SECTION I
Summary of the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program

The Uniform Crime Reporting Program is a nationwide, cooperative statistical effort of approximately 17,000 city, county, and state law enforcement agencies voluntarily reporting data on crimes brought to their attention. During 1998, these law enforcement agencies were active in the UCR Program and represented over 259 million United States inhabitants or 96 percent of the total population as established by the Bureau of the Census. An analysis of community types indicates these agencies represented 97 percent of the population in Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), 90 percent in cities outside metropolitan areas, and 89 percent in the rural counties.

Since 1930, the FBI has administered the Program and issued periodic assessments of the nature and type of crime in the Nation. While the Program's primary objective is to generate a reliable set of criminal statistics for use in law enforcement administration, operation, and management, its data have over the years become one of the country's leading social indicators. The American public looks to Uniform Crime Reports for information on fluctuations in the level of crime, while criminologists, sociologists, legislators, municipal planners, the media, and other students of criminal justice use the statistics for varied research and planning purposes.

Historical Background

Recognizing a need for national crime statistics, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) formed the Committee on Uniform Crime Records in the 1920s to develop a system of uniform police statistics. Establishing offenses known to law enforcement as the appropriate measure, the Committee evaluated various crimes on the basis of their seriousness, frequency of occurrence, pervasiveness in all geographic areas of the country, and likelihood of being reported to law enforcement. After studying state criminal codes and making an evaluation of the recordkeeping practices in use, the Committee in 1929 completed a plan for crime reporting which became the foundation of the UCR Program.

Seven offenses were chosen to serve as an Index for gauging fluctuations in the overall volume and rate of crime. Known collectively as the Crime Index, these offenses included the violent crimes of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault and the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. By congressional mandate, arson was added as the eighth Index offense in 1979.

During the early planning of the Program, it was recognized that the differences among criminal codes precluded a mere aggregation of state statistics to arrive at a national total. Further, because of the variances in punishment for the same offenses in different state codes, no distinction between felony and misdemeanor crimes was possible. To avoid these problems and provide nationwide uniformity in crime reporting, standardized offense definitions by which law enforcement agencies were to submit data without regard for local statutes were formulated. The definitions used by the Program are set forth in Appendix II of this publication.

In January 1930, 400 cities representing 20 million inhabitants in 43 states began participating in the UCR Program. Congress enacted Title 28, Section 534, of the United States Code authorizing the Attorney General to gather crime information that same year. The Attorney General, in turn, designated the FBI to serve as the national clearinghouse for the data collected. Since that time, data based on uniform classifications and procedures for reporting have been obtained from the Nation's law enforcement agencies.

Advisory Groups

Providing vital links between local law enforcement and the FBI in the conduct of the UCR Program are the Criminal Justice Information Systems Committees of the IACP and the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA). The IACP, as it has since the Program began, represents the thousands of police departments nationwide. The NSA encourages sheriffs throughout the country to participate fully in the Program. Both committees serve in advisory capacities concerning the UCR Program's operation.

To function in an advisory capacity concerning UCR policy and provide suggestions on UCR data usage, a Data Providers' Advisory Policy Board (APB) was established in August 1988. The Board operated until 1993 when a new Board to address all FBI criminal justice information services was approved. The Board functions in an advisory capacity concerning UCR policy and on data collection and use. The UCR Subcommittee of the Board ensures continuing emphasis on UCR-related issues.

The Association of State Uniform Crime Reporting Programs and committees on UCR within individual state law enforcement associations are also active in promoting interest in the UCR Program. These organizations foster widespread and more intelligent use of uniform crime statistics and lend assistance to contributors when the needs arise.

Redesign of UCR

While throughout the years the UCR Program remained virtually unchanged in terms of the data collected and

disseminated, a broad utility had evolved for UCR by the 1980s. Recognizing the need for improved statistics, law enforcement called for a thorough evaluative study that would modernize the UCR Program. The FBI fully concurred with the need for an updated Program and lent its complete support, formulating a comprehensive three-phase redesign effort. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the Department of Justice agency responsible for funding criminal justice information projects, agreed to underwrite the first two phases. Conducted by an independent contractor, these phases were structured to determine what, if any, changes should be made to the current Program. The third phase would involve implementation of the changes identified. Abt Associates Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts, overseen by the FBI, BJS, and a Steering Committee comprised of prestigious individuals representing a myriad of disciplines, commenced the first phase in 1982.

During the first phase, the historical evolution of the UCR Program was examined. All aspects of the Program, including the objectives and intended user audience, data items, reporting mechanisms, quality control, publications and user services, and relationships with other criminal justice data systems, were studied.

Early in 1984, a conference on the future of UCR, held in Elkridge, Maryland, launched the second phase of the study, which would examine potential futures for UCR and conclude with a set of recommended changes. Attendees at this conference reviewed work conducted during the first phase and discussed the potential changes that should be considered during phase two.

Findings from the evaluation's first phase and input on alternatives for the future were also major topics of discussion at the seventh National UCR Conference in July 1984. Overlapping phases one and two was a survey of law enforcement agencies.

Phase two ended in early 1985 with the production of a draft, *Blueprint for the Future of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program*. The study's Steering Committee reviewed the draft report at a March 1985 meeting and made various recommendations for revision. The Committee members, however, endorsed the report's concepts.

In April 1985, the phase two recommendations were presented at the eighth National UCR Conference. While various considerations for the final report were set forth, the overall concept for the revised Program was unanimously approved. The joint IACP/NSA Committee on UCR also issued a resolution endorsing the *Blueprint*.

The final report, the *Blueprint for the Future of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program*, was released in the summer of 1985. It specifically outlined recommendations for an expanded, improved UCR Program to meet informational needs into the next century. There were three recommended areas of enhancement to the UCR Program. First, reporting of offenses and arrests would be made by means of an incident-based system. Second, collection of data would be accomplished on two levels. Agencies in level one would report important details about those offenses comprising the current Crime Index, their victims, and arrestees. Law enforcement agencies covering populations of over 100,000 and a sampling of smaller agencies would be included in level two, which would collect expanded detail on all significant offenses. The third proposal involved introducing a quality assurance program.

To begin implementation, the FBI awarded a contract to develop new offense definitions and data elements for the redesigned system. The work involved (a) revision of the definitions of certain Index offenses, (b) identification of additional significant offenses to be reported, (c) refinement of definitions for both, and (d) development of data elements (incident details) for all UCR offenses in order to fulfill the requirements of incident-based reporting versus the current summary reporting.

Concurrent with the preparation of the data elements, the FBI studied the various state systems to select an experimental site for implementation of the redesigned Program. In view of its long-standing incident-based Program and well-established staff dedicated solely to UCR, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) was chosen. The SLED agreed to adapt its existing system to meet the requirements of the redesigned Program and collect data on both offenses and arrests relating to the newly defined offenses.

To assist SLED with the pilot project, offense definitions and data elements developed under the private contract were put at the staff's disposal. Also, FBI automated data processing personnel developed Automated Data Capture Specifications for use in adapting the state's data processing procedures to incorporate the revised system. The BJS supplied funding to facilitate software revisions needed at the state level. Testing of the new Program was completed in late 1987.

Following the completion of the pilot project conducted by SLED, the FBI produced a draft set of guidelines for an enhanced UCR Program. Law enforcement executives from around the country were then invited to a conference in Orange Beach, Alabama, where the guidelines were presented for final review.

During the conference, three overall endorsements were passed without dissent. First, that there be established a new, incident-based national crime reporting system; second, that the FBI manage this Program; and third, that an Advisory Policy Board composed of law enforcement executives be formed to assist in the direction and implementation of the new Program.

Information about the redesigned UCR Program, called the National Incident-Based Reporting System, or NIBRS, is contained in four documents produced subsequent to the Orange Beach Conference. Volume 1, *Data Collection*

Guidelines, contains a system overview and descriptions of the offenses, offense codes, reports, data elements, and data values used in the system. Volume 2, *Data Submission Specifications*, is for the use of state and local systems personnel who are responsible for preparing magnetic tapes/floppy disks/etc., for submission to the FBI. Volume 3, *Approaches to Implementing an Incident-Based Reporting (IBR) System*, is for use by computer programmers, analysts, etc., responsible for developing a state or local IBR system which will meet NIBRS' reporting requirements. Volume 4, *Error Message Manual*, contains designations of mandatory and optional data elements, data element edits, and error messages.

A NIBRS edition of the *UCR Handbook* has been produced to assist law enforcement agency data contributors implementing NIBRS within their departments. This document is geared toward familiarizing local and state law enforcement personnel with the definitions, policies, and procedures of NIBRS. It does not contain the technical coding and data transmission requirements presented in Volumes 1 through 4.

NIBRS collects data on each single incident and arrest within 22 crime categories. For each offense known to police within these categories, incident, victim, property, offender, and arrestee information are gathered when available. The goal of the redesign is to modernize crime information by collecting data presently maintained in law enforcement records; the enhanced UCR Program is, therefore, a by-product of current records systems. Of course, the integrity of UCR's long-running statistical series continues to be maintained.

It became apparent during the development of the prototype system that the level one and level two reporting proposed in the *Blueprint* might not be the most practical approach. Many state and local law enforcement administrators indicated that the collection of data on all pertinent offenses could be handled with more ease than could the extraction of selected ones. While "Limited" participation, equivalent to the *Blueprint's* level one, will remain an option, it appears that most reporting jurisdictions, upon implementation, will go immediately to "Full" participation, meeting all NIBRS data submission requirements.

Implementation of NIBRS is occurring at a pace commensurate with the resources, abilities, and limitations of the contributing law enforcement agencies. The FBI was able to accept NIBRS data as of January 1989, and to date, the following 18 state-level programs have been certified for NIBRS participation: Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. An additional 16 state agencies, several local law enforcement agencies in 2 states not having state-level programs, and 5 federal agencies (the Departments of Commerce, Interior, and Defense; Federal Protective Service; and the FBI) have submitted test tapes or disks containing the expanded data. Five other state agencies, agencies in the District of Columbia and Guam, and other federal agencies are in various stages of planning and development.

Recent Developments

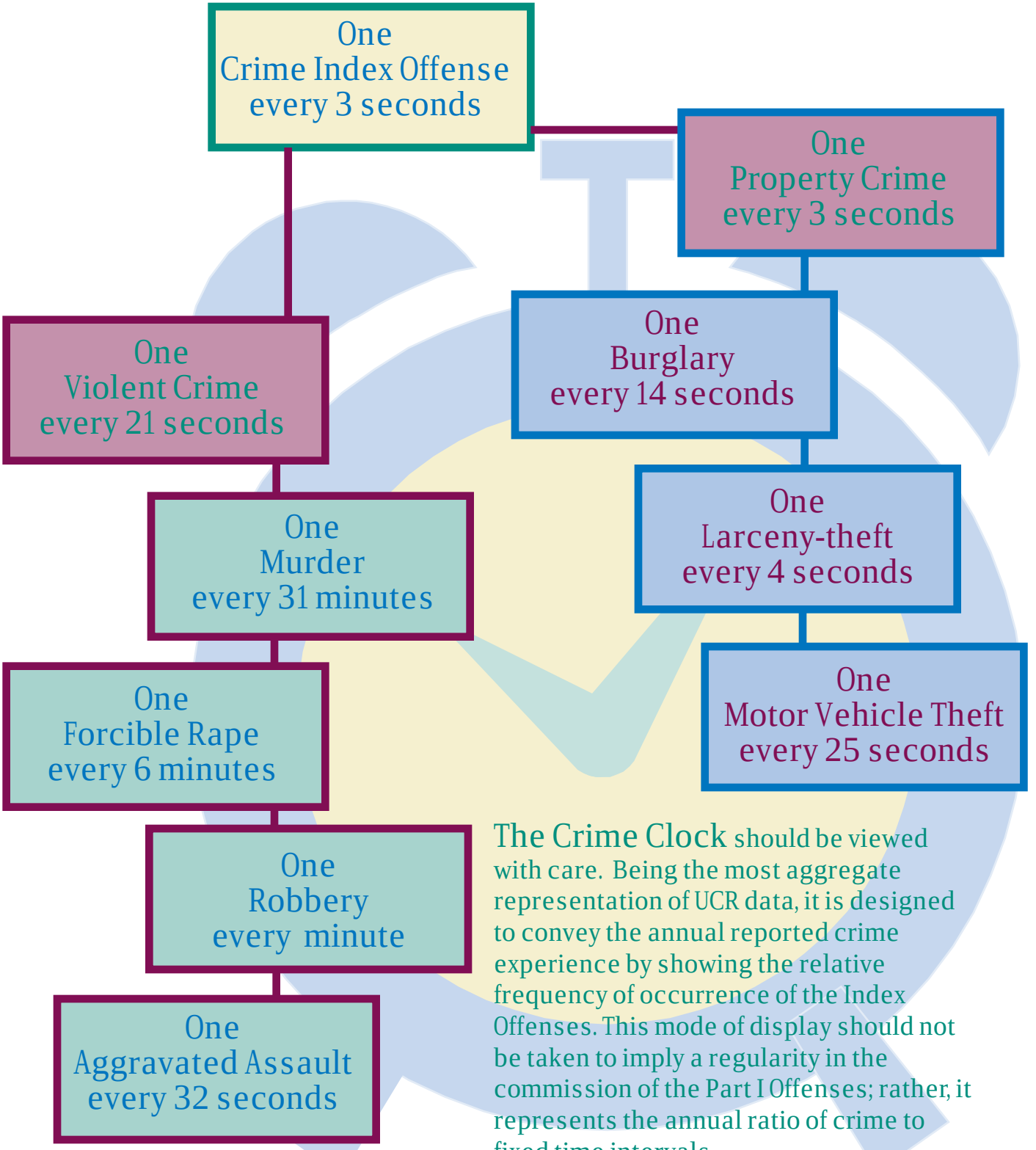
QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW — The FBI is currently piloting a voluntary Quality Assurance Review (QAR) for the UCR Program. The purpose of the QAR is to assess the validity of crime statistics through an on-site review of local case reports. This review also includes an examination of policy and procedures for collecting and compiling local agency statistics by the state repositories. At the local level, FBI staff appraise a sample of incident and arrest reports to evaluate the accuracy of data submitted to the national Program. Among the areas explored are offense classification and scoring, victim and arrest counts, crime clearances, and stolen property descriptions and values. Following the review, the QAR team sends a written evaluation of the agency's reporting methods, i.e., meeting submission criteria, overreporting, or underreporting, to the agency.

Since its June 1997 implementation, the QAR has been conducted at 74 agencies during 19 state reviews. Through these reviews, discrepant data and trend analyses have been conducted and disseminated to the state UCR Programs to assist in the accurate reporting of UCR data. While refinement of the process continues, including further expansion of the NIBRS portion of the review process, it is projected that the Program will be operational late 1999 - early 2000. Once finalized, the QAR may allow for an adjustment of crime statistics at the national level, and it will still serve as a support mechanism for system users to provide a valid assessment of crime statistics.

POPULATION ESTIMATION — In order to make population adjustments in preparation of the 2000 census, the UCR Program this year used a method of estimating population that it has not used in several years. Population figures for individual jurisdictions were updated by first applying the 1998 state growth rates (which were calculated from 1997 and 1998 Bureau of the Census state estimates) to 1997 Bureau of the Census county estimates to obtain 1998 county estimates. Then a county growth rate was determined by dividing 1998 county estimates by 1996 county estimates. This rate of growth was then applied to 1996 Bureau of the Census individual city estimates for each individual agency within the county. When preparing 1998 UCR population updates, the most current state, county, and city population estimates available from the Bureau of the Census were used.

Figure 2.1

Crime Clock 1998



The Crime Clock should be viewed with care. Being the most aggregate representation of UCR data, it is designed to convey the annual reported crime experience by showing the relative frequency of occurrence of the Index Offenses. This mode of display should not be taken to imply a regularity in the commission of the Part I Offenses; rather, it represents the annual ratio of crime to fixed time intervals.