violence as both a criminological and a public health concern. His epidemiological research, for example, demonstrated how the growth of illegal drug markets and the prevalence of illegal weapons among youth influenced violent crime in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Here are a few highlights of his work:

- **Carnegie Mellon University.** For more than 35 years, he has been the J. Erik Jonsson University Professor of Urban Systems and Operations Research and the director of the National Consortium on Violence Research at Carnegie Mellon's H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management. He was dean of the Heinz School from 1986 to 1993.
- **President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice.** He led the Commission's Task Force on Science and Technology, working with some of the best criminal justice minds in the country. Out of the Commission's work came *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*. (See related story, "The 40th Anniversary of the Crime Report," p. 20.)
- **National Consortium on Violence Research (NCOVR).** Under Blumstein's leadership, NCOVR created a unique framework for research on violence. He pulled together a remarkable group of scholars and policymakers to serve on NCOVR's advisory committee.
- **Awards and honors.** A page of Blumstein's résumé could be devoted to leadership positions he has held and awards and honors he has received. Here are three: the American Society of Criminology's Sutherland Award (1987), the President's Award from the Operations Research Society of America (1993), and the Wolfgang Award for Distinguished Achievement in Criminology (1998).
- **Body of written work.** Blumstein has coauthored and edited many notable works, including *The Crime Drop in America* (2006); *Exploring Recent Trends in U.S. Homicide Rates* (1998); and *Youth Violence, Guns, and the Illicit-Drug Industry* (1995). He is regularly published in journals, such as *Law and Society Review*, *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, *Journal of Criminal Justice*, and *Criminology*.

This is just a glimpse of Blumstein's résumé. Behind it, of course, are the lives he has touched. Countless people have been affected by Blumstein's work on

youth violence, for example. Then there are the hundreds of students, coworkers, policymakers, researchers, and in-the-trenches law enforcement professionals who call him advisor and friend. To offer *Journal* readers a flavor of the man behind the accomplishments, we asked a few of these people, "How has Al Blumstein enriched or influenced your life?" Here are their responses.

Al's international recognition for contributions to research on criminal justice comes as no surprise to those of us who have benefited from his insights over his long and productive career. During my service as governor of Pennsylvania, Al served as chairman of the Commission on Crime and Delinquency. His wisdom on sensitive issues involving police, courts, and corrections contributed greatly to a safer Pennsylvania. Al was always inquisitive, respectful of the views of others, but true to his core beliefs in equal justice under the law—a true champion of the value of solid research in the development of sound policy.

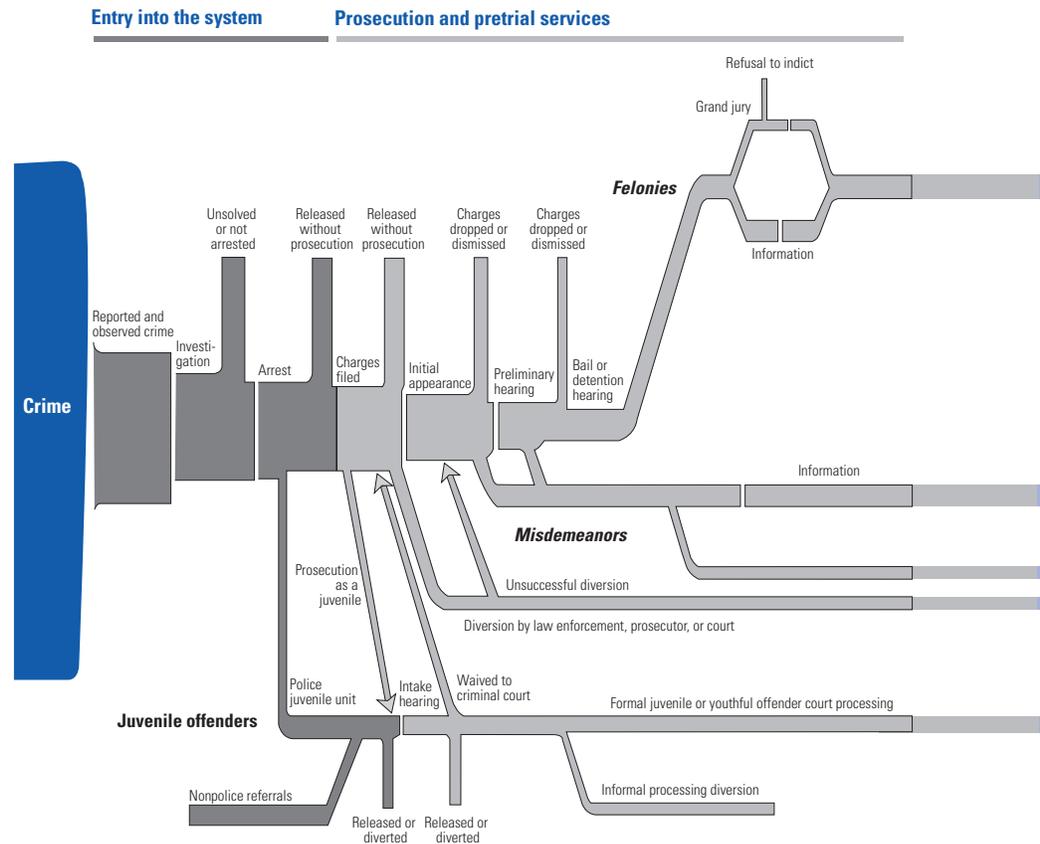
*Dick Thornburgh
Former U.S. Attorney General
Former Governor of Pennsylvania
Attorney, K&L Gates LLP*

I first met Al within weeks of my arrival at graduate school in 1974. I poked my head into his office and asked, "How much can age explain the crime rise during the 1960's?" His response was not a bunch of intimidating queries about whether I had read this or that paper or considered how hard a question this was or, even worse, how badly I framed the research question. Instead, he said, "Don't know. Why don't we work on it?" That's how my career in crime began. It typifies Al's enthusiasm for plowing ahead, unafraid, with youthful optimism and enthusiasm.

*Daniel S. Nagin
Professor, Carnegie Mellon University*

SYSTEMS ANALYSIS FLOWCHART

As director of the Science and Technology Task Force (part of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice), Al Blumstein was instrumental in creating a "systems analysis" portrayal of criminal justice in



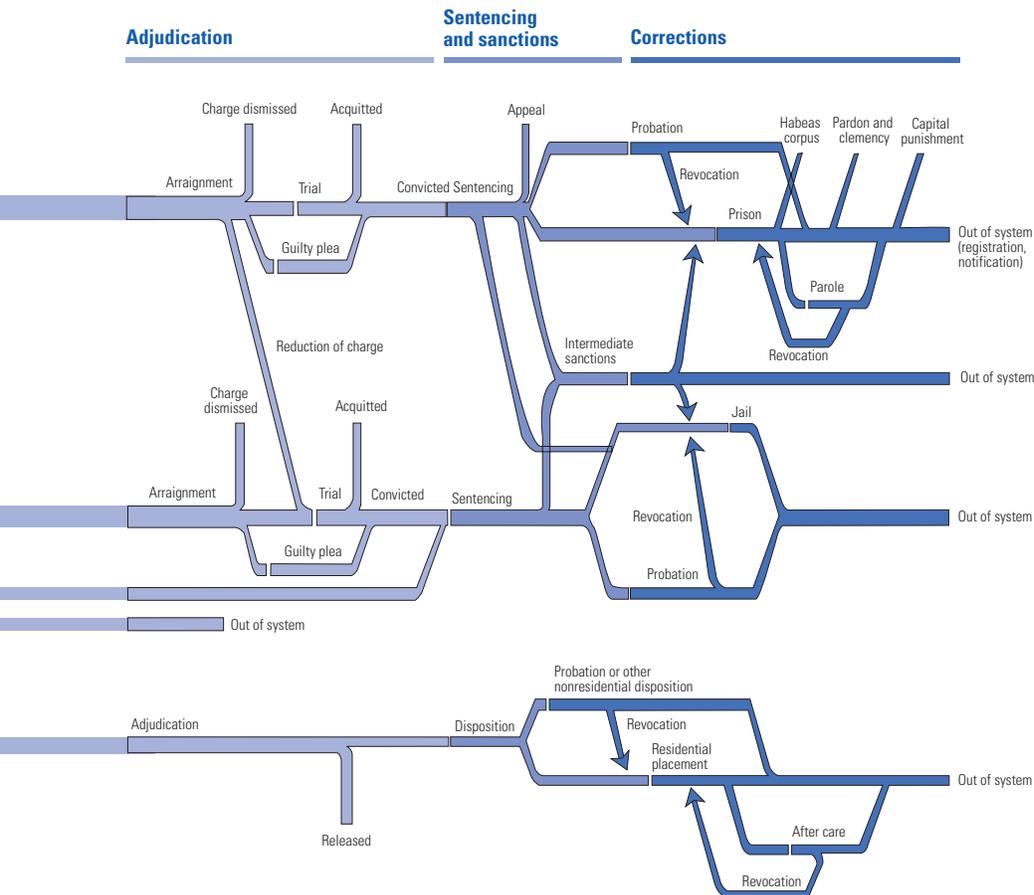
Note: This chart gives a simplified view of caseload through the criminal justice system. Procedures vary among jurisdictions. The weights of the lines are not intended to show actual size of caseloads.

In 1966, Al brought 'systems analysis' to the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. For better or worse, he is the person most responsible for the widespread use of the term 'system of justice.' I remember telling him the data that were needed to put numbers to his justice system flowchart simply did not exist. Not to be deterred, Al and his staff produced a chart *without* numbers that has been so useful as a teaching tool that it has been printed in every major criminology text since 1970. He is one of our country's most influential and productive criminologists.

Roland Chilton
Professor, University of Massachusetts

He's 5'9" yet the NIJ staff referred to Blumstein, the dean of criminologists, as 'Big Al.' When he grudgingly welcomed me to the NIJ directorship, he said it was a strange irony, indeed, when the Nation's most important crime research portfolio is handed over to a police officer without a Ph.D. or a long list of juried publications. Big Al's sarcastic welcome was tongue-in-cheek—he has an engineering background and is not a traditional social scientist by education or training. That was 25 years ago. Al continues to challenge policymakers and researchers to be more serious about understanding the causes and correlates of crime in America. With a magic marker

the United States. In 1997, the Bureau of Justice Statistics published the flow-chart shown here, which is an updated version of the one that first appeared in the Commission's 1967 report, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*. To download or order a copy of this chart, visit www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/justsys.htm.



and an overhead projector, Al can be very persuasive in using data analysis to demonstrate how misinformed, wrong, and dangerous the conventional wisdom about crime rates can be.

*James K. (Chips) Stewart
Former Director, NIJ
Senior Fellow, CNA Corporation*

Today, a mathematician helping police to solve crime—like in the hit TV series *Numb3rs*—seems ordinary. But in 1966, finding a scientist within the criminal justice system was rare. By some stroke

of luck, Al Blumstein, a Ph.D. in operations research, was chosen to be the director of the first national-level criminal justice Science and Technology Task Force. Al's systemic view of the interactions between the courts, police, and corrections has proven to be a seminal and lasting contribution. This came about not by theoretical musing in the office, but by Al's scientific philosophy: learning and assimilating everything he could of the system . . . short of getting arrested, prosecuted, and tried.

*Saul I. Gass
Professor, University of Maryland*

Serving simultaneously as the U.S. Attorney for Western Pennsylvania and in national posts for the U.S. Department of Justice has required me to travel frequently between Pittsburgh and Washington, DC. An unexpected joy in this aerial commute has been the opportunity for ongoing, onboard collaborative discussions with Al Blumstein, who also travels frequently between the two cities. Just as a window seat affords a view of the big picture that can never be gleaned from ground level, Al's leading-edge scholarship has lifted criminology issues to the perspective of public policy solutions.

*Mary Beth Buchanan
U.S. Attorney for Western Pennsylvania
Acting Director,
Office on Violence Against Women,
U.S. Department of Justice*

In 1966, Al hired me as the youngest fulltime member of the Science and Technology Task Force of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. I was 23 years old and had just completed my first year in graduate school at MIT. In other words, I was wet behind the ears—with virtually no professional experience in applying operations research to crime. Al was my mentor. He showed me how to think, how to structure problems, even how to write. He encouraged me to continue this as a doctoral research topic—I did, and it changed my career. His encouragement, patience and support were remarkable, given all the other responsibilities he had at the time.

*Richard C. Larson
Director, Center for Engineering Systems
Fundamentals,
Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

At the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we looked to Al as a member of the Research Agenda Steering Committee for the CDC Injury Center, a group that has helped define priorities for CDC research on public health and violence prevention since 1999. I also recall—with much gratefulness—Al's wise counsel during the preparation of the Surgeon General's report on youth violence in 2001. I asked for his help in identifying a scientist of sufficient stature (Al was too busy to take the job himself) to serve as editor of this report, which had a tremendous impact on U.S. public health research and program polices on youth violence.

*W. Rodney Hammond
Director, Division of Violence Prevention,
National Center for Injury Prevention
and Control,
Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention*

When Al asked me to join the National Consortium on Violence Research (NCOVR) Advisory Board, I did not realize how important a role NCOVR would play in this country's criminal justice system. Al has a knack of sitting at a table—sleeves rolled up and scratching at his left elbow—while imparting pearls of wisdom and challenging everyone present to think a little broader and deeper about the problem. He has made me a better judge by challenging me to think dispassionately about very serious issues within the criminal justice system. Without Al, neither Carnegie Mellon University nor NCOVR would have attained the high level of respect that is now taken for granted.

*Justin M. Johnson
Judge, Pennsylvania Superior Court*