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Murder Made Easy SEP 1 1972

No matter how deftly the latest statistics on the national crime rate are manipulated to give the appearance that this "law and order" Administration has crime on the run, two closely related facts simply cannot be covered up: violent crime increased sharply last year, and gunfire is responsible for most of the increase.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation reports that "firearms continued to be the predominant weapon used in murders for the year 1971, as in the previous three years." Guns of all types accounted for 65 per cent of all murders, and handguns alone for 51 per cent. Since most homicides are perpetrated by relatives or acquaintances of the victim, it is a safe assumption that many of these fatalities, triggered by temporarily aroused emotions, would not have occurred had guns been less easily accessible at the moment of angry passion.

Yet, according to Milton Helpern, New York's chief medical examiner, handguns "are flooding the market." Of the 1,155 homicides committed in this city since the beginning of this year, 638 were shootings.

Those who have opposed and sabotaged legislation for effective gun control bear a heavy share of responsibility for the growing carnage. The gun lobby brazenly distorts the facts. The Democratic Congress lacks the courage to oppose the highly vocal foes of meaningful curbs, even though polls indicate that the majority of the American people favor strong gun-control laws. The Administration—and particularly the Justice Department, which ought to be in the forefront of the battle for gun controls—has been just as deferential to the champions of private arsenals.

How many more must die needlessly before expert testimony on the high cost of easy traffic in guns gets the legislative attention it requires?