



**From the Editor**

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## From the Editor - Cycles and Social Challenges

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*Michael Lauderdale*

The content in our current edition ranges broadly across the profession of social work with an emphasis on specific applications in teaching and practice settings.

However, as this issue appears in 2016, it seems timely to reflect on broad patterns and challenges that will surely influence the profession in coming years. The Obama Administration is in its final year with some achievements and some failures. Among the achievements are clear steps toward national health care and a reduced military engagement in the Middle East. The two previous administrations Bush (2000-2008) and Clinton (1992-2000) were marked with a rising economy reaching an unemployment low of 4% in 2000 but two economic busts, the dot com that started in from 1999 to 2000 and the mortgage collapse in 2008. Unemployment peaked in 2011 at 9.2%

Much of the attention during the Obama Administration has been on efforts to recover from these economic problems including restoring the balance sheets of financial companies and urging economic growth to increase employment and prosperity. The primary tool of the government has been to hold interest rates at nearly zero and that has benefited the wealthy through a boom in the stock market but not a commensurate boom in jobs and middle incomes. Levels of full-time employment and inflation-corrected earnings indicate no progress since.

The lack of middle-income jobs is most striking in the historic centers of manufacturing such as Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Newark, etc. Detroit is the most pronounced having lost with much auto manufacturing an entire generation of people, and a collapse of city government with high levels of crime, gangs and other disorder as well as reduced services including police, medical care and

even water. In many of these cities there is a tense relationship with groups caught in the urban core and more prosperous suburbs that have economic bases other than manufacturing. Some of that tension began to explode in August of 2014 in Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis. Perhaps other manifestations can be seen in Cleveland in November with the shooting of a 12 year old boy, in Staten Island with the officers choking a man selling cigarettes, the planned killing of two NYC police officers in December, the police custody death of a young man in Baltimore, the shooting of a black man by police in North Charlotte in April and the murders of 9 people in a church in Charlotte in June. Contextually some of these acts of violence can be examined from the perspective of overall crime rates in a recent year (2012) and likely the low of a 20 year pattern of declining crime rates.

State	City	Population	Crime Rate
Michigan	Detroit	707,096	2,122.90
California	Oakland	399,487	1,993.30
Missouri	St. Louis	318,667	1,776.50
Tennessee	Memphis	657,436	1,750.30
California	Stockton	299,105	1,548.00
Maryland	Baltimore	625,474	1,405.20
Ohio	Cleveland	393,781	1,383.80
Georgia	Atlanta	437,041	1,379.00
New York	Buffalo	262,434	1,288.70
Missouri	Kansas City	464,073	1,263.20

The decade of the 80's saw rising crime rates with a peak in 1990 and a decline for most areas until 2012 when rates began to rise.

This violence, at what appears to be a rising rate since about 2012, are forces that go beyond the individual and represent a cycle of declining prosperity in the American economy and anger in the society. Such violence may not be effectively addressed at the individual or neighborhood level,

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but only understood as a consequence of an economy and society in decline. To support such a statement one must see if there is evidence in cycles of progression and decline in an economy, and thus in society. Then one must establish that experience of economic disruption and poverty leads to aggression. We will look at this literature and think over the next 2 editions of the Journal to determine if there are actual rate increases in violence in the United States and if that increased violence can be explained by economic disruptions.

Economic cycles and social violence were noted as early as the 1920's by social scientists in the relationship between the price of cotton and the rate of lynching of Blacks in the South.

We look this time at recent reports of violence in many areas of America and attempt to determine if a decade long decline in crime is ending. It is assumed that crime in America is partially a function of poverty, education level and ethnic integration. In subsequent issues we will examine changing levels of each of these three variables and conclude with specific challenges developing for social work. In that effort we will examine research that seeks to detect generational changes (Howe and Strauss, 1997; Giancola, 2006), long term economic waves (Kondratieff, 1984; Rostow, 1978; Thompson, 2008) and iconic studies that sought to establish economic relationships with racial violence (Raper, 1933; Beck and Tolnay, 1990; Hepworth and West, 1988; Hovland and Sears, 1940).

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