

TUNE IN TO THE
SOUND OF DEMOCRACY

Justice Talking Radio Transcript

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Americans are fascinated with murder. You can see this cultural fixation in best selling novels, television news and entertainment, and headlines from local papers. Most Americans probably can name more murderers than they can Supreme Court justices. But what about the significant policy debates on the best ways to reduce America's startling murder rate? Some say the solution is in better community policing efforts or new gun control measures, while others push for harsher sentences or increased use of the death penalty. On this edition of Justice Talking we ask what can be done to reduce homicides in America.

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MARGOT ADLER: From NPR, this is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. Today we take on one of the great fascinations of our culture: murder. Hit TV shows, best selling murder mysteries, cable TV, all bring the twisted tales of real life and fictionalized murders into your home. But what do we really know about the social and economic causes of murder? Why do murder rates go up one year and down the next? Despite a major drop in the homicide rate in the 1990s, the United States has one of the highest murder rates in the world. Arguments continue over what was responsible for the decrease in murders. Was it more police on the streets and better policing or was it the slowing of the crack cocaine epidemic? Some say it was the booming 1990s economy. What can cities do to lower the murder rate even more? We take a deeper look at these questions as we talk about the crime we fear most: murder. Stay with us.

MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. Whether you are personally fascinated by murders—either news accounts of real homicides or just the latest murder mystery—there is no question that our society has a fixation with murder. Later on today's

show, a former police reporter turned novelist tells us why she thinks we as a culture are so attracted to stories about killing. Also, Miami's police chief talks about one of the challenges to lowering violent crimes...

MIAMI POLICE CHIEF: You know, we have this love affair with guns in this country that is really problematic, but it's a fact of life.

MARGOT ADLER: ...and we'll have a debate between two criminologists about how to lower the homicide rate. But first, let's get a better understanding of murder in America. Richard Rosenfeld is a professor of criminology at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He is co-author of the book "Crime and the American Dream" and has written extensively on homicide in the United States. Richard, welcome to Justice Talking.

RICHARD ROSENFELD: Thanks for having me.

MARGOT ADLER: Richard, we have a fairly high murder rate in this country. How does it compare with other countries around the world? I've always assumed that it's really high in comparison.

RICHARD ROSENFELD: It is. The homicide rate in the United States is comparatively quite high especially when the comparison is with other developed nations comparable to our own. And in that comparison the United States has a homicide rate that is substantially higher than other societies.

MARGOT ADLER: Why do you think that the murder rate is so high in this country and why has the murder rate gone down recently?

RICHARD ROSENFELD: I think there's no question that a major part of the difference between homicide here and elsewhere has to do with the use of firearms. Roughly speaking, two-thirds of all homicides committed in the United States are committed with a firearm. That's much, much higher than virtually every other nation in the world. But even our non-firearm homicide rate is higher than the homicide rates of most other developed nations. Rates of homicide and other serious crime peaked in the early nineties and then began a decade-long decline that at the national level ended at the beginning of the current century. But it was a very, very important decline. Homicide rates came down a little over 40 percent over that period and that's a substantial drop.

Now, why? One reason clearly is the end of the crack cocaine era. Crack turned out to be a single-generation drug and as that generation aged out of its so-called crime-prone years, the drug markets began to shrink and crack-generated homicides began to decline. So, one reason for the decline was the end of the crack era. Another has to do clearly with the sharp escalation in imprisonment in the United States over the last now 30 years.

MARGOT ADLER: Now where are most of the murders being committed in America?

RICHARD ROSENFELD: Most homicides are committed in big cities.

MARGOT ADLER: That's interesting to me because I've heard recently that the rise in the murder rate today has often been in small towns and rural areas.

RICHARD ROSENFELD: I don't know that there's anything particularly significant about the current rise in homicide in small towns and some suburban communities. One finds that to be the case over time, and by and large, homicides are committed in the central cities of our largest metropolitan areas.

MARGOT ADLER: One thing that I know that you've talked about in the past is that you actually believe that immigration has had an affect on murder rates in places like New York City and not in the way most people would suspect.

RICHARD ROSENFELD: Right. The criminologist Ramiro Martinez has done some very, very important work on the relationship between immigration, Latino immigration in particular, and homicide. And his work really overturns, it seems to me, the gross stereotypes that link immigrants to crime. In fact, where one finds immigrant populations in large numbers, one tends to find reduced levels of crime, especially when you take into account the level of income and unemployment very often, and other characteristics of immigrant populations that often lead to crime.

MARGOT ADLER: What do we know about the victims and perpetrators of murder? Do victims usually know their perpetrator?

RICHARD ROSENFELD: Roughly speaking, around 40 to 50 percent of homicides involve victims and perpetrators who know one another. Some of those are homicides in which the victim and the perpetrator are intimate partners. Most are not intimate partners, they're acquaintances. Perhaps another—it's hard to know—another 20 percent, on the high side, would involve people who are strangers to one another. And the remainder—a relatively large fraction of homicides—involve victims and offenders about whom the relationship is unknown.

MARGOT ADLER: Thank you so much for talking with me today, Richard.

RICHARD ROSENFELD: You're quite welcome.

MARGOT ADLER: Richard Rosenfeld is a professor of criminology at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He is co-author of the book "Crime and the American Dream" and he's written extensively on homicide in the United States. To hear more of my conversation with Richard Rosenfeld, visit us on line at justicetalking.org.

MARGOT ADLER: Last year Boston's murder rate rose to a ten-year high of 75 homicides for a city of about 600,000. The rate is low compared to other cities. Baltimore had 270 homicides last year, Philadelphia 380. These cities too have seen their murder rate rise.

Now Boston, along with most other cities in America, is looking for ways to bring the homicide rate down. From WBOR in Boston, Monica Brady Myerov reports.

MONICA BRADY MYEROV: Boston's worst murder in a decade happened in December in Dorchester, a neighborhood that has pockets of crime. But the execution-style shootings of four young men took place in the basement of a Victorian home on a quiet street. The sad irony of the first quadruple murder in ten years is that it happened next door to Reverend Eugene Rivers, an anti-crime activist. Rivers is a black minister who was integral in responding to the surge in violent crime in the 1990s. His group, working with police gang units, community workers and prosecutors is credited with dramatically reducing Boston's murder rate. It became known as the "Boston Miracle." Now standing in front of his home, Reverend Rivers says he's discouraged by what he calls stupid violence.

EUGENE RIVERS: These are not drug lords fighting over kilos or money. What's going on in this city of Boston now—and police will tell you this, and former drug dealers on this street—it's all stupid. We've got a bunch of 15 to 19-year-olds, roughly, that are fighting over stupid things. The gun play has no economic logic. There's no bigger plan. Folk are looking for reason where it doesn't exist.

MONICA BRADY MYEROV: No arrests have been made in connection with the quadruple murders. Police don't think gangs were involved. The Boston Miracle brought together law enforcement, ministers and community groups to target young men prone to violence. The idea was to give them other options to crime and warn them of stiff federal prosecution for repeat offenders. Police launched Operation Ceasefire in 1996 to disrupt the flow of handguns into Boston to youth gangs, some involved in the crack cocaine market. Pastor Bruce Wall was a leader in bridging the gap between gangs and police.

BRUCE WALL: The black community in Boston did not have a good relationship with the Boston police. We didn't trust the police and they didn't want to work with us. But because of the crisis of losing 50, 60, 70 young people a year, everybody sat down at the table and everybody said we need to do something to stem the tide of violence.

MONICA BRADY MYEROV: It worked. In 1996, the city had 58 murders, the lowest rate in 30 years and not one person under 16 was killed. Wall and others traveled the country to share the "miracle" strategy.

BRUCE WALL: We learned how to talk about it, but nobody was back here in Boston maintaining it, so it took seven more years and then we came to 2005 when we saw last year the ten-year high of youth violence, and that, I think, is a result of really our neglect of staying with the issue. Once you become successful, you begin to go into neutral.

MONICA BRADY MYEROV: Last year, 75 people were murdered in Boston; 28 were men under 21 and a disproportionate number were black. Wall says law enforcement and clergy are trying to revive the Miracle. For instance, he has again declared the ten blocks around his church gun, gang and drug free. Every Friday night, he and members of his church walk the ten blocks. And police have launched Operation Home Safe, a multi-

agency task force that meets every day with U.S. Marshals, FBI, ATF, immigration and local cops to talk about hot spots and head off crime. Police Commissioner Kathleen O'Toole.

KATHLEEN O'TOOLE: We're facing some big challenges in certain neighborhoods right now so we have to go in with a huge dose of visibility and enforcement, but we want to balance that with prevention and intervention as well.

MONICA BRADY MYEROV: Police and politicians are grasping at reasons why the homicide rate is on the rise. The most commonly cited reason is illegal guns. Boston Mayor Tom Menino blames kids who have easy access to guns and no hope for a bright future.

TOM MENINO: Well there's a certain amount of unrest with the young people in this city and there are a lot of different factors in that. One of them is the issue that the kids don't see that they have any hope in life. The issue of reentry is a major piece. I think another one is guns. I mean, how many guns these kids have and how do they get 'em?

MONICA BRADY MYEROV: State funding for intervention programs has been cut. As a result, there are fewer outreach workers, job training programs and summer jobs. On the punishment side, Boston recently stepped up its efforts by creating a gun court to deal more quickly and harshly with gun violations. But to secure more convictions, especially in murder cases, law enforcement needs more witness cooperation. They're up against a culture of witness intimidation that wasn't there ten years ago, says Massachusetts prosecutor Daniel Conley.

DANIEL CONLEY: Witness intimidation and fear probably isn't a new phenomenon but its intensity is. I was a gang prosecutor in the late eighties and early nineties and I was able to make a lot of cases. I came back as district attorney some nine years later and 90 percent of cases involving guns and gangs in Boston had witness intimidation and fear. You can see the change that took place in just less than a decade.

MONICA BRADY MYEROV: This level of distrust between law enforcement and the community is a long way from where the city was ten years ago. For Justice Talking, I'm Monica Brady Myerov.

MARGOT ADLER: Just ahead, the criminologist who came up with the "broken windows" theory of crime argues that his approach helped New York City dramatically lower its number of homicide. Don't go away.

MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. Every city in America struggles with how to lower its crime rate and the stakes are even higher to lower the murder rate. Some cities have made big strides in bringing down the number of homicides.

A little later in the program, I'll talk with Miami's chief of police about how he is trying to address violent crimes there. But before we hear from him, two criminologists join us to debate the effectiveness of crime-fighting efforts around the country. What is not debatable is that every community wants to lower its murder rate. As we'll see, the debate is about how to accomplish this monumental task.

Franklin Zimring is a criminologist and law professor at the University California, Berkley. He is author of "The Great American Crime Decline," which will be published this fall. He joins us today from the campus of U.C. Berkley. George Kelling is also a criminologist. He is a professor at the Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. He joins us from Dartmouth, New Hampshire. George, Frank, welcome to Justice Talking.

FRANKLIN ZIMRING: Thank you.

GEORGE KELLING: Hi.

MARGOT ADLER: Earlier in the program, I spoke with Richard Rosenfeld about the major drop in the murder rate throughout the United States in the 1990s. He shared with us his ideas about why we saw such a drop. But I'd like to hear from each of you what has caused the decline in homicides. Let's start with you, Frank.

FRANKLIN ZIMRING: Well, the first thing that I'd want to point out is that it wasn't just the decline in homicide, it was the decline in every one of the serious crimes that are counted well in the United States, everything from auto theft to homicide, and that's kind of strange because larceny and auto theft really have very little to do with homicide, but all kinds of crime were down. They were down nationally about 35 percent and I would want to divide that 35 percent into two roughly equal chunks. For about half of the decline, we can round up the usual criminological suspects. The demography of the American population changed the percentage of the population that was between 15 and 29—it went down over the 1980s and the 1990s by almost a third. And that, everything else being equal, should drop crime and violence rates, and they finally did drop in the 1990s. Item two was the expansion of the economy. Unemployment dropped steadily in the United States after 1992, and the same nine years in a row that crime rates dropped all over the country were the nine years of the largest consecutive quarterly economic expansion in American history.

MARGOT ADLER: George, where do you see the drop coming from?

GEORGE KELLING: Well, in many respects as the question is framed, it's unanswerable, at least in my point of view, and that is because if you think of all the variables that are thought to either contribute to crime or deter crime, I think one has to say that they operate differently in different cities, in different communities that the economy can have a certain impact in one neighborhood and not in another. Imprisonment can have differential impact depending upon the neighborhood or cities. In other words, I think you have to look at very local kinds of efforts to control crime local kinds of conditions and judge from that.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, let's look at New York for a minute. New York's homicide rate continued to go down even after 2000, where in many communities the decline has stopped. Why don't you tell us, George, about what happened in New York and particularly about your "broken window" theory of policing.

GEORGE KELLING: Well, "broken windows" is a metaphor and basically it argues that it's important to take care of minor offenses because minor offenses, unless controlled, can lead to major offenses. And that was kind of the floor in New York City. Now on top of that, district commanders, under a program called ComStat, which was a combination accountability crime analysis capacity in New York City, they would very carefully develop strategies for different neighborhoods, different precincts.

MARGOT ADLER: Frank, if it wasn't George's approach, in other words "broken windows," that made the difference in New York, why do you think a city like New York saw such a decline in crime, including murder?

FRANKLIN ZIMRING: Okay, let's talk about New York in the national picture for a moment because, you see, crime went down everywhere in the United States. But in New York, the rule of thumb is for every one murder that was prevented nationally, New York crime decline was twice as much. And so, the first thing is—and I'm on the verge of agreeing in a limited way with George's position—that half of New York's crime decline happened everywhere and it is very unlikely that there were any nationwide police efforts, either in the number of cops or in what cops were doing, that contributed to the national crime decline. And that means they probably didn't have much to do with half of New York's crime decline, the half that reflected the national average.

For the other half, George is quite right. New York lagged the rest of the country in the number of people it put in prison, in the decline of the youth population, and in the economic boom, at least as it affected young kids, so that by a process of elimination, policing efforts were responsible for between a half and a quarter of the total New York crime decline.

MARGOT ADLER: And the rest, what was it caused by? Why did New York's crime go down?

FRANKLIN ZIMRING: That's where life gets very interesting because, you see, New York had a kitchen sink full of changes in its policing. In the first instance, New York City in that one decade added 13,400 employees, uniformed and non-uniformed. That is adding, in the New York City Police Department, about the same number of employees as Chicago has on its police force. That's a huge addition.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, George, let's talk for a minute about Boston and New York. Boston's murder rate went way down. It was called the "Boston Miracle." Explain what that was and why Boston's crime rate is now rising.

GEORGE KELLING: Well, they developed a program that was called “pulling levers” and that was partially a product of Donald Stern, who was the federal prosecutor, David Kennedy at the Kennedy School of Government...

MARGOT ADLER: Why was it called “pulling levers”?

GEORGE KELLING: Well, it turns out that if you look at homicides and violence, a small number of offenders are committing a large number of offenses and everyone knows who they are. And also if you look carefully at the killers and kill-ees, they’re virtually identical. They have lengthy criminal histories; they’re very busy criminals; they’re real jerks in many respects. And many of them are on probation or parole; there are warrants out for their arrest; they’re out on bail. Those basically are handles that you can grab onto and try and get some leverage—that’s the pulling levers—some leverage to get them to control themselves. And it was extraordinarily successful. Over a two year period, they stopped gang homicides completely. But what happened was that the coalition that ultimately included the clergy, probation, parole, the police, and the attorney general broke down and they haven’t been able to put it back together again. And a new generation of young people came up and proceeded to start to kill each other in very similar patterns to what I described earlier and that they had before in Boston.

MARGOT ADLER: Let me go on to another subject. Frank, criminologist Richard Rosenfeld, who was on our program earlier, wrote an article for Scientific American and he said, the U.S. incarcerates a larger proportion of its citizens than any other nation and the size of the American prison population quadrupled between 1980 and 2000. How important is the connection between increased incarceration rates in the nineties and the decline in the number of murders?

FRANKLIN ZIMRING: Five years ago, I would have agreed with two or three other quantitative analysts and said that it could be up to 25 percent of the nationwide decline, a much tinier part of the New York decline. And the reason that it was only a quarter of that, and one of the big mysteries is, the biggest increase in incarceration was during the eighties. But during the later part of the 1980s violent crime went up, so everybody went back to the drawing board.

MARGOT ADLER: Frank, most murders in our society are committed with guns. What’s the connection between the presence of guns in a society and homicide rates?

FRANKLIN ZIMRING: It’s very simple. If we didn’t have any violence, we could have all the handguns we wanted. And if we didn’t have any handguns, we could be very violent and we wouldn’t kill very many people. The point is that the guns are about 14 percent of all the assaults in the United States and they’re about 70 percent of the assaults that kill.

MARGOT ADLER: George, do strict handgun laws have an effect on the murder rate?

GEORGE KELLING: My own opinion about that is that there are so many guns out there at the present time that even now if we had the strictest gun laws in the world, it wouldn't make much difference for a generation.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, I'd like to ask both of you if you think there's any correlation between how much money we spend to fight crime and the crime rate. Let's start with you, George.

GEORGE KELLING: No. I wouldn't say so. I think you don't have to be very far into what we call the criminal justice system to know that it's a badly malfunctioning set of organizations. A lot of money is wasted and one can almost despair when one gets inside of a good share of the criminal justice agencies. The extent to which their activities are uncoordinated, the extent to which there is little collaboration, to the extent that there is no real strategic planning, I think would shock most American citizens.

MARGOT ADLER: Let's get Frank to respond on this one.

FRANKLIN ZIMRING: Well, there are two separate questions. One of them is whether money is necessary to fight crime and the answer to that is yes. Now the question is, if you throw a lot of money at a problem, is that sufficient so you think the crime rate will go down and there the answer is no. But if you go back to that New York story of the 1990s, they threw a ton of money at the policing reforms that we've been talking about, a larger increase than any city had ever made and I think that's a part of the story. That isn't to say that if all you do is throw money into your criminal justice system, you'll be doing anything other than making a lot of people rich, but it is to say that intelligently spent money is a sine qua non for the kind of really significant dents that make a difference in public safety.

MARGOT ADLER: George, do you agree with Richard Rosenfeld that a large part of the drop in crime that America experienced in the nineties was simply the end of the crack cocaine epidemic?

GEORGE KELLING: I have no doubt that in many communities the changing drug use patterns had an impact. In other communities, there wasn't that kind of a change with crack. So once again, I have to go back to my earlier statement. Very much it's depending upon the local context. In a lot of communities, it had a big difference. In a lot of other communities, you didn't have that difference.

MARGOT ADLER: I'd also like to ask both of you about one thing we haven't talked to, which is murder between intimates, that is, between partners. Frank, is it that we have so much more focus on domestic violence that there has been a decline nationwide?

FRANKLIN ZIMRING: Well, I think that's a small part of it. The decline actually has been going on since 1969 and for the first part of that period, domestic violence was going down, while everything else was going up. Part of it is the availability of divorce. It allows people to solve problems, particularly wives at great risk of continued beating in

intimate violence in ways that don't become murders. And we also know that there's a tremendous concentration of life-threatening violence in domestic circumstances.

On crack, I'd have to say that I'm more skeptical for two reasons. One is because homicide dropped all over the country, including in a lot of places where crack hadn't been a big problem and the second reason I'm skeptical is that the American homicide rate didn't drop more than the American auto theft rate dropped or the American burglary rate dropped. And if it had been crack-fueled, then you would have expected the preventive impact on homicide to have been a little bit more specific to that crime rather than the crime in general. So all I can ask for there is another large grant from the government.

GEORGE KELLING: Returning to the domestic abuse, I think also this is linked to the victim's movement. My guess is that many more women are willing to come forward as a result of their abuse, which can account for some of the apparent increase.

MARGOT ADLER: Isn't it important to look into the root causes of murder and the causes of violence in our society?

FRANKLIN ZIMRING: Well look, there are a whole series of generally preventive things that social services should do in this country: decent education, economic opportunity and making sure that no child falls behind are tremendously important. It turns out that like the early childhood education experiments, these things also help us with the whole series of dysfunctions: crime and violence and welfare involvement and taxation. I don't think that these should be the kinds of things that are in the department of crime prevention or the department of justice. I think those are the things that we should do because those are the ways that we should educate and socialize kids.

I'd want to spend more money doing that than I'd spend on the entire crime control budget but I wouldn't want to define that as just a crime control exercise. I think the fact is that little girls who can't read should be taught better reading and math, even though they don't commit many homicides. And so I think that de-linking important general services and educational missions from the crime control project would probably be a good thing to do. But if we drop the funding simply because we've decided there are other ways we can keep the street safe, then I think we're committing a kind of a species of national suicide.

MARGOT ADLER: George.

GEORGE KELLING: I think you try and deal with the root causes because it's the right thing to do and I think that's just a variation on what Frank just said. But when it comes to a crime control and the causes of crime, I think we've had 40 years of extensive research into what causes crime, and from a policy standpoint, very little has come out of that research that has really been policy-relevant. It's been interesting to me that in terms of the whole crime control movement, police, which are the least-educated group in the bunch, have led the move towards community policing, the move towards careful strategic analysis. It's an interesting commentary on the structure of criminal justice in the country.

MARGOT ADLER: Although I know we could go on and on about this and much more could be said, we do need to wrap this up. George, Frank, thank you both for joining me today on Justice Talking.

GEORGE KELLING: Thank you.

FRANKLIN ZIMRING: Thank you.

MARGOT ADLER: George Kelling is a professor at the Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, and Franklin Zimring is a law professor at the University of California, Berkley and the author of “The Great American Crime Decline,” to be published this fall.

MARGOT ADLER: Coming up, a police chief tells us how enforcing open container laws in New York’s Greenwich Village nearly stopped brutal gay-bashing there. Don’t go away.

MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I’m Margot Adler. So far on the show, we’ve talked with criminologists about the murder rate in America and what they think works in lowering the number of homicides. But to give us the perspective of what it’s like on the front lines, I called John Timoney, a police chief who is nationally respected for lowering urban crime rates and managing police forces. John Timoney has served as the chief of police of the Miami Police Department since January 2003. Before going to Miami, he was the police commissioner of the Philadelphia Police Department. Chief Timoney, thank you for coming back on our show.

JOHN TIMONEY: My pleasure.

MARGOT ADLER: As police chief of one of America’s big cities, what do you think are the most effective ways to combat homicide?

JOHN TIMONEY: I think first of all you’ve got to do a proper analysis of the underlying cause or causes of the homicides. There are certain homicides for example, domestic violence homicides, which police historically have not been able to impact. You know, they happen indoors, they are crimes of passion, and even though we’ve spent a lot of time trying to deal with that, by and large it has not been effective. In the drug related homicides, however, there is an awful lot that police departments can do, and then in the area of homicides that result of low-level quality-of-life violations, for example dice games that are out on the street, if you intercede early, you can prevent homicides from happening.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, I gather that you’re a believer in an aggressive arrest strategy. What does that mean and why?

JOHN TIMONEY: Well, you know, traditionally when police officers talk about preventing crimes, they'll talk about prevention. They normally are thinking in terms of, you know, a high uniformed presence to deter the crime. But you can also have prevention through apprehension, and the drug-dealers and the violence surrounding drug activity is the most glaring example. We know for a fact that drug-dealing and the shooting surrounding it don't happen in isolated situations, that they're often a series of shootings along a continuum. So drug dealer A shoots at and maybe hits drug dealer B in the leg. Drug dealer B comes back with his crew and retaliates and this goes back and forth and by the end of this cycle, you know, you may have had six or seven related shootings.

If you treat the very first shooting, the guy that got shot in the leg, with the same seriousness that you would if he was killed, it may require you to go out there right away with the detectives and it may require you to even lock up the guy who was shot in the leg for his own protection. He may have an outstanding warrant, you know, prior contacts with the criminal justice system and so what you're trying to do is rapid response, particularly on the part of the detective, to interrupt or disrupt this cycle of violence.

MARGOT ADLER: Are there any risks with this? For example, you know, if you have a very aggressive policy, do you ever have more problems with causing resentment and mistrust in the community?

JOHN TIMONEY: No. I think you have those things if you're going around doing, you know, mindless sweeps. When I say aggressive, I mean, you have a shooting and you respond to that in an aggressive fashion. You know, you'll hear the excuse all the time—well, you know, the people aren't cooperating; the guy isn't talking that was shot. Well, if he was dead, he wouldn't be talking and so you can't use that as an excuse. Detectives can't use that as an excuse not to aggressively pursue the case.

MARGOT ADLER: Do you think that it's very different what you're doing in Miami than let's say what you were doing in Philadelphia? Is Miami a very different city to police than Philadelphia?

JOHN TIMONEY: It is but, you know, the culture is clearly different. This is a lot in the culture in Miami, clearly. But the issue of crime, whether it's a robbery in Manhattan or Philadelphia or Miami, I mean, the way the police react, will be the same. You know, burglars, we know for a fact that it's only a handful of burglars that commit most of the burglaries. And so when you're going after burglars, you want to, you know, go after it in a kind of a smart way. Don't just hope that you have to catch somebody. There are ways of doing this.

MARGOT ADLER: Are there some kinds of homicides that are easier to reduce than others?

JOHN TIMONEY: I would think out of all of them, the easiest is the drug-related homicides because, you know, you have a variety of tools at your disposal. You have clearly prior arrest records. You have informants. You have a narcotics division that, if they're worth their weight, should have a good knowledge of what's going on. Well, you have the

detectives working in sync with the narcotics investigators, working in synch with patrol officers. You can have an impact on these homicides. And the way to bring them all together that we do here in Miami, and we did it in New York and in Philadelphia, is through the ComStat process.

MARGOT ADLER: And what does that mean?

JOHN TIMONEY: The ComStat is a term that originally started to be comparative statistics. We started it in New York. Jack Maple, Lord rest his sole, was the architect, and it was meant, comparing statistics, today to yesterday, this week to last week, this month to last month and this year to last year, examining every crime, no matter how small it was, how it was happening, where it was happening, and bringing in the commanders, the uniform commanders for the area, the narcotics commanders, the detectives commanders and making sure that they were all aware, they're all seeing from the same sheet of music, that they all understand the nature of the crime, that they're all cooperating. Cops, they're just like everybody else—it's human nature to want to solve a case all by yourself, not to share credit. That's just human nature. What ComStat does is forces all of them to be in the same room, you know, working well together.

MARGOT ADLER: What do you think of “broken windows,” the order maintenance policing theory?

JOHN TIMONEY: I'm a huge believer in it. You know, you tell it to the average citizen, it makes perfect sense to them because they understand. And you can go to any city to those neighborhoods where the sidewalks aren't clean. Those neighborhoods that look like they're deteriorating, that nobody's paying attention. That's where crime flourishes. You also have a situation, for example, in Greenwich Village—we used to have a situation in Greenwich Village in New York in the late eighties, early nineties where young kids in the suburbs, otherwise law abiding kids, would come in. They would drink beer openly and then by nine or ten o'clock, they were good and drunk and they would either engage in assaults, they'd go gay-bashing or engage in robberies.

Well, the way to stop that, I mean, you can make an arrest later on but what you want to do is prevent it. And so what we did all along Bleecker Street and Sixth Street, we went to summons them and arrest them for open containers of beer. Now people would say, well, you know, they're just having a beer. One beer in and of itself may have been harmless but when you have, you know, six and seven, that leads later on in the night to assaults, to robberies and so by early intervention, you'll wind up preventing these robberies and assaults later on in the night.

MARGOT ADLER: Why is our crime rate, even though it's gone down, so high compared to other developed nations?

JOHN TIMONEY: Yeah, well, that's true, although other developed nations, England and my home country of Ireland, are all of a sudden seeing the problems with crime and violent crime over the last decade, decade and a half, come to fruition. They're not near the

American numbers. You've got to go through our history, you know, we have this love affair with guns in this country that is really problematic, but it's a fact of life. People, you know, maintain the right under the Second Amendment, and I guess they have that right. But there are way too many guns in America and so we have a history of violence in this society. But I'll also tell you, and I make no apologies about this, I think American policing is the best, not the most efficient policing, but it's the most effective.

Because there are so many police departments, police departments actually compete and so a mayor in city A sees that the police chief in city C is doing some things to reduce crime and he complains to his police chief and we all are, whether we like it or not, in a bit of a competition. You know, you don't want to look bad while your neighboring chief police looks good. And so the nature of American policing, while it's very inefficient, in other words there's duplication and triplication, there are 18,000 police departments with over 800,000 police officers and so there's a lot of overlap and inefficiency, but as a result of the competitive nature, it's actually very effective.

MARGOT ADLER: How important is funding for your departments to their effectiveness in fighting crime?

JOHN TIMONEY: I think it's extremely important and I think not enough credit has gone to the federal government, who in the early nineties came up with the COPS program, which allowed municipalities to hire extra police officers, but they didn't have the wherewithal through local funding. That gave us the ability to have a dramatic impact on crime. I'll use Philadelphia for example. Philadelphia, prior to the COPS legislation being passed, had a force of 6,100 police officers. Ed Rendell, who was the mayor then and hired as a result of this federal funding an additional 900 police officers, and so the head count went to 7,000. When I got there I was able to use those additional police officers to create specialized units. And so, for example, the narcotics unit, I beefed that up in Philadelphia by a couple of hundred extra police officers because that's where the crime was, surrounding the narcotics trade.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, is that kind of federal funding continuing today?

JOHN TIMONEY: No. Unfortunately as a matter of fact we just got word from Washington that they've cut back again drastically on the COPS program in Washington. My sense is that next year it'll completely disappear. I think that's a shame. I felt there was a real role for Washington in this whole fight on crime and it's one that's been abandoned over the last three or four years.

MARGOT ADLER: This is in the current budget proposal?

JOHN TIMONEY: Yeah. Well this one also. But the last couple also have reduced it dramatically and it was a very, very useful program that we can point to the statistics all across the United States where crime was driven down, driven down dramatically. But now you're starting to see as that funding has dried up, you're starting to see all across

America, city after city where the crime rates are spiking, where the homicide rates are going back to the old ways.

MARGOT ADLER: Chief Timoney, thank you so much for talking with me today.

JOHN TIMONEY: My pleasure.

MARGOT ADLER: John Timoney is the chief of police of the Miami Police Department.

MARGOT ADLER: As the saying goes, sometimes truth is stranger than fiction and my next guest has made a career from both sides of that coin. As a Miami Herald reporter, Edna Buchanan has covered 5,000 murders. She won a Pulitzer Prize for her work there. She now writes crime novels and is the author of 14 books. Her latest is called "Shadows." Welcome, Edna.

EDNA BUCHANAN: Hello. Thank you.

MARGOT ADLER: Why do you think people are so fascinated by murder and murderers?

EDNA BUCHANAN: Well, the crime that inevitably intrigues us all the most is murder. It's so final.

MARGOT ADLER: Is it that it embodies people's worst fears? I still don't understand why we find it so entertaining.

EDNA BUCHANAN: Well, I guess people would like to think that they are in the most danger from some sinister stranger lurking in the shadows, but the truth of the matter is that you're far more likely to be killed by the person who sleeps next to you or the people across the breakfast table.

MARGOT ADLER: So let me ask you, in your career, how would you describe the changes that have occurred, you know, over the years that you've both reported and wrote about murders?

EDNA BUCHANAN: Well, back then when I first started in the business, murders were relatively rare and so each one that happened would warrant a front page story. But now it's so common, many are not even covered by the press. And back in 1981, when Miami's Dade County broke all records for homicide and had 637 murders in one year, I covered them all. And it wasn't easy. I was on call 24-7. And it's become more common. It's become something you see on television every day. I don't think I even know anyone in Miami who hasn't had a friend or relative murdered.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, why are we more interested in the murder of an upper class person than someone caught in the middle of a bad drug deal?

EDNA BUCHANAN: Well I never was. It was interesting because once some young reporter complained to me—I met him somewhere in Chicago or something—and he said he only got to cover the dirt bag murders. But there are no dirt bag murders. If you dig hard enough and you really find the story, each one of these victims wanted to live as much as you or I do.

MARGOT ADLER: Tell us a story of a murder you covered where what really happened was not what it appeared to be, something that no one would have guessed from the outset.

EDNA BUCHANAN: Gee, that's hard. Sometimes you'll find someone who has pushed the envelope for so long that you're sure that you know what happened. Like there was a drug dealer's wife—he was a major drug dealer and he'd been arrested, and the police were pressuring him to testify against others but he didn't. So his wife, his lovely wife, pulled her Jaguar up to a parking space in front of the beauty salon in Coral Gables on a bright sunny morning and got out of her car to go inside to have her hair done and was blown away by someone on the street—she was shot dead. And of course everyone immediately assumed it was in relation somehow to her husband's situation and her husband's reputation. But it turned out it was just some street robber who wanted her purse and she resisted.

MARGOT ADLER: Now let me ask you, do you think that TV forensic shows like CSI are making investigation and prosecution more difficult because of the unrealistic expectations of technology and crime-solving that we all have, having watched these shows?

EDNA BUCHANAN: There are good things and bad things about it. I don't know which outweighs the other. I know it makes juries demand more. Sometimes there just is not forensic evidence and juries used to seeing all of these shows think that if there are no forensics there can't be a case. And on the other hand, it will bring out more money for research, money for forensic tools, because the demand is there and everyone sees it on television. On the other hand, it tips off people who are thinking about committing a murder. There are more cases now where killers will pour bleach over their victim's body to prevent DNA evidence from being found. And they'll do other things; they'll clean themselves up a lot more carefully. Luckily these are just the murderers who planned very carefully in advance and I'm sure it involves some serial killers as well. Most murders happen as crimes of passion and people don't plan it that carefully. They don't have the bleach on hand. They don't have a little check off list of things that they have to do to foil the forensic detectives.

MARGOT ADLER: You're now writing novels and I'm wondering what the elements are to a successful crime novel?

EDNA BUCHANAN: You know, I loved covering the police beat. I loved the writer's paradox, where sometimes if you wrote a story right, it affected how the story ended or developed. If you wrote enough clues in there, you could possibly help the cause of justice, and the fact that justice might triumph because of something that was in the paper

and it brought out some witness or some clue, and it was wonderful. But I think one of the things I love most about writing novels is that even though we have to show the cruelty and the dark side, in novels, you can find some resolution and you can make the good guys win in the end and the bad guys get what they deserve, which almost never happens in real life.

MARGOT ADLER: Thank you so much for talking with me today, Edna.

EDNA BUCHANAN: You're welcome.

MARGOT ADLER: Edna Buchanan is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. She's now a novelist. She lives in Miami and her latest novel is called "Shadows."

MARGOT ADLER: So why do you think people in our society are so fascinated by murder? Do you think the best way to lower the homicide rate is through more aggressive policing? Or do you have a different idea? You can tell us on our website, justicetalking.org. While there, you can also listen to previous shows or sign up for our podcasting service. I hope you'll tune in next week. I'm Margot Adler.
