

CHALDEANS SUFFER THROUGH THE GANG WARS BAD APPLES SMEAR ETHNIC GROUP, THEY SAY

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Monday, November 20, 1989

Author: JOE SWICKARD Free Press Staff Writer

Innocent, uninvolved children are paying **the** mental and physical price as ethnic-based **gangs** shoot and bomb their way toward dominance in Detroit's cocaine trade.

"It is harmful, especially to our children," said Jamal Shallal. "You know how kids can be -- cruel and teasing. When someone starts talking about **Chaldeans** being dope dealers, a young child doesn't know how to react. They come home from school crying."

Representatives of **the** Detroit area **Chaldean** community -- a hardworking and proud group of some 60,000 people -- said their ethnic group has been smeared by **the** alleged criminal activities of some of its members and some of **the** subsequent news coverage.

Beyond tarnished honor and reputation, there is also danger.

Community members living in **the** area of Woodward-7 Mile- John R have had to endure a year of bomb blasts and gunfire around their homes, shops and churches.

"A lot of people are scared with these bombings and shootings going around," said Shallal, an investment adviser and systems analyst. "Well over 90, 95 percent of **the** people are just trying to go about their own businesses. I think **the** criminals are hiding themselves in that area. If you notice, many of them live in **the** suburbs and then come into **the** community to do their dirty work."

Alleged **gang** members and their associates make up only a fraction of **the Chaldean** community, but their activities have been **the** focus of intense attention.

"Some people do go that path," Shallal said. "But that's not what **the** community stands for. That kind of behavior goes totally against **the** grain of our traditions, cultural mores and values."

Chaldeans -- Iraqi Christians -- began coming to **the** Detroit area early this century. **The** community was small -- fewer than 1,000 families, estimates Shallal -- until immigration quotas were restructured in 1963.

There was a major influx in **the** late 1960s and early 1970s, fostered in part by political disruptions in Iraq and then by **the** Iraq-Iran war .

Chaldeans -- who pride themselves on strong bonds of family loyalty, honor and community reputation -- are probably most strongly identified with **the** grocery and party store business in **the** Detroit area.

But Joseph Kassab, an immunology instructor at Wayne State University, said **the** image of **the Chaldean** as market owner is becoming outdated as **Chaldeans** advance educationally and enter other professions.

"It's not just **the** party stores any more," Kassab said. "We are talking about 15 percent of **the** community being professionals now -- engineers, lawyers, doctors, accountants."

Kassab said **the** community is tightly knit, with interfamily relationships going back generations. Behavior can have community-wide, as well as personal, impact, he said.

"If someone does something wrong, they think about **the** community and how **the** community feels as much as they do **the** law," Kassab said.

Sam Yono, market owner and chairman of **the** Associated Food Dealers of Michigan, said allegations of drug dealing by some members of **the** community can spawn remarks and questioning looks that can hurt children and chill business dealings.

"I tell my children we have nothing to do with it," Yono said. "We're proud to be **Chaldean** Honor, dignity and ethics means more than any amount of money in **the** world."

The sense of community obligation and standing is crucial, Yono said.

"If a young man proposes to a young woman, **the** very first thing asked about is **the** families," he said. " **The** relationships go back **through the** generations. Really, **the** feeling is wonderful -- it's beyond explanation."

Likewise, lawyer Joe Acho said it is hard to overplay **the** importance of a family's reputation.

"My father had a saying to me: 'You are my treasures -- you, your brothers and your sisters are my treasures.' That conveys **the** feeling that if a son is not good, it is also a reflection on **the** family," he said.

" **Chaldeans** truly believe **the** children are reflective of **the** family and always a part of it. . . . That's how they think of you -- an extension of **the** family."

Acho said newspaper and television accounts of alleged criminal groups from **the** community "certainly do not add to **the** luster of **the Chaldean** community. It's a negative any way you cut it."

He said some reports presenting an image of a " **Chaldean** mob . . . are patently unfair. These people, who may not really be **Chaldean** , just take away from **the** efforts so many others have made."

Yono said even if **the** number of young men involved in illegal activities is 200, "that's still less than 1 percent of **the** 60,000 **Chaldeans**

"For those that go wrong, it may be that prestige of having money. But they did not bring that habit with them. They learned it here by what was going on around them -- they became trapped and tempted. And for some, once they get hooked on **the** money, it is hard to get away."

John Mackay, an insurance company program analyst, said a person's honor "is not just your own. It goes to your family, too."

Mackay said **the** community is striving to present a positive image and to build bridges into **the** broader society in **the** wake of news accounts about criminal activities in **the** community.

"We are trying to emphasize **the** positive -- make it a positive presentation rather than getting into rebuttal of accusations," Mackay said.

Along those lines, **the** community is building a **Chaldean** Political Action Committee to promote **Chaldeans** in politics and to support other political figures who are sensitive to **the** community's concerns, he said.

He also said **the** community is developing anti-drug programs **through the** church to educate their children.

Kassab said: "There is always a bad apple in **the** bunch. . . . But this is not restricted to **the** **Chaldean** community. Unfortunately, this is human nature. It can happen in any group."

Caption: Photo

: A gas station at 7 Mile Road and Woodward was bombed July 27.

Residents in **the** area of Woodward-7 Mile-John R have had to endure a year of bomb blasts and gunfire around their homes, shops and churches.

Memo: **THE** KALASHO COCAINE PIPELINE; SERIES;

SEE ALSO SWICKARD STORY PAGE 1A

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

Page: 12A;

Index Terms: SERIES ; DRUG ; VIOLENCE ; CHALDEAN

Record Number: 8902160756

Copyright (c) 1989 Detroit Free Press