

## PORTRAIT OF KILLER : ANGRY YOUTH WITH GUN AT HAND

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Author: JEANNE MAY Free Press Staff Writer

Why are so many kids killed in Detroit?

That's what Ann Goetting, an associate professor **of** sociology **at** Western Kentucky University, wanted to know. She slogged through mountains **of** arrest records for 1977 through 1984, and she found 55 children under 15 who police said had killed someone.

Then she drew this composite **portrait of a** Detroit youngster who had killed:

He is **a** black male in his early teens, **with** bad grades in school, born and living in the city **with** one **of** his natural parents in **a** single-family home they share **with** two or three other people, perhaps family members. His parents were married when he was born, but they no longer are. His father has remarried, and his mother is single. His parents were born in the South into large families who have limited educations and money.

The killing brought the kid his first official contact **with** the police.

In **a** moment **of** anger, he killed **a** friend, an acquaintance or **a** relative -- also **a** black male -- 15 years older than he. The victim did not live in the same house **with** his **killer** .

**As** tempers flared, the **killer** used physical force before the victim did. And the teenager killed **with a gun** in **a** private home between 2 p.m. and 1:59 a .m. on **a** Tuesday, **a** Thursday or **a** Friday.

Although her composite fits no single **youth** exactly, it reflects the grim statistical picture **of youths** who kill.

In another study, Goetting looked **at** victims, Detroit children under 15 slain in 1982-86. **A** Kalamazoo native, Goetting went to Wayne State University, has **a** doctorate in sociology and specializes in homicide studies.

From the two studies, she has drawn some conclusions about Detroit.

"There are more **guns** in Detroit than households," she said in an interview. "We know that homicide is predominantly carried out **with guns** ; **guns** allow individuals to kill spontaneously without thinking. If the **gun** is not there, **a** lot **of** potential homicides turn out to be fights or brawls. . . . If there's one per household, and the kid knows where it is and he sees how easy it is to use it on TV, well. . . ."

**Of** the 55 **killers** studied by Goetting, 85 percent were black. Why?

"One **of** the theories there is associated **with** the transition when Southern blacks must uproot themselves to go into **a** Northern area for jobs," she said. "They have to leave their kin. **A** minority uprooted, moving away from their kin, the alienation that goes along **with** having to move and the frustration **of** employment insecurity, it's more conducive to violence. . . ."

So who's to blame for all this killing?

"When you come out **of** (studies) like this, you think the responsibility belongs to the community **as a** whole, not to the individual. . . .

"They live in **a** world where (shooting) is what is going on, and it's us **as a** whole who create that world. . . . The people we are talking about are disadvantaged. . . . They're not in the mainstream. When they are born, they do not have the opportunities. . . .

"One form **of** racism is showing up in the homicide rates. Blacks are killing each other off, poor people are killing each other off. And we're not intervening."

Why not?

"Even in mainstream America, the average family is struggling to get by. So you can't come down too hard on them. How dare they not notice? Well, they've got problems **of** their own. Their kids are coming up sexually provocative and on drugs.

"America is troubled right now **at** all levels. It's hard for people in the mainstream to look around."

But one who does look around is Goetting's brother Mark.

Mark Goetting sees many **of** Detroit's young shooting victims because he runs the children's intensive care unit **at** Henry Ford Hospital, and Ford is **a** major trauma center serving the heart **of** the city.

Goetting says he's no expert on **youths** and **guns** , but you can't patch wound after wound without coming up **with** some ideas.

"It's more acceptable for **a** teenager to carry **a** **gun** . . . more available. More acceptable. I've personally taken them off children," he said "Kid comes in for **a** cough or something, he's got **a** **gun** stuck in his belt. 'Oh, that's my **gun** .' He didn't even think about it. And kids have beepers that shoot **a** bullet. I think it's .32-caliber. We had some in the emergency room here. . . .

"The ones who are shot are usually poor, usually inner city. They're . . . victims **of** circumstances. . . . How can they develop any value for life when they see this downside? They're not **at a** developmental point where they fully understand what they are doing. . . ."

Like his sister, Mark Goetting was born and reared in Kalamazoo. He grew up **a** western Michigander who liked to hunt and harbored not **a** single bleeding-heart-liberal view on **guns** .

His views didn't change **as** he went through medical school and became **a** neurologist.

But two years ago, when he came to Ford Hospital, they changed.

"I'd never have believed I'd be supporting **gun** control," he said. "But I see the inadvertent victim, what happens on the spur **of** the moment. Saying if he didn't die from **a** Saturday Night Special he'd have been clubbed to death doesn't hold. **A gun** . It's so efficient and effective. All it takes is **a** second -- and it's over."

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