

## **DEADLY COMBINATION OF CRACK AND GUNS TAKES TOO MANY LIVES**

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He is wearing \$90 Fila sneakers and a \$200 nanny goat coat, the sheepskin jacket so prized on the streets **of** Detroit that youngsters have killed for it. There is a gold chain around his neck and a .357 Colt Python in his pocket. He is 15 years old and he can barely read, but he can earn \$300 a day as a runner for a west side **crack** house and smoke it away almost as fast.

He is a loser, a failure -- impulsive, remorseless, emotionally dead -- and one night he is going to go out and cross paths with a kid very much like himself.

"You bitch," one will say.

"Don't talk your junk, punk," the other will respond.

The insults will escalate, the **guns** will appear and when it is over someone will lie injured or dead. Later, when police question the survivor, the cause **of** the argument will seem fleeting and trivial: He was lookin' at me. He owe me money. He was messin' with my brother. He always callin' me Bighead.

And Detroit's explosive **combination of** angry kids, **guns** and **crack** will have claimed another victim.

So far this year, at least 334 youngsters 16 and under have been shot in Detroit, 34 fatally, according to figures compiled by the Free Press from daily police reports. Police records show that 30 were ruled homicides, three accidental and one remains undetermined.

The numbers are below those **of** 1986, when there were 365 juveniles shot, 43 fatally. Yet Detroit's toll **of** death and injury to juveniles by firearms is still far higher than the rates **of** such cities as Chicago, Cleveland, Houston and Philadelphia, despite Mayor Young's insistence that Detroit's problem is no worse than anybody else's.

Nationally, the homicide rate for blacks over the age **of** 10 has been dropping steadily since 1980. Detroit's adult and juvenile homicide rates have remained stubbornly high.

Meanwhile, the number **of** Detroit juveniles charged with homicide has risen again, after dropping sharply in 1982-83. The figure fluctuates from year to year, but seems to be moving back up to the levels **of** the mid- and late 1970s, when gangs **of** adolescent heroin sellers were waging fierce turf wars.

As **of** mid-December, 42 Detroit youngsters under 17 had been charged with homicide, compared with 27 for all **of** Wayne County in 1986, and 44 in the county in 1985. In 1987, as in the past, almost all the juvenile victims and slayers are black males.

What's going on here? Why has Detroit become such a dangerous place to be young in?

Detroit suffers from poverty, unemployment, abandoned neighborhoods and the poorest prospects for swift recovery **of** any major U.S. city, many economists and social scientists say -- all factors that tend to be associated with high crime rates.

The city also has a slightly higher percentage **of** youngsters under 18 -- an age **of** risk-taking and violence -- than many other large cities. An estimated 28 percent **of** Detroit's one million population is under 18.

But most **of** all, Detroit has a surplus **of** guns and crack -- the cheap, potent smokable form **of** cocaine that produces swift addiction and self-destruction.

"Juvenile homicides are directly related to the drug industry and how it is marketed in our poorer and less affluent neighborhoods," said Dr. John Waller, chairman **of** the department **of** community medicine at Wayne State University and a former city health director. "The use **of** adolescents in marketing, selling, delivery and collecting for drugs is not new to the city. It began with heroin distribution by Young Boys Inc. And it's a very violent life-style."

Some **of** Detroit's young homicide victims are killed accidentally. Some are gunned down in the course **of** robberies. A few innocents died because they were standing in the wrong place when the **guns** came out.

But the most common case **of** homicide involving a juvenile, either as victim or as slayer, is similar to the grim scenario at the beginning **of** this story. All the details were taken from various police and court files on juvenile victims and slayers in 1987.

The lethal weapons and the hip wardrobe, the senseless insults and the fatal bravado, the remorseless slayer, the victim who knows or provokes his assailant, the link to the cocaine trade - - all these are recurring themes in Detroit's juvenile homicide cases.

In many confrontations, police and prosecutors say, the victim is usually no more a law-abiding citizen than the slayer. "It sounds bad when you get the lady who is a churchgoer whose son is shot," said Inspector Gerald Stewart **of** the Detroit Police Homicide Section. "But overall, both victims and perpetrators tend to be involved in drugs."

He has feelings **of** inferiority, insecurity and he lacks self-confidence. . . . He feels guilty about his perceived failures and poor achievement. . . . Suspicious and distrustful, moody, irritable, unfriendly, negative, impulsive, he tends to jump into things without thinking. . . . He is overly sensitive to criticism and overreacts under stress. His reality testing is poor. He tends to distort or misinterpret what he sees and experiences. . . .

-- Psychologist's report on a 16-year-old awaiting trial as an adult for murder

"You look at the crime and you want to strangle the kid," said assistant prosecutor David Wolock **of** the typical adolescent gunman he prosecutes in Wayne County Juvenile Court. "Then you look at the case history, and you want to cry for him."

Some common threads run through the lives **of** the juvenile slayers. They are generally angry and impulsive young men, failures in school, physically abused or neglected at home, wearing suspicion and hostility like armor.

Intellectually, they may have undiagnosed learning disabilities. Emotionally, they are damaged goods, unable to feel empathy for others because nobody has shown love or empathy for them.

On the brink **of** adulthood, many are still struggling to get through a third-grade reader. They have nothing to be proud **of** : no skills, no hobbies, no grades, no prospects. Their fragile self-esteem rests on the designer labels on their clothing and their reputation for toughness on the streets, and they seem recklessly willing to die for either. Ten years ago, they would have carried knives as a badge **of** power; today, they carry more efficient .22s and .38s.

Their fathers disappeared long ago. Their mothers, overwhelmed by the strains **of** poverty and single parenthood, have never learned to be strong and caring parents. They learned in infancy to lie low, to cry less, to shut down their feelings and to duck the angry and unpredictable adults around them. Some mothers are not even aware their 15- or 16-year-old sons can't read until the youths are asked to read or sign their statements in juvenile court.

"There's no family there," said psychologist Tom Regan, who interviews most **of** the youths the Prosecutor's Office seeks to try as adults for violent crimes. "It's a bunch **of** people who live in the same house and run into each other a few times a week. It's not conscious neglect. It's just inadequate parenting."

Among the juveniles accused **of** homicide in Detroit in 1987 are youngsters who have attended seven schools by the sixth grade and failed in all **of** them; who have seen their mothers attempt suicide and watched their stepfathers shoot drugs; who have been shuttled among relatives like an unwanted boarder; who have endured abandonment or humiliation by the parents who should have protected them.

\* When Jerome (not his real name) was eight years old, he saw his mother carried away in an ambulance minutes after she had been doused with gasoline and set afire by an unidentified assailant. It was a year before she returned; her appearance then terrified him, but he helped to rub her body with salve.

Other youngsters teased him about his mother's disfigurement. As a young child, his family had called him a sissy when he ran away from fights. Now he began fighting in school and failing his classes, dropping out for good in the seventh grade.

His father, who never married or supported the mother, disappeared after the burn incident. **Of** his two stepfathers, one beat his mother, the other was a heroin and cocaine user.

When Jerome was 15, he was accused **of** using a sawed-off shotgun in a robbery. In the room where he and another youth were arrested, police found a blue Adidas shoe box with \$865, 13 packets **of crack**, a razor and a scale.

Last May Jerome, by then 16, was charged with participating in an armed ambush that left one man dead and two wounded. Tried as an adult, he was convicted and sentenced for felonious assault.

\* Armand, who dropped out **of** school in the sixth grade, first appeared in juvenile court at the age **of** 12 on a charge **of** auto theft. His father left home when the boy was four and was murdered three years later, apparently in a drug deal gone wrong. His mother is an alcoholic who once attempted suicide in front **of** her son. The youth himself has made three suicide attempts.

Last January, when he was 16, Armand and his friends got into an argument with another group **of** youths over his missing nanny goat coat. A few hours later, the two groups met again in a **gun** battle that left one young man dead, and Armand facing trial for murder as an adult.

\* Delayne was four years old when his mother and her boyfriend took him along on an armed robbery. When they were captured, Delayne cried and begged to be taken to jail with her, although now he claims he cannot remember the incident. His father, who spent time in jail for robbery, neither lived with the family nor provided financial support.

Two years ago his mother and soldier-stepfather moved to an Army base in West Germany, leaving the youth with his grandmother. While playing pool in a friend's basement last December, Delayne, then 15, shot and killed a 14-year-old boy. "Are you still mad at me?" the youth had asked a few minutes before. "Now talk your junk, punk," responded Delayne, pulling the trigger again and again until the **gun** would fire no longer.

One month after his 16th birthday, he was tried as an adult, convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

(The names in all three cases above have been changed to protect the privacy **of** family members who were not charged with any crimes.)

"Kids who grow up abused and neglected don't have a strong sense **of** what other people feel," said psychologist Charles Rooney, director **of** the juvenile court's citizens' advisory committee. "It's defensive. When you've been hurt a lot you shut off your feelings. We see the youngster who doesn't feel empathy, doesn't feel remorse, doesn't feel much **of** anything, really.

"Caring about each other is the glue that holds society together, and if you don't grow up experiencing that, well, that's a significant factor in being able to blow somebody away," Rooney said.

Nobody cares for them, nobody wants them and the television set bombards them with visions of material goods they will never have. And then, assistant prosecutor Wolock said, "The dope dealer says, 'Hey, kid. I like you.' "

Detroit is "a city hooked on **crack** ," second only to New York in the seriousness of its cocaine problem, said William Coonce, special agent in charge of the Detroit office of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

Cocaine seizures reported by the DEA's Detroit district leaped from 28.7 pounds in 1985 to 1,444 pounds in 1987. The number of emergency room visits in which cocaine was mentioned quintupled between the first half of 1985 and the first half of 1987, in Detroit area hospitals that report such figures to a federal monitoring program.

In some neighborhoods, adults actively entice or coerce juveniles into selling **crack** and running weapons, as a buffer between adult offenders and the police. In an economically ravaged city, the trade in **crack** provides young men with jobs and status. They acquire the gold chains with the Mercedes emblem to prove their success, the **guns** to protect the gold, and a business ethic that encourages the gunning down of anyone who defaults on a debt or a deal.

They also acquire the delusions and paranoia that go with the use of **crack** , a psychomotor stimulant that increases aggression, reduces judgment and brings the classic symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia.

"When you see children shot to death in **crack** houses, when you see a father slit an infant's throat, those children may have died because of somebody's **crack** cocaine delusions," said Marlyne Kilbey, chairman of the Wayne State University psychology department.

Coonce said: "A youthful violator coming off **crack** can't handle the normal emotions. You put a **gun** in his hand, and you mix up a magical formula for homicide."

In Detroit, the **guns** are never far from hand.

"Everyone in our neighborhood has a .22," Anthony Barrow, 16, told police after his arrest last fall on a charge of first-degree murder. "Once upon a time back in August I was selling dope. When I started there was about 15 of us in the same house and he gave all of us .22s. The kids that was shooting use to work with me but I don't know their names," Barrow said in a statement to police.

A witness told police that Barrow shot one youth in the hand and another in the back in separate incidents on the same September night that he is accused of killing Cornell Jackson, 17.

Barrow, who told police Jackson and his friends had been cursing Barrow's younger brother, is awaiting trial as an adult in Recorder's Court in the slaying.

Barrow's Dexter-Elmwood neighborhood on the city's west side is described in court files as "infested" with drug dealers and raggedy-knit teen gangs that engage in breaking and entering, occasional robbery and shootings that inevitably demand retaliation.

"The problem is the availability **of guns** ," said psychologist Regan. "Those kids have been shooting at each other for the past couple **of** years. They don't go out with the intent **of** exterminating certain people, they don't have a list **of** people to take out, but they all carry **guns** and when something comes up, they are going to deal with it. It's just taking care **of** business."

In 1981, there were 182 youngsters charged in juvenile court with carrying a concealed weapon. By 1986, the number had risen to 420. At the Spinal Cord Injury Center **of** the Rehabilitation Institute in the Detroit Medical Center, 42 percent **of** patients are being treated for gunshot injuries, compared to 14.6 percent **of** the patients in similar facilities nationwide.

Mayor Young, a foe **of gun** control, has blamed Detroit's youthful death toll on drugs and unemployment, and he criticizes the news media for "hying it every damn day."

"There's a **crack** problem all over the country," he said recently. "It's a sign **of** the frustration **of** young people, especially minorities -- the lack **of** opportunity, the lack **of** jobs."

Many police departments do not record homicides by the age **of** victim or by weapon, so it is difficult to make comparisons with Detroit's 1987 firearms toll **of** 34 juveniles dead and 300 injured. Cleveland, which has roughly half the population **of** Detroit, had 16 juvenile homicides, including five by firearms. The rest included deaths by child abuse, vehicular homicide and arson. Philadelphia, which has a population 50 percent higher than Detroit's, had 19 juvenile homicides, six by firearms.

In Chicago, 53 persons under 16 have been slain so far this year, including 27 by firearms. Chicago, three times the size **of** Detroit, is not perceived as a city with a homicide problem, University **of** Illinois sociologist Darnell Hawkins said in a recent interview. But neighborhoods on that city's south and west side that have poverty and unemployment rates similar to Detroit's have similar rates **of** homicide and violent crimes, he said.

Hawkins, an expert on black homicides, said is difficult to publicize the juvenile homicide problem without blaming the victims.

"It's not just trying to protect the image **of** a city," he said. "When you start talking about it, some people are inclined to think it's just another index **of** black pathology and that there's nothing you can do about it. There's so much racism in society. That's why people like Coleman Young and other mayors don't talk that much about it."

And outside **of** the affected communities, Hawkins said, "Most people don't really give a damn, as long as the victims are black."

Some people worry that Detroiters have been numbed by the drumroll **of** deaths and firearms injuries among young people here.

"We've been immunized to the problem, to use a public health term," said Waller, the former city health director, who is involved in a research project aimed at reducing violence in Detroit neighborhoods. "There's no major outrage. Most people think the problem is too big to put their arms around."

Law enforcement officials believe the first step to reducing juvenile violence is to break the back **of** the illicit drug trade here by mounting an intensive, long-term crackdown on sellers and buyers -- and not allow the crusade to be thwarted by lack **of** jail space or crowded court dockets.

"We needed some leadership here and the leadership has finally come out," said Coonce, referring to the mayor's recent drive against **crack** houses.

Others solutions, well-known and oft-repeated, include the development **of** programs to strengthen the family, the schools and the criminal justice system, to reduce the flow **of guns** on the street and to restore the teaching **of** traditional values to young people. Such solutions are easier to advocate than to turn into workable programs.

But if nothing is done, child psychologists and others warn, the habits and harvest **of** violence will continue to be passed on from generation to generation.

Many experts say both parents and youngsters need to be taught conflict resolution, the art **of** handling anger or settling arguments without reaching for an Uzi. Waller also argues for the removal **of** "every anti-family rule and regulation in the book," including the ban on ADC payments when there is a man in the home, a regulation which he says encourages the breakup **of** families.

The social problems must be addressed with "a massive amount **of** family support and community support," said Elliott Hall, former chief assistant Wayne County prosecutor who is now a Ford Motor Co. vice-president.

"The solutions won't come quickly. In fact, we may lose a generation," he said.

Hall said he opposed **gun** control until he served in the prosecutor's office and saw "black folks killing each other in great numbers. It didn't take me long to come to the conclusion that **gun** control was needed -- to the chagrin and anger **of** our mayor."

Combating juvenile violence "really is a question **of** political, moral, social leadership," said Rooney, director **of** the juvenile court's citizens action committee. "The mayor may feel he's being realistic when he says people aren't going to give up their **guns** , but somehow at the leadership level it has got to be said, that **guns** are not the solution. **Guns** are a part **of** the problem."

Until the problem is solved, Detroit's juvenile slayers will cast a shadow that goes far beyond the number **of** their direct victims.

The great majority **of** young Detroiters do not turn to lives **of** crime and violence, even when they come from poor or troubled families. They do not carry **guns** , they skirt confrontation, they are never seen in the halls **of** juvenile court, yet every day they struggle to cope in a world shaped by the unholy trinity: angry kids, **guns** and **crack** .

"The experience **of** just making it from home to school is a real task for them," said Regan, the court psychologist. "These kids are threatened, they're robbed, they can't wear anything expensive or it's taken from them. They are in fear **of** their life. They have to walk around certain neighborhoods and blocks because they know there's going to be a confrontation.

"In terms **of** protecting them, providing them a safe life, we have failed the kids **of** this city."

#### CUTLINE:

This sawed-off shotgun wrapped with duct tape was among evidence confiscated by Detroit narcotics officers Dec. 16 in a raid on a suspected **crack** house on Sixteenth Street. A 15-year-old was detained by police and two adults were arrested.

Handcuffs, chains and expensive running shoes -- part **of** the street scene during the recent Detroit police crackdown **of** sales **of** **crack** cocaine, in which numerous juveniles were arrested.

Currency **of** the **crack** trade: **Guns** , knives, money and a substance believe to be **crack** cocaine were confiscated during a drug raid at a reputed **crack** house on Fourth Street Nov. 30, the first night **of** Mayor Young's declared war on **crack** in Detroit.

Frisked and arrested, a 14-year-old was one **of** three people taken into custody during a Dec. 16 raid on an abandoned house on Englewood in Detroit. The youth was charged with a drug violation and taken to the Wayne County Youth Home.

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Caption: Photo Color MANNY CRISOSTOMO

Memo: Special Report: Too Young to Die

CORRECTION RAN December 29, 1987

getting it straight

\* A West side Detroit neighborhood referred to in Sunday's Comment section report "Too Young to Die" should have been called Dexter-Elmhurst.

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