

Why Hasn't Crime Fallen Further?

The Immigration Explanation

BY STEVE SAILER

One of the creepier experiences I had last year was walking past the TV as the local news reported on a woman who had been knifed repeatedly in the neck and face by a robber in her apartment. As the broadcast introduced more details about the nameless victim, I started to feel a horrible sense of inevitability: the victim was somebody I knew. Finally, when the reporter mentioned the victim had been a Peace Corps volunteer, I found my wife to tell her that some intruder had attempted to murder her friend T., but that she was in stable condition in the hospital.

Just two weeks later, T. was back at work, speaking through a voice amplifier. She said that while doing

paper-work on her bed on Saturday night, she had fallen asleep and failed to lock her door. The robber had walked in at dawn and awakened her. When she said, "Take my laptop," he replied, "But you've seen my face," and started stabbing her (seven times, by one report). Her screaming brought neighbors out of their apartments, so the would-be killer made a run for it, taking her computer, cell phone, and credit card.

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He wasn't exactly a criminal mastermind. He used her credit card at his local Jack-in-the-Box and called all his friends in his Latino street gang on her cell phone. When the cops came down hard on the gangmates, they rolled over on him and said he always went to Jack's for breakfast. There, the police collared him the next day.

This 19-year-old idiot's criminal career reminded me that the real sociological mystery is not why the crime rate came down after its crack-driven peak in the early 1990s (when, for

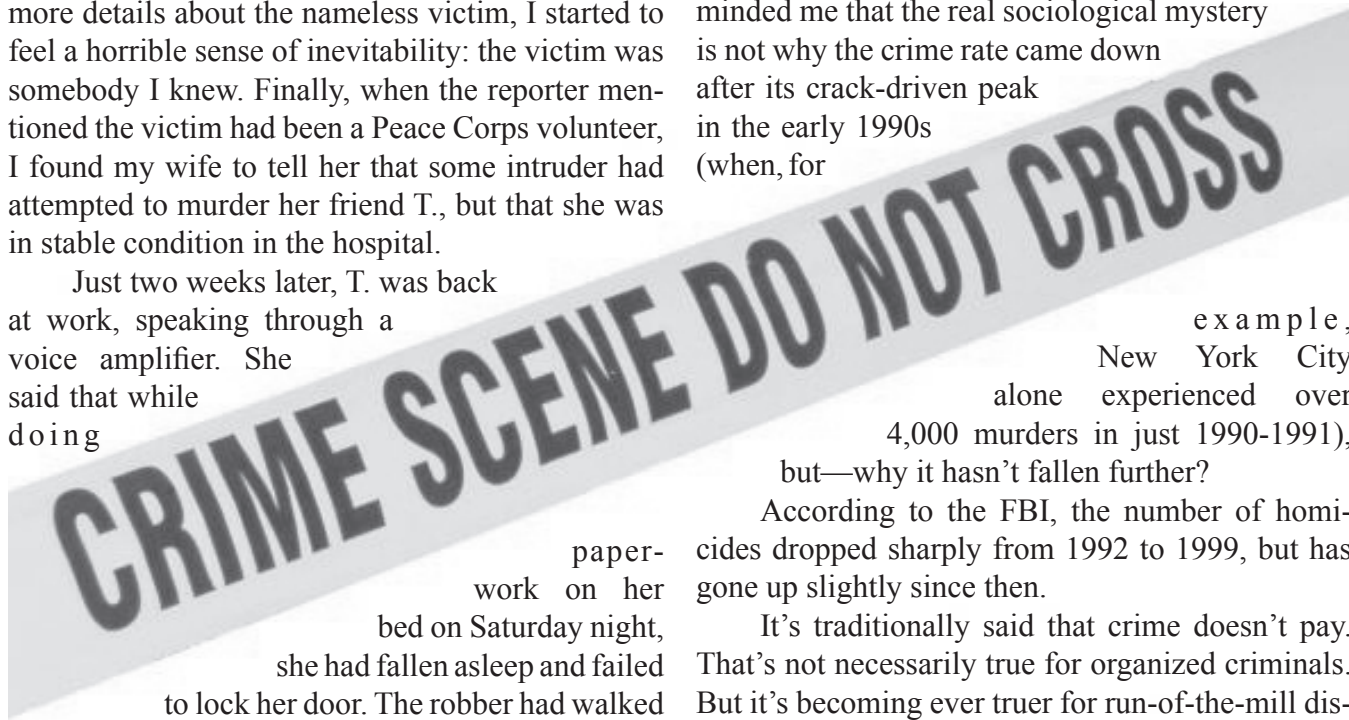
example, New York City alone experienced over 4,000 murders in just 1990-1991), but—why it hasn't fallen further?

According to the FBI, the number of homicides dropped sharply from 1992 to 1999, but has gone up slightly since then.

It's traditionally said that crime doesn't pay. That's not necessarily true for organized criminals. But it's becoming ever truer for run-of-the-mill disorganized criminals.

Think how easy it was to steal stuff back when crime was just starting to boom in the mid-1960s. In those innocent days, many folks not only parked their cars unlocked in their driveways overnight, for example, but left their car keys in the ignition! You could pursue a lucrative career in auto theft just by climbing into random cars and driving them away.

One of my earliest memories of reading the news in the mid-1960s is of all the articles warning citizens to start taking their car keys with them. But even when that lesson sunk in, many people still didn't lock their cars. A common memory of my boyhood is my father and I seeing a parked car with



its headlights left on, so he'd open the car door and switch them off before the battery drained down. In that trusting era, thieves merely had to hotwire the ignition.

And even if they got caught, punishment was light back in those naively liberal days. Indeed, the imprisonment rate was lower in 1975 than in 1960, although the murder rate had more than doubled.

In response, owners began to lock their cars. Since my childhood, I've tried a few dozen times to turn off the headlights of strangers' cars, but the last time the car turned out to be open was 1972. And automakers began armor plating the ignition system, and then building steering wheel locking system.

As it became harder for crooks to steal cars in toto, they started smashing the windows and prying out the expensive new 8-track stereos. This set off a defensive arms race to harden the target that is still going on. Ultimately, though, electronic in-dash gizmos got so cheap that these days it really isn't worth fighting past all the defenses just to sell the loot to a fence for a small fraction of its heavily discounted retail price.

Similarly, the public's shift from carrying cash to plastic has made robbery a more risky business because using a stolen credit card leaves an electronic trail.

When my wife dropped her credit card in the Costco parking lot, the person who picked it up got away with spending \$1,800 at six grocery stores in a couple of hours (buying alcohol, I would guess, because liquor is quicker to stock up on than anything else). He or she knew the cops were unlikely to watch security camera tapes and interview check-out clerks just to track down a nonviolent credit card fraudster.

On the other hand, the police took the intruder who stabbed our Peace Corp volunteer friend mul-

multiple times very seriously. They used the records from the stolen credit card and cell phone to put him behind bars in just over 24 hours.

And then there are all the advances in forensic technology, such as DNA testing, that are so heavily publicized in television dramas.

The public's biggest defensive move, of course: moving to the suburbs, far away from the bad guys. In contrast to Britain's more enterprising urban criminals, who routinely drive 50 or 100 miles out into the countryside to commit home invasions, American hoods don't like to leave the 'hood. Homeboys aren't comfortable away from home—fortunately.

It must be discouraging to be a career criminal these days. You can still sell drugs, of course, but there haven't been many hot new products like crack in years.

This doesn't mean that these days there aren't a lot of young men who want to be career criminals. But now, they get caught faster and get out of jail slower.

The imprisonment rate is quadruple what it was in 1975.

But one side effect of the lower crime rate in this decade is that the media think even less cogently about crime. For instance, the *Wall Street Journal* editorialized on New Year's Eve:

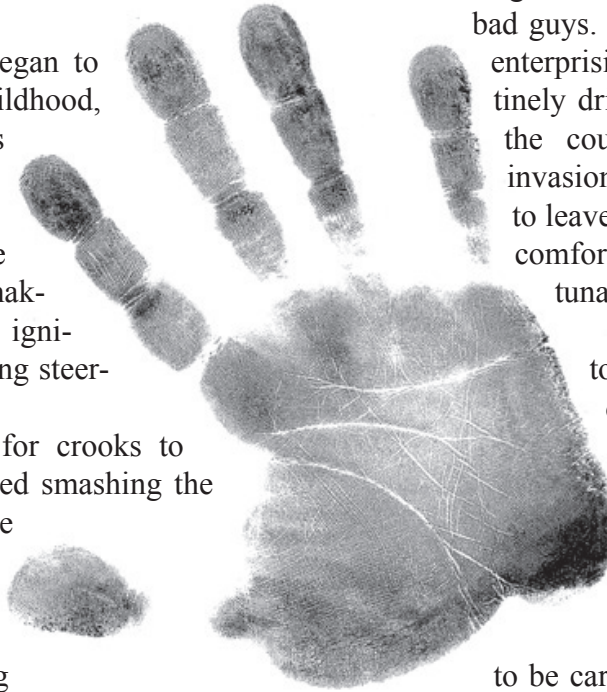
"Today, immigrants on balance are five times less likely to be in prison than someone born here."

My comments:

1. I doubt if the study the *WSJ* is citing is methodologically reliable. The government does a terrible job of keeping track of immigrants. Statistics that are driven by illegal immigrants, such as the immigrant crime rate, are inherently untrustworthy.

2. On average, immigrants haven't been in the country as long as natives, so they have less time to wind up in jail.

3. Many immigrant criminals get deported



after their terms are up—one strike and you’re out. Well, that’s how it’s supposed to work in theory. And it works often enough in practice to reduce the



Linda Chavez
author and columnist

number of immigrant career criminals.

4. Immigrant criminals are less likely to be imprisoned because they are more likely to flee across the border to escape arrest. Check out the Los Angeles Police Department’s Most Wanted List, which consists heavily of fugitives who take the money and run back to the Old Country.

5. Immigrants tend to arrive too old to fall into a life of crime. The critical years are about ages 11 to 16, while most first generation immigrants are a decade or more older when they get here.

“ Nevertheless, with all hundreds of millions of people willing to compete for the right to be allowed into America, why in the world should we be satisfied with immigrants whose qualification is that they are somewhat less criminal on average than African-Americans? ”

6. Why is it a good thing that the next generation of American-born Hispanics has so much higher crime rates than their dads? Linda Chavez trumpeted a study implying that American-born Latinos are eight times more likely to be criminals than Latino immigrants. Aren’t the problems posed by the first generation of immigrants supposed to diminish in the second and third generations, not increase? Overall, the Hispanic imprisonment rate is 2.9 times the white rate.

7. A lot of these statistics about native-born Americans are inflated by blacks, who, although they only comprised one-eighth of the population, committed 52.2 percent of all homicides from 1976 to 2005. That’s a little over half of all murders despite being barely more than one-eighth of the population. Blacks commit murder at 7.6 times the rate of the rest of the population.

Because the black crime rate is so high, it makes it easy for immigrants to slide under the black-driven national average.

Nevertheless, with all the hundreds of millions of people willing to compete for the right to be allowed into America, why in the world should we be satisfied with immigrants whose qualification is that they are somewhat less criminal on average than African-Americans?

Don’t expect this question to appear on the *WSJ* editorial page anytime soon. ■

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http://www.vdare.com/sailer/080107_crime.htm



Gang graffiti in public areas across the small town of Clayton, North Carolina.