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## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN JUDICIAL CRIMINAL STATISTICS

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As a result of a growing demand on the part of students and scholars of the administration of criminal justice for national statistical data on judicial criminal statistics, the Bureau of the Census was authorized by an Act of Congress in 1931 to compile and publish annual statistics relating to crime and criminal administration. Judicial statistics were first collected for the year 1932. Sixteen States, including the District of Columbia, cooperated by furnishing data covering the disposition of criminal cases in the courts of general jurisdiction. Since that time the number of States cooperating has increased so that 30 States furnished statistics of this nature for the year 1936.

The annual collection of judicial criminal statistics is made by means of two tally sheets which are furnished to the clerks of the trial courts in each county at the end of the calendar year. The clerks are requested to tally on the first sheet the number of defendants disposed of during the year according to offense charged and disposition, and on the second the number sentenced according to offense and sentence. In each State a supervisor is selected who acts as the Special Agent of the Census Bureau and who distributes these sheets to the clerks within his State and collects and edits them before returning them to the Census Bureau. All of the work done by the supervisors and clerks of court is on a voluntary basis.

This method of collecting data was adopted on the theory that there would be in most States an agency or official already engaged in the collection of similar statistics within the State who would, in the interests of promoting national uniform statistics, supervise the collection for the Census Bureau and see to it that it was accurately and properly made. As a matter of fact, there are very few States in which there are such agencies or officials who are in a position to offer real supervision or assistance in the collection of these data. Most collections of judicial statistics made by such officials as attorney generals, secretaries of State, or judicial councils are made without any expert analysis or evaluation of the material gathered.

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The statistics collected by the Census Bureau in this field have not been entirely satisfactory. The returns have improved very little in quality from year to year and in several instances have become increasingly more incomplete. There is no provision at the present time for any field work to be carried on in connection with this collection of statistics and that, together with the fact that few States can supply expert supervision, makes it difficult to improve this collection. Until the time comes when the Census Bureau can furnish some field assistance for this work or the States themselves will supply adequate field supervision, it would seem doubtful whether any expansion of this collection should be attempted. It is probably wiser to drop a number of the States where the returns are unsatisfactory from the present collection and concentrate on those States in which the returns are satisfactory or promising.

Several States have created by statute central statistical agencies for the collection of criminal statistics but most of these are bureaus of identification and have not been given sufficient appropriations to do more than carry on pure identification work. During 1937 the States of Michigan and North Carolina both created State agencies with rather comprehensive powers for the collection of criminal statistics—the new Department of Corrections in Michigan and the State Bureau of Identification and Investigation in North Carolina. As more agencies with broad powers of collecting statistics of this type within a State are created and put into operation, the better the chances will be for an adequate uniform collection of statistics on the part of the Census Bureau.

During 1938 the Bureau of the Census is experimenting with a different method of collecting judicial criminal statistics in the States of Minnesota and Ohio. The weaknesses of the tally sheet method are that all classification is done by the clerks of court as they fill out the tally sheet and that no analysis can be carried beyond the 2-way comparison that appears on the tally sheet. Considerable experimental work has been done in the past by research agencies on the individual case reporting system under which a clerk of court furnishes a summary report on each case handled, all classification and tabulation being done by a central statistical agency. This insures uniform classification throughout the State, instead of 100 possible variations of classification which will occur in those States where 100 different clerks make out the tally sheets. It will also provide data in a manner that permits much more detailed analysis. This method produces much more satisfactory and accurate statistics,

although it entails more work at the central statistical bureau. For the most part, this method is acceptable to the clerks of court as they fill out reports on the cases as they are disposed of from day to day and do not have to prepare a full year's report at the end of the year.

The State Bureau of Criminal Apprehension in Minnesota is taking full responsibility for the introduction of this method in that State and will tabulate and analyze the individual returns in cooperation with the Census Bureau. In Ohio about 50 of the 88 counties of the State are furnishing reports under this new method during 1938. As there was no State agency that was prepared to do the detailed work and analysis in Ohio, the Census Bureau is performing this service in Washington. The Ohio experiment is being carried on in cooperation with the office of the Ohio Secretary of State and the Ohio Judicial Council.

It will not be possible for the Bureau of the Census to carry on the collection of judicial statistics under this method in all States if it has to handle the detailed editing, coding, tabulation, etc., for all of the courts of a State. However, the Census Bureau feels that it can do the detailed work for a few States at a time on the assumption that such States will set up their own statistical bureau to take over the work once its value is demonstrated.

Meanwhile, the general collection of judicial statistics will have to continue under the tally sheet method. It may be possible to experiment with the individual case method in some other States within the next year or two. The following States seem to show the most promise for further development along this line: Wisconsin, Kansas, Indiana, Michigan, and California.

While no southern State has as yet been included in the Census Bureau collection of criminal statistics, it is thought that within another year it will be possible to include the State of North Carolina. The fact that a State agency has just been created there which in itself has broad powers of collecting criminal statistics offers a real opportunity for the development of these collections in that State.

All of the work done at the present time or contemplated is in the field of criminal statistics of courts of general jurisdiction. The question of what are courts of general jurisdiction offers considerable difficulty in those States where there are courts having overlapping jurisdiction or where minor courts are given the power, in certain instances, to dispose of felony cases. Statistics which will

show the handling of felony cases in the administration of criminal justice from the time of arrest on have not yet been contemplated nor has any consideration been given to the reporting of statistical data covering the activities of the minor courts in the misdemeanor field. There has not been sufficient experimental work done covering minor courts on which to base a plan of collection at the present time. In the past decade a series of crime surveys made it possible to become well acquainted with the work and records of the courts of general jurisdiction and to plan a collection of statistics from these courts. It would seem that statistical survey work, particularly in the field of minor courts, needs to be done by various colleges and other research agencies before any plan can be worked out for such a collection.