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THE TREND OF CRIME IN CHICAGO

Harry Willbach¹

Chicago, the second largest city in the United States, has shared and perhaps has even surpassed the first city, New York, in its newspaper-made notoriety as a city of iniquity and the gathering place and hunting-ground of the lawless.

In a previous study of the trend of crime in New York City² for the period from 1916 to 1936 it was shown that there was a decrease in the number of arrests as well as in the ratio of the arrests to the male population aged sixteen years and upward.

The present study arises out of the desire to ascertain whether the downward trend observed for New York City was peculiar to that locality or was characteristic of similar movements elsewhere. The present analysis, relating to Chicago, will be followed by others for communities located in different sections of the nation.

Reference to these studies—already completed or in the course of preparation—makes it imperative to caution against any attempt to make detailed comparisons of the data for the different places. Such comparisons would be invalid because these analyses have not been based on all crimes committed, nor on all crimes reported nor even on all arrests made. The measure used was arrests for major crimes. They, therefore, treat only part of all the persons who committed crimes in

the localities studied. Such comparisons would be valid if the arrests included in these studies were a fixed and known ratio of all those who committed crimes. Such ratios are unascertainable and can only be secured if detection and arrest invariably follow the commission of every crime.

The value of this study—based on arrests—does not lie in the number of arrests or the ratio of arrests to the population but rather in the fact that it shows the trend over a period of time. This trend retains its value even though it is not based on all arrests but only on those for the more important crimes which have always been frowned upon by the group politic.

It is intended at a later date to bring together the analyses of trends of crime in the several jurisdictions for the purpose of comparing them and securing a composite picture of the trend of crime for the nation as a whole.

While the arrests on which this study is based, do not include all crimes the omissions do not vitiate the present analysis or the conclusions drawn. The group of crimes included has been constant for the entire period and is composed of the more important offenses against the person and against property rights.

This study utilizes data on arrests of males, sixteen years of age and over, reported by the police department of

¹ Capitol. Albany. N. Y.

² This Journal. Vol. XXIX. No. 1.

the city of Chicago for the years of 1919 to 1939 inclusive. The annual reports of this department contain tables giving the number of persons arrested for the various crimes. Those included in this analysis are:

Crimes Against the Person

Assault
 Assault and Battery
 Assault to Murder
 Assault with Deadly Weapon
 Intimidation
 Kidnapping
 Manslaughter
 Mayhem
 Murder
 Murder—Accessory to
 Rape
 Resisting an Officer
 Threat to Kidnap or Murder

Crimes Against Property Rights

Arson
 Burglary
 Confidence Game
 Counterfeiting
 Embezzlement
 Forgery
 Impersonating an Officer
 Larceny
 Malicious Mischief
 Obtaining Money or Goods by
 False Pretense
 Perjury
 Receiving Stolen Goods
 Robbery

The two major divisions adopted were the broad classifications of crimes against the person and crimes against property rights. The particular crimes included under each of these headings have been listed above.

Data for the crimes of larceny, burglary and robbery have also been shown separately because they constitute about four-fifths of all arrests included herein as crimes against property rights.

The twenty-one year period extending from 1919 to 1939 has generally been viewed as a period of increasing criminality. At times, during this span of two decades, an aroused citizenry has been tremendously concerned about the crime problem and focussing attention on occasional reports of outrageous or atrocious acts has assumed that crime in Chicago was increasing.

Various explanations have been offered for this alleged increase. Among these were the aftermath of the World War which brought changed standards; the era of prohibition which developed bootlegging and hi-jacking; the repeal of prohibition to which has been attributed kidnapping and racketeering; and the economic displacement of the present decade which is blamed for everything that cannot be placed in any other category.

The amount of crime as measured by arrests has not been constant each year nor has it followed any simple process of continual and regular increases or decreases from one year to the next. Rather, it has been marked by fluctuations—ups and downs—which thus far have eluded accurate explanation.

In 1919 the estimated male population for Chicago of persons sixteen years of age or over was 963,590. In 1939, twenty-one years later, the population of this age group was 1,358,700, an increase of 41 per cent.

In 1919 there were 11,881 persons arrested for all of the crimes listed above. In 1939 only 9,155 persons were arrested for these same crimes—a decrease of 23 per cent.

In 1919 the number of persons arrested for crimes against the person was 2,760. Twenty-one years later only 2,212 persons were arrested for these crimes—a decrease of 19.7 per cent.

In 1919 a total of 9121 persons were arrested for crimes listed herein as being against property rights. In 1939 only 6,943 persons were arrested for the same crimes—a decrease of 23.9 per cent.

Between the two extremes of this same twenty-one year period arrests for larceny decreased 37.6 per cent, and arrests for burglary decreased 15.7 per cent. Arrests for robbery increased 3.6 per cent.

The selection of the two years for which comparisons have been made is not arbitrary but is due solely to the fact that they are the beginning and the end of the twenty-one year period un-

der study. A longer interval would have included the war period during which great changes occurred in the composition and activities of the population of Chicago.

It should not be assumed that while the population increased continuously, the number of persons arrested decreased continuously from each year to the next. The curve of crime or of arrests follows no such simple or regular pattern.

An examination of the data shows that the actual number of arrests for each of the five groups of crimes went through a series of changes—increasing and decreasing. These periods of increases and decreases were not of equal length for any particular crime. As between different crimes these fluctuations varied as regards frequency, dates and length of period.

THE TREND OF CRIME IN CHICAGO

	<i>Number of Males Arrested for</i>					<i>Rates per 100,000 Male Population Aged Sixteen and Over Arrested for</i>				
	<i>Crimes</i>					<i>Crimes</i>				
	<i>Crimes against the person</i>	<i>against prop- erty rights</i>	<i>Lar- ceny</i>	<i>Bur- glary</i>	<i>Rob- bery</i>	<i>Crimes against the person</i>	<i>against prop- erty rights</i>	<i>Lar- ceny</i>	<i>Bur- glary</i>	<i>Rob- bery</i>
1919.....	2760	9121	4886	1244	1214	286.4	946.6	507.1	129.1	126.0
1920.....	2850	9614	4713	1498	1231	290.7	980.6	480.7	152.8	125.6
1921.....	3691	10657	4852	1479	1507	365.2	1054.6	480.1	146.4	149.1
1922.....	3780	9543	4516	1073	1289	363.2	917.0	433.9	103.1	123.9
1923.....	3852	9343	5030	879	1001	359.7	872.5	469.7	82.1	93.5
1924.....	4705	10670	5167	1239	1442	427.3	969.1	469.3	112.5	131.0
1925.....	5113	11165	5209	1300	1528	452.0	987.0	460.5	114.9	135.1
1926.....	5252	11768	5878	1330	1542	452.2	1013.3	506.1	114.5	132.8
1927.....	5538	13734	6548	1813	1779	464.8	1152.6	549.6	152.2	149.3
1928.....	5244	11621	5444	1420	1638	429.2	951.2	445.6	116.2	134.1
1929.....	5125	11733	5743	1033	1409	409.4	937.3	458.8	82.5	112.6
1930.....	4949	13520	6853	1474	1968	386.0	1054.6	534.6	115.0	153.5
1931.....	4594	14558	7481	1659	2257	356.0	1128.3	579.8	128.6	174.9
1932.....	3667	12672	7030	1634	2199	282.4	975.8	541.4	125.8	169.3
1933.....	3590	11947	6122	1597	1961	274.7	914.1	468.4	122.2	150.0
1934.....	3433	10135	4718	1425	1842	261.0	770.6	358.7	108.3	140.1
1935.....	2653	8421	4081	1151	1407	200.5	636.3	308.3	87.0	106.3
1936.....	2424	6632	3224	826	1044	181.9	497.6	241.9	62.0	78.3
1937.....	2585	6516	3133	937	1022	192.8	485.9	233.6	69.9	76.2
1938.....	2437	6951	3081	1045	1285	180.6	515.1	228.3	77.4	95.2
1939.....	2216	6943	3049	1049	1258	163.1	511.0	224.4	77.2	92.6

This examination suggests further that the twenty-one year period showed two trends. The first terminated in 1927 and was marked by a rise in the number of arrests. The second followed immediately and except for arrests in 1930 and 1931 for crimes against property rights, was characterized by decreasing numbers.

Common to all of the five groups were the continued increases in arrests from 1923 to 1927. In the latter year arrests for crimes against the person were more than double the number for 1919 while in this same period there was an increase of more than 50 per cent in the number of persons arrested for crimes against property rights.

Common also to all of the five groups were the decreases from 1931 to 1936.

It cannot be suggested that this decrease is due to an increasing laxity of the police or a breaking down of all law enforcing agencies. Such a suggestion

would be untenable for several reasons each of which is sufficiently important in itself to offset such implication.

1. The press, alarmed and amazed at the disclosures of the Illinois Crime Survey has been alert for a repetition and would openly condemn laxity on the part of any law enforcement agency.

2. The Chicago Crime Commission is continually watching the entire machinery for the administration of justice and would speak up if any laxity were shown.

3. The last decade has witnessed great advances in police science.

4. Similar decreases have been observed in other cities.

Reference has been made to the continuous decrease in arrests from 1931 to 1936. The following figures are presented to indicate that crimes reported followed the same course:

CRIMES REPORTED

	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
Robbery	17,866	17,350	15,616	11,462	7,231
Burglary	31,232	30,510	28,730	25,774	21,390
Larceny	54,052	48,854	32,085	25,476	21,633
TOTAL	103,150	96,714	76,431	62,712	50,254

It is apparent that the reports of these three crimes to the police decreased 51.3 per cent during the period indicated. During this same period the number of persons arrested for these same crimes decreased 53.1 per cent.

This close agreement holds not only for the entire period but also for each year. A comparison of arrests for these three crimes and the reports of such crimes to the police gives the following results when compared with 1932:

COMPARISON WITH 1932 FOR CRIMES OF ROBBERY, BURGLARY AND LARCENY

	Arrests	Crimes Reported
1933	—11.9%	—6.2%
1934	—26.5%	—25.9%
1935	—38.9%	—39.2%
1936	—53.1%	—51.3%

The close similarity in the figures for each year justify and validate the use of arrests as a measure for determining the trend of crime.

The year by year data on the number of arrests for the several groups of crimes can be summarized as follows:

Arrests for crimes against the person increased continuously up to 1927. Thereafter the numbers decreased each year, except in 1937 when there was a slight rise. The lowest figure reported during the entire twenty-one year period was for 1939 when the arrests for this group of offenses was four-fifths of what were reported in 1919 and two fifths of what they were in 1927.

Arrests for crimes against property rights increased from 1919 to 1927 except for the years of 1922 and 1923 when decreases were noted. After a decrease from 1927 to 1928 there set in a new upward surge which terminated in 1931 when the arrests for this group of crimes reached the highest point. Thereafter there were continuous decreases through 1937 which were followed by a slight increase in 1938 with a further almost imperceptible decrease in 1939. The reported arrests for 1939 were about three-fourths of what they were in 1919 and two-fifths of the number shown for 1931.

Arrests for larceny fluctuated until 1922 and then rose continuously until 1931, except for a decrease in 1928. Since 1931—when the arrests for this crime were the highest for the twenty-one year period—there were continuous decreases from year to year. The arrests reported for 1939 were five-eighths of the figure shown for 1919 and two-fifths of that for 1931.

Arrests for burglary increased from 1919 to 1920 and then decreased to 1923 which was followed by continual rises

until 1927 when the largest number of arrests were shown for this crime. The next two years registered decreases which were followed by increases for 1930 and 1931. Thereafter and through 1936 the course of the arrests was steadily downward. During the last three years the figures have risen somewhat. The arrests for this crime in 1939 were about five-sixths of those for 1919 and seven-twelfths of those for 1927.

The general pattern of the arrests for robbery followed fairly closely that shown for burglary. The largest number was reported for 1931. This crime is the only one of those listed in the table which showed a larger number of arrests in 1939 than in 1919.

The chart of the number of arrests shows the yearly fluctuations. However, because of the many rises and falls in the arrests the data was smoothed by mathematical methods so that a continuous straight line shows the trend for the entire twenty-one years. This procedure when applied to crimes against the person yielded the equation $Y=3831-68.9X$, using 1929 as the origin. This not only establishes the course of the arrests for these crimes as being downward but also indicates the average yearly decrease.

Similar methods applied to the other groups of crimes gave the following equations:

Crimes against property rights	$Y=10346-127.4X$
Larceny	$Y=5083.7-70.7X$
Burglary	$Y=1290.7-10X$
Robbery	$Y=1515.4+6.2X$

From the above it will be observed that the course of the actual number of arrests was downward for all of the groups of crimes except robbery in which case it was slightly upward.

Thus far only the absolute numbers of arrests have been considered. Cognizance must be taken, however, of the fact that the population of Chicago has been increasing. Certainly, in measuring crime as a social phenomenon it is important to relate arrests to the size of the population. Through the courtesy of the Board of Health of Chicago there was made available the estimated male population sixteen years of age and over. By dividing male arrests (sixteen years of age and over) by the population, per capita rates of arrest were secured.

Comparing 1919 with 1939, as was done with the actual numbers of arrests, it was found that the per capita ratios also showed a decrease. This decrease was much more marked than for the actual numbers because the population increased steadily.

In 1919 there were arrested for crimes against the person 286.4 out of every 100,000 of the male population sixteen years of age and over. In 1939, as a result of both the increase in the population and the decrease in the actual number of arrests, this figure dropped to 163.1 or 43.1 per cent less than in 1919.

At the beginning of the twenty-one year period arrests for crimes against property rights were 946.6 persons out of every 100,000 of the male population aged sixteen and over. At the end of

the period, in 1939, this figure was 511—a decrease of 46 per cent.

The ratios of arrests for larceny, burglary and robbery decreased 55.7, 40.2, and 26.5 percent respectively.

These ratios, when plotted, also showed a series of changes—increasing and decreasing. These fluctuations, however, were not as marked as those shown for the actual numbers of arrests.

The ratios of the population arrested for crimes against the person and crimes against property rights also indicated an increase for each year in the period from 1923 to 1927 and a continuous decrease from 1931 to 1936.

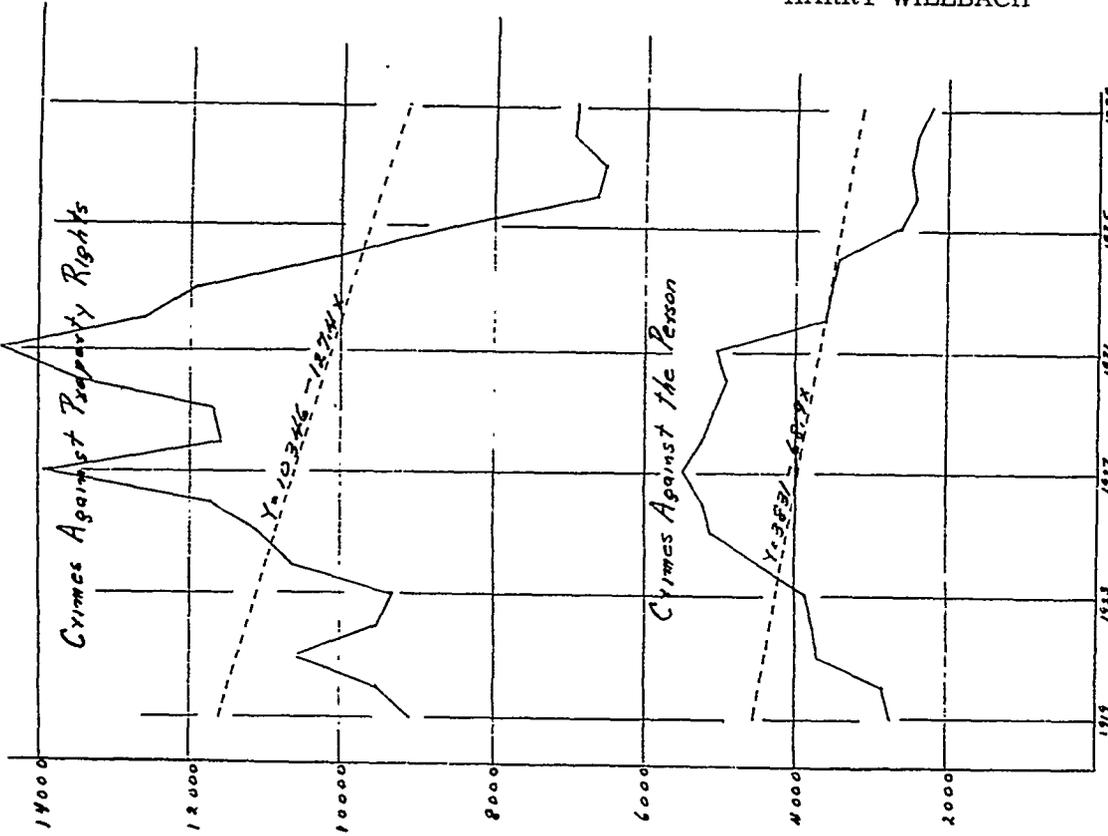
The highest ratios of arrests to the male population sixteen years of age and over were as follows:

Crimes against the person	1927	464.8 per 100,000
Crimes against property rights	1927	1152.6 per 100,000
Larceny	1931	579.8 per 100,000
Burglary	1920	152.8 per 100,000 and
	1927	152.2 per 100,000
Robbery	1931	174.9 per 100,000

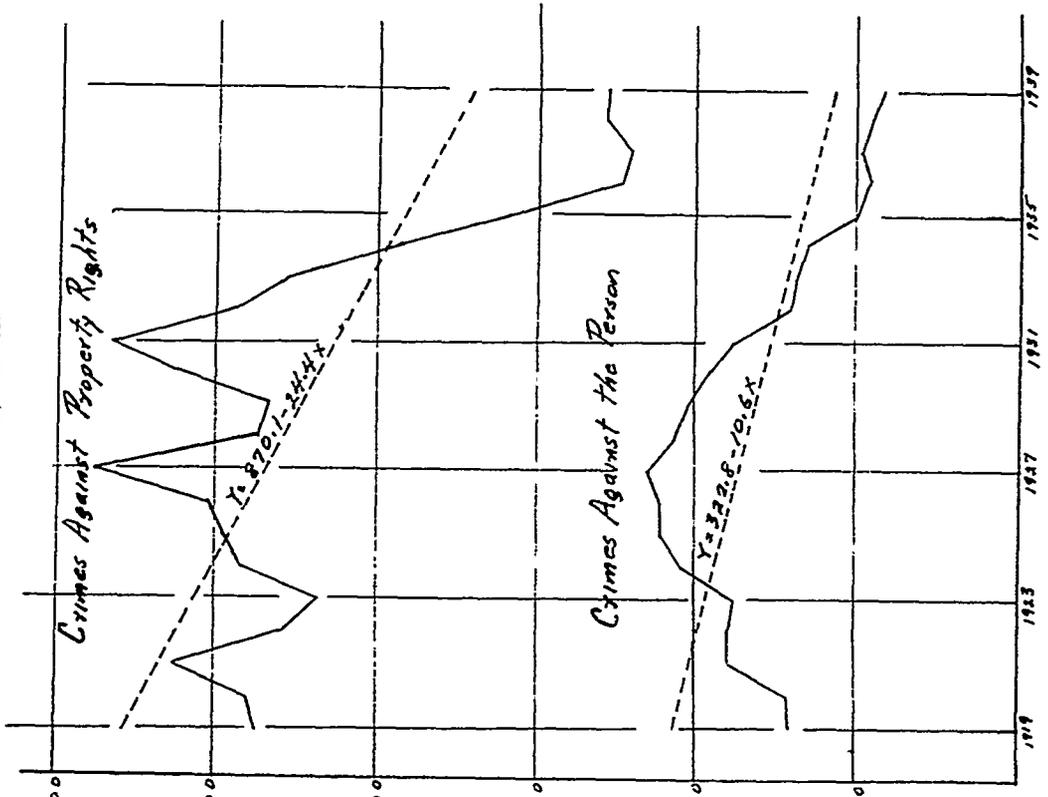
The ratios of the population arrested for crimes against the person showed an almost continuous increase up to 1927 which was followed by an almost uninterrupted decrease through 1939.

The curve of arrests for crimes against property rights showed two high points. These are the years 1927 and 1931. In the latter year the ratio of the population arrested for these crimes approached within 24.3 points the all time high of 1927. It receded in the next year and continued to decrease

NUMBER OF MALES ARRESTED
IN CHICAGO, 1919-1939



ARRESTS FOR EACH 100,000 MALES
AGED 16 OR OVER
CHICAGO, 1919-1939



through 1937 which was followed by a slight increase.

Since 1927 was the peak year for crimes against the person and crimes against property rights it is of interest to compare the data for that year with that for 1939.

In 1927 the arrests for crimes against the person were 464.8 per 100,000 of the male population aged sixteen years or over. In 1939 this figure was 163.1—a decrease of 65 per cent.

Arrests for crimes against property rights dropped from 1152.6 in 1927 to 511.0 in 1939—a decrease of 55.7 per cent.

The ratios of the population arrested for the several groups of crimes were smoothed by the same methods that were used with the actual numbers. The equations derived showed that the trend of arrests on a per capita basis was downward for all of the groups. These equations were:

Crimes against the person	$Y=322.8-10.6X$
Crimes against property rights	$Y=870.1-24.4X$
Larceny	$Y=427.7-12.5X$
Burglary	$Y=108.5-2.7X$
Robbery	$Y=126.2-1.5X$

Findings

The number of persons arrested is a valid measure for determining the trend of crime if the crimes included have been constant for the entire period and constitute the more important offenses.

While the male population of Chicago aged sixteen and over increased

41 per cent from 1919 to 1939, the arrests for a constant group of crimes—the major crimes—decreased 23 per cent.

Arrests for crimes against the person decreased 19.7 per cent during this interval while arrests for crimes against property rights decreased 23.9 per cent.

The number of persons arrested for the several groups of crimes did not follow any simple or regular pattern but showed a series of changes—increasing and decreasing.

In general there were two trends—an increase which terminated in 1927 and a decrease from then to the end of the twenty-one year period.

The validity of using arrests as the unit for measuring the trend of crime is borne out by the close agreement in the decreases of both arrests and reported crimes for the period of 1932-1936.

Smoothed curves of the actual number of persons arrested showed that the course of arrests during the period of 1919-1939 was downward for crimes against the person, crimes against property rights, larceny, and burglary. For robbery it was slightly upward.

Translating the number of arrests into ratios of the male population aged sixteen years and over, the decrease in arrests from 1919 to 1939 was even more marked because the population increased over this period.

The smoothed curves of these ratios showed a definite downward trend for all of the five groups of crimes.