

HOW DETROIT GANG GOT TO NEW CASTLE TACTIC OF USING TEENS AS DRUG COURIERS INVENTED BY YOUNG BOYS INCORPORATED; [REGION Edition]

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The gang called Young Boys Incorporated started here and changed the face of drug dealing.

Adults in their 20s and 30s took children from the streets and hired them to be couriers of crack cocaine. The kids would have most of the confrontations with police. Meantime, those behind the illicit operation would hide themselves and the money their couriers brought in.

If police caught the young drug runners, their juvenile status would protect them from adult punishment. Those who escaped the law would pocket a little money and learn about the business of operating a drug gang.

Every cop working a beat generally knows about the criminal system that Young Boys Incorporated started during the 1980s. But Pennsylvania law officers say they had never seen adults use 14- and 15-year-old drug runners so boldly or so widely until last month, when they caught two Detroit gangs that had shifted their crack- dealing operations to New Castle.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Tom Corbett said the number of couriers sent to New Castle was larger and more efficiently disguised than drug-dealing operations elsewhere in the state.

"These young dealers would stay for several weeks and then return to Detroit, replaced by another group of young dealers," he said.

New Castle Police Chief Thomas Sansone said couriers hired by drug dealers often are locals, but the gangs broke that pattern.

"What was different in this case was that all of the juveniles were from Detroit, and not one of them was reported as missing or a runaway," Chief Sansone said. "They were kids nobody was looking for."

Police say the couriers came from the East and West Sides of Detroit, where the gangs were headquartered. From there, adult bosses drove them 250 miles to New Castle. Once in town, they were to deliver crack cocaine to buyers and keep their mouths shut if police started asking questions.

They did just that.

When found on the streets late at night and questioned by New Castle police, the kids from Detroit lied about who they were. Whether they were staying in crack houses taken over by the gangs or fending for themselves is one of the case's enduring mysteries.

None was found with crack or cocaine, Chief Sansone said. In the end, those who were picked up by police ended up in a juvenile shelter while social workers searched for their parents or guardians.

The gang leaders' tactics threw Chief Sansone's 35-member department off stride for years. Each time his officers thought they had a bead on one group of couriers, a new army of 14-year-old dealers replaced them.

Only after the gangs had been in business for almost three years did their empire started to crumble. Police and prosecutors, using wiretaps and secret informants, obtained arrest warrants for 28 of the gang members. Seventeen of them are Detroit natives.

Even so, all the teenage couriers imported from Detroit slipped away. What became of them is the most haunting part of the case.

"It shows there is a whole underground -- an underworld -- that we don't have a handle on," said Carl S. Taylor, a Detroit native and Michigan State University professor noted for his street research on the gangs.

After World War II, when Detroit was capital of the auto industry, it had a humming economy and a population of almost 2 million. Today, it is down to 900,000 people, and it consistently ranks as one of the most impoverished big cities in America.

Dr. Taylor, 56, said a poor economy, staggering school dropout rate and sense of hopelessness combine to give Detroit gangs a steady supply of foot soldiers.

"Street culture is the one institution that will take you in when no one else will," he said.

Even though these criminal operations have eager teenagers to choose from, they also are facing a bad economy. No longer can the Detroit market feed every drug gang.

"When there's no more meat on the carcass, where do you go?" Dr. Taylor asked. "It's a tough and ugly situation in the city, so I'm not surprised that Detroit gangs find their way to Pennsylvania or Ohio or anywhere else."

In fact, he said, Detroit's drug gangs have branched out to the Midwest and South, all following the business blueprint created by Young Boys Incorporated. This means gangs recruit juveniles to do the dirty work of street sales and delivery while adults collect most of the money.

The leaders tend to be older and willing to use violence to shove out any hometown competition. That was the case in New Castle.

Police say Lamarol "Tone" Abram, 28, and James "O-Z" Brooks, 39, led the Detroit gangs that ran crack-dealing operations. They eventually expanded into Beaver and Mercer counties. Police estimate that, through violence or the threat of it, they eliminated 80 percent of the competition.

Mr. Corbett said the Detroit gangs chose Pennsylvania markets where they would be "the big fish."

But James Tate, second deputy police chief of Detroit, maintains that the gangs looked for a new base because they were being run out of their hometown.

Mr. Tate said Detroit police made drug busts totaling \$140 million last year and \$85 million in 2004. Because they are under such duress in Detroit, he said, gangs look for cities where they might operate with less pressure from police.

Mr. Corbett, though, said the gangs that took over the crack-dealing trade New Castle and other Western Pennsylvania towns never really left Detroit. They continued to accumulate powder cocaine at their home base in the city, he said. Then they drove the drug supply to Pennsylvania, where it was processed into crack.

In addition, the regular rotation of couriers from Detroit showed that the gangs always maintained their presence there, Chief Sansone said.

With operations in two states, the gangs confounded law enforcement for a time.

"It was frustrating," Chief Sansone said. "A few times we arrested people, adults and juveniles, who had felony drug warrants in Detroit. But then the Detroit police would not extradite them, so we had to let them go. They began to feel more comfortable when they realized we couldn't do anything to them."

Mr. Tate said he knew of no such breakdowns between law officers in Detroit and Pennsylvania. He said Wayne County courts and prosecutors, not his department, typically handle extraditions.

For Dr. Taylor, who wrote about Young Boys Incorporated in his 1990 book "Dangerous Society," gangs are not a police problem.

"They are societal problem, but they have been so glamorized with 'Scarface' and 'The Godfather' that we don't realize it. I'm guilty because I'm looking forward to 'The Sopranos' as much as anybody."

He says the 14-year-old drug couriers who moved from Detroit to New Castle should have been found out immediately, as they were not in school. But nobody in Detroit, not a mom or a dad or a neighbor, seemed to notice when teenager left town for weeks at a time.

"Gangs are evidence of a total breakdown of society," Dr. Taylor said. "It's not 'The Sopranos' at all. It's dog eat dog, life in its lowest form. That's the part of this we should be most worried about."