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## RECENT CRIMES AND THE VETERANS

Harry Willbach

After several years of graduate work in sociology and the social sciences the author entered the field of criminology. He was associated with the New York Crime (Baumes) Commission for whom he prepared a report on the statistics of crime and disposition of arrests. Subsequently he served as research expert in the field of criminology for several New York State commissions. He was associated with Raymond Moley in an investigation of the conduct of the office of the district attorney of New York County. This JOURNAL has published a number of articles by him on the trend of crime. For the past seventeen years he has been employed by the State of New York in connection with its correctional activities.—EDITOR.

There is a feeling throughout the land that the returned veterans have been engaging in crimes to such an extent as to endanger the very foundation of civil life and safety. Indeed, some people have spread before the public a canvas on which the ex-service man is shown bludgeoning all passers-by and after maiming them, robbing them of their possessions. Another canvas portrays armed men walking along the streets and killing, without cause, anyone who dares to venture out and use a public thoroughfare. And while all this happens it must be presumed that the police stand by fearfully and are unable to protect human life and property!

This, it is said, is a consequence of the war training and war experience of those who had faced danger in order to preserve the culture of their country and the safety and independence of their fellow citizens who for one reason or another did not participate in military activities.

It is reasoned that the returning soldier, having engaged in mass movements to vanquish an enemy, returns home with a new code and a new set of morals plus a knowledge of the use of weapons and a desire to continue adventure and to make a living or amass a fortune by expropriating the property of others.

In support of this contention official statistics are used and a comparison is made between a war year and a post-war year.

During the war men and women were either in the military service or were on the home front aiding in one way or several ways to further the war effort. They were either removed from the civilian population or were kept so busy during their working hours that they were fatigued and didn't possess the energy or the desire to participate in criminal activities.

During the post-war year there was an increase in the civilian population because of the return of the soldier. In addition to this, those who had remained at home were occupied fewer hours daily and had more free time and smaller take-home pay.

These statistics show that in New York City in 1943 the total number of arrests for all offenses was 369,047. In 1946 it rose to 697,734, an increase of 89.1 per cent.

This great increase cannot be dismissed lightly. It requires analysis and study. The basis of the presentation in this article will be *persons arrested*. It is admitted that this is not an all inclusive crime figure. It omits an unknown and undetermined number of persons who committed crimes and were not apprehended. It is however the most complete figure that is available. This article is restricted to New York City. Similar studies can and should be made for other localities for which there is available detailed, comparable material over a series of years.

New York City has a highly heterogeneous population who move in a very competitive setting and live in dire poverty or fabulous riches or in any economic state between these two extremes. It is said to contain large numbers of criminals and to offer unlimited temptation both to persons who choose criminal ways and to those who lack inhibitions or codes of conduct which respect and protect the rights and the possessions of others.

The term "crime" is usually loosely applied to all acts which may result in arrest. Accepting this view it is found that in New York City in 1946 there were 697,734 arrests—more than 1,900 a day. However, 92 per cent of the arrests were for what the New York City Police Department's annual report classifies as "Offenses against public health, etc." Almost all are minor offenses and close to 80 per cent were for violating various city ordinances relative to the operation and parking of automobiles.

In addition to "offenses against public health, etc." the Department reports list crimes under the general headings of offenses against the person, against chastity, against family and children, against the administration of government, against property rights (with a breakdown of thirteen sub-classes), and general criminality.

In 1946, arrests for all offenses except those against public health, etc., totaled 58,553. We will restrict our analysis to 16,861 of these. This is the number of arrests for crimes against the person, larceny, burglary and robbery. These four groups are considered crimes in all jurisdictions and have had consistent definitions for a long time. They accounted for close to 30 per cent of all arrests exclusive of those for offenses against the public health.

The annual reports of the New York City Police Department give the ages of persons arrested by five and ten year intervals.

In the condensations of the tables, presented herewith, the age group twenty-one years to thirty years can be expected to include almost all of the returned veterans who were arrested. This age group, therefore, becomes the focal point of any analysis of the participation of the ex-service man in the picture of what is said by some people to be the rising tide of criminality.

From the data assembled it appears that crime, as reflected by arrests, is not a problem created by the veteran. Crime today is committed much more by teen-agers and youths—persons who had not been in the armed forces because they were too young. Of the persons arrested during 1946 for the four groups of serious offenses studied, about 40 per cent were twenty years old or younger while about 30 per cent were between the ages of twenty-one and thirty.

The only variant from this generalization was among those arrested for "crimes against the person." Here, the age group of twenty-one to thirty showed twice as many arrests as the younger group. However, it cannot be maintained that this indicates the returned veteran is vicious or that his military experience has developed in him a disregard for the rights and safety of others. In the pre-war years this age group (which includes very many persons who were not in uniform) had five times as many arrests for this type of crime as did persons who were under twenty-one years of age.

With the exception of murder, robbery is viewed generally as being the most atrocious of all crimes. The robber is thought of as being fearless and vicious—traits which presumably were instilled in the veteran while he was in service.

Yet, in 1946, with the total number of arrests for this crime at the highest point for the last ten years, it was found that there were 867 arrests of persons twenty years of age or under, and 684 for those between the ages of twenty-one and thirty.

Making comparisons with the pre-war years of 1936 to 1940 inclusive it is observed that arrests during 1946 for the younger group—those twenty years of age or under—has increased tremendously while for the twenty-one to thirty year group it has decreased. Comparing 1940 with 1946, arrests for the younger group increased 100 per cent, while for those between twenty-one and thirty there was a decrease of 7.2 per cent.

The crime of burglary has generally been considered a crime of the younger offender. In 1946 arrests for this crime showed that 20 per cent were of persons between the ages of twenty-one and thirty, while almost 70 per cent of all of the arrests were of persons twenty years old and younger. And in each of the years

from 1936 to 1940, approximately 30 per cent of the persons arrested for burglary were between twenty-one and thirty years of age.

In arrests for larceny during 1946, somewhat less than 30 per cent of the total were between the ages of twenty-one and thirty. This figure does not vary very much from what it was in the five pre-war years of 1936 to 1940. In 1936 the percentage was 29. In the following years it was successively 29, 33, 31 and 32 per cent.

In 1946, arrests for the combined total of the four more serious crimes referred to in the preceding paragraphs showed that almost 40 per cent were twenty years of age or less, while about 30 per cent were between the ages of twenty-one and thirty. In 1940, the latest pre-war year (before the operation of the Selective Service Law), this situation was reversed. During that year the arrests of the twenty-one to thirty age group constituted 44.5 per cent of all arrests for these four crimes while the younger group, those under 21 years of age, accounted for 32.6 per cent. In each of the four years preceding 1940 the percentage of arrests for the older of these two age groups was considerably in excess of that for the younger—persons twenty years of age and under.

Some of the concern about the crime situation is due to the fact, already referred to above, that during the last few years there has been a most noticeable increase in the ratio which persons between the ages of twenty-one and thirty years bear to the total number of arrests. This was to have been expected because during the war years, as a result of voluntary enlistments and the operation of the Selective Service Law, large numbers of the population of this age group had been withdrawn from the civilian population and were under the jurisdiction and control of the Army and Navy. It has been estimated that 907,638\* persons from New York City were in the armed forces. While not all of them were retained in the service throughout the war period (some had been discharged at earlier dates for various reasons), it is a fair assumption that about 600,000 had been out of the civilian population for the years of 1943 to 1945, inclusive.

As of January 1, 1947 about 90 per cent of the service men from New York State had been discharged from the armed forces. Since all parts of the State were probably similarly affected, it can be assumed that 500,000 ex-service men returned to civilian life in New York City in 1946.

For the four more serious classes of crimes referred to above,

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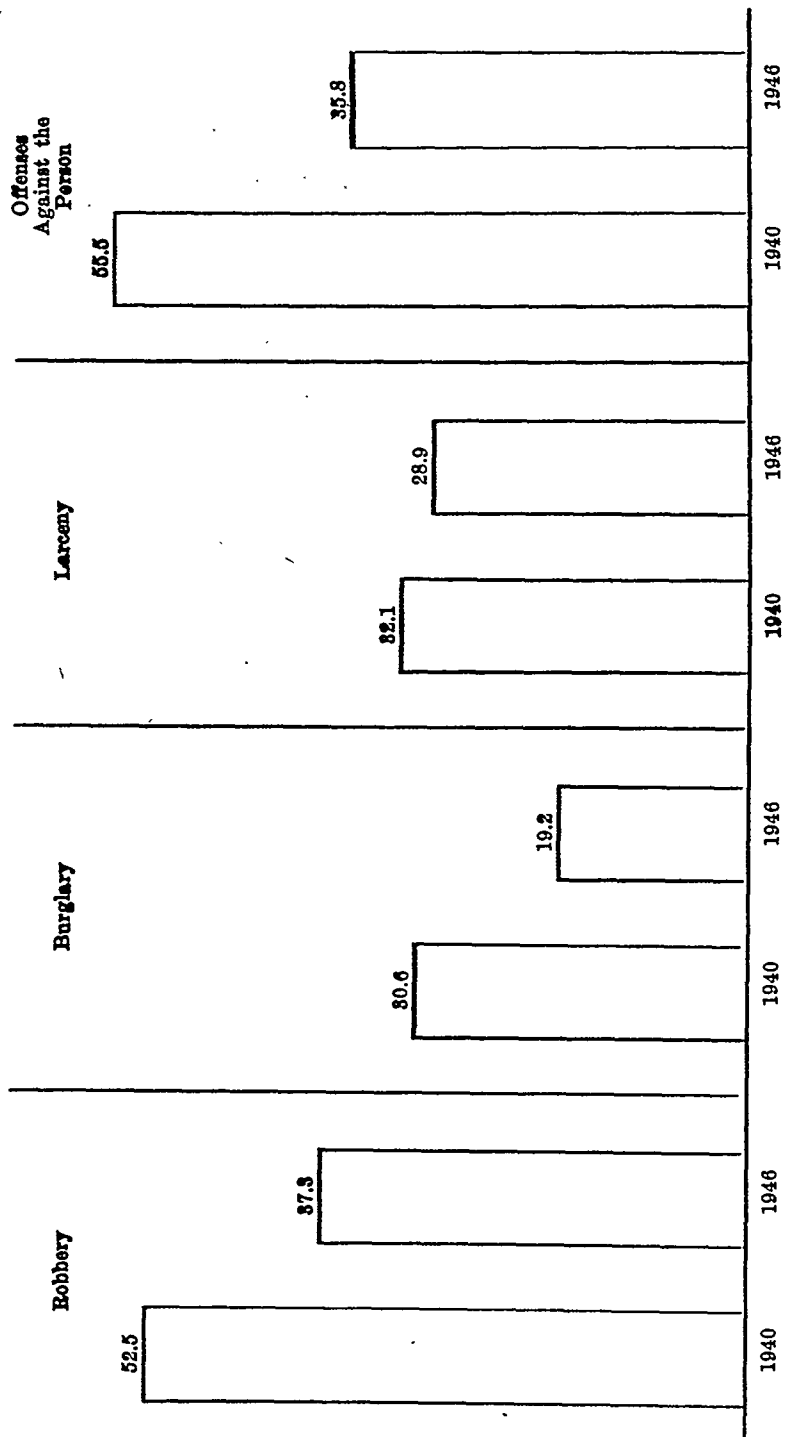
\* From tables supplied by the New York State Commerce Department.

the actual number of arrests of persons between the ages of twenty-one and thirty was 4,355 for 1945 and 5,174 for 1946. This is an increase of 819. Since about 500,000 veterans returned to civilian life in 1946, the 819 additional arrests for violations of major laws represents a ratio of less than two persons per each thousand of this additional population. Surely this small ratio cannot be considered a threat. Even if it is allowed that these 500,000 were returned to civilian life throughout the course of the year and that they therefor represent only that many persons for an average of six months each, the ratio of two per thousand for a half year or four per thousand population for a full year is far from presenting serious implications.

It might be argued that sufficient time has not elapsed since the discharge of the veterans to have indicated clearly the place they will take in society. There is no doubt that with the passage of time, others who were veterans will come into contact with law enforcement agencies. At that time the veterans will be older (and presumably more adjusted and better integrated into the social order). There may be some who will hold that the criminal activities of these persons must be attributed to their previous military experience. To quiet them, it should be stressed that if there is any carry over of asocial conduct it should be expected to make its appearance within a very short period after the return of the veteran to the community.

In the main the veteran is too busy trying to make up for the loss of years from his civilian life. This loss is both in his social life as well as in his industrial and economic status. He has no time for crime. He has no interest in it. He retreats from any activities which may still further retard his readjustment towards assuming and reaching that position in society which is in keeping with his age. All of his energy and resources are being utilized to pick up the loose ends which he left when he entered the service. With all his might and perseverance he is trying to establish himself as a civilian and to further his economic and social life to that position which he feels he would have attained if war had not interrupted his normal peace-time development and progress.

PERCENT OF ALL PERSONS ARRESTED—AGES 21 TO 30  
COMPARISON OF 1940 AND 1946



ARRESTS FOR ROBBERY IN NEW YORK CITY—BY AGE GROUPS  
FOR THE PERIOD 1936-1946 INCLUSIVE

AGE	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946
20 years and under	442	521	469	419	430	456	477	650	698	1106	867
21-30 years	890	772	799	759	737	597	564	404	438	492	684
31-40 years	389	267	277	250	225	217	214	200	199	185	222
41-50 years	58	15	26	5	11	11	2	4	18	19	42
over 50 years	13	3	9	..	..	1	..	..	..	3	18
Total	1792	1578	1580	1433	1403	1282	1257	1258	1353	1805	1833

ARRESTS FOR OFFENSES AGAINST THE PERSON IN NEW YORK CITY—  
BY AGE GROUPS FOR THE PERIOD 1936-1946 INCLUSIVE

AGE	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946
20 years and under	768	746	655	685	678	782	831	1001	1139	1255	1111
21-30 years	3330	3589	3888	4338	4102	3752	2762	1972	2198	2310	2660
31-40 years	3182	3139	3035	2797	2422	2279	2647	2560	2328	2171	2494
41-50 years	990	653	528	184	163	219	288	389	693	708	759
over 50 years	381	255	117	23	20	81	76	74	221	356	397
Total	8651	8387	8223	8027	7385	7113	6604	5996	6579	6800	7421

ARRESTS FOR LARCENY IN NEW YORK CITY—BY AGE GROUPS  
FOR THE PERIOD 1936-1946 INCLUSIVE

AGE	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946
20 years and under	2225	2513	2313	2605	2309	2351	2028	2191	2199	2392	2066
21-30 years	1228	1336	1475	1428	1346	1091	997	858	769	909	1099
31-40 years	647	639	566	520	499	556	566	610	471	456	484
41-50 years	123	59	54	21	40	67	54	83	65	99	110
over 50 years	47	18	13	5	2	11	1	12	29	47	50
Total	4270	4565	4421	4579	4196	4076	3646	3754	3533	3903	3809

ARRESTS FOR BURGLARY IN NEW YORK CITY—BY AGE GROUPS  
FOR THE PERIOD 1936-1946 INCLUSIVE

AGE	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946
20 years and under	1676	1996	1922	2063	1846	1610	1574	2227	2164	2604	2626
21-30 years	891	1168	1036	944	1006	818	603	523	502	644	731
31-40 years	379	342	386	279	310	334	251	305	286	274	351
41-50 years	39	22	32	6	8	31	7	22	31	24	67
over 50 years	10	2	10	..	..	..	..	2	9	3	23
Total	2995	3530	3386	3292	3170	2793	2435	3079	2992	3549	3798

ARRESTS FOR ROBBERY, BURGLARY, LARCENY, AND OFFENSES  
AGAINST THE PERSON IN NEW YORK CITY—BY AGE GROUPS  
FOR THE PERIOD 1936-1946 INCLUSIVE

AGE	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946
20 years and under	5111	5776	5359	5772	5263	5199	4910	6069	6200	7357	6670
21-30 years	6339	6865	7198	7469	7191	6253	4926	3757	3907	4355	5174
31-40 years	4597	4387	4264	3846	3456	3386	3678	3675	3284	3086	3551
41-50 years	1210	754	640	216	222	328	351	498	807	850	978
over 50 years	451	278	149	28	22	93	77	88	259	409	488
Total	17708	18060	17610	17331	16154	15264	13942	14087	14457	16057	16861



*Summary.*

An analysis of crime in the first full year following the cessation of hostilities should not rest with a comparison with a war year because service men had been removed from the civilian population and those who remained at home were busily engaged in their various activities, many of which were concerned with the war effort.

In studying crime trends as reflected by arrests it is important to eliminate the large number of arrests due to minor violations of the motor vehicle laws and other ordinances.

A study of arrests in New York City for major crimes—offenses against the person, larceny, burglary, and robbery—shows that in 1946 three-tenths were of persons between the ages of twenty-one and thirty. This is the age group which includes almost all of the ex-service men. Persons twenty years of age and under accounted for 40 per cent of all of the arrests.

A valid comparison is not with a war year but with 1940 and several preceding years. This shows that arrests of persons between twenty-one and thirty years of age were considerably fewer numerically in 1946 than in any of those previous years. For the years 1936 to 1940 this age group averaged about 40 per cent of all arrests for the crimes of robbery, larceny, burglary and offenses against the person.

In 1946 arrests of persons between twenty-one and thirty years of age increased considerably over the figure for 1945—a war year. Yet this increase represents a ratio of less than four persons for every thousand of the 500,000 service men returned to the community during that year.

The veteran has not turned to crime. He is too concerned with reestablishing himself in the social order and is ambitious to make up for the loss he sustained by having been removed from civilian life for several years.