

# Book Raps Nation's Social Statistics

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Errors in the FBI's Crime Index "largely operate to show spurious increases," a sociologist charged yesterday in a scathing attack on the Nation's social statistics.

The sociologist, Albert D. Biderman, said that the FBI Index "grossly distorts" both the rate and the distribution of crime in the United States.

He made the charge in a contribution to a newly published book, "Social Indicators, which pleads for statistics capable of showing accurately the great changes currently overtaking American society.

The book was written under a \$285,000, five-year grant from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The Space Agency, anxious for a reputation for social concern, has commissioned the Academy to look into the im-

port of the rockets on national life. The scholars have concluded, first of all, that the Government is not collecting enough of the right kinds of information to measure the real changes taking place.

Using the FBI index as an example of misleading statistics, Biderman pointed out that it only counts incidents that are reported to police, and only those that the police regard as genuine crimes.

Because more people carry theft insurance today, he observed, more small and obviously insoluble thefts are reported to police. As a result, theft figures rise and the proportion of solutions falls.

Whether a fist-fight between two men is counted as an assault depends largely upon community mores (are police called?) and the attitudes of the local police (is anyone charged?). A rising assault rate may not mean more fights, according to Biderman's argument. Instead, it may mean a diminishing tolerance of violence.

The FBI figures only illustrate a general defect of social statistics, observed the editor of the book, Professor Raymond A. Bauer of the Harvard School of Business Administration.

"Virtually every trend series pertaining to social problems has a built-in inflationary bias that would make it look as though things were 'getting worse,' unless the trend for improvement were very strong," Bauer said.

The contributors to the book fear that the wealth of purely economic statistics is giving national policy an unbalanced dependence upon economic theory, and a bias toward values that can be measured in dollars. They termed this tendency "the new Philistinism."

The country needs urban indicators to follow "the state of the city, the state of the metropolitan area," said another contributor, Professor Bertram M. Gross of Syracuse University.

To try to define poverty in economic terms alone, Gross said, is "idiotic."