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THE CRIME OF ROBBERY  
IN THE  
UNITED STATES



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# THE CRIME OF ROBBERY IN THE UNITED STATES

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An Assessment of Studies  
and Related Data From  
1965-1970

A Background Paper by  
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
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## FOREWORD

The fear of crime is an all too pervasive phenomenon of contemporary American society, manifesting itself in the public's concern about crime in the streets. The crime of robbery has stirred the public's greatest concern. Over the past decade the rate of robbery has increased 146 percent, surpassed only by the increase in larceny (165 percent) among the crimes reported annually in the Uniform Crime Reports. And 110 percent of the increase in the rate of robbery has occurred in the last three years!

*The Crime of Robbery in the United States* was prepared in an effort to ascertain the present state of knowledge of robbery and, thereby, provide a basis for formulating guidelines for improved deterrence of robbery and apprehension of offenders. The author accomplished this purpose through a review and assessment of all significant reports, papers and articles on robbery that have been published during the past five years. The results clearly establish the need for a better understanding of robbery and for more research in tactics and equipment development in this area.

This study was carried out by Arnold Sagalyn while a staff member of Arthur D. Little, Inc., in fulfillment of a contract with the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice. Mr. Sagalyn has been concerned with police and law enforcement problems for over 30 years. From 1961 to 1965 he was principal law enforcement advisor to the Secretary of the Treasury, and served as U.S. representative to Interpol. He has also served as consultant to the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice and to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, and as Associate Director for Public Safety of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. From 1967 to 1968, Mr. Sagalyn was Advisor on Public Safety to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

This document is one of a series of reviews of the literature on crime issued by the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, the research arm of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U.S. Department of Justice. The Institute was established under the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 in

response to a widely recognized need for research and development in crime control and prevention.

Information about the Institute, its research plan and programs, may be obtained from the Institute upon request.

IRVING SLOTT  
*Acting Director, National Institute  
of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice*

## *PREFACE*

This report had its genesis in a memorandum written by the author to the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice in December 1969 proposing a background paper which would seek to compile and evaluate the available current literature dealing with the crime of robbery.

In accordance with the contract executed between the National Institute and Arthur D. Little, Inc., we have sought to identify and assess the significant research and other data-gathering efforts available which have been conducted on robbery in the United States during the past five years. On the basis of the assessment of the findings and their value for law enforcement officials and other agencies of criminal justice, we have sought to point up some of the major problems and to make recommendations for follow-up priority research projects for consideration by the Institute.

In addition to a literature search of professional and general publications, inquiries were made to nearly fifty major law enforcement agencies, including every police department listed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police as having a planning and research division. Information on robbery studies was also sought from more than fifty colleges and universities which have departments of police administration and criminology or which offer courses in police science and law enforcement. At the same time, a number of individuals known to possess special knowledge or expertise in the crime field were also queried.

The results of this effort served to point up the inadequate amount of recent research and data gathering that has been reported relative to the crime of robbery. It demonstrates the need for more information on the problem, if those concerned with the problem are to have a better understanding of the nature of the crime and of those who commit it. Without such knowledge, the development of more effective measures to control and reduce the incidence of future crimes of this nature will continue to be handicapped.

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## I. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Robbery, as the FBI Uniform Crime Reports indicate, is essentially a large-city problem. The 57 large core cities—so identified by the FBI and with populations over 250,000—experience 75% of all the robberies that take place in the United States each year.<sup>1</sup> Yet despite the fact that this particular crime constitutes one of the most urgent problems confronting our law enforcement and criminal justice systems, very little has been done to produce the information needed to so identify and describe the problem as to facilitate development of appropriate countermeasures to control and reduce it.

Few of the police departments surveyed were found to be collecting, analyzing and utilizing the kinds of statistical data which would enable them to have a better understanding of what kinds of robberies occur, when and where they occur, and what the principal determining factors are that affect the commission or prevention of the crime. Insofar as knowledge about the robbery offender is concerned, the few studies that have been undertaken have been relatively small in size and scope. As a result, the information collected, while useful, has been of limited value and application.

It is also very difficult to draw many meaningful conclusions on the basis of the statistical information that is available due to the fact that they would be based on information which is often out of date and may no longer accurately portray the current situation. This is especially true with respect to bank robberies. As some of the studies reviewed have indicated, the large number of persons responsible for robbing banks today tend to be youths and amateurs, whereas in the past they were often adults and professionals. Consequently, this directly affects—and often changes—such key factors as the targets of the robber, his control over the potential for violence, and the effectiveness of traditional police and criminal justice deterrent and control measures.

Indeed, not only is information about the offense and those who commit it quickly dated, but its validity and value are often limited by geography. Available studies and data indicate that the problems of robbery vary greatly not only from city to city, but also from neighborhood to neighborhood. For example, the FBI reports that nationally 58% of all robberies in 1968 occurred on the street.<sup>2</sup> A study by Andre Normandeau of robberies that took place in Philadelphia between 1960

and 1967 showed this percentage to be nearer 47%,<sup>3</sup> while another recent study, of the high-crime Second District in Chicago, found that street robberies accounted for 65% of all of the robberies in that district.<sup>4</sup>

The discrepancy and problem described above is dramatized by studies in New York City involving two different precincts. In the Fiftieth Precinct, a white, middle-class area, street robberies accounted for 75% of the robberies. Yet in that same city in the Forty-fourth Precinct, which is a changing neighborhood, data collected at the same time showed only 34% of the robberies occurred on the street. Sixty-six percent of all robberies in this precinct took place inside buildings—that is, hallways, lobbies and elevators of apartment buildings, which accounted for a large part of the housing of this area.<sup>5</sup>

What this points up is that it is very difficult to make generalizations about robberies, even within one city.

Unfortunately, it seems evident that most police departments lack data on robberies in the amount and detail needed to make any kind of statistical analysis for predictive purposes. Consequently, they are greatly handicapped in assigning and employing their manpower on a purposeful and effective basis. In the absence of good predictive data and analysis or of reliable intelligence, they are forced to patrol and conduct preventive measures on a very rudimentary, hit-or-miss basis.

As a result, the general practice today is essentially what it has been in the past: when confronted with an increase in crime, the Chief of Police merely diverts more manpower or makes more hours of manpower available to increase the number of police personnel available on the street to control and reduce the offenses on an emergency basis. Unfortunately, the traditional kinds of tactics employed, such as stake-outs, decoys, and preventive patrols must in turn rely on the same inadequate information. The results are bound to prove less effectual and efficient than they should be.

There is, therefore, a pressing need for good statistical, analytical data on robberies that would be useful and applicable to the cities faced with the problem.

The only available national data is that reported by the FBI in its annual Uniform Crime Reports. As stated by the FBI,<sup>6</sup> "the fundamental objective of this program is to produce a reliable fund of nationwide criminal statistics for administrative and operational use of law enforcement agencies and executives. At the same time, meaningful data is provided for other professionals with related interests in the crime problem . . ." To achieve these goals, the UCR tries to (1) "measure the extent, fluctuation and distribution of serious crime in the United States through the use of a Crime Index consisting of seven selected offenses" (one of which is robbery); (2) compile the total volume of all types of criminal offenses . . . as they become known by police

arrests; and (3) collect related data "to demonstrate effectiveness of enforcement activities, available police strength and significant factors involved in crime."<sup>7</sup>

However, the FBI is greatly handicapped in collecting crime data and putting it to optimum use by the decentralized nature of the U.S. law enforcement and criminal justice system and differences among crime reporting agencies. Thus the FBI states in the 1968 Uniform Crime Reports: "A principal stumbling block to a uniform national crime reporting system . . . results from variations in definitions of criminal violations among the states."<sup>8</sup> While the uniformity problem was resolved by establishing a rather arbitrary set of crime classifications, the accuracy, completeness and value of the data received is dependent on the voluntary reporting efforts of some 8,500 independent jurisdictions. The system, therefore, has inherent characteristics which serve to affect not only the uniformity but also to restrict the scope and amount of detail of criminal statistics. It is not surprising, therefore, that the resultant data provides a limited national data base for statistical analytic purposes.

As a consequence, the UCR data is broken down into only a limited number of categories relative to the type of offense and the circumstances surrounding the crime, as well as to the nature of the respective offenders and other relevant factors concerning their activities. While this information is very useful for depicting national robbery trends, it is not specific and detailed enough to provide those clues and insights into the problems which could result in more effective control and deterrent measures.

The Uniform Crime Reports break down robbery into seven broad classifications: "Highway" (street), "Commercial House," "Gas or Service Station," "Chain Store," "Residence," "Bank," and "Miscellaneous."<sup>9</sup> These very general categories do not provide any information or knowledge relative to various specific types of robberies involved, i.e., purse snatchings, taxicab, bus or delivery truck robberies, hold-ups of laundry-dry cleaning shops, clothing, liquor, grocery, drug stores, or of restaurants and pedestrians. The broad spectrum of most of these subject categories restricts the usefulness of the information except for very general purposes. Moreover, for each category, data (compiled from reports sent to the FBI by 684 cities of 25,000 population and over) is presented in tabular form with respect to only the following selected subjects: number of offenses (including preceding year), percent change, percent distribution and average value.<sup>10</sup> This information is not recorded in the UCR relative to more detailed types of offenses.

While the UCR in its summary of robberies presents other data, including the percentage of armed robbery and the type of weapons employed, clearances, persons arrested and charged, these are not broken down according to sub-classification, either. Thus, in the UCR re-

port covering the year 1968, the FBI reported that approximately 58% of all robberies committed occurred in the street.<sup>11</sup> As noted above, this category includes a wide variety of types and degrees of robberies, ranging from strong-arm robberies of newsboys and ladies' purse-snatchings, to armed hold-ups of taxis, buses and armed trucks.

Information on armed or unarmed robberies, which is also very limited, indicates that sixty percent of the robberies involve armed offenders, with the remaining 40% strong-arm. Of the armed robberies, 63% were committed with firearms, 24% with a knife or other cutting instrument, and the remaining 13% with a blunt object, such as a club.<sup>12</sup> Here, too, these figures are very general and are not broken down by even the broad UCR robbery classifications—i.e., "Highway," "Commercial House," "Chain Store," etc.

With respect to the ages of the offenders, the information available from the UCR is again sparse and quite general. In essence, we learn that seventy-five percent of all persons arrested for robbery were under 25 years of age, 56% were under 21, and 33% were under 18; that adult offenders were involved in about 80% of the robberies cleared by arrest, while juveniles arrested accounted for 12% of the armed and 34% of the strong-arm type robberies which were cleared; that this "greater proportion of young-age arrests, compared to solutions," is due in part to the fact that the youths tend to act in groups; that 39% of those processed for robbery offenses were juveniles (whose cases were referred to juvenile court); that juvenile arrests for robbery showed a 22% increase in 1968 over 1967; and that in the suburban areas, young persons comprised 26% of robbery arrests and in rural areas, 15%.<sup>13</sup> However, no detailed information on the ages of the offenders is supplied with respect to the different types of robberies committed.

The national robbery percentages for 1968 reported by the FBI were confined to the same seven broad robbery categories: Highway (street), 57.8% in 1968; Commercial House, 20.1%; Gas Service Stations, 5.3%; Residence, 5.5%; Chain Store, 3%; Banks, .6%; and Miscellaneous, 7.6%.<sup>14</sup> The change between 1968 and 1969 in these classifications showed the largest increase in the residential robberies—64%. The second highest were chain stores, which accounted for a 23% increase over 1968. Bank robberies, however, showed a 1% decrease over the previous year. In the remaining categories, there was a 5% increase in commercial house robberies, a 10% increase in gas service stations, and a 23.7% increase in the "miscellaneous" category over the previous year.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from the Uniform Crime Reports, it is regrettable that the various data-gathering efforts have not compiled or collated information on the same basis or according to the same classification as one another. Several of the most detailed recent studies made of robbery—notably Normandeau's *Patterns in Robbery* covering the city of Philadelphia,

Albert Bottom's study of robbery in the Second District of Chicago, and the data collection efforts of the New York Police Department in its Bronx robbery project—have assembled a very valuable array of data on a number of important factors such as the time, place, nature of the robbery, amount of force or violence involved, etc. However, in seeking to correlate and analyze the information resulting from these studies and the Uniform Crime Reports, the absence of any uniform standard and format of reporting the robbery data—and in sufficient scope and depth—together with the absence of established criteria for the classification of this information, greatly minimizes their value. As a consequence, it is difficult to draw meaningful or useful conclusions which would be valid and applicable to these or other cities.

One hopeful note to this inadequate data picture is the emerging role of the states to take more responsibility for the UCR data within their borders. With the assistance of the FBI, and with their conformity to national Uniform Crime Report standards, these State programs could generate robbery data in the scope, volume and depth needed. LEAA's new National Criminal Justice Statistics Center can also play an important role in helping to identify the robbery statistics needs and to provide support and resources to achieve a strong local and statewide statistical analysis capability that will complement and strengthen the national system.

## II. THE CONFUSION OVER CLASSIFICATION

One of the basic problems involved in compiling and analyzing useful statistical data on robberies arises from the present system of classifying and reporting on the offense. The FBI Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) define robbery as: "Stealing or taking anything of value from the person by force or violence or by putting in fear, such as strong-arm robbery, stickups, armed robbery, assault to rob, and attempt to rob."<sup>1</sup> In its report on bank robberies in California, the Bureau of Criminal Statistics of the California Department of Justice observed: "Robbery has elements of both crimes against persons and crimes against property; the motive is monetary gain but it must be taken from or in the presence of another person."<sup>2</sup>

In the FBI Uniform Crime Reports, Part I Offenses are divided into two categories: (1) Crimes Against the Person (which comprise criminal homicide, forcible rape and assault), and (2) Crimes Against Property (robbery, burglary, larceny-theft, and auto theft). Although robbery is classified as a crime against property, for presentation purposes the FBI includes robbery with crimes against the person when it presents charts and statistics on Crimes of Violence. At the same time, it excludes robbery from its chart depicting Crimes Against Property. In charts showing the trend of "Crimes by Month" and "Crimes Cleared by Arrest," robbery is included in the category of "Crimes Against Property."<sup>3</sup>

Thus the UCR classifies robbery as a crime against property but treats it as a crime against the person as well as a crime of violence.

The Uniform Crime Reporting Handbook published for the guidance of law enforcement officials by the FBI states that where the element of force or threat of force are absent, as in pocket-picking and purse-snatching, the offense should be reported in the larceny-theft class. However, a purse-snatching is classified a strong-arm robbery if an unarmed thief uses force to overcome the resistance of the victim.<sup>4</sup>

This classification problem is further illustrated by the procedures a police department follows in determining the proper crime classification. If more than one offense is committed during the course of a crime, the sequential ranking of the Uniform Crime Reports is followed to select the proper classification.<sup>5</sup> Criminal homicide and forcible rape both precede robbery in the Uniform Crime Reporting System. Thus

if in the course of a robbery, someone is killed, the crime reported is murder, not robbery. Or if a rape is committed in connection with the robbery, the classification process calls for the crime to be reported as a rape.

The dual nature of robbery and the ambivalent approach to classifying and reporting on it, which are reflected in the studies and data-gathering efforts that have been conducted into robbery, make it extremely difficult to identify and evaluate the critical factors which may determine the value and usefulness of measures and factors to control and prevent robberies. The Task Force on Individual Acts of Violence of the Eisenhower Commission on Violence devoted a chapter to the problem and needs of criminal statistics. It makes the following observations concerning the need for more refined classifications in the Uniform Crime Report practices and procedures:

"Offenses covering a wide range of seriousness are sometimes included in the same UCR category. This makes refined analysis of the crimes extremely difficult. To the extent that the public image of these crimes is couched in terms of the more serious (and generally more publicized) variations under the same crime category, the result may be a somewhat distorted conception of what the rate for the particular crime means.

"A prime example is robbery. There are many variations, ranging from an armed bank robbery, in which several people are shot and injured, to minor thefts, such as purse-snatching where force or threat of force is used. Dramatically profiling the lower end of the robbery spectrum was the report on the thefts in which one of the two 9-year-old boys twisted the arm of the other in the schoolyard in order to obtain 25¢ of the latter's lunch money. Because force was used, the police correctly recorded and counted the act as highway robbery.

"While these less serious events should be recorded, it does not seem reasonable to include them in the same category as the more serious offenses. At the very least, it would be desirable for analytical purposes to publish two index categories of robbery—perhaps armed robbery and unarmed robbery (strong-arm robbery, muggings, purse-snatching with force or threat of force, etc.)—in order to give a clearer picture of which kind of theft with force is recorded."<sup>6</sup>

As the Violence Commission report points out, the term and single category of robbery is used to cover a number of essentially different offenses with a wide variation in the degree of the violence threatened or used and in the economic loss to the victims. As noted previously, this makes it extremely difficult to analyze and assess robbery data, or to obtain an accurate picture of the nature of and critical factors involved in these offenses.

In this connection, more study and a reevaluation appears warranted with respect to the practice and wisdom of labelling all robberies as

crimes of violence. For the studies reviewed tend to present a great deal of evidence that a wide variation exists between the perception and reality of the role of violence in robberies.

Contrary to the commonly held belief that a robbery usually involves the actual employment of violence and that a large proportion of the victims suffer injuries, a number of the studies reviewed disclose that the percentage and degree of violence used in actual practice by robbers proved to be relatively small.

Armed robberies in particular tend to result in little injury. In large measure, this appears to be attributable to the fact that the overwhelming nature of the threat of the weapons discourages and minimizes resistance. Most injuries that are suffered occur in strong-arm robberies where the victim is more likely to resist and where the offender tends to be youthful and more prone to readily employ physical force.

The Bronx, New York study, for example, found that less than 10% of robbery victims suffered any injury.<sup>7</sup> In his study of 722 cases of robberies in Philadelphia between 1960 and 1966, Normandeau found that 44% of all the robberies resulted in no injuries. Of the remaining 56% involving injuries, 26% were minor, 25% were discharged after treatment, and only 5% required hospitalization.<sup>8</sup> Normandeau reported that most of the injuries resulted from strong-arm robberies, which usually involved the employment of physical force by younger offenders.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, a survey of robbery cases in 17 cities conducted in 1967 for the Violence Commission Task Force on Individual Acts of Violence found that injuries occurred in only 14% of the armed robberies and in 28% of the strong-arm robberies. By way of comparison, injuries resulted in 21% of the rape cases and in 80% of the aggravated assault cases.<sup>10</sup>

Normandeau also raises some important questions about the intrinsically violent nature and behavior of persons who commit robberies. He disagrees with Wolfgang and Ferranti who, in the *Subculture of Violence*, argue that robbery arises out of the "subculture of violence."<sup>11</sup> Instead he sees robbers as a class to be relatively non-violent in their criminal activities.

"Robbers," Normandeau holds, "are not a special class, but are primarily thieves who occasionally, though rather rarely, use force to achieve their object. The display of violence in this context is on the whole an isolated episode. It is general persistence in crime, not a widespread specialization in crimes of violence, which is the main characteristic of robbers." Therefore, he states, the term "violent offender class" could not be applied to robbers without distorting the factual data to fit preconceived ideas. On the basis of his data, Normandeau concluded that robbery should be termed "a subculture of theft, rather than violence." Violence, he maintained, was used only as a tool by the robbery offender who kept it largely under control.<sup>12</sup>

This conclusion receives support from research studies undertaken in California. As a result of the work and recommendations of John P. Conrad, Chief of the Research Division of the California Department of Corrections in 1963, the California Department of Corrections undertook to classify all inmates according to an aggressive history profile (AHP).<sup>13</sup> Violent offenders were classified according to seven categories: culturally violent, criminally violent and pathologically violent, situationally violent, accidentally violent, institutionally violent, and non-violent. All persons sentenced on charges of robbery were classified as "criminally violent." The definition for "criminally violent" was those who "will commit violence if necessary to gain some end, as in robbery." The criteria for such offenders was: (1) violence was used as a tool in carrying out some criminal act, typically robbery; (2) the offender carried a concealed weapon and is not classifiable as culturally, pathologically, or situationally violent.<sup>14</sup>

According to Conrad's theory, the criminally violent offender regards violence as a tool of his trade. He uses it not for personal satisfaction as does the culturally violent, but to gain other ends. Thus the robber, through planning and the judicious use of violence, hopes to gain a certain mastery over his circumstances and reap quick rewards. He does not use violence to inflict deliberate injury. If he can achieve his goal with only a threat of injury to his victim, so much the better.<sup>15</sup>

In a follow-up study of the criminal career occupational history and demographic characteristics of offenders classified in the AHP, Dr. Carol Spencer's findings corroborate Conrad's conclusions that the "criminally violent" type rarely uses actual violence. Spencer reported that 83% of those classified as criminally violent—which would cover the robbers—had no conviction for actual violence at any time in their criminal careers.<sup>16</sup>

"Rarely causing physical injury to their victims when committing their felonies, they were not much given to assaultive behavior at other times. They differ sharply from the other groups where approximately 90% had convictions for actual violence."<sup>17</sup> Spencer also found that fewer of the robbers he studied had a police record before the age of 18 than did other offenders; that juvenile violent offenses were relatively rare.

In a summary of findings on the Criminally Violent group, Dr. Spencer reported: "The relative lack of assaultive behavior, greater consistency of motivation, fewer conflicts with law enforcement and more cautious driving record all suggest better control. The criminally violent channel their aggressions into profitable avenues of robbery rather than into impulsive assaults."<sup>18</sup>

The above findings as to the high degree of control exercised by robbers over the violence at their employ and the very low record of any violence or injuries that result from robberies would seem to sug-

gest that more attention needs to be given to this factor of violence and its reality in the crime of robbery. To the extent that a typical robber is not a violence-prone person and is unlikely to employ violence unless he is provoked or encounters resistance has important meaning and consequences for those who are victims of robberies, as well as for those responsible for preventing and controlling such offenses.

It is far from certain, however, that the relatively small number of injuries experienced in robberies which occurred in past years presents a reliable picture of what is currently happening. As in the drug problem, the non-violent nature of robberies and those who commit them may be changing.<sup>19</sup>

In his report on *A Contemporary History of American Crime*, Fred P. Graham quoted criminologist Marvin E. Wolfgang as follows: "Perhaps it is because the robbers tend to be younger and the young are more likely to use violence, but there has been a considerable increase in the level of violence in robberies."<sup>20</sup>

Another important consideration is the intolerable nature of the violence and danger inherent in a crime where serious bodily harm is threatened. This very point was made by J. Edgar Hoover in discussing bank robberies where the number of physical injuries suffered by victims has been relatively minimal. Referring to "the potential for violence and death inherent" in such robberies, Hoover pointed out that the threat to human life cannot be ignored.<sup>21</sup> Thus the public sense of personal as well as property security requires that the potential, horrendous threat of deadly force and serious bodily harm inherent in a robbery must be taken into full account in assessing the seriousness of the crime, even though the frequency or level of violence actually employed is relatively small.

### III. THE OFFENDER

On the basis of available studies to date, it is apparent that more up-to-date information and far greater research is required in order to obtain a fuller picture of who is responsible today for committing the various types of robbery and how he operates.

Such information as exists tends to be very fragmentary and sketchy, with insufficient detail and often obsolete.

More studies and related data have been conducted on bank robberies than on possibly any other type of robbery. Yet, after analyzing reports on 238 bank robberies which took place during a three-month period in 1964, the FBI concluded: "There is no such thing as a typical bank robber . . . There is no typical method of operation used by bank robbers."<sup>1</sup>

A training pamphlet on robbery published in 1966 by the International Association of Chiefs of Police describes a number of different types of robberies and tries to provide some guidance with respect to the commission of these crimes and the offenders. It notes that whereas bank robbery used to be committed by highly skilled professional criminals, in recent years a new type of bank robber has emerged who is essentially an amateur and "may strike at any time, sometimes almost compulsively."<sup>2</sup> Store and shop robberies are seen committed by "criminals ranging from the skilled and ruthless gunman to drug addicts."<sup>3</sup> Gasoline stations, particularly the all-night service station, located in outlying areas of a city or on the fringes of the metropolitan community are called "highly vulnerable" targets which attract robbers in the late evening and early morning hours. According to the IACP, the offender who robs residences usually possesses information as to the amount of valuables or currency he may obtain. This home invader is characterized as "one of the most vicious of all robbers," who frequently operates as a member of a gang.<sup>4</sup>

However, too little is known about whether or not a person who is robbing banks or residences is the same or different person who robs chain stores, gas stations, taxicabs, liquor and small retail stores or holds up pedestrians on the street. Nor do we know enough about the motivations or *modus operandi* of such robbers, including which type of offender is apt to be armed and with what kind of weapon or what

measures and tactics to employ which will most effectively control and deter him.

Too little is known also about the economic factors involved. In two studies by the Pennsylvania Board of Parole of convicted robbers, it was found that 57% of those involved in the 1950 study and 74% in the 1965 study were unemployed at the time the robbery was committed. This led the Pennsylvania Parole Board to conclude that "a positive relationship exists between the crime of robbery and unemployment."<sup>5</sup> This would tend to corroborate other studies which have emphasized the essentially monetary gain motivation of the robber as the primary factor in this offense. Here again, however, there is inadequate information available on which to draw any useful conclusion and research efforts should be directed towards this need.

#### The Youthful Nature of the Robber

Studies of robberies by the FBI on a national basis disclosed that young offenders are responsible for a very large proportion of robberies that occur in the United States. The last available figures, covering the year 1968 for example, showed that 75% of all persons arrested for robbery were under the age of 25. Fifty-six percent were under 21 and 33% were juveniles. The FBI noted that youths tend to operate in groups, particularly in strong-arm robberies and most of the juveniles involved in robberies were arrested on charges of strong-arm robberies.<sup>6</sup>

The Chicago study of robberies in the Second District found that sixty-seven percent of robbery offenders were between 14 and 25 years of age. The strong-arm robbers tended to be youthful, 69% being 19 or under. Juveniles between the ages of 14 and 16 accounted for the highest number of strong-arm robberies. The Chicago study also disclosed that 92% of the strong-arm robberies took place on the street. No strong-arm robberies were found to have taken place in any business establishment.<sup>7</sup> A large number of victims were newsboys between the ages of 8 and 15 who were robbed by one, two or three unarmed boys a few years older than themselves. Where there was no resistance, there were usually no injuries.<sup>8</sup>

In a study of crimes of violence involving youth groups or gangs in 17 cities in 1967, the Task Force on Individual Acts of Violence found that youth groups and gangs were involved in a "significant percentage of all robberies . . ." An analysis of major crimes cleared by arrests showed that 9.5% of youth groups or gangs were involved in armed robbery and 6.8% in unarmed robbery. With respect to groups or gangs where the majority of offenders were juveniles, the percentage involved in armed robbery was 14.1% and in unarmed robberies, 18.6%. However, no youth group or gang was involved in 76% of the armed robberies or in 74% of the unarmed robberies.<sup>9</sup>

In view of the apparent contradictions between the above findings and those reported by the FBI Uniform Crime Reports and in other statistical analyses of robberies, more research is needed to clarify this aspect of robberies.

#### **The Lone Offender**

Unlike the study of bank robberies by the FBI, which found that the bank robber worked alone in 72% of the cases,<sup>10</sup> the Pennsylvania Board of Parole study showed that 32% of all robberies studied were committed by a lone robber. More than two-thirds had accomplices. This led the Board of Parole to conclude that another characteristic of robbers is that a large majority do not operate alone, but are assisted by accomplices.<sup>11</sup> (The Pennsylvania study was not limited to bank robberies, however.)

Dr. Donald Newman also found in his study of robbery offenders that the majority had partners in their crimes. These accomplices were not friends as much as someone with whom the robber could share responsibility and guilt for his offense. He also stated that there was little sense of guilt among the offenders studied. Rather, they tended to picture themselves more victimized than their victims. Dr. Newman also concluded that some of the robbers committed the crime deliberately in order to be returned to prison because of their need for a structured environment.<sup>12</sup>

A study conducted by Gerald Wolcott in March 1967 of 81 convicted robbers incarcerated at the California Conservation Center in Susanville found that 79% of all the robbers (none of whom appeared to have been bank robbers), had accomplices. The study also showed that 40% of all the robberies were committed against lone individuals; and that 65% of these were crimes of opportunity that were committed on the spur of the moment. Such situational spur-of-the-moment robberies were likely to be committed by lone robbers and involve a lone victim.<sup>13</sup>

In general, however, the data is too limited to try to make any deductions of significant assistance to law enforcement and criminal justice personnel.

## *IV. THE FACTORS OF FIREARMS AND DRUGS*

### **Role of Firearms**

FBI Uniform Crime Reports show that, nationally, 60% of all robberies are committed with a weapon and that firearms are used in some 63% of these cases.<sup>1</sup> Bottoms' study of robberies in Chicago's Second District found that 57% of the robberies reported involved armed offenders, principally with a gun,<sup>2</sup> while Normandeau's data on Philadelphia robberies indicated the percentage of armed robberies to be around 50%.

In Kansas City, Missouri, an analysis of robberies during the first six months of 1969 indicated that guns were used in only 31% of the robberies studied, although this represented a 6% increase over the same period in 1968.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, a study limited to commercial robberies in Oakland, California, for a six-month period covering February 1, 1969, disclosed that guns were used in 73% of the robberies.<sup>5</sup>

As the above data indicates, firearms, principally hand guns, account for the great majority of all weapons employed in armed robberies. There is reason to believe that measures which could effectively limit the availability of firearms or otherwise deter persons from using a gun to commit a robbery would reduce significantly the number of armed robberies.

In a study on the role the gun plays in crime, prepared for the President's Commission on Violence, Dr. Donald Newman interviewed a number of convicted offenders charged with violent crimes. He reported that those who had engaged in robberies and had employed guns associated the gun with manliness. To them the gun represented the means to control others and to prove their manliness and worth by forcing others to do their will. For many of these, the most important element was not the actual acquisition of money, but the brief moment when the possession of the gun enabled them to force victims to follow their commands. It was this mastery over others, a desire to control, a sense of omnipotence—and not a desire to hurt—that appeared to characterize these persons. "For the most part the men involved in robbery were not very large and not very strong. Some were not very aggressive. The impression was that some of these men could not pos-

sibly carry out a robbery without a gun. In fact, the ready availability of the gun was the only reason there was a crime . . . the gun suggesting and encouraging the crime.”<sup>6</sup>

### **The Role of Alcohol, Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs**

The studies and data available on the role of alcohol, narcotics and dangerous drugs in the crime of robbery tend to be very inconclusive. Any attempt to delve more exhaustively into the problem is frustrated by the fact that in many of the studies into this aspect of the problem no distinction was made between the various drugs. Thus the opiates were not separated from the hallucinogens or other dangerous drugs—or even from alcohol.

In its study, the Violence Commission's Task Force on Individual Acts of Violence reported: “There is no direct causal connection between alcohol, drugs and narcotics and violence.”<sup>7</sup> But, the report goes on to say, “while these substances can only modify behavior (they do not directly cause it), their involvement in acts of crime and violence—sometimes because of modifications of basic behavior patterns, sometimes for less direct reasons—cannot be overlooked.”<sup>8</sup> With respect to the extent to which the chronic use of drugs and narcotics contribute to crime and violence, the Task Force noted that “the most important consideration is that an addict's need to support his habit often leads him to commit crime to secure funds for drugs.”<sup>9</sup>

Hence, in cities with large concentrations of users, such as in New York City, significant numbers of crimes, particularly property crimes, were reported to be drug related. In this connection, a New York City study in 1967 revealed that “41% of those arrested for burglary were admitted users.” Rates were similarly high for other property offenses.<sup>10</sup>

In his study, Dr. Newman reported that the vast majority of those interviewed “depended on drugs or alcohol prior to committing a crime, i.e., they could not rob, steal or involve themselves in gang fights without being under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.”<sup>11</sup> As to claims made that robberies were committed in order to support the addiction of the offender, Dr. Newman observed that his study indicated that the opposite was true, that the addiction appeared to support the crime. It was the character of the robbery itself and its psychological effect on the offender that made him turn to drugs. This observation seems to be contrary to the commonly held belief that addicts commit robbery to support their habit.

Another study of robbery offenders by Andre Normandeau found that alcohol was present either in the offender or victim or both, in less than 15% of the cases. Normandeau concluded that insofar as alcohol was concerned, it did not appear to be a triggering factor or to affect

the "mean seriousness score"<sup>12</sup> (the amount of violence and related factors indicating the seriousness of the crime).

Wolcott, on the other hand, concluded that drugs and alcohol provided a stimulus or played a significant role in the case of 71% of offenders studied who committed spur-of-the-moment robberies. With respect to those who committed planned robberies, he found that 44% were under the influence of drugs or alcohol.<sup>13</sup>

A study of persons arrested and committed to the D.C. jail during the period of July-August 1969 disclosed that out of the 226 persons selected for the sample, 99 were found to be drug addicts, 15 of whom were being held on charges of robbery. (Fifty others had been arrested for property crimes other than robbery.) According to Nicholas Kozel, a Research Analyst at the D.C. Narcotic Treatment Agency, there is evidence that addicts are becoming increasingly involved in crimes against persons where there is financial gain, as in robbery. Kozel also noted that there was a great difference between the older and younger addicts in that the young addict was likely to be more aggressive and commit acts of violence.<sup>14</sup>

In an article describing the life and activities of lower-class heroin users in New York City, Edward Preble and John J. Casey, Jr., state: "One of the myths derived from the passivity stereotype of the heroin user is that the heroin user avoids crimes of violence, such as robbery, which involves personal confrontations. This no longer seems to be the case. A 1966 New York City Police Department study of the arrests of admitted narcotic (primarily heroin) addicts for selected felonies other than violations of the narcotic laws, showed that 15.1% of the arrests were for robbery. This compared with 12.9% robbery arrests of all arrests (addict and non-addict) during the same year . . . Among the addicts, 40.9% were burglary arrests, compared to 19.7% of all arrests; felonious assaults constituted 5.6% among the addicts, compared to 27.9% of all arrests.

"What these figures reveal is not that heroin users avoid crimes of violence as compared to non-addicts, but that they avoid crimes not involving financial gain . . . Where financial gain is involved, as in robbery, the risk of violence is taken by heroin users in a higher percentage of cases than with non-addicts. These statistics confirm the observations and opinions of street informants, both addict and non-addict."<sup>15</sup>

The above data and conclusions could be most significant and more research is needed to confirm the validity of these findings and to provide some reliable guidance as to the trend, dimensions and impact of this crime factor.

## V. A COMMENT ON DETERRENTS

The studies conducted on robbery raise some serious questions about the validity of accepted deterrents to the crime of robbery. In a study of bank robberies, for example, Dr. Franklin Huddle of the Legislative Reference Service of the Library of Congress noted that the law enforcement profession has long believed and relied on the premise that "crime will be inversely proportional to probability and severity of punishment." Pointing out that these presumed deterrents depend (1) on the perceptions of the robber as to the likelihood and severity of punishment, as well as (2) the rationality of the criminal in acting in accordance with his perceptions, Dr. Huddle questioned whether bank robbers do indeed perceive clearly the risks and penalties that society is prepared to impose and whether such offenders do in fact act rationally on the basis of this perception. For despite the fact that bank robberies have an extremely high rate of apprehension and usually result in very severe sentences for those convicted, these "deterrents" do not in fact stop persons from continuing to rob banks.<sup>1</sup>

A study by the Bureau of Social Science Research on the deterrent value of crime prevention measures as perceived by criminal offenders indicated that insofar as traditional police "deterrents" (such as maximizing police presence and employing aggressive patrol) are concerned, they were not very effective. The report concluded that those committing serious crime do not tend to be highly rational; either they do not fear the consequences or else they block out the fear during the commission of the crime.<sup>2</sup>

In another study involving convicted robbers, Dr. George Camp, Assistant Warden of the Federal Penitentiary at Marion, Illinois, found that the only significant deterrent to bank robbers examined appeared to be the closeness of a police station to the bank. Neither police patrols nor the capability of police response was found to be considered a deterrent by those engaged in bank robberies. The large amount of cash available, the ease of access and of getting away from the crime scene seemed to outweigh other considerations.<sup>3</sup>

In examining robberies, the attractiveness of the prize and the ease of taking the money from the victim or custodian by the use of the threat of force, appears to make this crime so inviting that large numbers of offenders fail to be deterred by presumed deterrents. The avail-

ability of how effective current robbery deterrents are—primarily the risk of detection, apprehension and punishment—therefore needs to be reexamined. This is especially true with respect to the young and non-professional offenders who are responsible for such a large proportion of serious crimes like robbery. Factors that might deter older persons do not appear to carry the same weight with these young offenders. So long as the financial reward appears as attractive and easy to obtain as perceived by the offender, all available information indicates that robberies will continue to increase.

#### **Robbery Control and Tactical Measures**

The results of inquiries to major police departments across the country pointed to the need for a practical method of developing and exchanging information between cities with common problems on common needs. By way of illustration, a number of communities are currently seeking to develop or improve their robbery response and apprehension capabilities by cordoning off escape routes and assigning police manpower according to predetermined apprehension plans. Philadelphia has developed a relatively successful system which it calls "Operation FIND," while the Kansas City system is tagged "Operation Barrier." Other cities have equally well-developed criminal apprehension systems.

Taxicab hold-ups have been a source of concern to major cities for some time and many police departments have found some sort of signal system atop the taxicab was a valuable aid in alerting passersby and police and serving as a deterrent.

Other examples involve developments to reduce or eliminate the opportunity factor in robberies, such as the exact change and scrip systems to minimize the monetary gain for a would-be robber; the use of inexpensive vaults in commercial establishments, delivery trucks, and other vulnerable targets of the robber.

Law enforcement agencies could profit from the experience and planning that have gone into the design, testing and experience of these and many other measures to control and deter robberies. In this connection, it is recommended that the Institute fund a series of small studies which would assemble, assess and circularize among law enforcement agencies effective control and prevention measures and tactics designed to deal with specific robbery problems and which would be of application and value to sister agencies.

## VI. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) The Institute, in conjunction with the FBI and the Criminal Justice Statistics Center, should initiate studies to identify the data deficiency problems and design remedial measures which would ensure the scope, volume and quality of information on robberies essential for the development of effective, practical counter-measures.
- (2) Research should be undertaken to obtain an accurate, up-to-date picture concerning the role and reality of force and violence employed in armed and unarmed robberies.
- (3) The Institute should support studies designed to develop an up-to-date profile of the robbery offender which would be of assistance to law enforcement and criminal justice agencies. Studies such as the FBI's "Profile of a Bank Robber" could serve as a model. The research should focus on specific types of robberies and robbers and seek to establish whether there is any correlation between the offenders responsible for the various types of robbery.
- (4) Research is urgently needed to speed up the design, development and testing of practical, effective programs and measures, including hardware, that would significantly reduce the danger of firearms carried on the street or into a building by those planning to commit robbery. Such studies should include devices capable of detecting and minimizing or neutralizing such lethal threats.
- (5) Up-to-date research is required to ascertain to what extent and degree the need for money to buy drugs is causing addicts to commit robbery and what proportion of and what type of robberies are attributable to this economic factor.
- (6) Funding should be provided for studies to determine what kinds of control and preventive measures would be most effective for different types of robbery offenders, including physical control devices which would create and ensure a high risk of detection and apprehension of robbery offenders, and measures which would minimize and reduce the opportunity factors, including the financial reward that would be realized.
- (7) The Institute should initiate a number of small research projects designed to focus on and help law enforcement agencies deal effectively with specific robbery problems common to a number of

cities. In this connection, it is recommended that information be quickly assembled, prepared and disseminated to interested law enforcement agencies on those particular measures and tactics which have been successfully used, such as protective devices and detection/alarm systems for taxicabs, barrier-blockade systems to apprehend fleeing robbers, exact change/scrip systems, and the use of small vaults to minimize the amount of monetary gain available in liquor stores, gas stations, chain stores, delivery-pickup trucks and other common robbery targets.

## APPENDIX A

### FOOTNOTES

#### I. General Discussion

1. "Crime in the United States," *Uniform Crime Reports—1968*, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Andre Normandeau, "Patterns in Robbery," *Criminologica*, Vol. VI, No. 3, November 1968.
4. "Robbery in the Second District," *Allocation of Resources in the Chicago Police Department*, Vol. I, Chapter 9, prepared by the Operations Research Task Force of the Chicago Police Department, Albert M. Bottoms, Director, under Law Enforcement Grant No. 195, November 1969.
5. David Burnham, "Bronx Police Aim at Indoor Crime," *New York Times*, December 24, 1969.

To deal with this type of robbery, the New York Police Department developed tactics known as a block-sweep. In this, ten-man teams search all public places and selected dangerous blocks. While this is a very time-consuming operation, the police consider it a valuable deterrent. The utilization of large numbers of foot patrolmen, systematically searching roofs, hallways, elevators, lobbies, and cellars of selected apartment buildings, was credited with a 9.9% decline in robbery complaints in the Bronx, while the city as a whole experienced a 12.3% increase. It also led to a 22.9% increase in robbery arrests in the Bronx, as compared with a 15.4% increase for the entire city.

6. *Uniform Crime Reports—1968*, *op. cit.*
7. *Ibid.* See Table 18, pg. 107.
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 5.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Uniform Crime Reporting (1969 Preliminary Annual Release)*. Issued by John Edgar Hoover, Director, FBI, U.S. Department of Justice, March 17, 1970.

#### II. The Confusion Over Classification

1. *FBI Uniform Crime Reports—1968*, *op. cit.*, pg. 56.
2. *Bank Robbery in California*, Bureau of Criminal Statistics, Department of Justice, Sacramento, California, June 1967, p. 6.
3. *Uniform Crime Reports*, *op. cit.*, see charts Nos. 2, 3, and 12.
4. *Uniform Crime Reporting Handbook*, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C., July 1966, pg. 20.

5. *Ibid.*, pg. 40.
6. Donald J. Mulvihill and Melvin Tumin, *Crimes of Violence*, Vols. 11, 12, and 13, National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, Staff Study Series (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970).
7. David Burnham, *New York Times*, *op. cit.*
8. Andre Normandeau, "Patterns in Robbery," *op. cit.*, pg. 4.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 9.
10. *Crimes of Violence, Report of the Task Force on Individual Acts of Violence*, *op. cit.*
11. Andre Normandeau, "Patterns in Robbery," *op. cit.*, pg. 12.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Dr. Carol Spencer, *A Typology of Violent Offenders*, Research Report No. 23, California Department of Corrections, September 1966.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Abstracted from John T. Conrad, "The Nature and Treatment of the Violent Offender," *A Typology of Violent Offenders*, Appendix II, November 5, 1965.
16. Dr. Carol Spencer, *A Typology of Violent Offenders*, *op. cit.* pg. 13.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, pg. 15.
19. See Chapter IV, *The Role of Alcohol, Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs*.
20. *A Contemporary History of American Crime, Violence in America*, Vol. II, A Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, June 1969, pg. 384.
21. John Edgar Hoover, "Violence and Bank Robbery," *The Tarhell Banker*, April 1968.

### III. The Offender

1. "Profile of a Bank Robber," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, November 1965.
2. Training Key No. 41, *Robbery*, published by the Professional Standards Division of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1966.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole, *Characteristics of Persons Arrested for Robbery* (Harrisburg: Board of Parole, March 19, 1965).
6. *Uniform Crime Reports—1968*, *op. cit.*
7. "Robbery in the Second District," *op. cit.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Report of the Task Force on Individual Acts of Violence, *op. cit.*
10. "Profile of a Bank Robber," *op. cit.*
11. Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole, *op. cit.*
12. *Violence and the Role of the Gun*, *op. cit.*  
Newman's study was based on interviews with 31 youthful offenders, all of whom were between 19-22 years of age and were charged with violent crimes: murder, assault with a deadly weapon and armed robbery. Of the 31, more than 50% were armed robbers.
13. Gerald D. Wolcott, *A Typology of Armed Robbers*, Master of Arts Thesis, Sacramento State College, 1965.

### IV. The Factors of Firearms and Drugs

1. *Uniform Crime Reports—1968*, *op. cit.*

2. "Robbery in the Second District," *op. cit.*
3. "Patterns in Robbery," *op. cit.*
4. Memorandum from Crime-Traffic Analysis Section, Kansas City (Missouri) Police Department, Six-Month Robbery Comparison, July 25, 1969.
5. Robert L. Marx, "A Preliminary Study of Commercial Robberies in Oakland, 1 February 1969-1 August 1969," Public Systems Incorporated, 30 October 1969.
6. *Violence and the Role of the Gun: Conversations with Protagonists*, by Dr. Donald E. Newman, Director, Psychiatric Services, Peninsula Hospital and Medical Center, Burlingame, California, a Draft Report prepared for the Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence.
7. With respect to the opiates, the Task Force report states: "While the public has all too frequently been shocked by general illicit drug use, the evidence to date demonstrates that opiate use does not lead to any compulsion to violence. When violence does occur in association with addiction, it must be viewed as related to personality, social and economic factors." *Crimes of Violence, op. cit.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Violence and the Role of the Gun, op. cit.*
12. "Patterns in Robbery," *op. cit.*
13. *A Typology of Armed Robbers, op. cit.*
14. Conversation with Nicholas Kozel, Research Analyst, District of Columbia Narcotics Treatment Agency and formerly with the D.C. Department of Corrections, May 1970.
15. Edward Preble and John J. Casey, Jr., "Taking Care of Business—The Heroin User's Life on the Street," *International Journal of the Addictions*, 4(1), pp. 1-14, March 1969.

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2. *A Study of the Deterrent Value of Crime Prevention Measures as Perceived by Criminal Offenders*, Leonard H. Goodman, Trudy Miller, Paul De Forrest, Bureau of Social Science Research, Inc., October 21, 1966, Washington, D.C.
3. George M. Camp, *Nothing to Lose: A Study of Bank Robbery in America* (Yale University, 1967, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis).

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