



Crime & Punishment

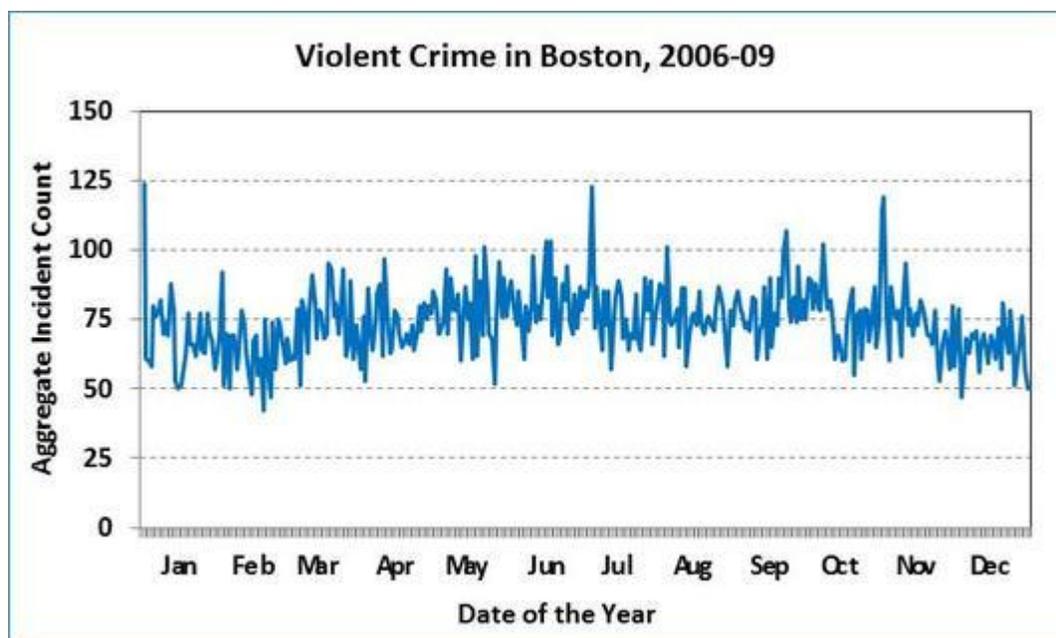
James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

Ghosts, Goblins and Violent Criminals

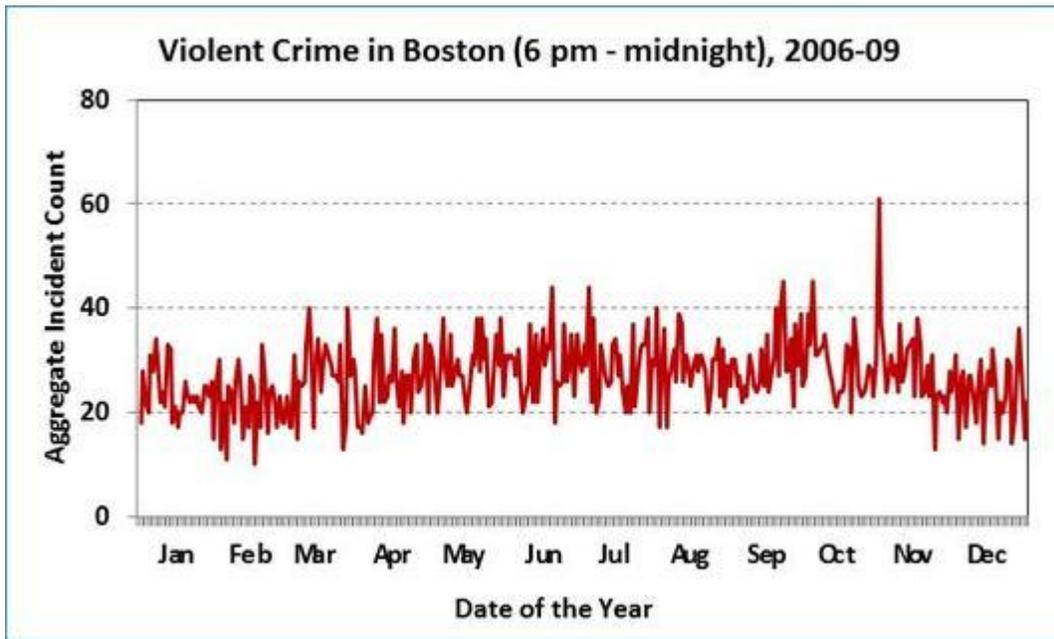
Posted by James Alan Fox, Crime and Punishment October 31, 2013 10:30 AM

Poisoned candy and razor-filled apples are long-standing urban myths surrounding the Halloween tradition of trick-or-treating. But Halloween mischief is a reality that is clearly reflected in crime statistics.

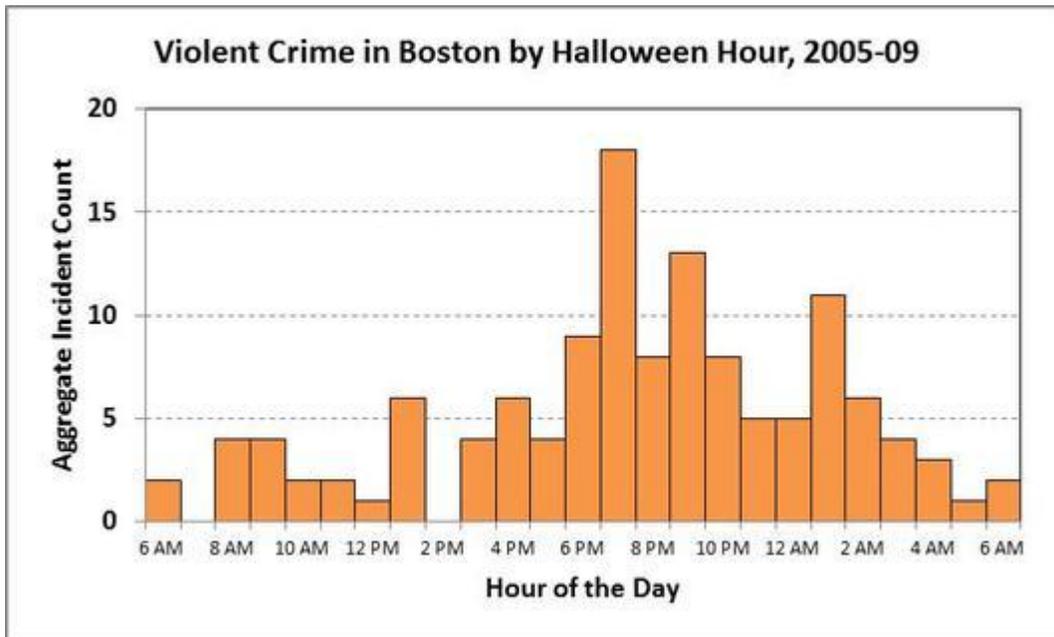
Certain days during the year tend to produce crime spikes. Violence frequently erupts by virtue of the usual activities (e.g., drinking, carousing, and partying with friends) that are associated with particular legal holidays and other unofficial occasions for diversion. As shown in the chart below, the aggregate number of serious violent crimes (homicide, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault) in Boston for 2006 through 2009 spiked significantly upward on three specific dates--January 1, July 4 and October 31.



There is, however, more to the Halloween horror story. The chart below displays the 4-year aggregate number of serious violent offenses that occurred in Boston between the hours of 6:00 pm and midnight. As shown, Halloween night, with its make-believe ghosts but very real assailants, is the worst evening of the year for violent crime victimization. The evening violent crime count on October 31 is about 50 percent higher than on any other date during the year, and twice the daily average.



Probing even deeper into the worrisome pattern, we see in the hour-by-hour chart below that the incidence of Halloween-night violence peaks in the early evening. The most popular hours for gathering Snickers and Junior Mints around the neighborhood are apparently also the prime time for violent crime. During the rest of the year, by contrast, crime incidence rises throughout the evening hours, not peaking until just before midnight.



Halloween is all about things that scare us. Tales of tampered candy and abductions of young trick-or-treaters may be exaggerated, but the threat of ordinary street crime during the Halloween witching hours is very real.

Note: This is a slightly modified version of a blog that appeared on Halloween 2011. However, it is as true today as it was then, and therefore worthy of resurrection.