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Crack and Criminal Justice in Canton, Ohio, 1987–1999: "The Drug Problem has Created a Monster"

Abstract: The rise of crack cocaine in the late 1980s propelled the war on drugs. The experience of Canton, Ohio, shows how the response to crack solidified mass incarceration. A declining industrial city of 84,000 people in northeast Ohio with deep-seated racial divides, it was overwhelmed by aggressive, enterprising crack dealers from outside the city. In response, politicians and residents united behind the strategy of incessant arrests and drastic prison sentences. The law-enforcement offensive worsened conditions while pursuing African Americans at blatantly disproportionate rates, but few people engaged in reframing the drug problem. Instead, a punitive citizenry positioned punishment as the principal remedy. The emergency foreclosed on more comprehensive assessments of the city's tribulations, while the criminal justice system emerged as the paramount institution.

Keywords: Crime, race, mass incarceration, deindustrialization, policing, Midwest history, carceral state, drugs

On October 9, 1987, Brian Walker visited his foster mother after moving back to Canton, Ohio, from Los Angeles. He told her that someone owed him money and asked her to save him leftovers, as he would be back the next day. She never saw him alive again. On October 27, police officers found Walker's body with a bullet wound to the head. Investigators determined that he had

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been shot about two weeks earlier. The unsolved murder was an omen: crack had arrived in Canton.[1]

The rise of crack use in the mid-1980s gave the antidrug campaign legs as traffickers dispersed it across the country. A cheap, smokable version of cocaine, crack exacerbated the social and economic woes of big cities as well as smaller places like Springfield, Massachusetts; Aliquippa, Pennsylvania; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Stockton, California; and Macon, Georgia.[2] Arrests furthered the bedlam, yet as conditions deteriorated prohibitionists pointed to the disorder as another reason the United States needed a punitive response. As historian David Courtwright notes, crack led to three presidential addresses, two omnibus federal antidrug laws, the creation of a drug czar, and large increases in federal drug-control budgets.[3] Policymakers took advantage of the crisis to further ulterior agendas, exploiting the epidemic to blame impoverished people for their plight, militarize the police, and score political points.[4] The carceral state inflated as crack and crime hardened attitudes.

This historical account illustrates how populist support for sterner measures against drug-related crime fueled the growth of a local criminal justice system. Scholars note that criminal justice actors—particularly county prosecutors—saw their clout expand mightily beginning in the 1990s. They used this influence to put more people in prison, contributing profoundly to the nation's status as the world's largest jailer, a perch built on unduly penalizing the poor and racial minorities.[5] To rein in the carceral state and curb unchecked prosecutorial power, reformers have suggested bolstering citizen participation.[6] Yet few have considered how carceral practices multiplied in the localities making punishment decisions.[7] Through a mix of newspaper accounts, government reports, city council minutes, and interviews, this article demonstrates how trauma intensified by prohibition led residents of Canton and Stark County to embrace penal remedies, a series of choices shaped by the on-the-ground events and political constructs. These sources privilege, amplify, and obscure various narratives, but together they provide a sense of how crime and drug policies were shaped by active citizens, the media, law enforcement, and politicians.[8] While drug users and dealers were most affected, they were not poised to redirect policies away from retribution or to challenge institutional legitimacy. In Canton, like many other cities, the era was defined by a dearth of alternatives to the punitive momentum.

To understand the rise of mass incarceration, policy historians must trace the capacity of voters and political institutions to deal with crime shocks.

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Canton demonstrated how localities came to be, as Jonathan Simon finds, "governed through crime."[9] For decades, formidable unions and manufacturing firms had safeguarded workers from law enforcement overreach. By the late 1980s, businesses had pared their workforces and demoralized industrial unions were left protecting the narrow interests of their diminished membership. To make matters worse, the rapidly declining city of 84,000 people in Northeast Ohio with deep-seated racial divides was beset by enterprising suppliers arriving from Los Angeles, Detroit, and Jamaica. In response, most politicians and residents endorsed punishment as the best medicine for the area's woes, uniting behind incessant arrests and incapacitation as penal populism abetted the upsurge of the state's corrections budget in a time of austerity.[10] Canton's example shows that local politics were as exacting as those unfolding at the federal and state levels.

The offensive on crime and drugs worsened racial discord as the criminal justice system pursued and punished African Americans at disparate rates. Many white residents readily ignored systemic contexts and attributed the city's dysfunction to African Americans. Black Cantonians, caught in an unenviable situation, struggled to find a balance between public safety and civil rights. Residents expressed the "dual frustrations" of police misconduct and the depredations of drug crews. Area black leaders, a mix of pastors and seasoned activists, condemned discrimination while insisting that the legal system could do more to stem disorder. The dominant narrative framed drugs and crime as moral issues, thwarting larger critiques of prohibition.[11] Crack kicked Canton while it was down, but the city's war also foreclosed on more thoughtful and candid assessments of racism, economic shifts, crime, and addiction.

CRACK'S CONTEXTS

Ohio's Rust Belt cities were on the ropes before crack appeared. During the cataclysmic 1979–1983 recession, the state lost nearly 800,000 jobs, more than one-sixth of total employment. In Canton, the largest city in Stark County, 24,614 jobs disappeared in the downturn, nearly 16 percent of the county's workforce. Most damagingly, the losses were concentrated in high-paying manufacturing. The city's real unemployment rate doubled to 20 percent from 1979 to 1985, and in 1986 Ford Motors announced a plant shuttering, eliminating more than 900 jobs.[12] The enlarging service sector did not reverse the area's fortunes. "The overwhelming majority of Ohio's net job growth since 1980 has been in low-wage occupational positions," a think tank reported in

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1990. "This changing occupational and wage structure in Ohio's economy shifted its income distribution in such a way that the rich got richer, while the poor got poorer. Youngstown, Cleveland and Canton have been hit particularly hard by this trend."[13] Union wages and affordable housing had attracted people from around the world to these cities, but they were hallowing out even before crack arrived.

The economic vicissitudes clashed with the state's confidence that jobs could resolve any social problem. For sixteen of twenty years stretching from 1963 from 1983, Jim Rhodes served as Ohio's governor. His philosophy was simple: masculine construction and factory jobs were "the tools to fight crime, unemployment, and welfare." Rhodes was a low-tax conservative, but liberals, treatment providers, and local politicians regularly agreed with his stance. Jobs, a black newspaper serving Canton stated in 1990, were the quickest way to thwart crack addition.[14] The emphasis on "work" downgraded public-health approaches many Ohioans dismissed as coddling, a tendency furthered by the medical sector's unwillingness to assert itself as a viable option.[15]

The reliance on jobs as a cure-all discounted how prosperity had masked the complex relationship between labor and substance abuse. In the 1970s, drug and alcohol consumption were rampant among blue- and white-collar workers—sometimes while on the job.[16] In a strong economy, these habits did not necessarily undermine respectability and could even burnish a manly image. Paternalistic industrial firms and potent unions shielded workers from state scrutiny by framing substance use as a collective-bargaining matter. Addiction was not a moral issue, the district director of the United Steelworkers stated, but a disease requiring officials to attend to "the welfare of our members whose jobs are threatened." Business elites agreed, regarding labor as a profitable commodity.[17] When work disappeared, however, addiction became a sinister dependency for deadbeats—especially if the user was black—as media accounts frequently portrayed African American drug abusers as unrepentant and oppositional.[18]

Deindustrialization and austerity politics turned poorer urban areas into fertile territory for the crime rise. Anticity animus and highway construction had shifted influence to the suburbs, a process that analysts derided as "sprawl without growth." Throughout the 1980s, the federal government degraded conditions by slashing local government aid. A searing cut for Canton was the loss of Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) funds. CETA not only provided employment preparation and paid positions, it was also a crime-prevention program, funding thirteen county peace officers.[19] Conservative critics were unmoved by what they regarded as a wasteful boondoggle.

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The Ronald Reagan administration promised that shifting from CETA to block grants would make career preparation more "efficient" and "businesslike." Instead, by 1991 Ohio had a byzantine mess of fifty-one separate programs operated by fifteen state agencies.[20]

The decentralization of job training was part of the larger Republican effort to compel urbanites to find and fund solutions locally. Speaking in Cleveland, Reagan administration official E. S. Savas said that cities were like "American Bangladeshes" that should stand on their own. Rural and suburban Ohioans generally agreed, and as cities lost population, lawmakers limited disbursements to stanching decay rather than on stimulating economic recovery.[21] The exception was criminal justice, as voters repeatedly sent politicians to the statehouse pledging to lock more people up.

FROM COCAINE TO CRACK

Ohio's response to the crack surge was primed by punitive stances taken in the postwar era. During the mid-1950s, the General Assembly adopted the nation's strictest drug laws, measures the Federal Bureau of Narcotics claimed had "broke the back of the narcotics racket in Ohio."[22] In the early 1970s, alarmed by rising marijuana and heroin use, Stark County leaders formed a comprehensive program of treatment, education, and interdiction. It collapsed as racial divides, the timidity of the health sector, and exasperation with rehabilitation positioned enforcement as the favored reaction, leaving the area unprepared to handle subsequent drug epidemics.[23]

Though cocaine use rose in the 1970s and early 1980s, few would have predicted that it would develop into the people's choice. The drug emerged as an expensive, fashionable high. Agents in the Canton area made a series of sizeable busts of wholesalers, a mix of white organized crime figures and businesspeople. Investigators found these groups easy to dismantle as threats of prison turned middle-class whites into informants. "There was big time hanging over their heads, so they had a lot of incentive to flip, and they did," a Canton lawyer said.[24]

The image of cocaine shifted in the mid-1980s as innovators and market forces interacted to make it into what journalist Barry Michael Cooper called, "a Tiffany drug at Woolworth prices." Arrests and seizures did not stop the flow of cocaine as oversupply dropped the price from $125 per gram in 1983 to $80 by 1987. White merchants continued to import large quantities, but the invention of cheap rock brought more players into the game.[25] In cities like Canton, black entrepreneurs, long excluded from the upper ranks of organized

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crime, grabbed the opportunity as casual customers and addicts flocked to copping zones. Medical professionals and journalists amplified panic by asserting that crack was demonic. A prominent Northeast Ohio psychiatrist argued that people could get addicted after just one use. "There's no drug on earth like that. All the other drugs give the abuser some discretionary movement. You cannot walk away from crack." Overheated accounts claimed crack made people paranoid, violent, and able to withstand pain.[26] Media reports, especially on television, distorted the dangers of crack. The racialized image of the "violent cocaine-crazed menace" bolstered the case of moralists and law enforcement while distracting from the real damage done by prohibition and markets dominated by armed dealers.[27]

By 1988, crack became easier to find in Canton than marijuana. Black Los Angelenos loosely affiliated with Crips gangs were among the earliest suppliers, benefitting African American retailers tired of doing dangerous street work while the lion's share of the spoils went to white bosses. Men such as Brian Walker brought crack from Los Angeles and benefitted from hefty markups. "You don't sell drugs unless you deal with them," a Canton user said. "They went out to L.A. and came back with Uzis and all sorts of 'caine. The L.A. boys don't fool around." The returns enticed traffickers to the Midwest. "It took me a day and a half. I made six thousand (dollars). This shit go quick here," a Crip crowed in a wiretapped call back to Los Angeles.[28] One man's plague was another's profit.

The heydays for the California connection were short as Detroiters entered the scene. Market saturation in the Motor City induced impresarios to find virgin territory and cocaine that sold for $600 an ounce in Michigan fetched $1,000 in Ohio.[29] Word of big paydays enticed the "Detroit boys" to Canton, where they undersold locals, took over public housing units, and hired youths as runners and lookouts. "Next thing you know," an experienced dealer remarked, "Canton got the reputation for 'hey, you want to make some money, let's go to Canton.'" The city's gangs were small and fleeting, a black leader noted, while the Detroit boys were "true gangs with the guns."[30] The Detroiters were young, bold, and sophisticated. "They appeared hard, they were not the kids we were used to seeing," the Stark County Family Court administrator noted.[31] The dealers were choosy about business, carefully avoiding treacherous places like Youngstown while infiltrating surrounding towns.[32]

While some Detroiters were involved in structured operations, many were independents looking to make quick money. "It's like moonshine used to be," an official acknowledged. "We have a lot of free-lancers making it. There are a lot of small dealers out there."[33] Billy Ray Sorrells turned to

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crack sales after being fired at Ford Motors and moved from Detroit to Canton because it had less competition. A SWAT team dressed in combat fatigues raided his family's operation in February 1989, arresting six people from Michigan and three Cantonians. People were making his family out to be the mafia or John Dillinger, he said, when they were just "everyday people" looking for the best prospects.[34] Cops had believed criminal enterprises could be smashed through methodical investigations. When Detroiters arrived, this impossible dream came to an end. "These young, black crack dealers from Detroit present a unique problem for law enforcement. They don't establish themselves here like the Crips did," a Canton police lieutenant stated in 1990. "These Detroit drug dealers come in and sell drugs for three or four days until they run out, and then they go back to Detroit."[35] Canton officials realized that arrests had no effect on the crack trade. This did not stop them from trying.

Detroiters were not the only entrepreneurs eager to exploit Canton's demand. Connected merchants were mobile and motivated. Canton cops apprehended three undocumented Jamaicans in 1989 on narcotics charges. They served two years in an Ohio penitentiary before being deported. After paying smugglers to bring them to Miami, two of them traveled to New York City, bought cocaine and headed back to Canton. After just a few days, the persevering duo was arrested again.[36] The Jamaicans that fanned out across the Midwest were often experienced political gunmen translating their skills into entrepreneurial dealing. In Canton and other cities, the "Johnny Too Bads" created turmoil in illicit markets.[37]

Canton dealers expressed their displeasure at being displaced by the gatecrashers. Prior to the influx, the city's commerce had been small-scale and generally orderly. When the red-light district waned, a madame moved into illicit pill sales and then cocaine. "I got into the drug business because I could stay home and make money. I would have loved to have gotten a job and taken care of us, but I couldn't when I had to take care of kids, disabled kids, and that's no picnic. So, I did what I felt like I had to do." She paid off a sergeant she had known since childhood for protection, and at her peak had three men working for her.[38]

The incursion of crack merchants changed the drug scene dramatically, as Cantonians had to do business with the newcomers or have no play. Dorothy Lee Turner, a 39-year-old caught with crack and a semiautomatic gun, wrote a series of letters from jail detailing the changes. "Much of our trouble began when others invaded our city with unclean drugs," she claimed. "These people are selling drugs here, taking over our residences, threatening families, shooting and beating our citizens and killing them with rock cocaine or powder that

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doesn't even contain cocaine." The dealers insulated themselves by hiring Cantonians as street sellers and made "strawberries" out of women trading sex for highs. Turner urged people to "Buy Canton," believing that the police clampdown would ease if interlopers left town.[39]

The police were equally incensed about the infiltration, demanding more resources and tougher laws. Aware of big-city tribulations, they warned that gang wars and drive-by shootings would soon afflict Canton.[40] Spurred on by research indicating that suppression of the retail trade could produce "valuable results," police departments across the country embarked on campaigns of mass street arrests.[41] Conspicuous raids and sweeps did not stem supply or demand, but citizens in besieged zones demanded exploits. "Every drug raid is significant in the neighborhood where it transpires," a Canton police spokesperson claimed. "If it directly affects you, it's a raid of enormous proportions." Canton's city council unanimously backed funding the county's Metropolitan Narcotics Unit, with black councilman Edward Coleman proclaiming that people do not understand the squad's importance "until you see them in action."[42] Raids had a satisfying performative quality—signals of government seriousness—even when they failed to produce results.

The narcotics unit shifted into overdrive. In the summer of 1988, cops admitted that out-of-state gangsters had taken over the housing projects and began making buy-and-bust arrests.[43] Apprehensions shot up in 1988 and 1989, and while residents wanted the invaders out, a neighbor expressed skepticism after the police closed a crackhouse. "You step on one cockroach, and there's 10 more to take its place." Another nodded toward Detroiters across the street that watched the raid and murmured, "There'll be others to take over." Turf battles marked the following weekend, inciting public outrage and the customary cycle of aggressive policing.[44] The city dismantled numerous crackhouses, but the trade became more unruly as it moved to the streets.

While lobbying for more supports, some police officers were startlingly frank about the limits of their effectiveness. A Canton lieutenant admitted that even if he were given a blank check and all the manpower he wanted, he doubted cops could stop crack. "These people are economically depressed. The despair they live with creates the desire to get high every day, and to escape."[45] Though outsiders had introduced rock, Cantonians pushed for a bigger share of the spoils, an "inevitable" development, the head of the narcotics unit stated. "As long as you have people out of work with access to a cheap drug, there's no way to stop it."[46] Police executives grasped supply and demand, but they reflexively poured good money after bad, persisting with strategies nearly guaranteed to backfire. Every martial method used by

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the punishment bureaucracy—pretext stops, arrests, raids, informants, stiffer penalties, mass incarceration—damaged government legitimacy and triggered violence.

The crack trade reversed the optimism of falling crime rates in the mid-1980s as it shot upward in Canton by nearly 20 percent in 1989. The police arrested eighty-three Detroiters that year, but the young men kept coming. The crime rise was a slow boil in bigger cities, an official observed, but in Canton, "It was shocking to us how quickly [outsiders] were able to take over."[47] The menacing sellers made people scared to leave their homes and children could not play outside. Gunfire punctuated the nights and from 1987 to 1991, the state saw a 59 percent increase in handgun murders. "I am tired of feeling like I live in Kuwait," an infuriated resident told the city council. Hawkers boldly flagged down anyone who passed by, including plainclothes officers. Serious offenses surged, with 1991 perhaps the city's most violent year since the chaotic period of alcohol prohibition in the 1920s.[48] Crack's impact was abrupt and frightening, hindering sober assessments of the situation.

BOYS IN A MAN'S GAME

The rapid rise of crack overwhelmed the juvenile system. Laws severely punishing adult sellers encouraged youthful participation, heightening the mayhem as armed young men performed dangerous duties. The statewide rate of juveniles arrested for murder increased by 101 percent from 1988 to 1992. Family Courts were not prepared to handle Detroiters as young as fourteen. "We didn't know what to do," the administrator remembered. "We tried to get parents, as you normally would, to come down and go to hearings—it wasn't that far—and that didn't happen. We tried to get cooperation from the [Wayne County, Michigan] court, and that didn't happen." Criminologist Franklin Zimring notes that the juvenile courts had been a holdout against the law-and-order revolution, but by the 1990s unremitting criticisms of perceived leniency induced sterner policies. Court administrators closely followed criminological research, which concluded that a segment of habitual young offenders could not be rehabilitated and should be tracked, detained, and incarcerated. Meanwhile, cops and politicians attacked the juvenile courts as "too soft" and pressed to prosecute youths as adults. "The system is designed to counsel, to get the kids back to their families," a Canton police lieutenant noted. "These kids we are seeing from Detroit are hard kids. They don't come here because they are running away from home because of some family problem. They come here with the criminal intent of selling drugs."[49]

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Governor George Voinovich agreed, linking societal plights to liberal indulgence. "Most Ohioans have had enough welfare, enough poverty, enough drugs, enough crime." The only way to break the cycle, he argued, was "to pick one generation of children, draw a line in the sand, and say to all, 'this is where it stops." For his administration, this translated into a massive investment in juvenile detention facilities.[50]

Voinovich's priorities found support from places stricken by crack. The saga of Terryonto "Bam" McGrier epitomized the inability to address the youthful business. A Detroit native, McGrier's criminal record began at age 11 and included armed robbery. He joined the cavalcade of Detroiters seeking paydays in Canton and after his third misdemeanor arrest, the juvenile court banished him back to his mother's home. He was back shortly and apprehended with crack, weapons, and a bulletproof vest. After thirty days in lockup, the county put him on a plane to Michigan. Two weeks later he was caught again in Canton's housing projects. Attempts to charge him as an adult were foiled by a psychological exam that concluded he was an "emotional, sensitive, imaginative, rather withdrawn and passive young man" and the inability to coordinate with Michigan's overburdened juvenile system. "You lucked out again," a judge acidly said.[51]

After six months in lockup, Jerome Thomas recruited McGrier to Charleston, West Virginia, to assist with heroin and cocaine sales. An associate became a police informant, and McGrier saw him consorting with cops in a hotel parking lot. McGrier opened fire from a car, while Thomas sped off with the officers in pursuit, swerving off the road and killing a bicyclist. The chase ended in a crash twenty-five miles later. Now considered an adult, the district court sentenced McGrier to life behind bars.[52]

Mid-sized cities across the Rust Belt felt defenseless against these young dealers. Law enforcement knew Detroit youths were importing crack, but the stiffest charge they could often make was public nuisance. Conveyed to the Motor City, they were often back in town within forty-eight hours, irking residents. A Cantonian recommended life sentences for youths like McGrier. "I mean hey, Bam, put him away. I mean I don't care if he is 15, he is old enough to know what he is doing." Befuddled policymakers understood that jailing severe offenders with minor delinquents was a recipe for disaster, and an Ohio Supreme Court committee advised sending juvenile traffickers into the adult prisons. As a Canton police lieutenant conceded, the measures were merely opening new opportunities for the next wave. "You can build bigger jails and arrest more dealers, but there's always another ghetto kid who wants to deal. Little kids who are willing to take the chance as a way out, as a way to buy gold

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chains and fancy cars."[53] Though the officer indulged in stereotypes about black consumption, his admission hit on some truth. The police were not battling narcotics, they were battling math.

WARTIME POLITICS

The antidrug campaign, global in scope, drew its political momentum from places like Canton. The city declared its war in the spring of 1988 in a visceral fashion by attacking a crackhouse with an armada of federal, county, and municipal raiders. The next day, the mayor bulldozed the home and offered $1,000 for information leading to the closure of other crack dens. "If there's going to be a drug war in this town, in the streets of Canton, Ohio, we're going to win it and it's going to be played by our rules," Democratic mayor Sam Purses declared.[54] Officials erected a "Just Say No to Drugs" sign where the house had once stood, and black city councilmen Charles Ede and Edward Coleman hailed the bulldozing as a turning point.[55]

These conspicuous exploits played well with the public as politicians vied for the mantle of topmost warrior. The county prosecutor noted that citizens demanded resolute answers and confidently stated that "the drug problem is on the verge of being solved. If we can put a man on the moon, we can solve the drug problem."[56] Partisan lines blurred as Republicans benefited from law-and-order rhetoric and Democrats lacked a progressive crime platform. All twelve candidates for two Stark County commissioner seats pledged to boost interdiction. Purses said addiction was the overriding issue of his mayoralty and appointed a drug czar tasked with "ridding our community of illegal drugs."[57] A few voices warned against the feverish rhetoric, arguing that society needed to figure out why people wanted to be "zonked" and advocating for increased social-welfare spending.[58] County commissioners ignored this advice, launching a $1.3 million antidrug plan in 1989 with the bulk going to enforcement. The plan enjoyed countywide support, as rural and suburban residents fretted about the encroachment of "city" troubles.[59]

The drug war was particularly useful for politicians without answers for the devastation caused by deindustrialization, slumping wages, and capital flight. Liberal Ohio senator Howard Metzenbaum, facing a bruising reelection battle in 1988, endorsed ideas once considered zany, such as deploying the military to halt narcotics importation and the death penalty for kingpins.[60] Decisionmakers in Rust Belt cities found themselves in the middle of a series of negative events, each a link in a chain of causation beyond their control. Crack had intensified the distress, and politicians vowed to combat the chaos before

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Canton could plot a recovery. In his State of the City address in 1989, Purses supported economic development, better housing, and upgraded infrastructure, but placed narcotics as the main challenge. "I don't want my kids growing up in a community that doesn't care if there is a crack house in your neighborhood," Purses, a father of four, stated. He exhorted Cantonians to "take the initiative to destroy the existence of illegal drugs in this community."[61] The rhetoric was intended to mobilize residents, but the focus on counterdrug efforts narrowed agendas as politicians strove to convince voters they were "doing something" about an urgent threat.

Open-air sales compelled officials across the country to desperate measures. For national figures the drug war could restore state authority, but local leaders were determined to craft effective policies. Canton's city council adopted statutes proposed by its two black councilpersons, Charles Ede and Edward Coleman, that criminalized renting to sellers, fortifying houses or apartments, and being a bystander to a transaction. When opponents questioned the legality of arresting someone who happened to be near a buy, a councilman dismissed the concern. "Life is unfair. Innocent people do wind up in jail." If the city did not halt selling in parks it would have "one big flea market for drug sales." Numerous municipalities tried similar measures, as polls showed that 62 percent of Americans were willing to give up civil liberties for a victory against narcotics, with two-thirds agreeing that cops should stop cars at random. Canton's ordinance drew scrutiny, however, as *Time* magazine called it a threat to freedom and a federal judge warned, "The Fourth Amendment is in danger of being melted down to cannon fodder in the war on drugs."[62]

When the ordinances proved futile against sellers, councilmen Coleman and Ede successfully sponsored an edict making a purchase attempt punishable by the maximum of a $1,000 fine and six months in jail. "If you do away with the customers," Coleman stated, "you won't have too many dope dealers on a certain corner."[63] Frustrated by the inability to curtail street sales, hardliners turned their attention to reducing demand through sanctioning buyers, a policy that found favor in black neighborhoods inundated by the stream of drug tourists.[64]

Officials continued to espouse arrests, even as suppressions in certain spots displaced it to others. In the summer of 1991, Cantonians claimed that they were losing the war and that rebellious youths were "running the city."[65] After a six-month investigation brought in twenty-nine suspects, a sergeant admitted that it would make just a small dent. Drugs "may be hard to buy for a few weeks, but there is always someone to take their place."[66] Business stayed

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steady in the city through 1993. “We haven’t seen a drop in drug activity,” an officer disclosed. “Not one bit.”[67] More Cantonians were involved, but the patterns remained remarkably similar. Detroiters came to town, paid poor women to set up shop, made a bundle of cash, and then moved on.[68] Through these years hardly any drug-war dissenters publicly materialized. Policy-makers and vocal citizens stood firm behind more of the same: raids, arrests, and prison.

“SLAVERY IN A PIPE”

Due to segregation and discrimination, the drug trade acutely harmed Canton’s black neighborhoods, generating demands for a vigorous reaction. Backed by vociferous constituents, councilman Charles Ede became a strident exponent of the city’s offensive. Unemployed after the Ford shutdown, Ede agreed with Mayor Purses that municipal distress could not be tackled until Canton clamped down. “Who wants to invest money in creating jobs in neighborhoods where there are drugs, robberies, muggings, shootings, burglaries and murders? No one will invest in a city that is infested with drugs.” Like many black leaders, Ede also appreciated that global economic trends fostered narcotics commerce. When the factories closed, his constituents became “surplus labor,” and “one form of placating the surplus labor … is to inject illegal drugs into the community.” Multinational corporations had stripped the region of manufacturing employment, while lucrative trafficking organizations delivered replacement gigs with low barriers to entry.[69]

Deindustrialization took a tremendous toll on black workers. African Americans battled substantial occupational discrimination, and by the 1970s a generation had achieved solid employment in Canton’s mills and factories. This progress stagnated as area African Americans lost ground in the 1980s in home ownership rates and income, while continuing to lag considerably behind in access to loans, crime victimization, and unemployment. The legacies of segregation compounded woes, as restrictive covenants, racial steering, and a ruinous urban renewal project had concentrated the black population in the isolated southeast side, far from the economically vibrant suburbs subsidized by the state’s sprawl agenda.[70]

Across Ohio’s flagging industrial towns, players in the drug game countered admonitions with forthright declarations of economic reality. “The money’s good,” a peddler stated. “I wouldn’t be making nothing at Burger King… . Ladies like the money and crack. You can bust your ass working for nothing or do this, man. There ain’t no choice.” The street economy, the

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anthropologist Philippe Bourgois found, provided the "autonomous personal dignity" that low-wage positions rarely delivered. African Americans snatched the opportunity and no longer had to serve as "flunkies" for aging white mobsters. Sophisticated operators gained grudging respect as people who could handle a treacherous business.[71] Deterrence was impractical, as poor Rust Belt youths had inherited broken cities and were told to make do. "I am just really out there to make the money," a dealer explained. He did not hook any customers, as "drugs was here long before me."[72]

For frightened residents, though, the drug business was the devil's jobs program. While young, impoverished men craved the status earned in the trade, the unregulated commerce propelled a perverse capitalism that produced neighborhood disillusionment. For black residents in impacted districts, the most immediate sources of fury were the hard-eyed dealer and bedraggled user. Factory closings came down like bolts of lightning from distant gods. Drug abuse was close and personal. Something needed to be done.

Pleas for swift reactions to crack chaos came from firsthand experiences. Fed-up black Cantonians were outraged when the mayhem engulfed respected neighbors. Attackers firebombed the home of Uriah Cone two days after he testified in favor of closing two drug-haunt taverns. Elsie Jackson, a foster mother of ten, was murdered in the crossfire of a drug dispute. Exasperated African Americans advocated an increased police presence and exhorted people to turn in pushers, eager to save teetering neighborhoods already beset by job loss and poverty.[73] Addiction-related crime jumped 52 percent in Canton after crack arrived, and raids on crackhouses frequently turned up stacks of stolen goods taken as payment. Officially tolerated prostitution and gambling rackets had flourished for decades, but crack dealing was especially detrimental. Residents lost control of social space and dreaded the unpredictable spasms of havoc.[74] Polling in Ohio showed that drug and crime concerns were most pronounced among blacks and the poor, as compulsive substance abuse damaged families and communities. In 1994, three-quarters of African Americans said they worried often about property and violent crime, far outstripping any other group.[75]

Councilman Charles Ede took matters into his own hands. A Muslim with a black belt in karate, he confronted sellers and assailed youths for holding "false values." "Our goal is simple: We want to run the drug dealers out of town," he stated. "We realized that if we're going to free our community of the drug problem, we're going to have to get involved ourselves and fight back. If they know their activities will be reported, maybe they'll leave Canton."

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Supporters credited Ede with doing more than the police to deter trafficking, as they suspected officers were afraid to come to housing projects at night. His outspokenness brought threatening phone calls, and in June 1989, assailants fired shotgun shells into his home as part of a wave of intimidation directed against those suspected of snitching. The 43-year-old declared "judgement day" and spent the next morning with gun-in-hand "just hoping" his attackers would return.[76]

The shooting galvanized Ede's supporters. At a community meeting, members of the Nation of Islam proclaimed Ede in the vanguard, as African Americans must wage war themselves. The Muslims present called addiction a "chemical holocaust" and "slavery in a pipe," and said they were ready to die for the councilman. Other black Cantonians wanted to use existing legal channels, yet those present agreed to endorse the city's "all-out war against pushers."[77]

One hundred African American residents gathered soon after the attack on Ede. The meeting was led by Gilbert Carter, a black nationalist who had paired protesting police misconduct with an animus toward narcotics stretching back to the early 1970s. Attendees discussed antiloitering acts, tougher sentences, and meaner lockups. Ede said he wanted the jails overcrowded to remove troublemakers from the streets. Another resident recommended burning down crackhouses. Several pointed their ire toward cops for slow response times and failing to catch white wholesalers. Some of the sharpest criticism, however, was directed toward alleged community dysfunction, as neighborhoods had too many bars, too many party people, and tolerated too much substance use and bad parenting. As one black Cantonian declared, the "goodies" must take back the streets.[78] Beleaguered residents were energized by movement-style solidarity to stop the carnage, but their organizing often pitted the "respectable" against those deemed the "bad elements."[79]

To deal internally with crime and drugs, several local black organizations believed a religious awakening could rescue wrongdoers. At a "War on Drugs Rally" sponsored by the Stark African American Federation, a minister told the three hundred people present that cocaine was tearing families apart, making women into prostitutes, and children must know that "the easy dollar leads to hell and destruction."[80] Churches led services featuring recovering substance users, arguing that faith could cure addiction. Feeling overrun by juvenile misbehavior, pastors wanted parents to use corporal punishment. While Charles Ede linked drugs to the structural challenges of decent employment and neighborhood deterioration, he acknowledged that he and other black leaders had limited means to address systemic problems. To battle crack,

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Ede accentuated improving blacks' "self-image" through empowerment. "If we're talking about an entire community being held accountable for its lack of discipline ... what we are offering is that discipline," Ede reasoned.[81] Liberal antidrug activists like Ede, criminologist Diana Gordon observed, expressed the dissonant message of blaming addiction on inequality and social misery while simultaneously advocating stern individual penalties.[82]

White policymakers eagerly piggybacked on the theme of self-responsibility, marching with African Americans through the streets of Canton and characterizing crime as sinful. To discourage single mothers from taking $100 a week from dealers for their apartments, the Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded the county a $480,000 grant to raise tenants' self-esteem.[83] Gestures such as this signaled the triumph of the moral prism. The various proponents of viewing lawbreaking as a "spiritual" problem—from federal bureaucrats to city clergy—thought they *were* attacking root causes by instilling values in the lower classes.[84]

Conservative commentators mistakenly asserted there was a values void in the inner-city. Instead, leaders in underprivileged communities overemphasized moral remedies at the expense of larger critiques of prohibition. As Heather Schoenfeld finds, the stress on racial self-empowerment and organizational absence of civil rights groups from penal policy debates further weakened Democrats' incentives to provide a different course of action.[85] The zealous rhetoric in Canton echoed the concerns of state and national black leaders convinced that their communities were in dire straits. Comparing crack to genocide and lynching, James Forman Jr. argues, reflected fears that drugs were eroding the gains of the black freedom movement. The bombast also muzzled drug war critics, as doubters were dismissed for declaring a premature "surrender."[86] The crusading stance against drugs made diverging from its tenets difficult even as racial disparities mounted. The cleavages among African Americans in Canton developed not against the drug war's rationale but in how an untrustworthy police department carried it out, a paradox shaped by a need for state intervention mixed with a hard-earned skepticism of law-enforcement's motives.

POLICE PROBLEMS

African Americans knew that turning to the police had drawbacks, as Cantonians constrained black ambitions through racially restrictive housing covenants, discriminatory hiring, and legal coercion. "The white community is using the police department as its subtle weapon to keep the black in his ghetto

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and his place," a civil rights stalwart remarked in the early 1970s.[87] In Canton, the cops were the tip of the spear for the Jim Crow order.

In the early 1980s, black activists and the few African American officers in the Canton police department (CPD) pushed back. The NAACP filed a class-action lawsuit alleging that Canton's hiring and promotion policies were discriminatory and the city eventually agreed to boost the number of minorities on safety forces.[88] Black officers also complained of a hostile environment, prompting the chief to circulate a memo in 1981 instructing officers to cease using "certain discourtesies and slurs."[89] A series of brutality suits coerced modifications in departmental policies to avoid expensive court settlements, including forbidding officers—over union objections—from donning "sap gloves" loaded with powdered lead. The CPD embarked on a series of community-relations programs, yet as a reporter concluded in 1985, "the stigmas of racism and brutality that came with the original cases remain."[90]

The CPD topped off prejudice with corruption. Elevated pay and changes in vice economies in the 1970s diminished payola schemes, but officers often realized it was better to go on the pad than to mess with entrenched graft schemes. Testifying before a Senate committee in 1984, the Stark County sheriff noted that officers that pried into the rackets faced "demotions, transfers, and failures to promote."[91] Canton cops had often been in league with white gangsters, but this complicity faded in the crack years. Instead, seized drug money often disappeared under flak jackets, a practice often considered clean plunder.[92]

Racially biased corruption and dubious strategies deepened black suspicion of the police. Cynics suspected that the authorities were conspiring to funnel drugs into African American communities, a notion bolstered by bumbling operations such as the Arthur Feckner case, in which Cleveland police allowed "White Art" to oversee the sale of $500,000 of cocaine in black neighborhoods in order to ferret out a supplier. The narcotics cops "didn't do that on their own," Congressman Louis Stokes said. "Somebody gave approval. Somebody above those five officers made a conscious decision that this is a throwaway community."[93] These ill-advised investigations—hailed as successes by white officials—bolstered black conviction that law enforcement was insensitive to their collective plight.[94]

The drug war reversed much of the headway departments had made with black communities and rejuvenated African American indignation. Canton cops had once turned a blind eye to white-dominated organized crime operating in black neighborhoods, but during the crack offensive they unapologetically concentrated on these same areas. Spurred on by the loose talk of

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"war" by public officials, a generation of new police officers adopted "us against them" attitudes.[95] Cops profiled young African American men, and in the spring of 1990 aggrieved African Americans charged them with applying excessive force. Robert Dogan, the president of the NAACP chapter, objected to police methods, especially pretext stops. He did not want a reduction in anticrime efforts but cautioned that black residents would turn against the police. "I am not saying back off," Dogan stated. "I'm saying treat people right."[96]

Councilman Ede vehemently disagreed, maintaining that profiling was necessary and that people should avoid rowdy areas. When Dogan and a constitutional scholar retorted that people were free to go where they pleased, Ede dismissed their concerns. "Moral and legal are two different things," Ede stated. "Let the constitutional lawyers move into the neighborhood and live there for six months." The councilman fretted that complaints would cause the department to shift emphasis. "This concern about police brutality sends a chilling signal to the police to back off." If that happens, "People will complain that not enough is being done." The breach over drug-war tactics among black Cantonians reflected national debates that could not be neatly categorized. While Councilman Edward Coleman backed police aggressiveness, his wife Juanita asserted that they were going too far.[97]

Police chief Thomas Wyatt denied the excessive-force allegations while concurring with Ede that the proactive strategies were essential and generally supported by residents. "Our officers are stopping a lot of people in some neighborhoods," he stated, "because we know that a lot of drug dealers are working from street corners." Wyatt expected further complaints and maintained that stop-and-frisk turned up contraband, weapons, and stolen cars. "I'm sure our officers will at times stop people who are innocent, but these are difficult times. And I believe most people will applaud what we're doing." Police-community relations degenerated as departments boasted that harassment and random stops were effective against sellers and gunslingers.[98]

The controversies exemplified historical disagreements over confronting crime spikes. Alarmists demanded retribution and even some reformers considered roughing up gangsters acceptable if the law-abiding were respected.[99] Polling showed that African Americans in the region were twice as likely as whites to distrust the police, but some black Cantonians also wanted sterner measures, deeming civil liberties as unaffordable luxuries. As Detroiters infiltrated the schools, the Stark County African American Drug Abatement Task Force endorsed "radical solutions," including private security teams, mandatory drug testing for high school employees and students, and

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dogs patrolling the hallways. Warren Chavers, a hustler-turned-pastor, sensed a growing resentment of governmental impotence. "There are brothers in the community with 9mm guns who have the firepower to stand up to drug dealers, if it should ever come to that. It would be an ugly war."[100] As the cultural critic Ishmael Reed remarked, people distant from the chaos tended to be "abstract and philosophical," insisting on constitutional rights for "some of the most vicious enemies of black progress yet." Those close to "ground zero," however, advocated bellicose reactions.[101]

At the same time, critics decried massive racial disparities in criminal justice. George Wilson, the African American director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC), noted that blacks made up about 10 percent of Ohio's population and 50 percent of inmates. The law lacked credibility, he bluntly stated, because, "if you're black, you are treated one way by the system and if you're white you're treated another way by the system and that's nationwide."[102]A study of juvenile adjudications in the state found significant racial differences in prosecutions and sentencing deriving from narcotics policing in disadvantaged metropolitan neighborhoods. The discrepancies were "absolutely true and we absolutely saw it," the Stark County Family Court administrator noted, but officials thought dealers—violent or not —must be exiled from society.[103] Officers turned traffic violations into probable cause for searches and judges usually denied defense motions to suppress. "We concentrated all our efforts in the black community and the stops were absolutely inappropriate," a judge recalled.[104]

For white Stark Countians perplexed by economic decline, arrests served to lash out at the people they held responsible for societal woes. From their perspective, the crack scene was to blame for turning a once-vibrant city violent and unstable. By racializing crime, they nostalgically washed away Canton's extended history of gang wars, bombings, and mayhem.[105] Due to the misconstrued link between crack and violence, many whites, including liberals, ignored racial disparities because they viewed the drug war as well-intended, if imperfectly implemented.[106]

Police officers denied assertions of racism, contending that they were responding to citizen pleas to put offenders in handcuffs. Their case was bolstered by black citizens who compelled cops to react faster and more energetically. "If we provide accurate and useful information, then this puts pressure on the police and puts the ball back in the court of the law," Reverend Chavers stated. "We intend to put the pressure on and keep the pressure on because the black community has been too often neglected by police in the past."[107] The insistence on busy cops increased racial disparities. The

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criminologist Lawrence Sherman noted the complexity: "It's a war on black people being fought on behalf of other black people who don't want drugs in their neighborhoods."[108]

Police endeavors further damaged targeted communities, yet different visions of public safety did not emerge. Black Ohioans were less punitive than whites in terms of sentencing and penalizing users, but because of internal disagreements and the state of emergency in their communities, African American leaders did not coalesce around alternate approaches. "Everybody's grasping for a solution," a Northeast Ohio Urban League official noted amid the strife.[109]As in other cities, black Cantonians, making up about 20 percent of the population, had limited political clout. Neighborhood efforts could not adequately respond to disinvestment, collapsing labor markets, discrimination, and stagnant wages.[110] The crack trade circulated cash in poor neighborhoods and created opportunities for fresh hustles, but most Cantonians felt the tradeoffs were not worth the hardships. Many of the upstart gangsters were not locals-made-good on the crooked ladder, but unfamiliar, cruel hardmen. Concerned black residents took no pride in their bloody achievements and were incensed when they directed fire at civilians like Charles Ede, Elsie Jackson, and Uriah Cone. Dealers flocking to Canton, an official remarked, "had no cares for anything that happened [in the community]. They were here to do business. If they had to hurt somebody, they did." Residents armed themselves and occasionally engaged in vigilantism. These acts, encouraged by leaders all the way up to President George Bush, only added to the turmoil.[111]

The disorder left exasperated black Cantonians desperate for decisive action. "I want to raise my family in a clean, decent environment that is safe and free of racism," Ede explained. Once the crime situation stabilized, he reasoned, then the "good people" could move forward.[112]African Americans had endured decades of underpolicing that had left their neighborhoods in the grip of white gangsters, a mix of corruption and inattention that cultivated criminality.[113] In spite of a checkered history, many African Americans maintained that police departments could be reformed, a hope strengthened by the presence of more black officers. There were no other practical options for residents experiencing the mayhem. The drug problem is "everywhere, but we don't live everywhere," a Cantonian told the city council. "We live in the 2000 block and that's what we are here concerned about."[114] Citizens wanted safety and tranquility, even if that meant expecting criminal justice actors to attack social and health issues beyond their ken.

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SWAMPING THE SYSTEM

With arrests serving as the chief method of securing order, Ohioans overloaded an already-strained punishment bureaucracy. In the 1980s the state embarked on the second largest imprisonment escalation nationally, yet new facilities could not keep pace with rising intake. ODRC director Wilson lamented that with the building spree Ohio had the fifth largest inmate population in the nation but was "in the same situation we were in ten years ago: We're still overcrowded."[115] By providing cells to counties without charge, the state essentially built its way to mass incarceration. Low-level offenders were a major part of this surge, with imprisoned drug offenders increasing 110 percent from 1987 to 1989.[116] White and black lawmakers at the municipal and state levels joined to sponsor strict measures, with Cleveland state senator and future mayor Michael White proposing "owner responsibility laws" to punish Ohioans who rented cars or housing to drug felons. To reduce the supply side, he pressed for strict civil forfeiture. "If we can confiscate everything from the house to the car to the firstborn," White stated, "we will make a dent."[117]

State politicians had support from county prosecutors and judges who reaped the political benefits of punitiveness without bearing the costs. As economist John Pfaff notes, statewide prison funding created a moral hazard as criminal justice decisions happened at the county level.[118] Correctional expenses ballooned while more than half of county judges said they were unaffected because prisons were not the judiciary's responsibility. "It is not my concern whether there is overcrowding," a judge remarked, "It is the Executive branch's duty to provide the facility." A state committee concluded that the only way to convince judges to consider alternatives was to make these punishments as retaliatory as possible. "Public embarrassment and other stigmas could be considered to mete out retribution," they concluded.[119]

County prosecutors steadfastly opposed any divergence from stiff sentencing. When a state committee suggested minor reforms along with construction to ease the penitentiary predicament, John Murphy, the prosecutor association's executive director, strenuously dissented. "The purpose of the criminal justice system is to protect our citizens from those who choose not to live by the rules. It is the means by which the state, as the embodiment of our society, carries out its duty to protect the members of our society from the ravages of crime. It does this by deterrence and incapacitation." Reforms were "misdirected compassion" and Murphy blasted the committee for not wholeheartedly endorsing more lockups as the only "readily available and easily

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affordable" solutions.[120] Murphy's term was marked by ironclad faith in punishment as prosecutors formed a robust lobby at the state capitol, casting even mild reforms as spineless and dangerous.

Ohio continued to stuff its jails and prisons while warning signals flashed red. In 1993, the year of the deadly Lucasville prison riot, Ohio's penitentiaries were 79 percent overcapacity, the worst figure in the nation.[121] Administrators converted recreational facilities into dorms, virtually eliminated job training, and cut counseling. To placate stingy Ohioans as the ODRC budget exploded, Governor Voinovich crowed that the state's per-prisoner cost was 28 percent below the national average and the system spent less on medical costs than any other state.[122] Stark County had its own chronically packed jail. In the mid-1980s, a court-ordered plan led to a $11.3 million extension. Meanwhile, court filings shot up, with virtually all the increase due to narcotics.[123] Cops howled in anger when convicted dealers were rearrested while waiting to be sentenced, but by 1992 the Stark County jail had a two-to-three-year queue for minor lawbreakers.[124]

Residents held contradictory stances on these developments. They contended that drugs were the area's top problem. They were also averse to opening their wallets. A 1989 poll showed that only 14 percent of respondents supported a tax hike to pay for additional jail cells. "The people of this city don't want to be taxed," Canton's safety director complained. "It's going to require some taxes, I'm afraid, to support a jail system where we can actually incarcerate these people."[125] The lack of cells further encouraged judges to send more offenders off to state-funded prisons. They usually returned to Stark County in less than a year, blacklisted from mainstream jobs as felons.[126] As penitentiaries overflowed, only 15 percent of Ohioans supported building more prisons. When provided with public health options, though, a "strong plurality" rejected them in favor of punishment. Stark Countians rebuffed a criminal-justice sales tax seven times, forcing judges to sentence offenders to community service. If given the option of endorsing these "lenient" punishments, the county prosecutor said, these same voters would have vehemently scorned them. "They would have run us out of town on a rail."[127] Given these voter inconsistencies, the straightforward solutions won out. Retribution was popular, David Garland finds, because it was immediate, easily implementable, and effective as an end in itself.[128] For Ohio, that meant constructing prisons and worrying about the costs later.

Throughout the crack crisis, alternatives were bandied about but rarely taken seriously. Polling demonstrated that Ohioans had keen interest in drug-related crime and the foibles of celebrity users but displayed limited curiosity in the details of alleviating substance abuse.[129] While big cities were

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overwhelmed by crack, smaller localities were even more ill-equipped to attend to addiction. Stark County was woefully short on rehabilitation opportunities, especially for the poor and working classes. Amid the crack epidemic, Governor Voinovich, with the bipartisan support of the General Assembly, drastically reduced General Assistance welfare, creating a "horrendous" crunch for already strained social service agencies. The county hospital ended services for indigent addicts in 1993, leaving twenty-four residential treatment slots for a county with 378,000 people. A frustrated resident noted that the well-off could afford stays at upmarket facilities, but these were "out of reach for the ordinary person."[130] Instead of rectifying this discrepancy, Stark Countians funneled offenders into the punishment bureaucracy.

Health challenges abounded, but leaders sought the right mix of penalties. Policymakers argued that the county could not afford its jail much less the extravagance of treatment. Judges stressed the deterrent value of tough sentences, while cops said curing addiction was "less-viable" than enforcement. "When the forest is on fire, you have to first put out the fire," an officer claimed.[131] Social-service programs were undoubtedly diminished by funding reductions, but providers frequently also expressed carceral sensibilities, supporting more funding for rehab while stating that addicts needed to hit "rock bottom" so the "stick" of the law would compel them to seek help. "Drug education and treatment have gained a name as a wimp activity," Detroit congressman John Conyers stated. "If you favor things, you're a softy." Many medical professionals wanted to appear resolute and authoritative. To penalize users, an executive with the county's largest treatment provider endorsed seizing their automobiles. After Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders suggested that crime could be lowered through legalization in 1993, the local reaction was swift and negative. Police officers, addiction experts, and medical professionals vehemently objected, claiming the nation would become a cesspool of wasted zombies.[132] In this formulation, drugs, not prohibition, were the source of the city's—and the nation's—troubles.

FEAR FACTORS

The one-sided reaction to crack inundated the criminal justice system while doing little to assuage addiction. Crack tapered off in the mid-1990s through what researchers called the "younger sibling effect" as youths spurned crack's tribulations. A survey of Canton sixth graders in 1990 found they were already tired of the thefts, violence, and the trials of addicted friends and relatives. The police and prosecutors engaged in a blitz, but an organic drop in demand proved to be the most significant factor in crack's demise.[133]

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The war marched on, however, fueled by dread and perverse incentives. Crime fell in the mid-1990s, but influential experts warned that a new breed of "superpredators" was poised to spring chaos on the nation. Given what cities like Canton had endured, the prediction seemed prescient. Area Democrats and Republicans joined hands to propose an expansion of the "grossly overcrowded" juvenile lockup. "We had seen this group of people who came to our community who really disrupted the community a lot, and so there was a concern that [the superpredator trend] could really be the truth," the Family Court administrator recalled. "Everybody was so fearful."[134] The ranks of the Canton police were bolstered by federal hiring grants under the 1994 crime bill. The White House stated that the "Clinton Cops" were supposed to implement "innovative crime prevention partnerships" and state officials claimed that a community police officer could be "a resource broker, arbiter, community leader, and friend." In practice, a Canton patrolman recalled, "It was all about drugs. Community policing was nothing more than a good-sounding term that received funding."[135] The dispersion of methamphetamine prompted a fresh assault on impoverished white Ohioans, while area departments also ratcheted up racially disparate marijuana arrests. Spurred on by forfeiture statutes that eased departmental budget woes, the enhanced Canton Police Department boosted drug apprehensions from 938 in 1996 to 1,509 in 1999.[136] The crime situation stabilized; the punishing impulse of the crack era remained.

The idealistic vision for community policing was incompatible with the drug war as belligerent law-enforcement actions fostered an atmosphere of mutual hostility. Many black Cantonians loathed the chaos of the drug trade but also recoiled when the "stick" came down hard on sons and brothers just trying to get by. Relations with African Americans degenerated so precipitously that by 2000 the local NAACP brought on activist Al Sharpton to threaten a shutdown of the city's Pro Football Hall of Fame Festival. The flashpoint was officer Mike Peterson, an African American raised in a violence-scarred neighborhood. He chose to protect the "decent" people in a predominantly black zone, he explained, because, "When I grew up, cops didn't go in our neighborhood, and people were victimized." His combativeness won him plaudits and scorn, but his extralegal methods became even too much for Charles Ede, who joined the NAACP in criticizing Peterson.[137]

Crusading police officers and other criminal justice actors were emboldened by the crime shock. In 1995, voters finally passed the criminal-justice sales tax as area manufacturers lavished money on the campaign, outspending opponents 20 to 1. The victory sealed the transition from an industrial

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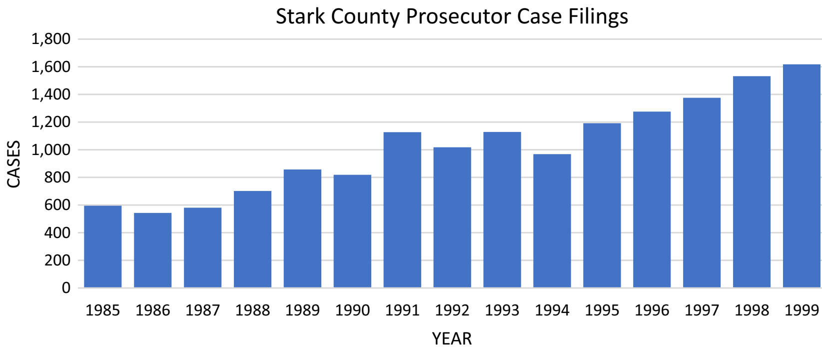

Source: Stark County Records Office, Canton, Ohio

powerhouse to a carceral county. Before the crack crisis, the county prosecutor hired litigators on a part-time basis. From 1989 to 1998, the office's budget increased 152 percent, with the bulk of that money paying for full-time personnel. The effects were dramatic. In 1986, the office made 543 criminal case filings. By 1999, it filed 1,618, a total enabled by the expansion of the criminal code and the prison building binge.[138]

Ohioans were reluctant to pay for bricks and mortar facilities, but they enabled the policies requiring their construction. In his 1997 State of State address, Governor Voinovich celebrated the advance of the disciplinary state. "Together, we made a commitment to be a better partner to local law enforcement, to enact tougher laws, to build more prisons and put more violent criminals behind bars. Today, violent crime is down, the overall crime rate is down, and Ohio is a safer place to live, work, and raise a family"[139] Politicians like Voinovich, historian Julilly-Kohler Hausmann shows, "connected themselves with muscular assertions of state power" to project a vision for government that was "fresh, resolute, and unsullied by the increasingly fortified links between social disorder and liberalism."[140] Many Ohioans relished his "tough love" standpoints, electing the consummate drug warrior as mayor of Cleveland, governor, and senator, endorsing his platform of austerity for social programs and runaway spending on criminal justice.[141] Voinovich governed through crime, and voters rewarded him.

CONCLUSION

Crack ran its course, yet the damage had been done. Prohibition and poverty had created dilemmas that the punishment bureaucracy could not solve.

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Canton trended older, poorer, and smaller as stable families deserted once-proud schools. As one resident brusquely stated, "This is not a safe place to raise children anymore."[142] Businesses accelerated their flight to the suburbs, leaving criminal justice and other government services as among the few functioning activities downtown. People exited high-crime, high-poverty census tracts across Ohio's cities, leaving those remaining with few ladders of mainstream opportunity.[143] The arrests and prosecutions set back black advancement, but civil rights moralism furthered social and economic marginalization while dovetailing with conservative notions that the crisis was rooted in bad behavior.[144]

While the area economy deteriorated, criminal justice was a growth industry. A policy think tank gauged total state and local spending on criminal justice in Ohio at $3.5 billion in 1995, a figure double that in 1983. Prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation and parole officers, jailers, court administrators, and social service providers replaced shopkeepers and industrial workers in the county's shrinking middle class. Subsequent attempts to divert offenders through specialized dockets—courts for drugs, mental illness, domestic violence, and veterans—widened the system's net without while maintaining staggering racial inequalities.[145] Tax-averse Ohioans found these expenditures palatable as job creators, especially as industrial unions were eclipsed by construction and public-sector unions that regarded incarceration as an employment boon. Meanwhile, felonies mounted, creating an antijobs program for people nearly shut out of legitimate labor markets.[146]

Absent any sustained effort at transforming approaches to drug abuse, there was no impetus for substantial reforms. Carceral state actors claimed they were keeping a deluge at bay by managing the unruly underclass. Scarred by the crack calamity, tough-on-crime legislation remained an easy vote. At the federal, state, and local levels, discussions remained petrified as practically everyone positioned the law as the primary thrust. Citizen reluctance to pay for police and confinement did not reflect leniency but rather an antitax sentiment that crippled treatment and harm reduction.

The suddenness of crack carnage entrenched the criminal justice system as the paramount institution in declining cities. "The drug problem has created a monster," a Canton city councilman despaired in 1989.[147] By the mid-1990s, the "monster" was not crack, but a process that funneled the county's "problems" into state prisons. The postindustrial economic shifts made Canton's recovery undeniably difficult, but the extraordinary focus on combatting drugs sidelined investments in education, infrastructure, and workforce development. Residents and political leaders thought crime had to be tamed first, but the onslaught only created disarray. For Stark Countians,

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turning to the police and prison was quick and satisfying. Confronting the future of the Rust Belt was much harder.

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