

EXECUTION CALLED ' STRAIGHT DRUG RIP-OFF '

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The **execution** of three men and two youths in a St. Aubin Street crack house -- Detroit's worst mass murder in 19 years -- was a " **straight drug rip-off** ," Detroit's top homicide investigator said Thursday.

Inspector Gerald Stewart, head of the homicide section, said the killing of the five and the critical wounding of a sixth person appear to have been part of a robbery of either **drugs** or cash. Police had no suspects in custody.

Stewart and other law enforcement officials said there was no indication that the killings, at a yellow two-story house in the 17800 block of St. Aubin, were part of a struggle among major **drug** factions.

"It looks like it was personal -- **drugs** , yes, but gangs, no," said an official familiar with the case. He spoke on condition that his name not be used because the case is under investigation.

According to police and witnesses, a woman and two men stormed into the house about 10:30 p.m., gathered the victims and opened fire with automatic and semiautomatic weapons. A second woman may have waited outside.

Five victims were found on the second floor and the sixth was found elsewhere, Stewart said.

The suspected killers who went to the door were familiar figures around the neighborhood in recent weeks, investigators said.

Neighbors said a woman matching the description of a woman sought by police was seen a half-mile from the murder scene Thursday.

The victims were identified as Steven Owens, 32, who rented the house; Carl Williams, 21; Levon Robinson, 18, Bobby Frazier, 16, and Robert Hill, 15.

Authorities said Rodney Lewis, in his late 20s, was in critical condition with a gunshot wound in the head at Detroit Receiving Hospital.

"I think we have to devise some way of bringing these shocking killings to a halt -- young people killing young people," said Mayor Coleman Young.

"You know, every day we read in the vital statistics of the chances of a young black male reaching the age of 40 or 50, and they're pretty slim. And they're made slimmer by such incidents as the one that occurred on St. Aubin. I think it's all of our responsibility. . . . And it's everybody's problem, not just a police problem."

The house had been raided four times in the last six months, said Police Chief William Hart, who lives less than a mile away.

Wayne County Prosecutor John O'Hair said two of the raids -- last Nov. 8 and Nov. 18 -- resulted in the seizure of suspected cocaine, **drug** paraphernalia, cash and guns.

Three other houses on the block also were raided Nov. 8, O'Hair said.

"Apparently, that neighborhood has a cluster of suspected crack houses," O'Hair said. "That area has had a lot of action."

U.S. Attorney Stephen Markman said the killers might be candidates for the federal death penalty in **drug**-related murders.

"The new federal death penalty statute passed in 1988 provides capital punishment in case of an individual who kills somebody in course of **drug** trafficking," Markman said.

"If after investigating the situation it was determined that it ought to be prosecuted by this office we would certainly look at that. Obviously in a case like this, we would look at all the possible penalties, including capital punishment. . . .

"It's the latest illustration of what firearms and **drugs** are doing to the city of Detroit. For somebody to call **drug** abuse a victimless crime, when you see this, is just beyond me."

A 58-year-old neighbor on St. Aubin, who spoke on condition that he not be identified out of fear of retaliation, said: "It was a crack house. Everybody knew that."

Automobile and pedestrian traffic came near the house "all day, all night," the neighbor said.

Robert Hill, the youngest of the victims, may have been caught in the slaughter simply because he was trying to return a jacket to Frazier, a long-time buddy who was at the house, said Hill's older brother, Michael.

Michael Hill said he was on his way to the St. Aubin house when he saw the police cars in front. He said he recognized his brother's gym shoes as Medical Examiner's Office personnel wheeled out the victims.

He said police told him that his brother was playing a video game when the killers forced their way in.

Police investigators filtered in and out of the house Thursday, checking for clues. A purple bicycle sat on the front porch; in the rear yard was a large yellow two-door Chevrolet, without plates. Homicide investigators checked rear locks.

Other homes on the street near East 6 Mile and I-75 had well-kept lawns and porches.

The resident, who said he's lived in the neighborhood since 1954, said the area has undergone "indescribable" changes since he moved there.

"It was no animosity; it was really nice then," he said. But now, "it's a whole new breed." He said there have been shootings in the neighborhood, and vacant lots dot the block.

He said the attackers "must have used silencers" because he "never heard any shots." He said that about 10:30-11 p.m., he noticed two people fighting in front of the house and then running north toward Nevada.

"Police had to kick the door in" to get in, he said.

At Owens' childhood home on Cheyenne near West 6 Mile, half a dozen people refused to talk to a reporter as they unloaded a U-Haul truck, apparently the same one used earlier Thursday to take goods from Owens' rented home on St. Aubin.

A neighbor, Louise Jackson, 57, said Owens, who rented the St. Aubin house, was just a typical kid.

"He was always respectful toward me. I won't see Steve any more saying, 'Hello, Mrs. Jackson.' "

Sylvester Gilmore, 21, another neighbor, said he considered Owens "cool. He told me not to sell **drugs** . He said just go to school, because **drugs** are nothing but trouble."

Homicide inspector Stewart said that there was nothing to tie the Wednesday night slaughter to an ambush Sunday night that left one person dead and two others wounded in a car about 1 1/2 miles away on Andover Street.

"It's not linked to the Andover case," Stewart said. "There's nothing that makes me believe that."
Caption: Map; Photo DAYMON J. HARTLEY

: Rodney Lewis Unidentified people carry away belongings on Thursday from the St. Aubin house where five people were slain Wednesday.

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