



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Security against Democracy: The Legacy of the Cold War at Home

Author(s): Elaine Tyler May

Source: *The Journal of American History*, March 2011, Vol. 97, No. 4 (March 2011), pp. 939-957

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of Organization of American Historians

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41508909>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Organization of American Historians and Oxford University Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of American History*

Security against Democracy: The Legacy of the Cold War at Home

Elaine Tyler May

The first decade of the twenty-first century was marked by the events of September 11, 2001, and the war on terror that followed. We have seen a dramatic preoccupation with security spark a wide range of antidemocratic policies, from torture to people held without trial at Guantanamo to the Patriot Act. We have become accustomed to orange alerts, metal detectors, and taking off half our clothes at airports. But if we assume that all this started with 9/11 or that the trouble lies primarily with public policies, we miss the deeper roots of our national obsession with security, which began more than half a century ago, permeating not just public life but private life as well.

The preoccupation with security emerged during the same decades that American democracy expanded to become more inclusive and more tolerant. As a result of what some have called the rights revolution—the civil rights, feminist, gay liberation, and disability rights movements—the United States came much closer to reaching its full democratic promise. These two goals—to expand democracy and to achieve security—need not be in conflict. Democracy and security depend upon each other. In a thriving democracy, citizens engage with each other across differences, empowered to grapple with problems and address common concerns. Democracy fosters trust and a healthy public life. But when citizens retreat from public life, they are unable to achieve meaningful change on behalf of the common good. People are more likely to feel insecure and distrust each other, and democracy withers. Security also withers, shrinking to a negative concept that is little more than fear combined with force. Yet true security has more to do with trust and confidence than boundaries, bunkers, and weapons. In the United States since World War II, security and democracy have been on a collision course. Misguided ideas about security, along with an investment in private life at the expense of public life, have muted efforts to expand and strengthen democracy, resulting in a nation that is not as democratic, nor as secure, as it could be.

The reasons for this clash of national interests reach back far into American history. Citizens have long been willing to compromise their basic democratic rights to achieve national security, especially during wartime. Since World War II, however, that willingness to sacrifice rights for security has become chronic. The Cold War ushered in an uneasy era often described as “peacetime.” But in fact the Cold War was more hot than cold, marked by more or less constant warfare. Despite all the talk of maintaining peace, war became a fixture of life. In the words of the historian Michael Sherry, Americans have been living in the “shadow of war” since the 1930s.¹

Elaine Tyler May is Regents Professor of American Studies and History at the University of Minnesota. This article is a revised version of the presidential address delivered to the convention of the Organization of American Historians in Washington, D.C., on April 10, 2010.

I am grateful to Jason Stahl and Andrew Paul for their excellent research assistance.

¹ Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven, 1997).

doi: 10.1093/jahist/jaq026

The Author 2011. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Organization of American Historians. All rights reserved. For permissions, please e-mail: journals.permissions@oup.com

March 2011

The Journal of American History

939

Antidemocratic policies, from the early Cold War purges of suspected Communists and homosexuals to the erosion of individual rights in the war on terror, have received extensive attention from scholars. Less studied are the ways citizens, in their private lives, have adopted and internalized the preoccupation with security. I will argue that the undermining of democracy in the name of security has penetrated much deeper into American life than our public policies, right down to the level of daily life. In fact, the obsession with security at the personal level may be even more corrosive of democracy than the public policies promoted in the name of national security.

The Cold War laid the groundwork for this development. Cold War ideology wove together several strands of American political culture into a tough fabric constructed to withstand the harsh postwar climate and protect the American way of life. These strands included a belief in individual freedom, unfettered capitalism, the sanctity of the home, and a suspicion of outsiders. Capitalism, grounded in private life and consumerism, defined the United States against the Soviet Union. When then-vice president Richard M. Nixon traveled to Moscow in 1959 for the American exposition, in an event that came to be known as the Kitchen Debate, he articulated the American way of life in terms of domesticity and consumer goods.²

These historically rooted dimensions of Cold War ideology shaped how Americans responded to perceived dangers at home and abroad. For example, at the dawn of the atomic age, protection against external dangers took the form of a nuclear arsenal; protection against internal enemies took the form of a nuclear family. The two were profoundly connected. The United States vigorously opposed international control of nuclear weapons, insisting on accumulating weapons, which led to a spiraling nuclear arms race. This stance reflected a turning away from a concern for the common good in favor of self-protection secured by an arsenal of atomic weapons. Rather than diffusing international tensions to achieve a safer world through democratic practices in the global arena, American leaders chose preparedness in the face of danger.

A similar process unfolded at home. To avoid big government programs that might resemble socialism, policy makers rejected large-scale public civil defense efforts, encouraging citizens instead to plan for a possible attack by fortifying their homes. The media did its part to keep citizens alert and insecure. For example, on July 26, 1950, the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* reported, "Experts Weighing A-Bomb Peril Here." To help readers figure out their own likelihood of being incinerated, the paper carried helpful illustrations. One map shows six hypothetical targets of atomic bombs dropped by the Soviet Union on Los Angeles. Another shows concentric circles from a potential ground zero, each ring indicating different levels of blast, fire, and destruction. Civil defense officials and enterprising businesses offered homeowners tips on constructing basement shelters, backyard bunkers, or even the "all-concrete blast resistant house . . . for the atomic age."³

There were good reasons for people to be worried. Atomic war was a real possibility. The United States had already waged it, and Americans saw the results. Even those

² See, for example, Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 2008), 19–22.

³ See Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton, 2000). William S. Barton, "Experts Weighing A-bomb Peril Here," *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1950, p. 1A. Portland Cement Association, advertisement, *Better Homes and Gardens*, 33 (June 1955), 3.

who opposed the proliferation of nuclear weapons fanned fears of an atomic catastrophe. Scientists calling for an end to the arms race pointed to the dire consequences of an atomic explosion to make their point, with the unintended consequence of heightening fears that could not be easily channeled into calls for peaceful coexistence. Americans became accustomed to the threat of nuclear annihilation, fueling a bunker mentality and a militarization of society.⁴

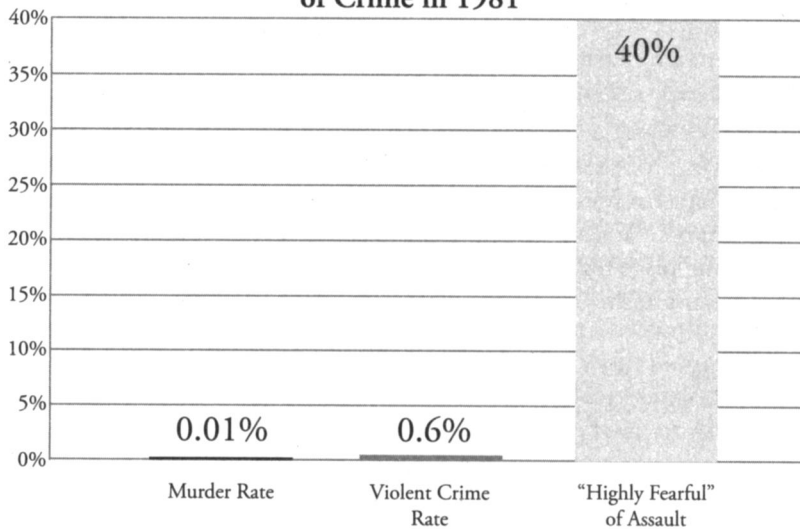
Very few homeowners actually constructed shelters. But the message was clear: the world was dangerous, and citizens were responsible for their own safety. Americans adopted a framework for security based on self-defense bolstered by private enterprise, rather than on cooperative democratic efforts to ease international and domestic tensions. Over time, a domestic arms race developed parallel to the nuclear arms race: citizens responded to perceived threats by fortifying their homes and arming themselves. Soon Americans could boast that they had more missiles, and more pistols, than anyone else. The United States' nuclear stockpile consistently outnumbered that of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982, and by the early 1990s the percentage of households in America with guns was far above that of other industrialized countries. It was not only the atomic age that made citizens fearful; there were also real domestic dangers. By the late 1960s crime was rising and inner cities were exploding. There were also good reasons for citizens to distrust the government. In its investigative zeal, the government engaged in intrusive practices such as wiretapping and other types of surveillance. In a 1970 Herblock political cartoon from the *Washington Post*, reprinted in *Time* magazine, a house labeled "individual security" is being broken into by four people. Two criminals breaking into the house are marked "crime increase," and two officials breaking into the house with them are marked "administration" and "no knock, wiretapping, and preventive detention." The caption reads, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." The cartoon suggests that government officials were no better than thugs and burglars. By the time the Watergate scandal unfolded a few years later, government officials had actually become thugs and burglars. Americans' trust in government dropped from 75 percent in 1963 to 25 percent in 1979.⁵

While dangers were real, citizens responded with exaggerated fear and distrust, much of it focused on crime. A 1974 study concluded that "The fear of crime in the United States is a fundamental social problem which has not yet received attention in proportion to its severity and which may well prove to be more difficult to treat than criminality itself." While it is difficult to quantify fear of crime, we do have poll data from particular years that indicate the level of fear. A poll taken in 1980 showed that while the chance of being murdered was a mere one in ten thousand and becoming a victim of violent crime was just six in one thousand, fully four in ten Americans polled reported that they were "highly fearful" of assault. More than half said that they dress plainly to

⁴ See Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill, 1994).

⁵ Gerald Segal, *The Simon and Schuster Guide to the World Today* (New York, 1987), 82. See also Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, eds., *Brezhnev Reconsidered* (New York, 2002). For comparative data on gun ownership see B. G. Krugg, K. E. Powell, and L. L. Dahlberg, "Firearm-Related Deaths in the United States and 35 Other High- and Upper-Middle-Income Countries," *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 27 (April 1998), 216; and "International Homicide Comparisons," *GunCite*, http://www.guncite.com/gun_control_gcgvinco.html. The cartoon appeared in "A Response to Fear," *Time*, Aug. 3, 1970, p. 10. Kevin Diaz, "Cynicism Is Out, Trust in Government In," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Oct. 23, 2001, p. A11.

Fear of Crime vs. Actual Incidents of Crime in 1981



Sources: James Brooks, "The Fear of Crime in the United States," *Crime and Delinquency*, 20 (July 1974), 241–44, esp. 241; "Crime: The Shape of Fear," *Economist*, Nov. 29, 1980, p. 36; "Crime—State Level: Trends in One Variable," U.S. Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/dataonline/Search/Crime/State/RunCrimeTrendsInOneVar.cfm>; Susan B. Carter et al., eds., "Table Aa6-8: Population; 1790–2000 (Annual Estimates)," *Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition Online*, <http://hsus.cambridge.org/HSUSWeb/search/searchTable.do?id=Aa6-8>.

avoid attracting the attention of attackers. A majority reported that they kept a gun for protection.⁶

So, how did this happen? I will offer some examples to suggest that the legacy of the Cold War fed this irrational response to crime, encouraged citizens to retreat from public life, and worked against the democratizing momentum of the rights revolution. Although the Cold War was not the sole cause of this fear, I argue that the ideological premises embedded in the Cold War shaped the response to it.

Long before crime filled the headlines and the airwaves, there was the alleged communist threat. Anticommunism was "in the air," according to the St. Paul native Patricia Hampl. She writes in her memoir of her terror as a child in the 1950s, unable to sleep for fear "of the *Communists* who lurked in the dark." She did not know "whether to watch for man or beast, goblin or reptile, malicious intent or natural disaster, something large and looming or a thing so insidiously small that no degree of vigilance could assure safety: I didn't

⁶ James Brooks, "The Fear of Crime in the United States," *Crime and Delinquency*, 20 (July 1974), 241–44, esp. 241. "Crime: The Shape of Fear," *Economist*, Nov. 29, 1980, p. 36. For crime and population, see "Crime—State Level: Trends in One Variable," U.S. Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/dataonline/Search/Crime/State/RunCrimeTrendsInOneVar.cfm>; and Susan B. Carter et al., eds., "Table Aa6-8: Population; 1790–2000 (Annual Estimates)," *Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition Online*, <http://hsus.cambridge.org/HSUSWeb/search/searchTable.do?id=Aa6-8>.

know, I didn't know." Noting the power of the new medium of television, she recalled watching TV shows, including the nightly news, which were filled with dire warnings about the Communists. Still, she wrote, "I could not concoct my Communists. . . . They remained, simply, dread."⁷

Such anxieties were not merely figments of an overly active imagination. Private enterprise did its part to whip up fear of Communists. Innocent children inside their homes appeared particularly vulnerable. In 1953, for example, a public service ad in *Newsweek* for the Norfolk and Western Railway pictured a frightened boy at home at night in a dark hallway, with the caption: "You needn't be ashamed of being afraid in the dark, son. . . . The darkness is a hiding place for confusion, greed, conspiracy, treachery, socialism . . . and its uglier brother, communism. . . . In the U.S.A. you are free to become vigilant to see what's going on . . . if you ignore this responsibility. . . . what you lose in the dark may be your freedom." Communists were not the only threat. The government was equally dangerous. A 1950 public service announcement in *U.S. News and World Report* from the Electric Light and Power Companies warned of increasing government control and assured readers that the company was "battling this move toward a socialistic government." The ad pictured a small boy in front of a table holding four symbols of freedom: a key, a bible, a pencil, and a ballot.⁸

These public service advertisements used familial images to raise fears among Americans that they and their children were vulnerable. They portrayed big government as akin to socialism and communism. Companies called on men to protect their families with do-it-yourself defense and to trust private enterprise, not the government, to keep them secure. This message was nowhere more explicit than in ads for the insurance industry, promising "self-made security" for the "do-it-yourself American" who is "creating his own security."⁹

As these ads suggest, the home gradually shifted from the place that *provides* protection to the place that *needs* protection. An example of that shift appeared in *House Beautiful* magazine. One of the most outspoken advocates of privatized single-family dwellings was Elizabeth Gordon, editor in chief of *House Beautiful* from 1941 to 1964. Gordon articulated the intertwined Cold War themes of individualism, free enterprise, the sanctity of the home, and suspicion of outsiders when, in a 1953 speech, she railed against the "International Style," the design of many postwar buildings, which she considered collectivist and un-American:

We don't believe the International Style is simply a matter of taste; any more than we believe that Nazism or Communism are matters of taste, matters of opinion. . . . Either we choose the architecture that will encourage the development of individualism or we choose the architecture and design of collectivism and totalitarian control. . . . The International Style . . . masses families together in one giant building so that relatively few, strategically placed, block leaders could check on all movements and conduct classes of ideological indoctrination . . . [it is] a design for living that we associate with totalitarianism.

According to Gordon, families flourished in privacy, fenced in and walled off from public gaze. Joseph Howland, the magazine's garden editor, agreed with Gordon:

⁷ Patricia Hampl, *A Romantic Education* (Boston, 1981), 37–39.

⁸ Norfolk and Western Railway, advertisement, *Newsweek*, Sept. 7, 1953, p. 13. Electric Light and Power Companies, advertisement, *U.S. News and World Report*, May 12, 1950, p. 25.

⁹ These quotes appeared on a number of insurance industry posters that have been collected by Caley Horan for her Ph.D. dissertation in progress on the insurance industry. I am grateful to her for allowing me to use these materials.

Good living is NOT public living. We consider [privacy] one of the cherished American rights, one of the privileges we fought a war to preserve. Freedom to live our own lives, the way we want to live them without being spied on or snooped around, is as American as pancakes and molasses. . . . The very *raison d'être* of the separate house is to get away from the living habits and cooking smells and inquisitive eyes of other people.¹⁰

By the early 1960s, the broad Cold War consensus was beginning to fracture. The excesses of McCarthyism had discredited the most vehement expressions of anticommunism. But fears of internal as well as external danger continued to permeate the country. Along with communism, criminality seemed to threaten individual security. In 1964, *House Beautiful* commented on the shift with a full-page illustration of a fortified house, with cannons, boarded-up doors and windows, alarms, guard dogs, locks, loudspeakers, and a large sign announcing "Burglars Go Home." Companies that stood to profit from fear of crime did their best to whip up terror. In 1970, for example, General Telephone and Electronics took out a two-page ad in *Time* magazine promoting their new intercom system. One side of the ad was a full-page photo of a man wearing a trench coat, face obscured by a hat. The facing page said in large bold letters, "Who's downstairs ringing your bell? A friend? Or the Boston Strangler?" These rudimentary devices eventually gave way to elaborate security systems, alarms, and safe rooms. The total worth of the private security business in the United States increased from \$3.3 billion in 1970 to \$52 billion in 1991. By the early twenty-first century consumers could contemplate a custom-built "quantum sleeper," a bulletproof cocoon complete with CD and DVD player, microwave, and refrigerator.¹¹

The locks, gadgets, barricades, and warnings against dangerous strangers revealed a growing siege mentality that began to solidify in the mid-1960s. It was not just about crime. Although crime was increasing, the rate of violent crime, even at its peak in the last half of the twentieth century, barely exceeded its highest point in the first half of the century. Throughout the twentieth century, the U.S. murder rate remained below 11 murders per 100,000 population. In the mid-1960s, the crime rate was relatively low, with violent crime affecting fewer than 2 people in 1,000. At its height, the rate of all violent crimes remained below 8 victims per 1,000 population. If we consider these numbers in terms of percentage of the population, these variations appear even slighter. The murder rate remained consistently below one one-hundredth of one percent of the population. The percentage of the population who were victims of all violent crimes remained consistently below one percent of the population. Regardless of the slim likelihood of becoming a crime victim, however, crime came to stand in for the many upheavals that were disrupting the Cold War order, including political protests, urban riots, and the many other challenges to the status quo and authority structures.¹²

¹⁰ Elizabeth Gordon, "The Responsibility of an Editor," speech to the Press Club Luncheon of the American Furniture Mart, Chicago, June 22, 1953, quoted in Dianne Harris, "Making Your Private World: Modern Landscape Architecture and *House Beautiful*, 1945–1965," in *The Architecture of Landscape, 1940–1960*, ed. Marc Treib (Philadelphia, 2002), 181–82.

¹¹ *House Beautiful*, 106 (July 1964), 100. General Telephone and Electronics, advertisement, *Time*, July 13, 1970, pp. 60–61. William C. Cunningham, John J. Strauchs, and Clifford W. Van Meter, *Private Security Trends, 1970–2000: The Hallcrest Report II* (Boston, 1990), 238. For population data, see Carter et al., eds., "Table Aa6-8." *Quantum Sleeper*, <http://www.qsleeper.com>.

¹² Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports* (Washington, 1940–1960); "Crime—State Level"; Susan B. Carter, et al., eds., "Table Ec190-198: Reported Homicides and Homicide Rates, by Sex and Mode of Death, 1900–1997," *Historical Statistics of the United States*, <http://hsus.cambridge.org/HSUSWeb/search/searchTable.do?id=Ec190-198>. For population data, see "Population Estimates," *United States Census Bureau*, <http://www.census.gov/popest/datasets.html>; Carter et al., eds., "Table Aa6-8."

The civil rights movement challenged racial hierarchies, and women were challenging domesticity by entering careers and public life. The counterculture, the antiwar movement, and the sexual revolution added to the sense that the tight-knit fabric of Cold War social order was coming apart. Urban riots across the country, along with a new militancy that accompanied the shift from civil rights to black power, heightened racial anxieties among white Americans. A backlash began immediately as an attempt to restore a sense of security and social order. Cold War ideology, with its emphasis on privatization, self-defense, and suspicion of both government and outsiders, gave shape to the backlash. Although the McCarthy era was over, anticommunism was still alive and well, fueling the “domino theory” that propelled the war in Vietnam as well as the suspicion of subversives within the country. In this atmosphere it is not surprising that many individuals and government agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, believed that “outside agitators” with communist sympathies were responsible for political protests, civil rights activism, and social disorder.

Politicians were quick to respond with a call for law and order. This was a new campaign issue. In the early Cold War years, from 1948 until 1964, candidates warned of the communist menace and promised to be tough on organized crime. But there was no mention of street crime in any presidential candidate’s acceptance speech or in any inaugural address. This changed dramatically in 1964. Law and order leaped into the center of political debates and stayed there for the rest of the century.¹³

Even as the issue of crime was taking hold, the Cold War still loomed large. Candidates in 1964 vied over which were the greatest dangers facing citizens and who offered the best protection. The Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater said that he would not rule out using tactical nuclear weapons in war. In response, the Democratic incumbent Lyndon B. Johnson aired a powerful television ad suggesting that his opponent would unleash nuclear war. In the ad, a little girl counts as she pulls daisy petals in a field of flowers. As a freeze-frame captures her innocent face, a man’s voice-over begins an ominous count-down, followed by sounds of a blast and horrific scenes of a nuclear bomb exploding. Johnson speaks in an ominous voice-over: “These are the stakes: to make a world in which all of God’s children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die.” The ad was so controversial that it aired only once, but it received tremendous attention. News programs played the ad over and over in their coverage of the controversy. The “daisy girl” appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, and two major television networks did stories on her. Many analysts claimed that this ad ushered in a new era of television attack-ad campaign advertising. Goldwater responded with his own fear mongering, not about atomic war but about crime, political protest, and social chaos. Above scenes of crime, rioting youths, and jarring music are large bold words suggesting that Johnson was “soft” on the dangers facing the nation: “Graft! Swindle! Juvenile Delinquency! Crime! Riots! Hear what Barry Goldwater has to say about our lack of moral leadership.”¹⁴

¹³ The only mention of crime in any of those speeches referred to organized crime and political corruption. See Gregory Bush, ed., *Campaign Speeches of American Presidential Candidates, 1948–1984* (New York, 1985); and Davis Newton Lott, *The Presidents Speak: The Inaugural Addresses of the American Presidents from Washington to Clinton* (New York, 1994).

¹⁴ Michael Carlson, “Obituary: Tony Schwartz; His Daisy Girl tv Ad Was a First, and Helped Put Lyndon Johnson in the White House,” *Guardian* (London), June 28, 2008. *Time*, Sept. 25, 1964, front cover. For quotes from and descriptions of television ads, see “The Living Room Candidate: Presidential Campaign Commercials, 1952–2008,” *Museum of the Moving Image*, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org>.

Although Johnson easily won the election, Goldwater's message on crime and social chaos set the tone for later campaigns. In 1968 both the Republican Richard Nixon and the candidate for the conservative American Independent party, George Wallace, focused on law and order. Nixon had a well-earned reputation as a fierce anticommunist; in 1968 he turned his attention to street violence and political protest. Nixon ran a television ad that turned the tables on "civil rights," using the term to address law and order. Amid scenes of urban chaos and violence, with a soundtrack of snare drum and dissonant piano chords, Nixon says, "It is time for an honest look at the problem of order in the United States. Dissent is a necessary ingredient of change, but in a system of government that provides for peaceful change, there is no cause that justifies resort to violence. Let us recognize that the first civil right of every American is to be free from domestic violence. So I pledge to you, we shall have order in the United States." Nixon drew no distinctions among crime, urban disturbances, and political demonstrations. In the ad, an eerie shot of an unclothed female mannequin torso tossed on the littered street underscored Nixon's pointed use of "domestic violence" to convey *public*, not *private* mayhem. His subtle use of language turned terms of the black freedom struggle and the feminist movement—"civil rights" and "domestic violence"—against them.¹⁵

The third-party candidate that year, George Wallace, had a well-earned reputation as a segregationist. In one ad he combined an antibusing message with a warning that city streets were dangerous, especially for women. As a school bus drives off, the narrator says, "Why are more and more millions of Americans turning to Governor Wallace? Follow, as your children are bussed across town." Wallace responds, "As President, I shall—within the law—turn back the absolute control of the public school systems to the people of the respective states." The ad then cuts to a darkened street with a woman walking, only her feet and the hem of her skirt visible. The narrator says, "Why are more and more millions of Americans turning to Governor Wallace? Take a walk in your street or park tonight." The sound of gunshots and breaking glass accompany the scene of a streetlight that is shot and then goes dark. Wallace says, "As President, I shall help make it possible for you and your families to walk the streets of our cities in safety."¹⁶

The Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey was the only candidate to address crime as a social problem. In one ad he tells an assembled crowd, "You're not going to make this a better America just because you build more jails. What this country needs are more decent neighborhoods, more educated people, better homes. . . . I do not believe that repression alone builds a better society."¹⁷

Humphrey in 1968 was the only candidate to address the underlying causes of crime. Nixon and Wallace combined won 57 percent of the votes. Although Humphrey's loss was in large measure due to his association with Johnson and the Vietnam War, the election results taught the Democrats a lesson. Four years later, the Democratic candidate George McGovern embraced law and order and anticipated the war on drugs. In a campaign speech incorporated into a television ad, McGovern said, "You're never going to get on top of crime in the United States until you get on top of drugs, because half of all the crime in this country is caused by the drug addict. They'll kill, they'll steal, they'll do

¹⁵ "Living Room Candidate."

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

anything to get that money to sustain that drug habit.” From that time on, the rhetoric of law and order became a political necessity, embraced by both parties.¹⁸

The framing of the crime issue reveals the escalating clash between security and democracy. The 1960s marked a shift in the black freedom struggle from civil rights to black power. While black people were not the only targets of racial profiling, media coverage of groups such as the Black Panthers and television images of urban riots fed a backlash that emphasized a black-white binary. The rise of the feminist movement also intensified the backlash against women entering public life. Just at the time when African Americans and women were asserting their rights as citizens, the news media fused the two issues by reviving the age-old trope that black men were dangerous and women—especially white women—were vulnerable.

The media contributed significantly to whipping up fear. By focusing disproportionately on rare but heinous crimes, television and newspapers contributed to exaggerated fears of random violence. The popular press saturated readers with the message that attacks on city streets were practically inevitable. As early as 1963 *U.S. News and World Report* exhorted women, “First Scream, Then Scram. . . muggings, rapes and assaults have become common” (which, of course, they were not). The *Washington Post* warned women not to “walk around alone at night,” to keep all doors and windows locked, and to install burglar alarms. In 1970, *Time* magazine asserted, “the universal fear of violent crime and vicious strangers . . . is a constant companion of the populace. It is the cold fear of dying at random in a brief spasm of senseless violence—for a few pennies, for nothing.” Who were these vicious strangers? *Time* asserted that “the most crime-prone segment of the population—poor urban youths aged 15 to 24—will increase disproportionately at least until 1975. Sheer demography adds a racial factor: half the nation’s blacks are under 21.” *Time*’s warning was not subtle. Young blacks were “crime-prone,” and their numbers were increasing. *Time* warned its white readers that “it is chiefly young black males who commit the most common interracial crime: armed robbery.”¹⁹

Time gave the impression that the city streets were swarming with young blacks eager to commit “interracial crime”—a term loaded with sexual associations. The police chief in Washington, D.C., trained his officers “to treat blacks decently mainly as a matter of self-protection. A mistreated kid, for example, may hurt a cop when he gets big and dangerous.” In other words, police should treat blacks decently not because they deserve to be treated decently, but because black kids will get big and dangerous.²⁰

The term “black militant” carried the most ominous weight, evoking power, violence, and danger. For example, *Time* quoted Julius Hobson, a critic of the city’s leadership, and identified him simply as “a local black militant.” *Time* failed to mention that Hobson was a longtime civil rights activist and World War II veteran who attended the Tuskegee Institute, Columbia and Howard Universities, held an M.A. in economics, was a member of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Roberto Suro, “Driven by Fear; Crime and Its Amplified Echoes Are Rearranging People’s Lives,” *New York Times*, Feb. 9, 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/02/09/weekinreview/driven-by-fear-crime-and-its-amplified-echoes-are-rearranging-people-s-lives.html>; Linda Heath, Jack Kavanagh, and Rae S. Thompson, “Perceived Vulnerability and Fear of Crime: Why Fear Stays High When Crime Rates Drop,” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 33 (no. 2, 2001), 1–14. “First Scream, Then Scram,” *U.S. News and World Report*, April 1, 1963. *Washington Post*, March 17, 1963. “Response to Fear.” “What the Police Can—and Cannot—Do about Crime,” *Time*, July 13, 1970, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,909452,00.html>.

²⁰ “What the Police Can—and Cannot—Do about Crime.”

the Washington, D.C., school board (he would also soon be elected to the D.C. city council), and taught at three universities.²¹

Like the reference to Hobson as a “black militant,” these warnings twisted reality and exaggerated danger. The most likely victims of violent crime, then as now, were men of color. The least likely victims were white women. Moreover, women were much safer, statistically, on the city streets in the middle of the night than in their own homes, where most violence against women occurred. Nevertheless, the media focused on women who ventured out onto public streets as particularly vulnerable to attacks by strangers. Not surprisingly, public opinion polls showed that women were most likely to fear becoming a victim of crime, even though they were least likely to actually be victimized.²²

Messages intended to scare women back into the home portrayed them not only as the most likely *victims* of crime but also as the *cause* of crime. As increasing numbers of women with children entered the work force, the media began to blame working mothers, not only for leaving their homes unprotected but also for leaving their children unsupervised and undisciplined. One article from 1981, noting an increase in crimes in the suburbs, explained, “As more and more husbands and wives hold down jobs, their unoccupied homes make tempting daytime targets for burglars. . . . The thieves are often the unattended sons of working couples who, say police, steal to keep up with the rising cost of marijuana.”²³

Meanwhile, as the backlash against feminism and civil rights intensified, so did the panic over crime. Calls for law and order led to harsher punishment for offenders. Although increasing numbers of European countries abolished the death penalty, and the United States followed suit with a moratorium on capital punishment in 1972, the U.S. suspension lasted only until 1976, when state killing began again. Riding the wave of the backlash, Ronald Reagan became president in 1981 and breathed new life into the Cold War, calling for law and order, family values, and a “star wars” protective shield in outer space to keep the country safe from nuclear attack.

By this time, fear of crime had taken on a life of its own that continued to grow, independent of the crime rate. According to a 1981 report, “A pervasive fear of robbery and mayhem threatens the way America lives. . . . The fear of crime is slowly paralyzing American society.” Houston police chief B. K. Johnson lamented, “We have allowed ourselves to degenerate to the point where we’re living like animals. We live behind burglar bars and throw a collection of door locks at night and set an alarm and lay down with a loaded shotgun beside the bed and then try to get some rest. It’s ridiculous.” “Americans are arming themselves with guns,” the report continued, “as though they still lived in frontier days.” But Chief Johnson himself kept several loaded guns in his own bedroom. Countless citizens did the same, arming themselves with guns, guard dogs, chemical mace, burglar alarms, karate classes, and target-shooting practice. They emptied the streets, making the streets more dangerous. Officials warned that the worst was yet to come, basing their predictions on unfounded assumptions. The former director of the

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York, 1995), 209–11. For data examined from online opinion polls, see “Self Defense, Personal Safety—Public Opinion Polls,” Roper Center at the University of Connecticut Public Opinion Online, available at LexisNexis. For example, polls taken in 1981, 1990, 1995, and 1998 indicate that women are more fearful than men. On crime statistics, see Eric H. Monkkonen, *Murder in New York City* (Berkeley, 2001), 55–79, 134–50.

²³ “The Curse of Violent Crime,” *Time*, March 23, 1981, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816.952929,00.html>.

Bureau of Justice Statistics predicted that “within four or five years every household in the country will be hit by crime.” In 1980, when the chance of becoming a murder victim was one in ten thousand, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology study made the absurd claim that one out of every sixty-one babies born in New York City in that year would be a murder victim.²⁴

Hollywood did its part to foster fear and encourage citizens to take crime control into their own hands, vigilante-style. The very popular *Death Wish* films starring Charles Bronson began in 1974 and continued into the mid-1990s. Undoubtedly inspired by the notorious grisly murders committed by Charles Manson and his hippie-styled followers in 1969 (a unique crime that nevertheless convinced many that the counterculture had gone berserk), the plots of all five increasingly violent *Death Wish* movies follow the protagonist, whose wife is murdered and daughter raped by a gang of thugs who break into their home. The villains in these films are usually portrayed as racial minorities and white hippies who commit Manson-style mayhem. The ineffectual police can do nothing. The main character, a New York City architect who had been a gentle, loving husband and father, and a “bleeding heart liberal,” is transformed into a gun-toting vigilante out for revenge. Viewers report that audiences in theaters stood and applauded when the hero shot the first mugger. At least one viewer boasted that he went out and bought a gun after seeing *Death Wish*. Many other popular movies carried similar themes, with violence providing the solution. During the Reagan era, the proportion of films ending in violence increased steadily, reaching 30 percent by 1990.²⁵

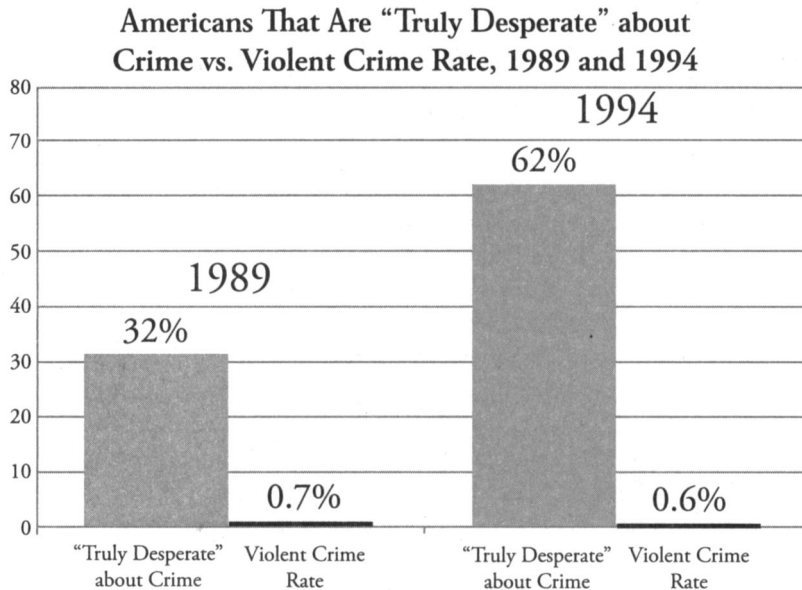
Vigilante justice was not confined to movie screens. In December 1984 Bernhard Goetz, a white subway passenger, shot four black youths when they tried to rob him, in a scenario much like one depicted in the first *Death Wish* movie ten years earlier. Goetz quickly became a folk hero. He was charged with attempted murder, assault, and several other crimes, but a Manhattan jury acquitted him of all crimes except one count of illegal possession of a firearm. According to a *Newsweek* poll taken three months later, 57 percent of respondents approved of Goetz shooting the youths. Half said they had little or no confidence in the police to protect them against violent crime. *U.S. News and World Report* was quick to comment with a telling political cartoon depicting the inside of a crowded subway car. All the passengers are armed to the teeth, including elderly women, as one passenger reads a newspaper with the headline, “Muggings down.” The message was clear: the way to stop crime was for citizens to carry weapons, become vigilantes, and protect themselves, like Goetz.²⁶

Racialized fear-mongering intensified during the 1980s, reaching a new low in 1988 with the infamous “Willie Horton” ad by the Republican presidential candidate George H. W. Bush, which featured a black man on parole who raped and murdered, released from prison under the watch of Governor Michael Dukakis. The Democratic candidate Dukakis responded not with a condemnation of Bush’s race-baiting and fear-mongering but with a “Willie Horton” ad of his own, featuring a Latino parolee from a federal prison who raped and murdered a woman during Bush’s years at the helm of the Central Intelligence Agency. These messages had an impact. One study found that for white viewers,

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See Paul Talbot, *Bronson’s Loose! The Making of the Death Wish Films* (New York, 2006). Data are from viewer response research and a random sample of film plots collected by Lary May (in Lary May’s possession).

²⁶ David M. Alpern, “A Newsweek Poll: ‘Deadly Force,’” *Newsweek*, March 11, 1985, p. 53; “Behind Tough Public Stance on Criminals,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Jan. 21, 1985, p. 60.



Sources: Rorie Sherman, “Crime’s Toll on the U.S.: Fear, Despair, and Guns,” *National Law Journal*, April 18, 1994, pp. A1, A19–A20, reprinted in John J. Sullivan and Joseph L. Victor, eds., *Criminal Justice 95/96* (Guilford, 1995), 57–61; “Crime—State Level: Trends in One Variable,” U.S. Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/dataonline/Search/Crime/State/Run-CrimeTrendsInOneVar.cfm>; “Population Estimates,” United States Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/popest/datasets.html>; Susan B. Carter, et al., eds., “Table Aa6-8: Population; 1790–2000 (Annual Estimates),” *Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition Online*, <http://hsus.cambridge.org/HSUSWeb/search/searchTable.do?id=Aa6-8>.

fear of crime increased when criminals portrayed on television were minorities, but fear of crime did not increase when the criminals portrayed were white.²⁷

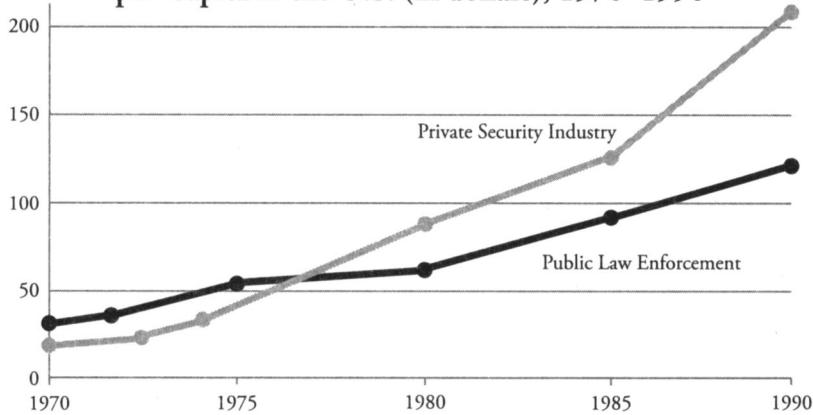
In the 1990s the clash between security and democracy reached a crescendo. It was a decade of small government and big business. A Democratic president presided over the end of the welfare program, a rapidly widening gap between rich and poor, and mergers of giant corporations into even more gigantic conglomerates with vast power. Citizens expressed distrust toward the government and each other. Although the crime rate declined in the 1990s, fear continued to rise. Between 1989 and 1994 the percentage of those polled who said they were “truly desperate” about crime nearly doubled, from 32 percent to 62 percent. At the same time, the rate of violent crime declined, from seven hundredths of 1 percent to six hundredths of 1 percent.²⁸

As movies such as *Death Wish* suggested, many people had little faith in government authorities and law enforcement. Because of a widespread belief that police could not be trusted to protect citizens and may not be around when needed, private security compa-

²⁷ “Living Room Candidate.” Sarah Eschholz, “Racial Composition of Television Offenders and Viewers’ Fear of Crime,” *Critical Criminology*, 11 (Jan. 2002), 41–60.

²⁸ Rorie Sherman, “Crime’s Toll on the U.S.: Fear, Despair, and Guns,” *National Law Journal*, April 18, 1994, pp. A1, A19–A20, reprinted in John J. Sullivan and Joseph L. Victor, eds., *Criminal Justice 95/96* (Guilford, 1995), 57–61. For crime statistics, see “Crime—State Level.” For population data, see “Population Estimates”; and Carter, et al., eds., “Table Aa6-8.”

**Private Security Industry Expenditures vs.
Public Law Enforcement Expenditures
per Capita in the U.S. (in dollars), 1970–1990**



Sources: David M. Alpern, "A Newsweek Poll: 'Deadly Force,'" *Newsweek*, March 11, 1985, p. 53; Barry Meier, "Reality and Anxiety: Crime and the Fear of It," *New York Times*, Feb. 18, 1993, p. A14; William C. Cunningham, John J. Strauchs, and Clifford W. Van Meter, *Private Security Trends, 1970–2000: The Hallcrest Report II* (Boston, 1990), 238.

nies began patrolling neighborhoods. From the 1970s onward, expenditures for private security exceeded expenditures for public law enforcement. A New Jersey security agency, for example, offered a "Family Protection Plan" that provided personal bodyguard service. Customers began hiring bodyguards to take them into New York City or to go shopping. During the 1980s the employment rate in the private security industry increased dramatically and far outstripped the rate in public law enforcement, which declined. By 1994 public perception of crime as the most important problem in America reached an all-time high.²⁹

The Cold War was over, but the war on drugs took its place. Bringing atomic-age fears full circle, a 1996 TV ad for the Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole began with footage of the little girl with a daisy taken from the 1964 Johnson ad. The female narrator says, "Thirty years ago, the biggest threat to her was nuclear war. Today the threat is drugs. Teenage drug use has doubled in the last four years. What's been done?" The ad continues with images of pre-adolescent children using various forms of drugs in a public park. Dole's ad reflected the continuation of a trend that began in the 1950s panic over juvenile delinquency. Children, while often portrayed as vulnerable, also appeared as threatening. Although the crime rate was declining rapidly in the 1990s, especially crimes committed by youths, polls revealed a vastly exaggerated sense of the danger. In 1994 juveniles committed only about 13 percent of all violent crimes. But Americans polled at the time believed that juveniles committed 43 percent of violent crimes—over three times the actual proportion. Not simply afraid *for* their children, Americans were becoming afraid *of* their children. Especially black children.³⁰

²⁹ Alpern, "Newsweek Poll." Barry Meier, "Reality and Anxiety: Crime and the Fear of It," *New York Times*, Feb. 18, 1993, p. A14. Cunningham, Strauchs, and Van Meter, *Private Security Trends*, 238.

³⁰ "Living Room Candidate." On the panic over juvenile delinquency, see, for example, James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York, 1988). Sherman, "Crime's Toll on the U.S.," 57.

In 1996 the Princeton University political scientist John DiIulio made a startling prediction. Looking at demographic trends, he asserted that by 2005 the number of fourteen- to seventeen-year-old males would increase by 23 percent and that the rate would rise faster among black children than among white children. Assuming that black boys would necessarily become violent teenage criminals, he coined the term “superpredator” and called the trend a “ticking time bomb” that would unleash “a storm of predatory criminality” on the nation. Critics who called DiIulio’s warnings alarmist, racist, and inaccurate were correct. The crime wave he warned about never happened. Crime was declining dramatically in the 1990s, just when DiIulio made his prediction, and within a decade violent crime by juveniles dropped to its lowest point in twenty-five years. But DiIulio’s claims about “superpredators” saturated the media. Michael Petit, the deputy director of the Child Welfare League of America, said that “superpredators” are “literally being manufactured, programmed, hardwired to behave in a certain way.” A 1997 editorial in the *Omaha World Herald* described these children as “killing machines.”³¹

False and frightening predictions such as DiIulio’s had an impact. Black people were incarcerated far out of proportion to their crimes. In the 1990s white people comprised 70 percent of those arrested (in line with their percentage of the population), but only 30 percent of those who went to prison. The reverse was true for people of color, who comprised 30 percent of those arrested but 70 percent of prison inmates. By the end of the century, one out of every four young black men was in jail, on parole, or on probation. The overcrowding of prisons with nonviolent offenders guilty of such crimes as drug possession and immigration violations eventually brought private enterprise into the criminal justice system. For-profit prisons expanded across the country, with financial incentives to keep more people incarcerated for longer periods of time. Between 1980 and 2008, the prison population increased from just under 320,000 to over 1.5 million. The rate of increase for prison costs was six times greater than that for higher education spending.³²

By the late twentieth century, it was not only criminals who lived behind bars and walls. Increasing numbers of nonincarcerated Americans locked themselves up in fortified homes. Nowhere is this bunker mentality more obvious than in the rapid proliferation of gated communities across the nation’s residential landscape. Gated communities have existed since the nineteenth century, but they had been rare and reserved for the rich. In the 1960s the numbers of gated communities began to grow, increasing in the 1970s and skyrocketing since the 1980s. By the turn of the twenty-first century, in the West, the South, and the Southeast, more than 40 percent of new residential developments were gated. In Southern California today, the majority of new housing units are in gated communities. Residents of gated communities often own their own streets, pay for their own services and utilities, and provide their own security guards. Homeowners pay significant fees for their infrastructure and security, which are independent of public funding and oversight. Some gated

³¹ John DiIulio, “Lock ‘Em Up or Else: Huge Wave of Criminally Inclined Coming in Next 10 Years,” *Lakeland (Fla.) Ledger*, March 23, 1996, p. A11; Joyce Purnick, “Youth Crime: Should Laws Be Tougher?,” *New York Times*, May 9, 1996, p. B1. Vincent Schiraldi, “Will the Real John DiIulio Please Stand Up,” editorial, *Washington Post*, Feb. 5, 2001, p. A19; “Superpredators’ Aren’t Mere Kids,” editorial, *Omaha World Herald*, May 16, 1997, p. 12.

³² See, for example, Department of Justice, “Prison Statistics,” Nov. 7, 2007, *U.S. Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics*, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/tables/corr2tab.cfm>; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Globalisation and U.S. Prison Growth: From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism,” *Race and Class*, 40 (nos. 2–3, 1998–1999), 172–74.

communities have actually incorporated as cities to enable homeowner associations to function as city councils and levy taxes. Some have built their own schools. Not surprisingly, residents of these communities often resent paying taxes for the same services that are provided to the public. Even inside the gates and walls, as recent survey data demonstrates, there is little sense of community or concern for the common good.³³

In many gated communities, freedom and security remain elusive. Homeowner associations develop policies that restrict residents' freedom to construct and decorate their homes as they wish, and enforce rigid behavioral codes as well. Whether inhabited by the wealthy or those of modest means, gated communities sometimes actually heighten feelings of vulnerability. Residents often complain that security is lax and outsiders easily enter. An illusion of safety makes the wide streets more dangerous, because cars speed and children play without the wariness they gain when living on public streets. In some cases, privatization actually makes these neighborhoods less safe. Police and fire emergency vehicles have trouble entering these communities because access is restricted. Researchers report that children become fearful of strangers, especially strangers who look different from themselves.³⁴

A 1995 study found that most residents chose gated communities for security, with the vast majority saying that security was "very important" in their decision. High-income residents of gated communities believed there was less crime in their neighborhood than in nongated communities, and they felt that crime was lower because of the gates. They believed they were safer, but in fact they were not: there was no significant difference in crime rates between gated and nongated communities with residents of similar income levels.³⁵ Unfriendly warnings and barriers did little to keep out crime, in part because some of the residents who lived inside the gates committed crimes against their neighbors.

Perhaps the perfect symbol of the trend toward privatized protection is the sport utility vehicle (SUV). Although sales of SUVs have declined in recent years due to rising gas prices and the economic crisis, these vehicles were the fastest growing segment of the auto industry during the last two decades of the twentieth century, outpacing minivans with similar size and features. Families often purchased SUVs because they appeared to offer safety. But SUVs are more prone to rollovers and braking failures than cars. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that SUV occupants are 11 percent more likely to die in a traffic accident than those in cars. SUVs are also dangerous to other cars. In the event of a side impact collision with an SUV, car occupants are sixteen times more likely to die than in these types of accidents with other cars.³⁶

Most SUV owners were men, but by 1989 women owned one-third of SUVs. SUVs carried a different appeal than the family-oriented minivan. A market research study that compared 4,500 SUV and minivan purchasers showed little demographic difference: own-

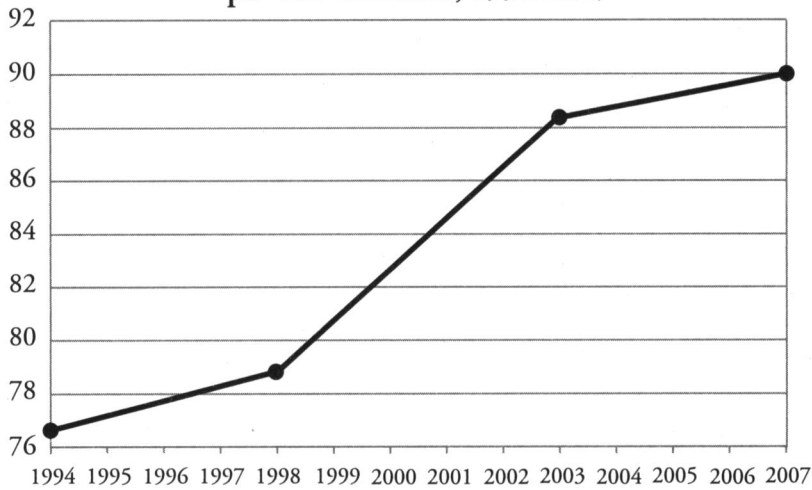
³³ Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (Washington, 1997), 7. Georjeanna Wilson-Doenges, "An Exploration of Sense of Community and Fear of Crime in Gated Communities," *Environment and Behavior*, 32 (Sept. 2000), 597–611.

³⁴ Sharon Waxman, "Paradise Bought in Los Angeles," *New York Times*, July 2, 2006, style section, p. 1. On the impact of gated communities on residents and the ways children become fearful of outsiders, see Blakely and Snyder, *Fortress America*. See also Roger K. Lewis, "'Gated' Areas: Start of New Middle Ages," *Washington Post*, Sept. 9, 1995, available at LexisNexis.

³⁵ Blakely and Snyder, *Fortress America*, 126–27.

³⁶ Keith Bradsher, *High and Mighty: SUVs—The World's Most Dangerous Vehicles and How They Got That Way* (New York, 2002); Josh Lauer, "Driven to Extremes: Fear of Crime and the Rise of the Sport Utility Vehicle in the United States," *Crime, Media, Culture*, 1 (no. 2, 2005), 149–68.

Number of Firearms in the United States
per 100 Residents, 1994-2007

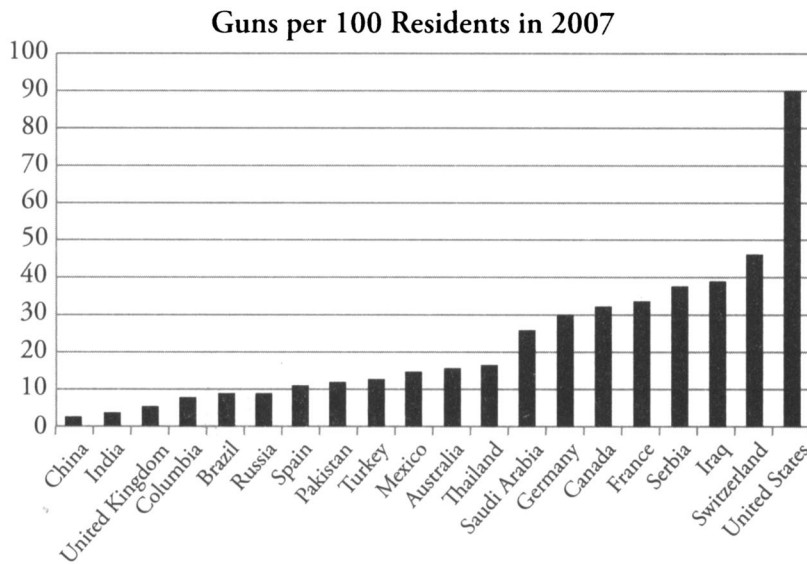


Sources: *Graduate Institute of International Studies*, *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City* (New York, 2007), 47; *Graduate Institute of International Studies*, *Small Arms Survey 2003: Development Denied* (New York, 2003), 4; Robert A. Hahn et al., "First Reports Evaluating the Effectiveness of Strategies for Preventing Violence: Firearms Laws. Findings from the Task Force on Community Preventive Services," Oct. 3, 2003, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5214a2.htm>; "Population Estimates"; Carter et al., eds., "Table Aa6-8."

ers of both vehicles were typically affluent married couples in their forties with children. Yet consultants for the auto industry found that the buyers were very different psychologically. SUV buyers were more restless, less social people with strong fears of crime. Minivan buyers were more self-confident and social, more involved with family and friends, more active in their communities. Minivan owners were more sexually satisfied; SUV drivers tended to be more sexually insecure. These data suggest that minivan owners exhibited more democratic tendencies in terms of their sense of security and engagement with public life. SUV drivers, in contrast, exhibited more antidemocratic characteristics, insecurity, and a retreat from public life.³⁷

One study concluded that the popularity of the SUV reflected American attitudes toward crime, random violence, and "the importance of defended personal space." Although advertised as rugged off-road vehicles, SUV owners almost never ventured off-road. But the large, intimidating vigilante vehicles offered the fantasy of escape, aggression, and conquest, even as their owners hunkered down. One researcher described SUVs as "weapons" and "armoured cars for the battlefield." The last incarnation of the SUV was, in fact, a military vehicle: the Hummer, a civilian version of the Humvee used by the armed forces in the first Gulf War. Arnold Schwarzenegger urged automakers to develop the Hummer in the mid-1990s, bringing the aura of foreign military campaigns to U.S. city streets. In 2001 the future governor of California promoted the new Hummer H2 at its unveiling in Times Square. Although at less

³⁷ Keith Bradsher, "Delving into Psyche of SUV v. Minivan Buyers; Automakers' Research: Minivan Owners Are Other-Oriented, SUV Owners Less Social," *Financial Post*, July 18, 2000, p. C3.



Sources: Graduate Institute of International Studies, *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City* (New York, 2007), 47; Graduate Institute of International Studies, *Small Arms Survey 2003: Development Denied* (New York, 2003), 4; Robert A. Hahn et al., "First Reports Evaluating the Effectiveness of Strategies for Preventing Violence: Firearms Laws. Findings from the Task Force on Community Preventive Services," Oct. 3, 2003, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5214a2.htm>; "Population Estimates"; Carter et al., eds., "Table Aa6-8."

than ten miles per gallon the Hummer did not survive the economic collapse, its presence on American streets at the turn of the twenty-first century was a symbol of the times.³⁸

By the end of the twentieth century, Americans had altered the way they live because of fear of crime. One study shows that women often changed their life-styles to avoid crime, by not going out alone or at night and by avoiding subways, downtown areas of major cities, and contact with people who look or seem dangerous to them. Although women are less likely to be victims of crime, research shows that they are more fearful. Fear of crime inhibits their participation in activities perceived as being too dangerous for women, and it maintains gender hierarchies that limit women's power, rights, and achievements.³⁹

The personal response to fears of crime mirrored the national response to the dangers of the atomic age: a heightening of alarm, a proliferation of arms, and a bunker mentality, rather than investment in the common good. The number of guns in the United States has increased steadily, from 76 per 100 residents in 1994 to 90 per 100 residents in 2007. Per capita gun ownership in the United States is now far above that of other nations, including those often described as lawless, such as Iraq, Mexico, and Colombia.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid.* Elaine Cardenas and Ellen Gorman, *The Hummer: Myths and Consumer Culture* (Lanham, 2007), 101.

³⁹ Esther Madriz, *Nothing Bad Happens to Good Girls: Fear of Crime in Women's Lives* (Berkeley, 1997), 119–24.

⁴⁰ Graduate Institute of International Studies, *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City* (New York, 2007), 47; Graduate Institute of International Studies, *Small Arms Survey 2003: Development Denied* (New York, 2003), 4; Robert A. Hahn et al., "First Reports Evaluating the Effectiveness of Strategies for Preventing Violence: Firearms Laws. Findings from the Task Force on Community Preventive Services," Oct. 3, 2003, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5214a2.htm>; "Population Estimates"; Carter et al., eds., "Table Aa6-8."

A vigilante mentality permeates society; forty states now allow citizens to carry concealed weapons. In Minnesota, for example, citizens can carry their guns into any building that does not post a sign at the door banning firearms. Members of pro-gun groups now carry firearms openly, showing off their guns on their hips in places such as Starbucks, a strategy they hope will intimidate the public into supporting concealed weapons laws. Firearms are now allowed in national parks. From 2008 to 2009, in just one year, the number of paramilitary militias tripled. The Supreme Court is currently considering striking down a Chicago law banning guns, an interpretation of the Second Amendment that would allow firearms everywhere in the country.⁴¹

So, as historians, how do we make sense of all this? I have suggested here that the Cold War was a factor in the obsession with security and the antidemocratic response to it that continued long after the Cold War ended. There are many outstanding studies of the domestic culture of the Cold War that point to several possible avenues for further exploration. We know that not all aspects of the Cold War were antidemocratic. After all, in an effort to eradicate inequalities and showcase to the world that the United States could live up to its ideals, national policies supported civil rights, women's rights, and the expansion of the welfare state in the Great Society programs. It is worth further study to examine why those liberal Cold War impulses were not powerful enough to prevent the antidemocratic tendencies that fostered the security obsession. It is also worth exploring the extent to which exaggerated concerns about security may have pushed the American political center to the right.

The principles of individualism, unfettered capitalism, the sanctity of the home, and a suspicion of outsiders that gained salience in the early Cold War era far outlived the Cold War itself. Those principles pushed back against the democratizing impulses of the rights revolution, fostered a bunker, vigilante mentality, and inhibited citizens from acting on behalf of the common good. Although Americans have largely accepted the gains made by the movements for civil rights and feminism, the security obsession has limited those achievements from reaching their full potential.

What, then, of security? Fear has made Americans feel less secure. As the twenty-first century unfolds, there is little evidence that Americans are safer or more empowered as a result of more weapons, more gated communities, and larger vehicles. But the security obsession has created an armed and defensive citizenry. There are more guns on the streets, locks on the doors, and walls around neighborhoods and along the nation's borders. Hostility to government and lack of concern for the common good may have made Americans considerably *less* safe. While citizens were distracted by street crime that harms relatively few people, unregulated private enterprise fleeced the entire country again and again. Locks on the doors did not protect families against losing their homes through mortgage foreclosure. Guns in their pockets did not prevent citizens from losing their shirts to Wall Street thugs.

And what about democracy? Democracy depends on citizens accepting their differences and trusting one another, at least to the extent that they understand themselves as belonging to a civic sphere as well as a private sphere. It requires investing in the common good and holding the government accountable as the institution that represents, and acts

⁴¹ Ian Urbina, "Locked, Loaded, and Ready to Caffeinate," *New York Times*, March 8, 2010, p. A11; David G. Savage, "Justices May Rule for Gun Rights: A Pending Decision on Chicago's Ban Has National Implications," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 2010, p. 1A.

on behalf of, the citizenry. If, in the name of security, Americans distrust each other and the government, and value private protection at the expense of the public good, then the basic social and political practices that ensure a healthy democracy cannot survive.

Understanding the way that fear became a dominant force in American culture alongside the great achievements on behalf of democratic inclusiveness provides a historical perspective on the wisdom of Franklin D. Roosevelt: if we believe in the democratic project, “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”⁴² It is up to us as historians to figure out when and how democratic practices have expanded and flourished, and when and how they have withered.

⁴² I am grateful to Daniel May for this insight.