

CRIME'S CAUSES GO UNTREATED

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A tough child of tough streets, he grew up with a gun in his belt, running dope. He looked much younger than 19 as he stared down at his empty hand, his finger curled around an imaginary trigger.

"The gun just excites me. I like to look at them, play with them," said Tyrone (Red) Simpson, who stole his first pistol at 13 while burglarizing a neighbor's house.

Two years ago, Simpson aimed a .38-caliber Smith & Wesson revolver at George Davis, a custodian for Ebenezer AME Church, and demanded his gun. They struggled, and Simpson's gun went off.

"He slipped and fell, and I pulled the trigger two more times, and I killed him," Simpson said in a visiting room at the Michigan Reformatory at Ionia, adding quietly, "Caught my case."

TAKE A SMALL army of young men like Red Simpson -- unemployed, uneducated and untrained -- surround them with drugs and guns, and you have a line of journeymen criminals who graduate from larceny to burglary to murder. A lineup that makes Detroit, as one criminologist calls it, "a laboratory for homicide."

Guns, drugs and despair are the deadly links in the chain of violent crime choking Detroit, according to a nine-month Free Press investigation that has included interviews with Detroit's political, legal and financial leaders, its killers, police and residents, and criminal justice experts in several U.S. cities.

Easy answers are not to be found. But there is a growing consensus among citizens and civic leaders that what's being done now isn't nearly enough, that acceptance of raging violence would condemn Detroit to a deadly future, and that a new community-wide, anti-crime program is urgently needed.

Ideas that have worked elsewhere may help. Programs in Washington, D.C., Boston, Toledo, Flint, Chicago and Miami have made a difference and will be examined by this series.

This is a city with 581 killings last year and the highest per capita homicide rate among the nation's 55 biggest cities. Already this year, 410 people have been slain in Detroit.

This is a city that federal officials rank second only to New York in heroin use. A city, according to Wayne County Medical Examiner Dr. Werner Spitz, in which at least half of all killings are drug-related.

A city where guns are so plentiful that Detroit had the highest percentage of gun-related killings and robberies among the nation's 10 biggest cities.

A city where the leading **cause** of death among young black males is homicide.

A city that last year ranked first among the nation's 10 biggest cities in violent crime -- homicide, rape, robbery and assault.

Crime isn't limited to Detroit. The suburban cities of Pontiac and Inkster have per capita violent crime rates approaching Detroit's. Even in such affluent suburbs as Birmingham and Grosse Pointe, crime is no stranger.

Nor does crime saturate all parts of Detroit. Some areas, including downtown, have homicide rates as low as nearby suburbs.

But an analysis of 1983 crime statistics shows clearly that Detroit accounts for a disproportionate share of crime in the metropolitan area. The city's violent crime rate is four times that of the rest of Wayne County; almost four times the Oakland County rate, and nearly six times the rate in Macomb County.

What makes Detroit so violent?

Experts say the root **causes** are long-term poverty, poor education and chronic joblessness: widespread woes in a city with a 30 percent unemployment rate among blacks, the highest last year among major U.S. cities.

Fostering the problem is an exposure to violence, a willingness to strike back violently, a massive drug problem and widespread availability of guns that makes violence more lethal.

Some also believe it is born of a sense of isolation, hopelessness and explosive rage: the twisted sense of survival that led Red Simpson to pump two slugs into George Davis' back after he already lay wounded on the ground.

"The racism of this country **causes** it," said Detroit Recorder's Court Chief Judge Samuel Gardner. "The typical person I see in front of me is a 19-year-old black male who is unemployed, who comes from a broken family, who has little or no education. Where is his place in this society? He doesn't have one.

"They tell me, 'Judge, how can you give me prison time when I'm in jail already?' That's a big difference. When people are so despondent, prison stops becoming a threat. It doesn't work on folks who are down at the bottom."

GUNS AND DRUGS stand out as the two deadliest links in the chain Detroit must break if it is to beat its crime problem.

A readily accessible gun can turn a family or neighborhood fight into a homicide. But career criminals who prey on strangers are another factor in Detroit's homicide cycle, say criminologists. They attribute much of the increase in homicide to crimes against strangers.

Violent crime has at times provoked this city to take special action. Recall the surge of anger over the schoolgirl rapes earlier this year. Mayor Young convened community-wide summit meetings, several steps were taken -- involving police, school officials, parents and business leaders -- and the number of rapes sharply declined. No similar, full-scale effort to diminish homicide or robbery has been undertaken.

"Where is the outrage?" the Rev. Jim Holley of Little Rock Baptist Church wondered after a close friend was killed this summer.

"Nobody really seems to be doing anything. The community has to say, 'It must stop.' It is like a cancer is spreading, and we are slowly dying It has to come from the leadership, from the community. But everyone is waiting for everyone else to get something going."

Murder in Detroit is largely a matter of poor people killing poor people and blacks killing blacks. Eighty-one percent of the victims were black, and so were 85 percent of those charged with murder.

"Why do you rob somebody or blow them away?" asked Roy Levy Williams, the former Detroit Urban League director who is also a member of Detroit's civilian Police Board of Commissioners. He worries about the kind of robber who not only holds up people, but shoots them afterward.

The danger, he said, is that violence will become commonplace. "As Detroit accepts the violence, there is a greater tendency to ignore it, to assume it needs to be accepted," he said.

WHAT IS MISSING from the city's fight against violent crime?

- * Detroit has no comprehensive program to kick its drug habit.

Big-time drug dealers have barely been touched, while street- corner pushers clog Detroit's courts, tying up police officers and costing the city in overtime. The city has yet to shift gears from treating a small number of its 50,000 heroin addicts to preventing drug abuse.

- * Detroit has not clamped down on illegal guns on its streets.

Prosecutors and judges rarely imprison people who illegally carry guns, something court officials say is impossible because of the logjam of cases and lack of prison space. Perhaps because of judicial indifference, confiscations of illegal guns by Detroit police have dropped 72 percent this year.

Despite its tough handgun-registration law, Michigan is a constant victim of guns flowing in from other states that have more permissive laws, and of the federal government's inability to monitor the sale of guns by licensed and unlicensed dealers. Former convicts can easily buy rifles or shotguns, which are not covered by the state's handgun-registration law.

* Detroit has not convinced its residents that police can protect them.

City residents hunger for increased police protection. Without adequate protection, the cycle of fearful citizens arming themselves and thieves then stealing their guns will persist.

* Detroit has not made a community-wide commitment to stop violent crime.

People in other communities have pulled together to do more. Money is not the answer to all of Detroit's problems. Imagination, determination, commitment -- from citizens as well as this city's leadership -- would **go** a long way.

Some steps, however, cannot be taken without more money. Taxpayers will have to decide if they want to build the prison space for dangerous repeat offenders or allow the overcrowded prisons to purge themselves regularly, thwarting police and court efforts to keep those criminals off the streets. Forty-four percent of the city's convicted murderers last year had criminal records.

VIOLENT CRIME is not a newcomer to Detroit. After peaking in the mid-1970s, violent crime ebbed in Detroit in the late 1970s but then began edging higher in the last four years as unemployment and the city's financial woes grew. Consider:

* Detroit's robbery rate and the percentage of robberies here in which guns were used led the nation's 10 biggest cities in 1982, the most recent year for comparative statistics. In 1983, Detroit ranked second only to Newark in the per capita rate for robberies: 140 for every 10,000 people.

* Between 1979 and 1983, homicides in Detroit increased by 28 percent, rapes by 11 percent and robberies by 48 percent. Major crime overall went up 35 percent.

* Of the 581 people killed in Detroit last year, 70 percent were killed by guns.

A widely held myth is that nearly all killings involve domestic squabbles or people who are closely acquainted. In 40 percent of Detroit homicides last year, police could not establish a link between killer and victim.

Of those murders in which police determined a relationship between victim and killer, 18 percent involved relatives, 58 percent involved acquaintances, 21 percent involved strangers, and three percent involved people police could not classify.

County Medical Examiner Spitz is convinced that most of the city's murders are related to drugs.

"They look like domestics, but they are not," said Spitz. "You find out they were friend killing friend who wanted his drugs, or who was upset over his drugs. If you add this to the number of drug robberies and murders where a dealer kills an addict, then you come up with very, very significant number that is in excess of 50 percent of the homicides."

If Detroit's boundaries reached several miles into the suburbs, University of Chicago criminologist Franklin Zimring said, its homicide rate might be as low as other cities with larger middle-class populations.

Likewise, if the homicide rates were isolated for New York's Bedford-Stuyvesant, Los Angeles' Watts, and Miami's Liberty City, Zimring and others said, their rates might match those in Detroit's highest-crime areas.

"We make up a city. We paste it together, and we give it a (crime) rate," Zimring said. But stretching Detroit's boundaries to include the suburbs would only mask the problem. It would not break the cycle of despair, guns, drugs and murder.

AFTER STUDYING felony murders in Detroit from 1971 to 1977, sociologist Mary Lorenz Dietz concluded that people are not pushed into killing. They are part of a group that says killing is all right. They are not always after money.

"You have to be able to say it is acceptable to kill," said Dietz, who teaches at the University of Windsor. Her husband, Manfred, was killed in 1960 while trying to break up an east side Detroit robbery.

Two murderers whom Dietz interviewed were groomed in their early teens by gangs or career criminals, she said. After their release, she said, one was convicted of a contract killing and the other was convicted for committing eight rapes.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Timothy Kenny also thinks some killers are career criminals who, he said, "move up from stealing cars to armed robbery. They progress to crimes of violence."

He cited two men convicted in the execution-style slaying last year of Detroit Sgt. Michael Bossuyt, 34.

Bossuyt had surprised the two as they were burglarizing an arcade but was disarmed during a struggle. As he was being led with his hands up in the air, he was shot in the back of the head with his own .357 magnum revolver, according to police.

Both men had criminal careers that had worsened over time, according to Kenny. Braden Holloway, 27, had five previous convictions, and his half brother, Frantz Shoubedor Johnson, 32, had six convictions.

OF THE 612 state prisoners from Detroit who were younger than 25 when sentenced for murder or manslaughter, how many are like Red Simpson -- small-time hoods who spiraled deeper into violent lives?

Simpson is one of 37 killers sentenced last year in Recorder's Court who responded to a Free Press survey.

"The most popular thing when you're running with a group of guys is to get your hands on a gun," Simpson said. "I guess it's to protect your image or to show how tough you are. I started carrying guns in 1980 when I was 15."

Simpson recalled how his first gun, a small .32-caliber automatic, fell out of a hollowed-out book knocked over when he and a friend burglarized his neighbor's home.

After firing all the bullets, Simpson sold the gun for \$40 to a neighborhood dope pusher, who later recruited him to sell heroin in Pontiac.

In drug dealings, he said, he always had a gun handy but never used it.

Those who knew him called Simpson a reckless youth with a quick temper. Simpson's sister said he learned as a youngster how to manipulate his alcoholic grandmother, who reared him and his five siblings after their mother died when Red was nine months old.

"He'd threaten and yell and punch holes in the wall to get his way," Sheila Craft said of Red. "He always thought he was invincible because my grandmother would get him out of trouble."

In 1971, Red's oldest sister, Lois, was killed during a robbery. The homicide was never solved, and Craft does not know what effect the slaying had on her younger brother.

SHORTLY BEFORE his arrest for murder, Red Simpson became the father of a boy born to a 15-year-old girl, Craft said. But she said Red did not tell his son's mother about his crime until recently.

"Now she won't go see him. She says, 'What am I supposed to tell my baby? That his father is a killer?' " Craft said.

Craft said Red's father took little interest in his son until Red's trial for murder; now, she said, he often visits his son at the reformatory.

Red said his dope business dried up after his two main suppliers were arrested in late 1981.

"After that, I was getting tight for money," he said. "Some of my friends, we started pulling little street crimes, snatching purses, and stickups. Stickups I should've never did because I caught my case that way."

Simpson is serving a 20-to-50-year prison term after pleading guilty to second-degree murder.

"He was a super-high-strung, jittery guy," said Homicide Sgt. Elwood Gunderson. "With a gun his hand, I think he'd be an extremely dangerous individual."

Violent crime:

How largest cities rate

* The cities are ranked according to the violent crimes per 100,000 residents. Violent crimes include murder, rape, robbery and assault.

Crimes

City per 100,000

Detroit 2,168

New York 1,868

Los Angeles 1,696

Chicago 1,325

Dallas 1,147

Philadelphia 1,004

Houston 926

Phoenix 627

San Antonio 609

San Diego 586

Violent crime:

Detroit area breakdown

Crimes

Area per 100,000

Detroit 2,168

Inkster 2,111

Pontiac 1,852

Lansing 743

Southfield 616

Oakland Cty. 554

Wayne Cty. * 541

Warren 428

Macomb Cty. 374

Metro area 278

* Excludes Detroit

Source: 1983 FBI statistics

Caption: Photo Color WILLIAM ARCHIE; Chart

Memo: crime in Detroit / a search for solutions

First of five parts; SERIES

SEE ALSO SIDEBARS

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

Page: 1A

Index Terms: DETROIT ; CRIME ; SERIES ; MAJOR STORY ; STATISTIC

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