

## **POLICE SUSPECT RIVAL SHOT GANG MEMBER KILLER FIRED FROM CAR IN SOUTHWEST DETROIT**

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Author: JIM SCHAEFER Free Press Staff Writer

Police on Wednesday blamed a southwest Detroit gang in the gunshot slaying of a 19-year-old rival who became vulnerable after being locked out of a fast-food restaurant.

Rafael Ortiz Jr. was shot around 7 p.m. Tuesday after another youth stood up through the sunroof of a car and fired as Ortiz ran away.

Witnesses and police, who recently began cracking down on gangs blamed for violence in the area, gave this account:

Before 7 p.m. Tuesday, Ortiz and Dawn Mendoza, members of the **Latin Counts**, went to McDonald's at Vernor Highway near Dragoon. Outside, they ran into about seven members of the rival Cobras.

After trading insults that included one Cobra saying, "We're **Count** killers," Mendoza and Ortiz went inside, but a Cobra carrying a baseball bat followed, Mendoza said Wednesday.

Inside, Mendoza said, the Cobra swung the bat at them until the restaurant manager kicked out Ortiz and the other man, locking the door behind them.

Mendoza said she frantically asked the manager, "What are you doing? . . . She locked me in but locked him out . . . by himself."

Just then, "I saw the Cobra with a gun," she said, and Ortiz grabbed his stomach.

Ortiz died in the emergency room at Southwest General Hospital.

Police questioned several members of both gangs but were still seeking the gunman Wednesday. They said he is a member of the Cobras.

Ortiz came to Detroit in 1981 from Chicago, where his older brother was a member of another gang, family members said. Detroit police have said they are investigating possible connections between the **Latin Counts** in this city and other gangs in Chicago.

Police have warned the **Latin Counts** against retaliation, Mendoza said. There will be none "if the police do their job and lock them up," she said.

Before he was killed, Ortiz had tried to change his life, Mendoza said. About a month ago, he moved to live with his mother in Hamtramck.

"He wanted to get a job, wanted to go back to school," she said. "They moved to Hamtramck to get away from everything."

But Ortiz couldn't get away, she said.

Asked why Ortiz was killed, Mendoza said, "Because he was a **Count** ."

On Dec. 23, the 16-year-old brother of the reputed leader of the Detroit **Latin Counts** was shot to death at a gas station near the McDonald's where Ortiz was killed.

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