Crime in New York City

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New York City is one of the most heavily populated and diverse cities in the entire world. While New York City is acclaimed as a world wonder, it is also scrutinized for a history of criminal activity. However, there has been a decrease in crime rates within the last twenty years. This paper will examine what types of criminal offenses occur in New York, factors that contribute to the city’s crime, and the role of crime preventing organizations. The paper will furthermore analyze the actions taken to answer why there was a substantial change in crime rates.

Criminal offenses occur in a wide range of classification and severity. Approximately 50,000 reports of violent crimes in New York City were documented in 2011 (The Weissman Center, 2013). Violent crimes include murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Another branch of crime is classified as property crime. Property crimes compose of burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. This degree of crime is more prevalent. In 2011, there was an astonishing number of 140,457 reports of property crime reports. Theft can be easily committed due to large crowds and busy streets. Many of the burglary cases may be due to economic differences among areas of the city. Another type of crime is drug related offense that may include the using, manufacturing, purchasing, and selling of illegal drugs. Studies show that low-income is directly correlated to drug involvement (Hoffman, 1997). The reasoning behind drug trade is to make profit. The addictive properties in drugs draw in consumers who are willing to pay a price to reach a high. In addition to low-income areas facing high frequency of crime, it is also evident that a high percentage of these crimes are gang related. Gangs are scattered throughout nearly all regions of New York including the Lower East Side, Harlem, and Chinatown. Unfortunately, gang activity is destructive and damaging to communities. They make residents feel unsafe. Criminal offenders are prosecuted accordingly with New York City law based on the type of crime committed.

Many cases of violent and property crimes are committed in the subway. In the 1970’s and 1980’s, crime in the subway was the most prevalent and there was a considerable decrease in passengers using this form of public transportation (Kelling & Bratton, 1998). Theft and drug usage were two of the most reoccurring problems in the subway. The subway smelled offensive due to urination and defecation. Innocent commuters were constantly confronted and often attacked by reckless individuals. In 1989, the chairperson of the Metropolitan Transit Authority, Robert Kiley addressed the issue of subway crime (Kelling, 1998).

A number of approaches were put into ordinance in order to hinder crime in New York. One approach works correspondingly with the “broken window” theory. The term “broken window” is a metaphor for the broken, disheveled property left behind after evident criminal behavior (Kelling & Bratton, 1998). The term was named by Wilson and Kelling. The underlying theory proposes that if the streets appear torn and crime filled, then it promotes criminal behavior in others. Therefore, in addition to arresting criminal offenders, officials were now being encouraged to maintain the streets of New York and help create a safe and orderly environment. A further part of the restoration plan was to remove graffiti and upgrade trains. In addition, felony arrests went up by 20% (Francis, 2013). Action was being taken into effect in order to improve the condition of New York and protect its citizens.

Remarkably, there has been a substantial decrease in crime in New York City in 1990’s. “The most visible and trumpeted manifestation of this rebirth was a plummeting crime rate which, in the latter half of the 1990s, fell to lows not seen in more than 30 years” (Curtis, 1998 p. 1233). While a concrete reason for the drastic decrease cannot be pinpointed, the city’s vigilance certainly helped the issue. After officials’ careful supervision, subway riders finally felt safe and relieved. Boarding public transportation was no longer a heavy concern for commuters.

Present day, New York City is very proactive in eliminating crime. There are many distinguished organizations trained to handle crime. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is responsible for investigating crime using up-to-date forensic technology (Jacobs, 1999). The two U.S. Attorney districts of New York are responsible for prosecuting cases. Of course, The New York Police Department (NYPD) is the most reactive of the organizations in enforcing the law. There are approximately forty-thousand officers employed by NYPD and respond to citizens’ calls instantly and follow up with reports (Jacobs, 1999). Since the high levels of crime in the 1980’s, the NYPD are strictly enforced to handle street crime and order maintenance. The combined efforts of these specialists have helped reduce crime rates. All of these organizations are reliable resources available to ensure safety to the citizens of New York. Crime may still exist in New York today, but comparatively to the 1970’s and 1980’s, there has been significant progress.

On a personal note, I feel overall safe walking the streets of New York. I will admit I was at first nervous; but that is typically me. While walking with a large group of students, I feel safe and secure. In my own experiences in this class I have thankfully not witnessed any crimes committed. However, we have heard stories about police arrests during radical protests from citizens. Some of these protests escalated into violent behavior. We learned about theft and drug use in certain communities and parks. Crime and law are reoccurring topics in the history and sociology of New York; two key ideas we have been exposed to in the duration of our course.

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