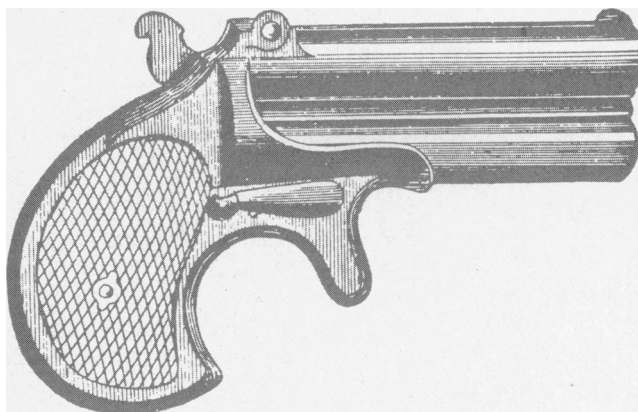


Homicide Trends in the United States, 1900–74

A. JOAN KLEBBA, MA



THE UPWARD TREND FOR HOMICIDE victims from 1960 to 1974 is the primary focus of this report. This trend is kept in perspective by a comparison of recent homicide rates with the rates for earlier years. Some data concerning persons arrested for homicide and circumstances concerning the violent deaths, supplied by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (1), are also presented.

In 1973, 20,465 men, women, and children lost their lives from injuries inflicted by another person or persons with intent to injure or kill (table 1). This figure gives a homicide rate of 9.8 deaths per 100,000 for 1973, the highest ever recorded for the nation. The next highest rate occurred more than 40 years ago—in 1933 when the rate reached 9.7 deaths per 100,000 (fig. 1). Provisional data for 1974 show that homicide is still at a high level. It is estimated that the rate for 1974 was at least 9.8 deaths per 100,000, with 20,770 victims of homicide.

Tabulations of homicide data in this report are based on information in copies of the original certificates of death that were received from the registration offices of

all States, certain cities, and the District of Columbia. The statistical information in these records was edited, classified, transferred to a tape for computer processing, and tabulated in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

Unless otherwise noted, the rates shown in this report are based on deaths that occurred in the death-registration States from 1900 to 1932 and all deaths that occurred in the continental United States thereafter, with Alaska added in 1959 and Hawaii in 1960. Deaths among Armed Forces overseas and among U.S. nationals living abroad are excluded for all years. Deaths among nonresident aliens are excluded for 1970 and later years.

The category "white" includes, in addition to persons reported as white, persons reported to be Mexican or Puerto Rican. The categories "races other than

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Table 1. Number of victims of homicide, by age, color, and sex, United States, 1973

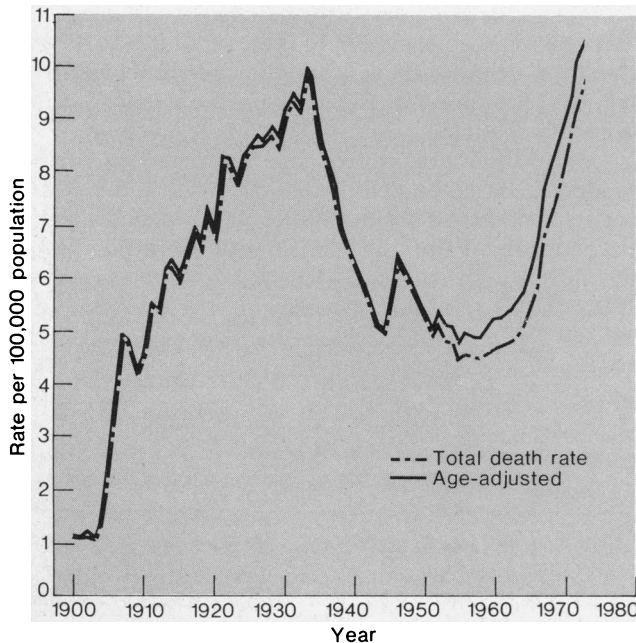
Age group (years)	Total			White			All other		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female
All ages	20,465	15,840	4,625	9,986	7,411	2,575	10,479	8,429	2,050
Under 1	161	81	80	99	53	46	62	28	34
1-4	342	186	156	192	104	88	150	82	68
5-9	139	82	57	86	48	38	53	34	19
10-14	286	179	107	166	93	73	120	86	34
15-19	1,863	1,396	467	897	627	270	966	769	197
20-24	3,319	2,609	710	1,474	1,122	352	1,845	1,487	358
25-29	3,016	2,464	552	1,359	1,088	271	1,657	1,376	281
30-34	2,388	1,919	469	1,032	817	215	1,356	1,102	254
35-39	1,920	1,487	433	891	673	218	1,029	814	215
40-44	1,698	1,325	373	770	572	198	928	753	175
45-49	1,469	1,167	302	702	537	165	767	630	137
50-54	1,163	931	232	617	476	141	546	455	91
55-59	891	728	163	514	408	106	377	320	57
60-64	628	495	133	381	293	88	247	202	45
65-69	453	336	117	283	197	86	170	139	31
70-74	310	215	95	201	132	69	109	83	26
75-79	210	125	85	158	84	74	52	41	11
80-84	119	60	59	97	47	50	22	13	9
85+	55	30	25	46	25	21	9	5	4
Not stated	35	25	10	21	15	6	14	10	4

NOTE: Homicides are those assigned to categories E960-E978 of the Eighth Revision of the International Classification of Diseases, Adapted for Use in the United States.

white” and “all other” consist of persons reported as Negro, American Indian, Chinese, and Japanese; other numerically small racial groups; and persons of mixed white and other races.

The Bureau of the Census reports that in 1973 about 26,802,000 of the 209,851,000 people in the United States (or 13 percent) belonged to “races other than white.” Of the 26,802,000 people, about 23,801,000 (or 89 percent) belonged to the Negro race (2).

Figure 1. Total and age-adjusted homicide rates, United States, 1900-73



Trends of Total Homicide Rates, 1900-74

An examination of the rates for homicide during this century shows that both the total rate and the age-adjusted rate increased from 1900 to about 1933. Then both rates declined slowly (except for the steep drop in the homicide rate during the years of World War II) through the 1940s and 1950s. But the trend during 1960-74 was again clearly upward. The total rate for homicide rose from 4.7 deaths per 100,000 for 1960 to 9.8 deaths for 1973 and to an estimated 10.3 deaths per 100,000 for 1974.

The impact of World War II on the rate for homicide—a cause of death that occurs more frequently in the first half of the lifespan—was in the opposite direction from that of the death rates for malignant neoplasms, diseases of the heart, and other degenerative diseases—causes of death that occur more frequently in the later half of the lifespan. The total number of victims of homicide dropped from 8,329 at the beginning of World War II in 1940 to a low of 6,675 in 1944, but the number turned upward again—to 8,913 in 1946, the year in which large numbers of servicemen returned to the United States.

Part of the explanation for the precipitous drop in the number of homicides in 1944 is that about 5½ million men were serving abroad with the U.S. Armed Forces. Any homicides that may have occurred among these men while stationed abroad are not included in the statistics in this report, as mentioned before. About 3,448,000 of the more than 5 million men overseas in 1944 were in the age groups 20-24 and 25-29 years, and these are the ages when man is in greatest jeopardy of becoming a victim of homicide.

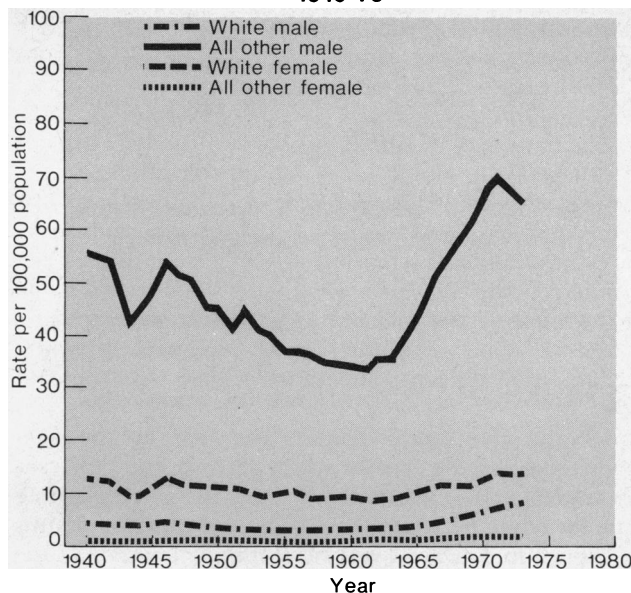
Another factor in the precipitous drop in the number of homicides during World War II was the reduction in the homicide rate among persons who remained in the country during the war years. This reduction may also have come about in part because so many young men were serving abroad; men at ages 20–24 and 25–29 not only have the highest victim rates for homicide but also have the highest rates for committing homicide. Further, one might ask whether the drop in the number of homicides during the war years may not have resulted in part from the unusual environment of the nation. At that time, the country was almost entirely united in an effort to win the war. Employment was high and long workweeks were common.

Color and Sex Differentials, By Age

The downward effect of World War II on the homicide rate was most pronounced for males of races other than white (fig. 2); their homicide rate decreased from 55.5 deaths per 100,000 for 1940 to 44.1 for 1944 (3). The corresponding decrease for white males was from 5.0 deaths per 100,000 for 1940 to 4.0 for 1944.

For each of the four color-sex groups, the homicide rates declined slowly through the last half of the 1940s and through the 1950s, but the rates turned upward again at the beginning of the 1960s. The upward trend continued through 1973 for three of the four color-sex groups—white males, white females, and females of

Figure 2. Homicide rates, by color and sex, United States, 1940-73



other races—but not for males of other races. For males other than white, the rate of increase in homicides decelerated from the middle of the 1960s until about 1971, and then the rate turned downward—from 70.1 homicides per 100,000 for 1972 to 65.8 for 1973. The effect on the total homicide rate of this striking down-

Table 2. Age-adjusted rates for homicide per 100,000 population, by color and sex, United States, 1950-73

Year	Total			White			All other		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female
1973	10.5	16.7	4.5	5.7	8.7	2.8	44.4	77.1	16.0
1972	10.3	16.8	4.0	5.2	8.2	2.4	46.6	83.1	14.8
1971	10.0	16.3	4.1	5.1	7.9	2.4	45.9	80.8	15.5
1970	9.1	14.9	3.7	4.7	7.3	2.2	41.3	72.8	13.7
1969	8.6	13.9	3.5	4.3	6.6	2.1	41.3	72.4	13.8
1968	8.2	13.4	3.4	4.2	6.5	2.0	39.6	68.9	13.6
1967	7.7	12.1	3.5	3.9	5.9	2.0	36.9	62.7	14.0
1966	6.7	10.4	3.2	3.4	4.9	1.9	32.4	54.8	12.4
1965	6.2	9.8	2.9	3.2	4.8	1.7	30.1	50.7	11.7
1964	5.7	8.9	2.7	3.0	4.3	1.7	27.9	47.1	10.6
1963 ¹	5.5	8.5	2.6	2.9	4.2	1.6	26.7	44.8	10.5
1962 ¹	5.4	8.3	2.6	2.9	4.1	1.7	26.5	44.4	10.3
1961	5.2	8.0	2.6	2.7	3.9	1.6	25.0	41.5	10.1
1960	5.2	7.9	2.6	2.7	3.9	1.5	25.7	41.9	11.2
1959	5.1	7.7	2.5	2.6	3.8	1.5	25.8	42.3	² 10.7
1958	4.9	7.5	2.5	2.5	3.6	1.4	25.3	41.6	10.5
1957	4.9	7.6	2.4	2.4	3.5	1.4	25.9	43.1	10.3
1956	5.0	7.6	2.4	2.4	3.5	1.3	26.5	43.2	11.3
1955	4.8	7.5	2.3	2.4	3.5	1.3	25.7	42.6	² 10.3
1954	5.1	8.0	2.4	2.5	3.6	1.4	27.4	46.2	² 10.3
1953	5.1	8.0	2.3	2.5	3.6	1.3	27.4	46.5	² 10.2
1952	5.4	8.5	2.4	2.6	3.8	1.3	29.9	50.4	11.3
1951	5.0	7.8	2.4	2.5	3.6	1.4	27.5	45.3	11.1
1950 ³	5.4	8.4	2.5	2.6	3.9	1.4	29.5	49.1	² 11.5

¹Color rates do not include New Jersey, which did not require reporting of this item for these years.

²Age-adjusted rates where more than half of the age-specific rates are based on fewer than 20 deaths.

³Based on enumerated population adjusted for age bias in the population of races other than white.

NOTE: For 1968-73, rates are based on deaths assigned to categories E960-E978, eighth revision ICDA, 1965; for 1950-67, rates are based on deaths assigned to categories E964, E980-E985, sixth and seventh revisions, 1948 and 1955. Age-adjusted rates were computed by the direct method using as the standard the total population for 1940.

turn in the rate for males of other races, however, was more than offset by the accelerated rise in the rate for the white population. For white persons, the homicide rate rose from 4.9 deaths per 100,000 for 1972 to 5.5 for 1973—representing an increase of more than 1,000 deaths—from 8,976 deaths for 1972 to 9,986 for 1973.

The pattern of the trends for age-adjusted death rates for each of the four color-sex groups is similar to the pattern for the unadjusted rates for these four groups (fig. 3, table 2). As measured by age-adjusted death rates, the relative increase of 101.9 percent in the total homicide rate between 1960 and 1973 reflects the following increases for the four color-sex groups: white male, 123.1 percent; other male, 71.7 percent; white female, 86.7 percent; and other female, 42.9 percent (fig. 3).

Despite the larger relative increase in the age-adjusted homicide rate for white persons, the 1973 rate for other persons was still 7.8 times the corresponding rate for white persons. This 1973 color ratio for victims of homicide, however, was substantially lower than the corresponding color ratio for 1960 (9.5) or 1950 (11.35).

For 1973, the age-adjusted homicide rate for males was 3.71 times the corresponding rate for females. This 1973 sex ratio for victims of homicide was somewhat higher than the corresponding sex ratios for 1960 (3.03) and 1950 (3.36).

Three Components of the Rising Rate

The continuing upturn in homicide cannot be analyzed without an examination of the following three components:

1. The unprecedented increase during 1958–72 in the population aged 15–29 years, an age group which traditionally has high victim as well as high assailant rates;

Table 3. Homicide rates per 100,000 population for three cohorts of persons born 1943–47, 1948–52, and 1953–57, by age, color, and sex, United States

Period of birth of cohort and age group at death (years)	Year of death	White males	All other males	White females	All other females
1953–57					
Under 5	1957	0.9	2.4	0.8	2.5
5–9	1962	.4	.7	.5	.8
10–14	1967	.5	3.8	.4	1.7
15–19	1972	6.3	55.5	2.8	11.7
1948–52					
Under 5	1952	1.3	2.1	1.0	1.9
5–9	1957	.3	.7	.3	.4
10–14	1962	.5	1.8	.6	.8
15–19	1967	4.3	43.8	1.6	9.3
20–24	1972	13.2	152.7	3.7	26.6
1943–47					
Under 5	1947	1.8	2.2	1.6	0.8
5–9	1952	.3	.9	.2	.8
10–14	1957	.5	2.7	.3	.8
15–19	1962	2.6	27.0	1.3	6.3
20–24	1967	8.7	105.8	2.9	24.7
25–29	1972	14.3	172.1	3.3	27.2

2. The substantial rise in death and assailant rates that began about 1960 for the 15–29 age group; and

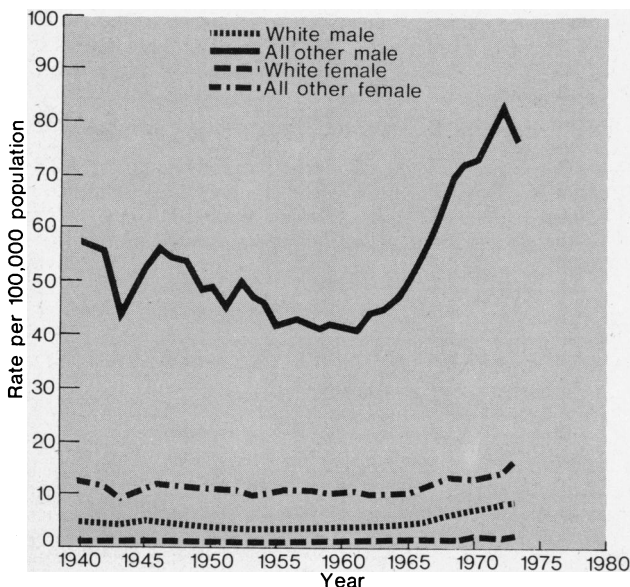
3. The higher cohort rates for homicide during 1960–72 at ages 35 years and over than at ages 25–34, the age group for which the usual peak homicide rate occurs.

Increases in population between 1960 and 1972 for the age groups 15–19, 20–24, and 25–29 raised the homicide rate for 1972 higher than it would have been if the population had not increased. These three age groups had far higher homicide rates in 1972 than in 1962 (table 3). Moreover, persons in these age groups, born in the last years of World War II and in the post-war “baby boom” years (1943–57), included 59.2 percent of all persons arrested for homicide in 1972. In 1973, the age group 15–29 accounted for 40.1 percent of all the victims and 59.3 percent of all those arrested for homicide (table 4).

The age group 20–24 years accounted for most of the upturn in homicides from 1962 to 1972, with both the greatest number of persons arrested for homicide and the greatest number of victims in 1972. This age group, born in 1948–52, included 17.0 percent of all the victims and an estimated 23.7 percent of all persons arrested for homicide in 1972. There were only 10,800,761 persons aged 20–24 in 1960, but by 1972—owing to the large birth cohort of 1948–52—this population had increased to 17,733,000. In 1973, the age group 20–24 accounted for 16.2 percent of all the victims and 24.2 percent of all those arrested for homicide (table 4).

Persons from the cohort born in 1943–47, aged 25–29 years in 1972, were almost as dominantly implicated in homicide as those aged 20–24 years in 1972. The age group 25–29 accounted for 14.5 percent of the

Figure 3. Age-adjusted homicide rates, by color and sex, United States, 1940–73



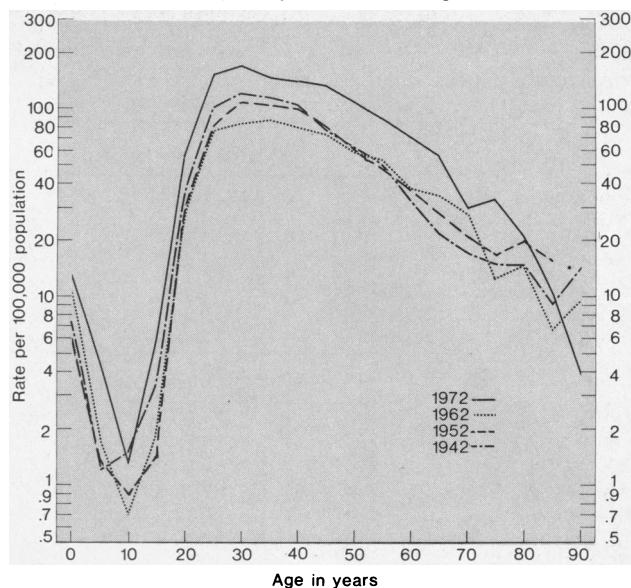
victims and an estimated 16.9 percent of all those arrested for homicide. The 1972 homicide rate for the age group 25–29 (172.1 deaths per 100,000) was much higher than the rate for the age group 20–24 years. The older group, however, contained smaller proportions of victims and of persons arrested for homicide, probably in part because in 1972 there were about 2,739,000 fewer persons aged 25–29 than persons aged 20–24 years. In 1973, the age group 25–29 accounted for 14.7 percent of all the victims and 16.0 percent of all those arrested for homicide (table 4).

Even more disturbing is the pattern emerging for the cohort born in 1953–57, the last years of the rising live birth rate in the United States. In 1972 this cohort was 15–19 years old, and it accounted for 9.0 percent of all the victims and an estimated 18.5 percent of all those arrested for homicide. There were 20,110,000 persons aged 15–19 years in 1972—a larger cohort by far than either of the other two critical cohorts born in 1948–52 or 1943–47. In 1973, the age group 15–19 years accounted for 9.1 percent of all the victims and 19.1 percent of all those arrested for homicide (table 4).

An examination of the mortality pattern for age-specific homicide rates for each year from 1933 to 1973 (beginning with the first year that all of the first 48 States were in the death registration area) shows that—with few exceptions for any given year—for each of the four color-sex groups the age group 25–34 had a considerably higher death rate than any other age group. This pattern holds both for years in periods when homicide rates fell and for years in periods when the rates rose.

Peaking of the homicide rate for males of races other than white is greater than that for any other color-sex group. The steep peaking pattern for these males is il-

Figure 4. Homicide rates for males of races other than white, by age, United States, at 10-year intervals during 1942-72



lustrated by the mortality curves for age-specific rates for 4 calendar years, at 10-year intervals, in figure 4. Two of these years were in a period when homicide rates rose (1962 and 1972) and two were in a period when homicide rates fell (1942 and 1952).

It must be feared, therefore, that unless the ongoing upturn in homicide is reversed, each of the four color-sex groups in the large cohort born in 1953–57 will have a higher homicide rate in 1977, when they will be 20–24 years old, than they had in 1972 at ages 15–19.

Cohort analysis is also used to clarify the alarming change in pattern in risk from homicide with advance in age. Again, as in the preceding description of the homicide experience of the cohorts born in 1943–47, 1948–52, and 1953–57, a cohort is defined as a group of persons born in a given 5-year period. The youngest cohort for which the following data are presented was born in 1938–42 and was 30–34 years of age in 1972 (table 5).

Although the greatest absolute increase in the homicide rate occurred for men of races other than white at ages 25–29 years, no age group was spared in the continuing upturn in homicide. In fact, the upturn in homicide is affecting all existing cohorts in somewhat the same manner as do epidemics of acute infectious diseases. One notable difference, however, is that epidemics of acute infectious diseases usually last only one or two seasons, whereas the upturn in homicide has already persisted for 15 years.

The pattern of upturn in homicide beginning about 1962 for all cohorts is more pronounced for white men than for men of other races (table 5). Although rates for homicide are still considerably lower for white men than for men of other races (fig. 5), the relative increases in mortality from this cause during 1962–72, as shown in table 5, were greater for white men. For five

Table 4. Number and percent distribution of victims of homicide and persons arrested for homicide, by age groups, United States, 1973

Age group (years)	Number	Percent
Victims of homicide		
All ages	20,465	100.0
Under 15	928	4.5
15–29	8,198	40.1
15–19	1,863	9.1
20–24	3,319	16.2
25–29	3,016	14.7
30 years and over	11,339	59.4
Persons arrested for homicide¹		
All ages	17,395	100.0
Under 15	299	1.7
15–29	10,315	59.3
15–19	3,315	19.1
20–24	4,209	24.2
25–29	2,791	16.0
30 years and over	6,781	39.0

SOURCE: reference 1. The data are limited to 6,004 agencies, covering an estimated population of 154,995,000 for 1973.

Table 5. Homicide rates among males, by age at death, year of death, color, and birth cohort, 1932-72

Age group at death (years)	Year of death	Death rate per 100,000 population		Age group at death (years)	Year of death	Death rate per 100,000 population	
		White males	All other males			White males	All other males
1938-42 birth cohort				1913-17 birth cohort			
Under 5	1942	1.4	2.4	Under 5	1917	—	—
5-9	1947	0.4	1.5	5-9	1922	—	—
10-14	1952	0.6	1.5	10-14	1927	—	—
15-19	1957	2.3	26.9	15-19	1932	5.0	45.0
20-24	1962	5.5	76.5	20-24	1937	8.8	128.1
25-29	1967	10.7	127.9	25-29	1942	6.4	120.3
30-34	1972	13.4	148.2	30-34	1947	7.4	106.6
1933-37 birth cohort				1908-12 birth cohort			
Under 5	1937	1.9	1.6	Under 5	1912	—	—
5-9	1942	0.3	1.5	5-9	1917	—	—
10-14	1947	0.5	3.5	10-14	1922	—	—
15-19	1952	2.4	34.7	15-19	1927	—	—
20-24	1957	5.7	69.0	20-24	1932	12.8	121.7
25-29	1962	6.6	83.3	25-29	1937	10.9	146.1
30-34	1967	10.1	125.0	30-34	1942	6.9	124.8
35-39	1972	13.8	143.9	35-39	1947	7.7	99.8
1928-32 birth cohort				1903-07 birth cohort			
Under 5	1932	2.0	3.1	Under 5	1907	—	—
5-9	1937	0.6	1.2	5-9	1912	—	—
10-14	1942	0.4	3.3	10-14	1917	—	—
15-19	1947	2.2	34.8	15-19	1922	—	—
20-24	1952	5.4	80.5	20-24	1927	—	—
25-29	1957	6.0	86.6	25-29	1932	16.2	145.9
30-34	1962	7.1	87.1	30-34	1937	10.4	121.2
35-39	1967	9.1	115.5	35-39	1942	7.2	105.0
40-44	1972	12.3	135.9	40-44	1947	7.8	74.9
1923-27 birth cohort				1898-1902 birth cohort			
Under 5	1927	—	—	Under 5	1902	—	—
5-9	1932	0.7	0.6	5-9	1907	—	—
10-14	1937	0.7	4.2	10-14	1912	—	—
15-19	1942	2.7	35.8	15-19	1917	—	—
20-24	1947	6.5	108.4	20-24	1922	—	—
25-29	1952	6.2	107.6	25-29	1927	—	—
30-34	1957	5.3	86.9	30-34	1932	16.4	136.1
35-39	1962	6.3	79.1	35-39	1937	10.9	118.9
40-44	1967	8.4	99.7	40-44	1942	6.3	76.9
45-49	1972	10.5	109.0	45-49	1947	6.2	62.9
1918-22 birth cohort				1893-97 birth cohort			
Under 5	1922	—	—	Under 5	1902	—	—
5-9	1927	—	—	5-9	1907	—	—
10-14	1932	0.7	3.5	10-14	1912	—	—
15-19	1937	3.3	44.0	15-19	1917	—	—
20-24	1942	5.6	101.9	20-24	1922	—	—
25-29	1947	7.4	114.9	25-29	1927	—	—
30-34	1952	5.1	104.5	30-34	1932	16.4	136.1
35-39	1957	5.0	72.1	35-39	1937	10.9	118.9
40-44	1962	5.6	73.2	40-44	1942	6.3	76.9
45-49	1967	7.0	82.3	45-49	1947	6.2	62.9
50-54	1972	8.8	88.0	50-54	1952	5.0	46.8
				55-59	1957	4.8	35.5
				60-64	1962	4.2	34.5
				65-69	1967	5.3	35.5
				70-74	1972	5.1	32.9

NOTE: Death rates for years prior to 1932 are not shown because of the break in continuity of homicide rates resulting from the rapidly expanding group of States in the "Death Registration Area." For 1968-72, rates are based on deaths assigned to categories E960-E978 of the Eighth Revision of the International Classification of Diseases, Adapted for Use in the United States; for 1949-67, categories E964, E980-E985 of the sixth and seventh revisions; for 1939-47, categories 165-168 of the fifth revision; and for 1930-38, categories 172-175 of the fourth revision.

Table 5. Homicide rates among males, by age at death, year of death, color, and birth cohort, 1932-72 (cont'd)

Age group at death (years)	Year of death	Death rate per 100,000 population		Age group at death (years)	Year of death	Death rate per 100,000 population	
		White males	All other males			White males	All other males
1893-97 birth cohort				1888-92 birth cohort			
Under 5	1897	—	—	Under 5	1892	—	—
5-9	1902	—	—	5-9	1897	—	—
10-14	1907	—	—	10-14	1902	—	—
15-19	1912	—	—	15-19	1907	—	—
20-24	1917	—	—	20-24	1912	—	—
25-29	1922	—	—	25-29	1917	—	—
30-34	1927	—	—	30-34	1922	—	—
35-39	1932	16.2	126.4	35-39	1927	—	—
40-44	1937	9.6	89.6	40-44	1932	13.0	97.7
45-49	1942	6.6	61.4	45-49	1937	9.4	73.6
50-54	1947	5.8	51.3	50-54	1942	5.5	50.2
55-59	1952	4.1	36.5	55-59	1947	5.9	35.5
60-64	1957	3.1	26.0	60-64	1952	3.8	27.5
65-69	1962	3.9	27.4	65-69	1957	3.7	26.1
70-74	1967	4.5	27.2	70-74	1962	2.7	12.6
75-79	1972	3.9	21.2	75-79	1967	4.0	16.8
				80-84	1972	5.7	10.4

Figure 5. Homicide rates for males, by color and age, United States, 1972

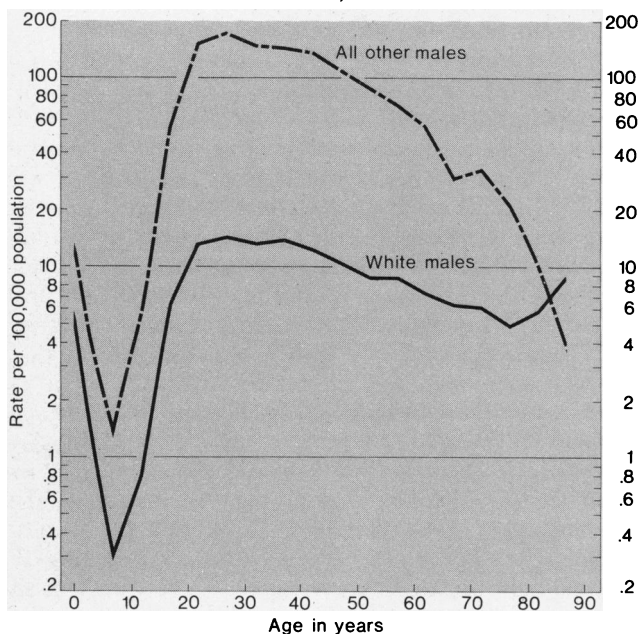
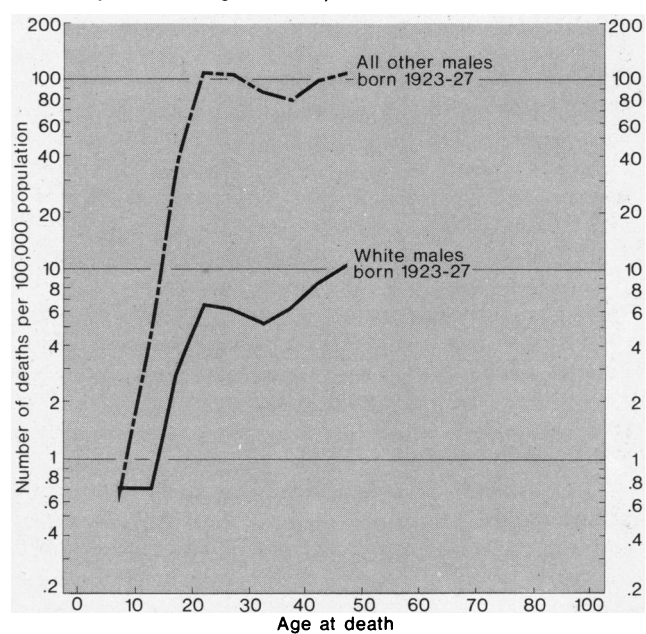


Figure 6. Homicide rates among males born during 1923-27, by color and age at death, United States, 1932-72



cohorts of white men, spanning the years 1918 to 1942 in table 5, the homicide rate reached a level at older ages in 1972 that was higher than the first peak rate reached at about age 30 years.

Moreover, for the five cohorts of white men the relative increases between the first peak rate for homicide and the rate for 1972 are markedly greater than the corresponding increases for the parallel cohorts of men of races other than white. Consider the experience of the cohort of white men born during 1923-27 and 45-49 years old in 1972 (fig. 6). This cohort of white men lived its first 34 years in a period of downturn in mortality, and its first peak death rate oc-

curred at younger ages (20-24 years) than the ages at which the peak death rate occurs in the annual schedules of age-specific rates for homicide. As mentioned before, in the annual schedules of age-specific death rates the highest homicide rate occurs for the age group 25-34 years. This 1923-27 cohort reached its first peak rate of 6.5 deaths per 100,000 in 1947, at ages 20-24, and then its homicide rate declined until sometime between 1957-62—the period when the nation's upturn in homicide began.

After dropping to a low in 1957 of 5.3 deaths per 100,000 at ages 30-34 years, the homicide rate for the 1923-27 cohort of white men turned upward; the rate

reached 10.5 deaths per 100,000 at ages 45–49 years in 1972. The relative increase between the first peak rate in 1947 (6.5 deaths per 100,000) and the rate in 1972 (10.5 deaths per 100,000) amounts to 66.7 percent. For the parallel cohort of men of races other than white, however, the relative increase between the first peak rate in 1947 (108.4 deaths per 100,000) and the rate in 1972 (109.0 deaths per 100,000) amounts to an increase of only 1.3 percent.

Changing Patterns of Injury and Murder

Firearms, especially handguns, are the primary means of homicide. According to information on the death certificates of the victims, the percentage of homicides committed by means of firearms and explosives rose from 54.7 in 1960 to 67.2 in 1973—an increase from 4,627 such homicides for 1960 to 13,572 for 1973. (For 1973, the Federal Bureau of Investigation ((1) estimated that 53 percent of the homicides were committed with handguns and about 14 percent with shotguns and other firearms.)

On the other hand, information on the death certificates shows that the percentage of homicides committed with cutting and piercing instruments (especially knives) dropped from 21.7 in 1960 to 15.9 in 1973. This percentage decrease, however, does not reflect an actual decrease in the number of homicides committed with cutting and piercing instruments because the number increased from 1,816 in 1960 to 3,254 in 1973. Rather, the decrease in the percentage is largely a result of the relatively greater increase during 1960–73 in the use of handguns and other firearms and explosives to commit homicide.

Deaths resulting from legal intervention of police (mostly by means of firearms) increased from 245 in 1960 to 376 in 1973. These figures do not include legal executions, which dropped from 56 in 1960 to 2 in 1967 (the last year in which any legal executions were committed in the United States).

Other means of injury, including homicidal brawl, poisoning, drowning, and pushing from high places, accounted for about 20 percent of the homicides in 1960, but for only 14.8 percent of such deaths in 1973. Again, the percentage decrease does not reflect an actual decrease in the number of homicides committed in these ways—the number increased from 1,700 in 1960 to 3,083 in 1973. This decrease in percentage also results largely from the greater increase in the use of handguns and other firearms and explosives to commit homicide.

When all means of injury are considered, there are still more suicides in the United States (25,118 in 1973) than there are homicides (20,465 in 1973). But the gap between the two types of violent death is closing rapidly. Whereas in 1973 more than half of the victims of homicide were among persons of races other than white, about 93 percent of the suicides were among white persons.

The rise in the homicide rate for older people may be associated with the change in pattern of what the Federal Bureau of Investigation describes as “murder circumstance” (1):

Felony murder in Uniform Crime Reporting is defined as those killings resulting from robbery, burglary, sex motive, gangland and institutional slaying, and all other felonious activities. Felony type and suspected felony type murders in 1973 constituted 29 percent of all murders, whereas these two categories accounted for 25 percent of total murder in 1968. An analysis of felony murder reveals that 52 percent of these killings occurred in connection with robbery offenses.

In 1973 the victims of felony-type murder were 62 percent white, 37 percent Negro, and the remaining 1 percent of other race or race not reported. The percentage of murders in the family (spouse killing spouse, parent killing child, and other family killings) decreased from 28.8 in 1966 to 23.2 in 1973.

Some Geographic Particulars About Homicide

To provide a better method for overall analysis of population groups in the United States, the Office of Management and Budget (formerly Bureau of Budget) defined Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas in 1967 (4). Except in the New England States, an SMSA is a county or a group of contiguous counties containing at least one city of 50,000 inhabitants or more or “twin cities” with a combined population of at least 50,000 in the 1970 census. Any such city (or cities) of 50,000 or more that is designated as a “central city” (or “central cities”) of an SMSA is included in the name of the SMSA. In addition to the county or counties containing such a city or cities, contiguous counties are included in an SMSA if, according to specified criteria, they are essentially metropolitan in character and are socially and economically integrated with the central city or cities.

In New England, the Office of Management and Budget uses towns and cities rather than counties as geographic components of SMSAs. The National Center for Health Statistics cannot use the SMSA classification for the New England States because its data are not coded to identify all towns. Instead, the Metropolitan State Economic Area (MSEA) established by the Bureau of the Census, which is made up of county units, is used. The National Center for Health Statistics tabulates data for a total of 229 SMSAs and MSEAs. Counties included in SMSAs or in New England MSEAs are called metropolitan counties; all other counties are classified as nonmetropolitan.

For a brief examination of geographic variation in homicide rates, the 1970 population is grouped as follows:

Group 1: residents of metropolitan counties with central cities. This group includes residents of counties which have all, or the largest proportion of, the population of central cities named in SMSAs and residents of independent central cities.

Group 2: residents of metropolitan counties without central cities: This group includes residents of the remaining counties included in the SMSAs and residents of any additional independent cities in the SMSAs.

Group 3: residents of nonmetropolitan counties. This group includes all persons living outside of SMSAs and MSEAs.

Table 6. Number and percent of white and Negro population in central cities, other urbanized areas, and rural areas, United States, 1970

Area	White		Negro	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	177,748,975	100.00	22,580,289	100.00
Central cities	49,546,571	27.87	13,144,798	58.21
Other urban areas	79,226,669	44.57	5,222,520	23.13
Rural areas	48,975,735	27.55	4,212,971	18.66

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population: 1970, General Population Characteristics, Final Report PC (1)-B1, United States Summary. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1972, table 54.

The average age-adjusted rate for homicide for 1969-71 for group 1 was 11.9 homicides per 100,000 population; for group 2 the corresponding rate was 4.7 homicides per 100,000; and for group 3 the rate was 7.2 homicides per 100,000. Although there is some overlapping, group 1—population 108,416,394 in 1970—is predominantly urban; group 2—population 31,537,864 in 1970—is predominantly suburban; and group 3—population 63,281,040 in 1970—is predominantly rural.

The largest number of homicides among Negroes take place in the central cities. According to the Bureau of Census, in 1970 about 58 percent of the Negro population and only about 28 percent of the white population resided in central cities (table 6).

The pattern of high homicide rates for residents of metropolitan counties with central cities and low rates for residents of metropolitan counties without central cities was also true in 1970 for both the white population and the population of other races, as shown in the following table:

Area	White		All other	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
United States	7.4	2.3	76.8	14.5
Metropolitan counties:				
With central cities	8.8	2.6	85.4	15.4
Without central cities	4.8	1.7	50.3	9.7
Nonmetropolitan counties	6.5	2.1	62.8	13.6

The United States is also frequently divided into the following four broad regions: Northeast, North Central, South, and West. In the South, the percentage of the population residing in nonmetropolitan counties (43.9 percent) is substantially higher than the corresponding percentages for the other three regions: Northeast, 20.1 percent; North Central, 33.4 percent; and West, 21.4 percent.

Among these broad regions, again for 1973 as for every other year of the upturn in homicide (1960-73), the South had both the greatest number of victims and the highest death rate for homicide:

Region	Number of homicides	Rate per 100,000	Percent of population—races except white
Northeast	3,839	7.7	9.6
North Central	4,362	7.6	8.7
South	9,316	14.1	19.7
West	2,948	8.1	9.8

The South also had the highest percentage of persons of races other than white, and the homicide rate for races other than white is consistently higher than the corresponding rate for white persons.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, again in 1973 as in prior years, a lower percentage of homicides among residents of the South were attributed to "known felony type" or "suspected felony type" (21.6 percent) than the corresponding percentages in other regions: Northeast, 34.8; North Central, 35.7; and West, 32.3.

Among the nine geographic divisions for which rates are regularly computed, the three divisions that constitute the South (South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central) have much higher homicide rates than the other divisions (table 7). Each of the nine divisions had higher homicide rates for 1973 than for 1959-61. The largest absolute increase occurred in the

Table 7. Homicide rates, by geographic divisions and States, 1973

Area	Homicide rate	Area	Homicide rate
United States	9.8		
Geographic divisions:		South Atlantic:	
New England	3.9	Delaware	7.1
Middle Atlantic	9.0	Maryland	11.6
East North Central	8.6	District of Columbia	34.9
West North Central	5.0	Virginia	11.2
South Atlantic	15.1	West Virginia	5.4
East South Central	13.0	North Carolina	15.0
West South Central	13.3	South Carolina	16.4
Mountain	7.7	Georgia	20.9
Pacific	8.2	Florida	16.3
New England:		East South Central:	
Maine	2.6	Kentucky	9.8
New Hampshire	1.3	Tennessee	13.3
Vermont	1.5	Alabama	14.4
Massachusetts	4.9	Mississippi	15.3
Rhode Island	3.8	West South Central:	
Connecticut	3.7	Arkansas	9.2
Middle Atlantic:		Louisiana	16.6
New York	11.1	Oklahoma	8.3
New Jersey	7.0	Texas	14.0
Pennsylvania	6.9	Mountain:	
East North Central:		Montana	6.1
Ohio	8.4	Idaho	3.5
Indiana	7.0	Wyoming	3.4
Illinois	8.3	Colorado	6.9
Michigan	13.0	New Mexico	12.1
Wisconsin	3.2	Arizona	10.0
West North Central:		Utah	3.5
Minnesota	2.5	Nevada	12.8
Iowa	1.9	Pacific:	
Missouri	9.5	Washington	5.0
North Dakota	1.4	Oregon	4.8
South Dakota	5.3	California	9.2
Nebraska	4.3	Alaska	8.2
Kansas	4.8	Hawaii	4.6

NOTE: Rates per 100,000 population residing in specified area.

Table 8. Homicide rates for 20 largest cities, by population and rank of homicide rates in 1970 and number of homicides in 1970 and 1973

City	1970			Number of homicides	
	Population	Homicide rate per 100,000 population	Rank of homicide rate	1970	1973
St. Louis, Mo	622,236	39.9	1	248	201
Cleveland, Ohio	750,903	34.5	2	259	279
Detroit, Mich	1,511,482	34.5	2	521	722
Dallas, Tex	844,401	29.1	4	246	280
Washington, D.C.	756,510	26.4	5	200	260
Baltimore, Md	905,759	25.8	6	234	275
Houston, Tex	1,232,802	25.7	7	317	347
Chicago, Ill	3,366,957	24.8	8	834	619
New Orleans, La	593,471	21.7	9	129	211
Philadelphia, Pa.	1,948,609	20.0	10	389	485
Memphis, Tenn	623,530	16.2	11	101	167
Los Angeles, Calif	2,816,061	15.1	12	426	490
San Francisco, Calif	715,674	14.8	13	106	105
New York, N.Y.	7,894,862	14.5	14	1,147	1,689
Boston, Mass	641,071	13.6	15	87	130
San Antonio, Tex	654,153	13.0	16	85	134
Phoenix, Ariz	581,562	11.0	17	64	77
Indianapolis, Ind	744,624	9.5	18	71	84
Milwaukee, Wis	717,099	8.4	19	60	79
San Diego, Calif	696,769	4.9	20	34	57

South Atlantic States, from 8.2 to 15.1 homicides per 100,000 population.

By State, nine of the highest homicide rates recorded for 1973 were for States in the South (table 7). These States, in the order of the magnitude of their homicide rates per 100,000 for 1973 were as follows: Georgia, 20.9; Louisiana, 16.6; South Carolina, 16.4; Florida, 16.3; Mississippi, 15.3; North Carolina, 15.0; Alabama, 14.4; Texas, 14.0; and Tennessee, 13.3. Michigan had the 10th highest rate for homicide—13.0 per 100,000—as a result of the large number of homicides in Detroit. In 1970 about 60 percent of Michigan's homicides occurred among residents of Detroit (521 of 861 homicides).

The five States with the lowest homicide rates in 1973 and their rates per 100,000 were New Hampshire, 1.3; North Dakota, 1.4; Vermont, 1.5; Iowa, 1.9; and Minnesota 2.5 (table 7).

In 1970, the following 5 of the 20 largest cities had the highest homicide rates: St. Louis, Cleveland, Detroit, Dallas, and Washington, D.C. (table 8). In Washington, D.C., the only city for which 1973 population figures are available, the homicide rate rose from 26.4 per 100,000 in 1970 to 34.9 in 1973. All but 3 of the 20 largest cities had a greater number of homicides in 1973 than in 1970. The number of homicides increased in New York City from 1,147 in 1970 to 1,689 in 1973; in Detroit from 521 to 722; and in Philadelphia from 389 to 485. The three cities for which fewer homicides were reported for 1973 than for 1970 were St. Louis, Chicago, and San Francisco.

The numbers of homicides in the cities in table 8 refer only to residents of these cities. Excluded from the counts are homicides that occurred in these cities

among visitors who were residents of other areas. On the other hand, homicides that occurred in other areas among residents of these cities are included in the counts. The homicide patterns indicate that the numbers of homicides among residents of these cities that occur in other areas are fewer than the numbers of homicides that occur within these cities to residents from other areas. For this reason, the total numbers of homicides that occurred in the 20 cities may be greater than the numbers among residents that are shown in the table.

Conclusion

This analysis of the important components of the rising homicide rates, the changing patterns in means of injury, and the relative increase in the number of victims at older ages indicates that unless present violent behavior is drastically altered, no downturn in the victim rate may be expected until the 1980s.

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