# THE POLICE RESPONSE TO *gangs*

## Case Studies of Five Cities



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# The Police Response to Gangs: Case Studies of Five Cities

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# Acknowledgments

Five police practitioners participated in the original research effort for these case studies in 1991–1992. William Tegeler was a lieutenant with the Santa Ana, Calif., Police Department, one of the nation's leading police departments implementing community-oriented policing. Tegeler was district commander of the department's Developmental Policing District—a decentralized police command—and maintained full responsibility for patrol, investigations, traffic, narcotics, vice and gang activity. Tegeler was a key representative in the Mayor's Task Force on Neighborhood Policing in Santa Ana—an effort designed to educate citizens about the department's approach to policing and elicit community input. Jim Weston was a deputy chief and division commander of the Reno, Nev., Police Department. He later became chief of that department. As a major, Carolyn Robison Kusler of Tulsa, Okla., Police Department served as an area commander. She was previously assigned as a training division commander and, as an area commander, pioneered the implementation of community-oriented policing in the department. Larry Lewis was a captain in the Corona, Calif., Police Department, which he joined in 1989. He served as division commander with responsibility for one of three major divisions within the department, and was in charge of the city's community-oriented policing program, a gang awareness program, field operations and special enforcement. Lewis previously worked for the Fullerton, Calif., Police Department from 1971 to 1989. A fifth practitioner was selected but was unable to complete the research effort.

In addition to the participation by practitioner investigators, PERF obtained the guidance and insight of an advisory committee in crafting key elements of the research plan. Participating on this advisory committee were Ernest Curtsinger, former chief of the St. Petersburg, Fla., Police Department; then-Division Chief Ronald C. Sloan of Aurora, Colo., later chief of the Arvada, Colo., Police Department; and Chief Ronald Nelson of University of California Police Department, formerly chief of the Berkeley, Calif., Police Department. These advisory committee members helped identify criteria for site selection, reviewed preliminary data collection tasks, reviewed case study protocols and reviewed each of the cases, providing guidance and direction for refinements. Their efforts helped refine the research design for the project, ensured completeness of data collection and consistency across the multiple sites.

# Chapter 1
# Introduction

In 1990, problems with youth gangs and street drug sales were receiving a great deal of attention by police agencies across the nation. Departments were responding to a variety of gang- and drug-related issues such as drive-by gang shootings and warfare between gangs over drug turf. Public and media attention to these problems was heightened and police agencies were responding to concerns.

During this time, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) received funding from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to study the varying responses of five police agencies to gang problems, paying particular attention to the nexus between gangs and drugs. The objective of the study was to develop a broader understanding of the various approaches that local police departments developed to respond to gang problems in their communities. It was hoped that the findings from this study—in the form of narrative case studies—would provide useful insight into the day-to-day operations of police agencies struggling to deal with emerging or rapidly evolving gang problems in their cities. The study offered a glimpse of how police agencies are influenced by public and political pressure to respond to high-profile problems and how organizational changes occur in response to these pressures.

In 1996, PERF and NIJ decided to update the original research conducted in 1991–1992 by conducting a limited follow-up with the agencies in the study. Thus, the original snapshot of police responses to gang problems was followed with an inquiry into how the department's approach had changed over the last five years. From both a research and practical perspective, this "longitudinal" look at police responses provides unique insight into how police agencies respond operationally and institutionally over time to prevailing crime-related problems.

The result of this two-phase research project is a set of descriptive case studies developed for each of the five cities studied. Each of the studies can be read and utilized as a stand-alone descriptive document, particularly for instructors using a case study method for police management training. The documents also form a compendium to contrast various and alternative responses being used by police agencies.

## Research Approach

PERF conducted its research using a case study approach to identify and document police responses to drug and gang problems in five police agencies—Austin, Texas; Kansas City, Mo.; Chicago, Ill.; Metro-Dade County, Fla.; and San Diego, Calif. The sites in this study were selected based on the severity of their drug and gang problems, for regional diversity, for ethnic diversity in terms of gang manifestation, and because of variations—at that time—in their approach to gang problems.

The case study approach provided a solid framework for conducting the research. In 1991, PERF used a panel of gang experts to provide guidance, and research staff developed a rigorous site protocol—a list of structured questions—to guide on-site data collection, which was performed by a team of a police practitioner and a researcher. This investigative team approach was designed to generate maximum relevance for police practitioners while ensuring high research standards. Standardization of cases was maintained through the use of a protocol; research teams were provided guidance on maintaining neutrality and a nonjudgmental approach to the research task. The teams collected information through structured interviews with identified individuals within and outside each agency. Extensive documentation was collected in the form of interdepartmental memoranda, news clippings, crime statistics, general orders and other documents. The follow-up research conducted in 1996 consisted primarily of telephone interviews with key people and review of new documentation from each agency.

On the site visits in 1991 and 1992, the research teams used a protocol consisting of three sets of questions designed to formally guide information collection and ensure some standardization among cases. The first set of questions dealt with identifying events that stimulated the agency to respond to gang and/or drug problems. Answers to these questions described the background of the case and chronicled the development of the problem. The second set of questions sought to describe the decisions that were made and the responses that were implemented by the agency. The third set of questions sought to describe the outcome of the department's response, including any evaluative information, if available.

Background questions included identifying the jurisdiction's economic conditions, political arrangements, race relations, geographic location, demographic characteristics and other background factors. Such questions included determining the police department's culture, leadership style, policies, procedures, organizational structure, staffing and resource allocation plan. Research staff also identified key decision-makers in the organization, reviewed their tenure and experience, reviewed the city's form of government, and determined the relationship between key elected officials and the chief of police. In particular, the research team sought to determine the degree to which the department's response to drug- and gang-related problems was influenced by local politics and community demand.

The research team also documented the scope of the current gang problem in the jurisdiction, determining how many gangs and gang members existed, their ethnicity, age distribution, leadership and primary activities. To the extent possible, the research team examined the current gang problem to determine any evidence of change in gang characteristics over time, carefully examining the nexus between gangs and drug activity.

The second set of questions in the protocol examined the agency's current response to perceived gang and drug problems. In addition to determining if the agency used a special unit or generalist approach to gang problems, the research team looked carefully at how the department formally defined gang membership, gang activity and gang-related incidents. The team

sought to identify any specific triggering event, set of events or other stimulus that created the need for the agency to respond specifically to gang problems, including identifying who made the decision, determining who exerted control in the decision-making process and the degree of formality of that decision-making.

The team identified specific information that was used in decision-making and determined what external events and/or individuals affected the department's decision-making. In addition, the team reviewed the degree to which the department provided explicit guidance for patrol officers and supervisors on how to deal with gang-related problems, examining, for example, the extent to which decisions related to gang enforcement had been defaulted to street officers, street supervisors and/or unit commanders.

The team studied each agency for the degree of its focus on enforcement, determining if elements of gang prevention, education or other proactive approaches were included in the response. The team examined the extent to which other public and private agencies in the jurisdiction collaborated with the police department in its gang efforts and examined the existence of intra-agency links, again, determining the formality or informality of these linkages.

In the third set of questions, the research team looked at the results or outcomes of the department's response to gangs, examining department members' attitudes toward the way in which gang enforcement efforts were conducted, and police officers' perceptions of the community's attitudes toward gang enforcement. The team also collected and reviewed information about the impact of the anti-gang effort as revealed by department members, press accounts, local reports and statistics.

## Site Selection

In Kansas City, the study originally reviewed the department's integration of a discretionary grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance into the departmental response to gang-related problems, scrutinizing efforts related to a problem with Jamaican posses. In San Diego, the research effort partially focused on the role of the District Attorney's Office, the recipient of another BJA discretionary grant, in addressing gang-related problems by using a vertical prosecution effort.

In Austin, the research effort involved documenting the department's generalist approach to its gang-related problems, while the Metro-Dade study focused on the department's mixed decentralized-centralized approach to gang problems with its emphasis on collaborative sharing of information with other agencies. In Chicago, the study focused on how various units within the department, as well as other local police agencies, worked together to address crime in a particular Chicago neighborhood.

Although no formal cross-site analysis was included in this study, research teams noted the wide variance in the manifestation of gang problems from one city to another and also with-

in cities. Similarly, the range of police responses to gang problems was equally varied. The range of these findings is discussed in detail in the final chapter of this report. The variance in the manifestation of gang- and drug-related problems appears to have become increasingly clear. In recognizing that variance, some police had begun taking steps to develop tailored responses to their problems. During the course of the research, several agencies were on the precipice of altering their departmental responses to gang problems. Agencies' future plans are reflected in these studies, providing a snapshot of where some police agencies' are headed as they continue to seek effective responses to gangs.

# Chapter 2
# Austin Police Department's Response to Gangs

As Austin, Texas, grew in size, its gang-related problems also grew. In response to these and other youth-related issues, the Austin Police Department experimented with a number of tactics, ranging from school-based prevention programs to proactive investigation of violent gang crimes. Throughout the department's anti-gang efforts, police and community leaders stressed community partnerships and the philosophy that the police do not have all the answers to gang- and youth-related crime.

Two pivotal points marked major transitions in the way that the Austin Police Department and the wider community addressed gangs. In late 1990, a gang-related shooting in the downtown area sparked increased public attention to rising gang violence and led the department to focus more attention on how they were addressing such violence. The shooting prompted a departmental reorganization and assignment of gang enforcement, intelligence and prevention work to various elements within the department. In 1994, the department made another major change when it consolidated responsibility for anti-gang efforts in a new unit—the Gang Suppression Unit.

## Overview of Austin

The city of Austin is located about 200 miles south of Dallas-Fort Worth, 162 miles west of Houston, and 77 miles north of San Antonio. During the period covered by this study, it was one of the fastest growing cities in the United States; it experienced a 35 percent increase in population, from 345,496 to 465,622, between 1980 and 1990. The population was spread throughout the city's 225 square miles. According to 1990 census data, 23 percent of the population was Hispanic, 12 percent was black, 62 percent was white and 3 percent was Asian.

About 10 percent of Austin's families lived below the poverty level. Most low-income families lived in East Austin. Some Austin residents considered the community separated by economics and a manmade barrier, Interstate 35, that separated east from west. "The west has moved further west and the east has gone down" was how one city councilor described it.

Austin is the capital of Texas, the county seat of Travis County and the home of the University of Texas system. The city provided social programs, health services, housing and economic development programs, supplementary educational programs, recreation and victims' services, among other programs. It had a city manager form of government with an elected mayor and six city councilors.

## The Austin Police Department

The Austin Police Department operated under a community policing philosophy since 1988, after the city's Part I crime statistics had gone up 14 percent. Under that philosophy, the department formed coalitions with other city agencies, such as the Austin Independent School District and the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services, and focused considerable resources on prevention and interdiction programs for youths, among other special populations.

The department employed 1,020 officers at the time of this study. The chief of police, Elizabeth Watson, oversaw three assistant chiefs, each responsible for a division. The Operations Division included patrol services for the city's three areas (North, Central and South); the Support Services Division oversaw such functions as personnel, computer services and communications; and the Operations Support Division focused on investigations as well as special services such as the crime lab. Under the direction of the deputy chief for investigations were numerous specialized units focusing on specific crimes, such as homicide, robbery, family violence, organized crime, narcotics, etc. The Gang Suppression Unit was located in this area.

## The History and Nature of Gangs in Austin

Gangs have been in and around the Austin area for many years. Hispanic gangs in their current form can be traced back to the 1950s. However, gangs were not a serious problem until 1988. Several police officers attributed the escalation of Austin's gang problem to the influence of the movie *Colors*, which popularized the drive-by shooting and the mimicking of gang behaviors.

Gang Suppression Unit personnel estimated that, in 1996, there were approximately 70 active gangs in Austin. The department had, over time, identified over 200 gangs, but only classified 70 as active because of frequent dissolution or merging of gangs. It was estimated that there were 4,000 to 5,000 gang members in Austin.

The major Austin gangs included the Este Grande Varrios, the Latin Kings, the Brothas, the Crips and the 10th Syndicate. For a long time, only the Latin Kings had ties to gangs in other cities (in that case, Chicago), but more recent evidence has indicated that the Crips and Bloods had ties to their Los Angeles counterparts. In the mid-1990s, Austin was also just beginning to see gangs distinguishing themselves as either "People" or "Folks"—two gang confederations or alliances present in Illinois and other states.

Gang membership was often based on neighborhood boundaries, and, though gangs did form along racial or ethnic lines to some extent, most gangs included members of varied backgrounds. In 1991, Sergeant Harold Piatt of the Criminal Intelligence Unit reported that "if you live in the neighborhood, you can belong" to a gang regardless of your race or ethnicity.

In 1996, Officers Tony Hipolito and Ray Brown of the Gang Suppression Unit concurred that there were no hard and fast racial barriers that defined gangs. For example, though the Crips and Bloods had mostly African-American members, they also included a handful of white, Hispanic and Asian members. Most of Austin's gangs and gang members were Hispanic, with African-Americans, Asians and whites following, in that order.

Despite the mixed nature of many gangs, however, police used ethnic terms to differentiate between two primary types of gangs in Austin. "Hispanic" gangs, also referred to as "turf" gangs, focused primarily on maintaining a territory and loyalty among gang members. "Black" gangs, on the other hand, primarily focused on making money through drug sales. They may have defended their territory, but not as an end in itself, rather to protect their share of the drug market. Piatt stated that

> The Hispanic gangs are the oldest gangs in Austin and primarily originate in the neighborhood. The black and Jamaican gangs are involved in drug sales to anyone wanting to buy, while the Oriental gangs keep criminal activity within the Oriental community. The violent street gangs are racially mixed and deal in violence for the sake of violence.

From 1991 to 1996, the number and activities of black drug-dealing gangs increased. The Hispanic gangs had also become more involved in drug dealing, possibly because Hispanic gangs saw the economic success of the black gangs and decided to follow suit. The type and extent of gangs' drug dealing activity varied among different gangs. The black gangs dealt in crack cocaine obtained from Houston and did not have direct links to major suppliers. Hispanic gangs were increasingly involved in dealing heroin, marijuana and powder cocaine. One gang, the Brothas, was known to have a direct link to suppliers in Colombia.

The city of Austin recorded 40,632 Part I index crimes in 1994. The crime rate per 100,000 population for the Austin metropolitan area was 6,195. The Gang Suppression Unit maintained annual statistics of gang-related crimes in Austin, and those crimes, both violent and nonviolent, increased yearly. For example, there were 358 gang-related Part I crimes in 1991, including four murders, while there were 743 gang-related Part I crimes in 1995, including eight murders. Part II gang-related offenses rose from 415 in 1991 to 1,319 in 1995. Of the 1995 gang-related crimes, the most common offenses were as follows: criminal mischief (41%), aggravated assault (24%), simple assault (21%), drug violations (13%), theft (9%), auto theft (9%) and robbery (8%). The department made 1,247 arrests in connection with those crimes, of which 672 (54%) were of juveniles.

## The Austin Police Department's Response to Gangs

The Austin Police Department's response to gangs can be divided into three primary phases: 1) pre-1990, before the high-profile Congress Avenue shooting that focused public attention on the gang problem; 2) 1990 to 1994, when, in response to the Congress Avenue shooting

and increasing gang-related problems, the police department made anti-gang efforts a primary focus; and 3) 1994 to the time of this writing, when responsibility for anti-gang issues was centralized in the Gang Suppression Unit.

**The Austin Police Department's Response to Gangs Before 1990**

In the late 1980s, as part of a new community policing emphasis, the police department became proactively involved with the Austin community. Neighborhood centers were established as cooperative ventures among private enterprise, the city, the police and the community in response to public perceptions that officers should become closer to the communities they serve. The centers provided access to needed governmental and social services for those living in the surrounding neighborhoods. The neighborhood programs, youth-related programs such as DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) and PAL (Police Athletic League), and other efforts addressed gang problems in an indirect, ad hoc fashion. Each unit or program dealt with gangs only as gang members' activities fell within their purview; there was no organizational focus on the gang issue. When he was commander of the Repeat Offender Unit, Captain Joe Putman reported that "the missions of each unit were not interrelated to the gang issue. Gangs were a side-line issue. Gangs, per se, were not addressed in a systematic or coordinated fashion."

Before 1990, the closest thing to a gang unit in the Austin Police Department was the Hispanic Crimes Unit, formed in 1984 in response to a growing number of unreported crimes in Hispanic neighborhoods. There had been three or four unsolved homicides of immigrants, and an increasing number of robberies by assault among the undocumented population. Communication between the department's robbery squad, which had only one bilingual investigator, and the Hispanic population was minimal. In addition, the undocumented population was mobile and had no ready access to telephones. As a result, a lot of cases involving Hispanics just stacked up—no information, no leads, no solutions.

Recognizing that a lack of communication with and trust of the police exacerbated these problems, an investigator assigned four officers to focus on overcoming language and cultural barriers to solve crimes involving Hispanics. The unit soon became highly acclaimed for its work.

Though Hispanic gangs were the most populous gangs in the Austin area, the Hispanic Crimes Unit was created to support the Criminal Investigations Unit, not to deal specifically with gangs. Though unit personnel came into contact with gang members as part of their investigative and surveillance activities, gangs were not the focus.

During this time, the department also initiated several prevention-oriented programs for at-risk youths. Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE), begun in 1987, focused on teaching fifth and seventh graders the life skills needed to resist drug use and other negative activities, such as gang membership. To complement DARE, the police department developed the Austin Police Promoting Leadership and Education (APPLE) camp, a week-long program for

DARE graduates that included presentations by law enforcement and emergency personnel, and activities designed to build self-esteem. The Police Athletic League (PAL) was formed to build young people's character and self-esteem by sponsoring sports activities, and stressing the importance of respect for others and adherence to the law.

In response to growing gang violence, several police officers, on a volunteer basis, organized softball games among gangs and held gang meetings to cool the tensions among rival gangs.

The police department's various responses to rising gang problems were one piece of a wider community effort to focus on troubled and at-risk youths. In March 1990, City Manager Camille Cates Barnett created an interdepartmental task force "to present issues to the City Council and recommend actions that would be most effective in addressing issues affecting youth at risk." In its final report, the task force identified gang involvement as an indicator of youths who are at risk.

At the community level, Robert Mendoza, an art teacher at Johnston High School, led efforts to open avenues of opportunity for youths who did not want to belong to a gang. He organized a softball and athletic program for at-risk youths in East Austin, where gang violence had escalated since December 1988, when drive-by shootings increased dramatically.[1]

In addition, the public became aware of the growing violence as newspaper headlines highlighted the problems with gangs and youths. The *Austin American-Statesman*, for example, published articles with the following headlines: "Gang Battles, Crack Trade Blamed as Arrests Mount" (April 22, 1990); "Teen Gets 10-Year Sentence in Slaying" (May 30, 1990); "5 Injured After Guns Fired at East Austin Crowd" (June 4, 1990); and "Death After Concert: Gang Ties Suspected in Chase by Youths" (July 28, 1990).

### The Congress Avenue Shooting and the Police Department's Response, 1990–1994

On Sept. 20, 1990, gunfire crossed from East Austin into the heart of the city, and the Austin community realized that gang violence was no longer contained on one street, one neighborhood or one side of the interstate highway.

It was 4:30 p.m. on September 20. Austin's rush hour was just beginning. A bus driver who regularly stopped at 5th Street and Congress Avenue looked into his rearview mirror as he pulled away from the stop that day. He saw about half a dozen youths on the intersection's southwest corner begin to cross the street toward a dozen youths on the northwest corner. He could tell by the gestures and facial expressions that a fight was about to begin. Then, abruptly, he heard gunfire. The violence he had previously only read about was now happening in the middle of the central business district—a gang confrontation complete with guns, violence and chaos.

The day before the Congress Avenue shooting, 18-year-old Arthur Harris, a member of one of East Austin's gangs (the Este Grande Varrios or EGV) put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger. The news reports said that his biggest dream was to quit the life of a gang member. According to art teacher Robert Mendoza, Arthur "kept using the word 'trapped' when he talked about it. He said he felt trapped by the gang life and he tried to keep younger kids from joining gangs."[2] The next day, some of Harris' friends and fellow gang members, who were hurt, angry and depressed by his death, got into a fight with members of a rival gang they suspected of insulting the memory of their deceased friend.

And fight it out they did. Armed with a 9mm Smith & Wesson, EGV members found the offending Latin King gang members in front of Eckerd's Drug at the bus stop at 5th and Congress. Each group taunted the other with words and gestures. As the EGVs approached the Latin Kings, one of the Latin Kings pulled a glass bottle out of a trash can and threw it at the EGVs. Arthur's grieving friend Bonifacio Alba pulled a gun from a fanny pack around his waist and opened fire. Three people were hit—a 16-year-old girl, a 16-year-old boy (both with the Latin Kings), and a 61-year-old man who had tried to stop the fight.

Sergeant Edward Villegas, at that time a supervisor in the Street Crimes Unit, described the Congress Avenue shooting as the "end of the denial stage" in Austin's response to gangs. Before the shooting, the police department's approach to gang activity was fragmented, and coordination of city initiatives focusing on youths was in its infancy. The death of reluctant gang member Arthur Harris sparked a movement that made controlling gangs number one on the agenda of the public, elected officials and the police department.

Some citizens saw a police gang unit as the best response to gang problems, but city officials and the police department focused on a more comprehensive effort that went beyond a single police department unit. The youth-at-risk task force that had been formed before the shooting developed an issue paper that presented the group's view of the appropriate response: "There is no single solution to the rising problems of gang violence...They must be addressed by a broad based community effort and there must be cooperation and coordination between all groups involved." The paper went on to describe the police department's role as something more than a heavy-handed approach: "In the area of law enforcement, the City of Austin is committed to prevention and alternative programs for youths at risk."

The police chief at that time, Jim Everett, echoed the need for a multidisciplinary, communitywide response to gangs, remarking that "a 'systemized' response by the entire police force instead of the creation of a special unit is the answer to stopping gang violence in Austin."[3] He advocated a multidimensional approach including prevention, education and enforcement. Then-Deputy Chief Ken Muennink concurred: "There is no quick fix. It's not a police problem, it's not a school problem, it's a community problem."[4] Though the public's primary call was for more police officers on the street, that is not the approach the department took. As Captain Putman expressed it, "Adding more police officers equals putting more people in jail. Putting people in jail does not solve the problem."

The balanced approach to gangs was also supported by the elected political leadership. City Councilor Gus Garcia emphasized that "gangs are a core part of the problem. They attract kids in and for whatever reason the kids want to hang with it." But then he added, "The major focus should be on the majority of kids—gangs should just be a part of it. They are the creator of a lot of problems, but a comprehensive approach is needed—schools, police, etc." This emphasis on service, cooperation, and identifying and attacking the root causes of gang membership stilled the public's gang hysteria and galvanized action within Austin's diverse communities to deal with the problem.

Before developing a new police department anti-gang strategy, Chief Everett reviewed the past approach to gangs and summarized it as follows:

> Initially we tried to get the gang members to talk to each other and try to work out their differences rather than fight with or shoot at each other. This was done by a series of meetings which eventually led to supervised sports activities. This worked for a while but was not enough to hold the fragile truce. Gang members started assaulting each other and drive-by shootings followed soon afterwards. The violence continued to escalate unabated and the criminal intelligence unit became more and more involved in identifying gang members and gathering information on specific crimes.

Everett reviewed the department's units, programs and divisions to determine their contribution to the prevention, intervention and suppression of gang activity and to identify gaps in service. The review revealed that the necessary pieces for dealing with gangs were in place but not a focused design. For example, the units of the Special Investigations Division (Repeat Offender Unit, Hispanic Crimes Unit, Criminal Intelligence Unit and Fugitive Section) had a mission that did not deal with gangs specifically. To close this gap, their focus was expanded to include local gang members. Because many gang members were repeatedly involved in violent acts but escaped prosecution because of the victims' reluctance to prosecute, the focus and name of the Special Investigations Division was changed to the Repeat Offender Division.

The units within the Repeat Offender Division were expanded to accommodate the broadened focus. The Hispanic Crimes Unit and the Property Recovery Unit were combined and renamed the Street Crimes and Gang Section. The combination allowed the formation of two units and expanded their coverage from eight to 16 hours a day. There was some opposition to renaming the Hispanic Crimes Unit because of its identity with the Hispanic community. But, according to Captain Putman, "the reorganization allowed us to address the issue as a gang problem, not a race problem."

The Street Crimes and Gang Section continued to use the high-profile tactics developed by the Hispanic Crimes Unit, including regularly checking gang hangouts and enforcing criminal violations. The officers were guided by weekly information provided to them by the

Criminal Intelligence Unit. They in return referred intelligence on active gang members to the Special Investigations Section for targeting.

The former Repeat Offender Unit was divided into two units, one to work days and one to work nights, and renamed the Special Investigations Section. The assigned personnel were cross-trained with the Street Crimes and Gang Section officers in gang investigations and preparing arrest and search warrants. The Special Investigations Section used search warrants, stings, reverse buys and sales, and paid informants to target individual gang members. They also cooperated with prosecutors, probation, parole and corrections personnel.

The Criminal Intelligence, Crime Analysis, Crime Stoppers and Fugitive Units were combined and renamed the Criminal Apprehension Section. The section's primary purpose was the collection, analysis and distribution of information on known or suspected violators, and their arrest and prosecution.

In 1990, the Criminal Intelligence Unit started its own local gang file. Based on the information it gathered, the unit published weekly intelligence bulletins on gang-related activities, including 1) gang activity for the week—a synopsis of each incident by area, other activity in the area, related offense reports, victim and suspect information, and persons arrested; 2) drive-by shooting incidents and charges filed; 3) gang offense reports filed that week; and 4) gang arrests by gang, offense and status (juvenile or adult). The information was distributed widely among city officials and the police department. The bulletins guided the activities of the Street Crimes and Special Investigations officers.

The Criminal Apprehension Section also conducted training in gang identification and reporting. All officers received two hours of in-service training relating to gangs, and how to recognize and report their activities. They were instructed in procedures to readily identify their incident reports as gang-related so that data entry personnel could record the information in the gang files. This field information, along with other intelligence, formed the basis for the Criminal Intelligence Unit's weekly gang bulletins.

To assist with prosecutions, the Austin district attorney's office committed to priority prosecution of gang members. Four assistant district attorneys were housed in the Repeat Offender Division. Whenever a gang member was charged with a crime, the Criminal Intelligence Unit provided the district attorney's office with a packet of information on the individual. The information included prior arrests, nonarrest involvements, probation or parole status, and other pertinent data.

The Criminal Intelligence Unit also networked with probation and parole by exchanging information on prison gang members who were released into the community. The gang hot line also received anonymous tips concerning gang members involved in criminal activity.

To increase the opportunity for a coordinated approach to the gang problem by other part-

ners in the criminal justice system, the Criminal Intelligence Unit hosted weekly gang intelligence meetings. These meetings provided a forum for each of the units in the Repeat Offender Division and representatives from each patrol area in the city to meet with representatives from probation and parole, the district attorney's office, juvenile court, the sheriff's office and other interested parties. Officer Hipolito, then in the Criminal Intelligence Unit, chaired the meetings. Each person presented current information concerning criminal activities of gang members. The dialogue helped identify those on probation or parole whose illegal activities could result in revocation of their release status.

The final piece in the department's reorganization—which was officially named the Gang Intervention Program—was a new Gang Liaison Unit. This unit focused on prevention and intervention. Officer Robert Martinez, a nationally recognized gang expert, was selected as the sole member of the unit in October 1990. In May 1991, Officer Mark Gil was assigned to the unit. Gil's experience in the Repeat Offender, Narcotics and Hispanic Crimes Units complemented Martinez's extensive experience with Hispanic gangs. According to Gil, "We were both born and raised in Austin to poor families and we made it. This qualifies us as instant role models to those who claim circumstances as a barrier."

Together, the two developed an anti-gang strategy that linked the resources of the community and the police department. Part of their strategy included a media campaign. In January 1992, anti-gang posters were placed in locations that gang-prone youths frequented. In addition, two public service announcements were produced for television. One featured the Dallas Cowboys, the other Texas Senator Gonzalo Barrientos, appealing to youths to find other opportunities for expression: "Say no to street gangs. Say yes to your future." Gil wrote an anti-gang rap popular with the kids in schools.

Gil and Martinez were very supportive of the weekly gang intelligence meetings to target repeat offenders. "These meetings are essential to our function," said Officer Gil, "because we can't intervene and prevent without the hardcore off the streets. Our intervention and prevention efforts run parallel with the suppression campaign."

At the same time that the police department instituted these anti-gang efforts, other community stakeholders became involved in gang issues as well. A "police can't do it all" philosophy was affirmed in part by the demise of the softball games previously organized by police officers. According to Piatt, "The officers couldn't play ball on Saturday and arrest Monday through Friday." Then-Assistant City Manager Alicia Perez, who was responsible for emergency services, described the Congress Avenue shooting as "changing the way we do our work." She espoused an "integrated approach that avoids duplication of services."

In October 1990, Mayor Lee Cooke formed a Community Task Force on Gangs, Crime and Drugs, a broad-based group that included various community members and representatives of the police department. After listening to hours of testimony, the task force compiled a report titled *Code Blue: Youth at Risk—Partnership to Reclaim Our Community* in May 1991.

The report focused on the need to provide "a combination of general direction and specific processes, programs, and strategies to begin the hard work of generating a sense in our citizens that they, too, can become a part of the solution to gangs, crime, and drugs." The report outlined 77 recommendations in a number of general areas, such as education, social services, mental health, recreation, employment, law enforcement and prosecution. In September 1991, the recommendations were translated into action when the mayor and city council added over $1 million to the budget for programs that targeted youths. This was the first budget increase in six years for services such as health, social services and child care. The council adopted at-risk youths as their number-one priority, and their budget allocations affirmed that commitment.

**The Austin Police Department's Response to Gangs, 1994–1996**

This approach was in place until October 1994, when the department did what citizens had called for after the Congress Avenue shooting—they started a Gang Suppression Unit. Gang unit personnel attributed the unit's formation to the fact that the department's response to gangs was fragmented among various units. No one had primary responsibility for gang problems, and personnel who were involved in the response to gangs had to add these responsibilities to their other duties. Gang unit personnel also surmised that perhaps the initial hesitation to start a gang unit had something to do with maintaining Austin's image as a booming, growing city. Political leaders might have worried that creating a gang unit would therefore mean that Austin had a "gang problem"—a label they did not want on their city.

The Gang Suppression Unit comprised 17 people. To form the unit, the department took officers from the Street Crimes and Gang Section, two detectives from the investigations bureau, two supervisors, and Officer Hipolito from the Criminal Intelligence Unit. In 1996, the unit was staffed with one lieutenant, two sergeants, two detectives, and 12 patrol officers. The patrol officers essentially did the work of detectives, as they were highly involved in gang-related investigations.

The Gang Suppression Unit was located on the same floor as the Narcotics Unit, and initially, drug investigations were a priority, but that changed. The Gang Suppression Unit's primary focus became investigating violent crimes, such as assaults and homicides, that were defined as gang-related. An officer arriving at a crime scene determined if the incident was gang-related based on whether the victim, suspect and/or witnesses had gang affiliations. The department used the following definitions of "gang" and "gang member" to guide its information gathering and investigations of gang activity:

> A "criminal street gang" refers to three or more persons having a common identifying sign or symbol or an identifiable leadership who continuously or regularly associate in the commission of criminal activities.

A gang member is someone who meets one or more of the following criteria:

- The individual admits membership in a gang.
- A reliable informant identifies the individual as a gang member.
- An informant of previously untested reliability identifies the individual as a gang member, and his or her information is corroborated by independent information.
- The individual resides in or frequents a particular gang's area and affects their style of dress, use of hand signs, symbols or tattoos, and associates with known gang members.
- The individual has been arrested two times in the company of identified gang members for offenses that are consistent with gang activity.

If an incident was defined as gang-related, then officers from the Gang Suppression Unit got called to the scene, along with others (such as homicide investigators when the incident involved a homicide), and participated in investigating the crime. The Gang Suppression Unit focused on gang-related violent crimes. They were less involved in investigations or enforcement of other gang-related crimes, such as graffiti or property crimes, but would assist other units in investigating such crimes, if needed.

As part of a Safe Streets program, the Gang Suppression Unit had two federal officers, one from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and one from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), assigned to work with them on federal investigations of gang members and activities. The federal officers assisted the gang officers with long-term investigations of drug trafficking, including undercover buys, and street sweeps. Additionally, one gang officer was assigned as a liaison with the Narcotics Unit to help in conducting undercover drug buys and surveillance as a way to target drug-dealing gang members.

Additional gang unit duties included gathering and sharing gang intelligence information, responding to calls reporting gang activity, saturating neighborhoods with high levels of reported gang activities, and cooperating with others involved in investigating gang-related drug activity.

According to Assistant Chief Michael McDonald, the Gang Suppression Unit's operations were influenced by the department's community policing emphasis, whereby beat officers were responsible for forging relationships with citizens to reduce crime and fear of crime, and improve quality of life. "The gang unit plays a support role for beat officers," commented McDonald. "If you have situations out of hand in an area, and routine patrol operations can't adequately respond, then our gang unit's role is to work with the community and officers to

stabilize the situation. Our approach probably contrasts with other department's approaches, where the gang unit, rather than the patrol officer, has primary responsibility to deter gang activity. The gang unit supplies intelligence, training, covert and overt support to patrol officers' efforts to deal with gang problems."

Officer Hipolito was in charge of maintaining and sharing gang intelligence. Patrol officers checked off a box on their incident reports to indicate if an incident involved a gang or gang members. Each day, Hipolito had reports from the previous day waiting for him when he arrived at work. With the assistance of college interns and other officers, he entered that information into a computer as part of the Gang Activity Tracking System (GATS). All tactical units, which were located on the same floor as the gang unit, had access to this information through a network server. The information was downloaded onto a computer disk about once a month, and then uploaded onto patrol officers' laptop computers so they could use the information in the field.

In 1996, the Austin Police Department was one of 15 cities to receive a grant from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), U.S. Department of Justice, to improve police response to gangs. Improving the department's computer capabilities for sharing gang-related intelligence information was a major component of this grant.

The department planned to set up a Wide Area Networking (WAN) program to allow for better information sharing among police department units as well as between the department and outside entities, such as schools, the housing authority and citizens. Officers would be connected via radio modems to a central server, whereby they could use their laptop computers in the field to pull up intelligence information on gang members, without having to download the information.

Schools would also have access to this system, so they could both obtain information on their students' gang involvement, and add information to the intelligence files based on school personnel's interaction with gang members. Hipolito saw this as a great benefit for the police department, because school personnel see youths every day and therefore have much more information on the daily activities of gang members.

In addition, citizens would be able to go to storefront police offices and pull up general information on computers. They could find out about what was happening in their neighborhoods, such as if certain houses had been identified as being inhabited by gang members. They could also get information on services available, such as counseling services for youths they knew who might be involved in gang activities.

Gang unit personnel also hoped that citizens would provide additional information that would help identify gang hot spots. The COPS grant allowed for an additional mechanism to provide long-term police presence in such hot spots. The Gang Suppression Unit had been highly successful at cleaning up gang activity in neighborhoods by saturating an area for sev-

eral weeks, but once they left, the problems recurred. The department thus developed a unit called the Crime Net Unit. Patrol officers were assigned to this unit for three months, and their task was to address citizen-identified problems. With support from the COPS grant, the gang unit planned to train Crime Net officers in identifying and responding to gang problems, and those officers would then be responsible for helping to maintain improvements in neighborhoods that had been targeted by the gang unit. This system also allowed the gang unit to train many patrol officers in gang-related issues. The gang unit hoped that once they returned to their regular assignments, these patrol officers would be better able to assist the gang unit because they would have more knowledge of gang-related activities and issues.

Finally, the COPS grant allowed additional mechanisms for the gang unit to coordinate their activities with other entities. For example, probation and parole officers for gang members and other youths would ride along with patrol officers. If the corrections officers witnessed one of their charges violating terms of probation or parole, they would have the authority to authorize an arrest.

Though it was not a primary activity, the gang unit did some community outreach and prevention work. Officer Brown did quite a bit of public speaking to community groups, state agencies, school groups and others to make people aware of the gang problem and what they could do to help, "even if it's just keeping track of their own kid to make sure he doesn't get involved in gangs," said Brown.

Brown went into schools, from elementary to high schools, to talk to kids about avoiding gang involvement, but he preferred to work with younger kids. "High school students are combative toward police officers. They know more about gangs than we do," said Brown. Hipolito and Brown agreed that middle-school-aged youths were also difficult to work with, because that was the age that kids began to get involved in gang-related activities, such as vandalism and graffiti. The officers saw a trend whereby younger and younger kids were getting involved in gangs; they once identified 50 fifth graders in one elementary school who had some gang involvement. They were also seeing a second generation of gang members—two-, three- and four-year-olds whose parents were active gang members. Brown recalled seeing photos of toddlers holding guns or flashing gang signs in front of a Christmas tree. "When you see things like that," Brown remarked, "you wonder if we're doing anything. At least, we feel like we're keeping a lid on things."

There were no statistics available to indicate direct correlations between the gang unit's efforts and the nature or rate of gang-related crime. Overall crime statistics in Austin were rising in 1996, which officers partially attributed to a growing population. Nevertheless, gang unit officers believed that gang-related incidents had gone down. They had not responded to as many assaults and shootings in 1996 as they did in 1995. Statistics revealed that the unit investigated 45 fewer cases involving Part I offenses and 69 fewer cases involving Part II offenses in the first six months of 1996 than they investigated in the first six months of 1995. Assaults showed the largest decrease, with 38 fewer aggravated assaults and 63 fewer simple assaults in 1996.

The gang unit also believed they made progress in preventing retaliation crimes, though this could not be supported by statistics since it is impossible to measure crimes that did *not* occur because of gang unit activity. Said Hipolito, "If we're immediately called in when there's a shooting, and are able to make arrests, then there will be less opportunity for retaliation against the perpetrator in that crime."

Communication difficulties between the gang unit and other units limited the gang unit's ability to successfully address all gang-related activities. For example, though many of the offenders that the Narcotics Unit came into contact with were probably associated with gangs, the gang unit did not receive nearly enough information about these offenders to effectively respond. Gang unit officers believed that, instead of focusing so intently on violent crime only and having to rely on other units to get other types of information, it would be more appropriate to have the gang unit involved in enforcement, investigation and intelligence for all gang-related activities.

Hipolito and Brown both believed that having a unit specializing in gangs was necessary, because patrol officers have too many other responsibilities. Chief Watson believed that officers should be generalists rather than specialists, and there was thus a five-year cap on officers working in the gang unit. Hipolito expected to be transferred back to patrol in late 1996, and someone else would be trained to take over his intelligence-gathering and -sharing responsibilities.

## Conclusion

After the Congress Avenue shooting, gang-related problems became the public's number-one agenda item, but Austin's city officials and police department leaders maintained a broader focus and made all at-risk youths the priority. They developed a strategy based on service rather than fear or retaliation, and they involved the public in planning a comprehensive approach that included prevention and education as well as law enforcement.

Within the police department, a departmental review following the Congress Avenue incident revealed that the resources for dealing with gang-related problems were available but were scattered and unfocused. The review led to a departmental reorganization, with responsibility for handling gang problems resting with the Repeat Offender Division, and the Gang Liaison Unit linking police department and community resources. Four years later, the department determined that a more concentrated and focused approach to gangs was needed, and formed a gang unit with centralized responsibility for handling gang problems. With a focus on gang-related violent crimes and improved information systems, the Gang Suppression Unit seemed to be making some headway in addressing gang crime in Austin.

# Chapter 3
# Chicago Police Department's Response to Gangs

The Chicago Police Department (CPD) focused considerable resources on addressing gang- and drug-related crime starting in the early 1980s. The CPD's response to gangs and drugs evolved throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and, by 1996, was significantly influenced by the department's adoption of a community policing focus referred to as the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS). CAPS, with its focus on neighborhood-level, comprehensive problem solving, meant that the backbone of the CPD's response to gangs and drugs was gang tactical officers assigned to 24 of 25 police districts to deal with gang-related crime at the neighborhood and beat level.

The deployment of these tactical teams in Chicago's neighborhoods was supplemented by a centralized unit responsible for gang-related investigations, intelligence and enforcement, along with several regional efforts and other secondary initiatives to deal with Chicago's gangs.

## The Chicago Police Department

Chicago is a lakefront city of approximately 3 million residents occupying an area of 228 square miles; the wider metropolitan area is home to over 6 million people. In 1990, according to census data, the city had a large minority population—approximately 40 percent of Chicago's residents were black, while nearly 20 percent were Hispanic.

The police department employed 16,780 people in 1996, 13,240 of them sworn officers, allowing for a ratio of 4.8 sworn officers per 1,000 residents. The department's 1994 annual budget was $779 million.

The superintendent of police, responsible for overall department management, was appointed by the mayor. The superintendent oversaw the department's five bureaus, each of which was headed by a deputy superintendent. The Bureau of Operational Services included rapid response, beat and tactical officers for the city's 25 police districts; the Bureau of Investigative Services was responsible for the investigation of crimes, the apprehension of offenders, and information sharing and investigative assistance for patrol officers; the Bureau of Technical Services was responsible for technical support such as communications and the crime lab; the Bureau of Staff Services focused on research, planning and training; while the Bureau of Administrative Services managed data systems, budget, personnel and records. The city's five police areas were subdivided into 25 districts, each containing a district station.

In 1993, the Chicago Police Department, under the leadership of Superintendent Matt L.

Rodriguez, adopted a new policing strategy called CAPS, for Chicago's Alternative Policing Strategy. According to the 1993/1994 Biennial Report, the Chicago Police Department stressed "vigorous and impartial enforcement of the law and rapid response to serious crimes and life-threatening emergencies," but also incorporated neighborhood problem solving, partnerships with the community and other city agencies, and departmental organizational change in its daily activities.

Before implementing CAPS, the Chicago Police Department was highly 911-call driven with uniformed patrol officers in the districts spending most of their time in cars responding to emergency calls. Both before and after CAPS implementation, each district was headed by a commander, who, though responsible for all policing issues in his or her district, relied largely on the support of special units (e.g., narcotics, gang crimes, traffic, etc.), which were outside his or her direct control.

As a result of CAPS implementation, each police district had two primary types of officer teams: beat teams comprising officers who worked the same beat on the same watch each day to connect with community residents, and identify and respond to problems; and rapid response teams to answer many of the emergency calls, thus freeing up the beat officers to focus more on long-term problems. All officers, however, were expected to participate in and support community policing and problem-solving activities. Since 1993, the department increased the number of officers available for neighborhood-level participation by hiring new recruits and redeploying officers from administrative positions.

Among the changes and practices instituted to support CAPS were the following:

- The department emphasized teamwork and information sharing among the various types of officers in each district, and between patrol officers and specialized units.

- Officers created "beat profiles" to highlight the chronic problems on a particular beat, as well as the resources available to address the problems. Beat teams then developed and implemented beat plans that reflected priority problems. Beat plans became the basis for district and citywide plans.

- A new system for dispatching cars to 911 calls attempted to minimize the number of 911 calls that beat officers responded to outside of their own beats.

- A new computer system called Information Collection for Automated Mapping (ICAM) was installed in each district to allow officers to analyze crime data and generate crime activity maps.

- A District Advisory Committee in each district, which included community members and business leaders, helped police to identify and prioritize neighborhood problems.

- Beat officers held community meetings with residents to discuss chronic problems and develop strategies to address them.

- Special procedures allowed officers to communicate directly with city services to request assistance with environmental problems such as graffiti or abandoned buildings.[5]

This philosophy directly influenced the department's approach to gang crimes. Rather than having a centralized gang enforcement function, beat officers and district personnel were responsible for identifying and addressing gang problems in conjunction with community members and with the support of centralized units. According to Superintendent Rodriguez:

> No single program or law or new technology can ever provide a complete answer to the complex problem of gangs and gang violence. In Chicago, we are combining tough and energetic enforcement of the law with prevention, intervention and education strategies that are meaningful and effective. . . All of Chicago's gang-reduction efforts reflect our department's overall philosophy of police-community partnership and neighborhood-based problem solving. Working with the community and other service providers, we are designing and implementing strategies that address specific gang problems in specific Chicago neighborhoods. This decentralized, problem-solving approach to gangs offers our best hope for containing the problem today and preventing it tomorrow.

## The History and Nature of Gangs in Chicago

Unlike many cities in which gangs were an emerging phenomenon in the 1980s and 1990s, Chicago was dealing with gangs since the turn of the century. By the late 1920s, gangs were so numerous that Frederick Thrasher's *The Gang* detailed the activities of 1,313 Chicago gangs. At the time, street gangs were organized around ethnicity and were made up mostly of European immigrants, who brought their Old World animosities with them to the United States. In the 1960s, gangs were limited in number and mostly concentrated in black communities on the South Side. There were several highly publicized cases of gangs engaging in extortion and rip-offs of federal aid programs. When intergang conflict arose, sticks and fists were usually sufficient to settle the problem. Members were typically aged 14 to 21 years and reached their peak of gang activity by age 20.

By 1996, gangs had spread to every portion of the city and its surrounding communities. Guns and knives replaced sticks and fists, and cars increased gang mobility. The gangs were primarily racially organized, though it was not uncommon to find white members in black or Hispanic gangs. Narcotics sales, prostitution, extortion and theft were the gangs' financial lifeblood. Several of the most organized and experienced gangs made inroads into legitimate businesses, such as real estate.

The Chicago Police Department estimated that there were 132 criminally active gangs and 100,000 gang members in Chicago in 1996. The department used the following definitions to classify gangs and gang activities:

**Street Gang:** A group or association of three or more persons who may have a common identifying sign, symbol or name and who individually or collectively engage in, or have engaged in criminal activity, or whose members commit, as a juvenile, any act that if committed by an adult would be a criminal act.

**Street Gang Member:** An individual meeting any one of the following criteria:

- When the individual admits membership in a gang.
- When a law enforcement agency or reliable informant identifies an individual as a gang member.
- When an informant of previously untested reliability identifies an individual as a gang member, and it is corroborated by independent information.
- When the individual resides in or frequents a particular gang's area and affects their style of dress, use of hand signs, symbols or tattoos; and/or maintains ongoing relationships with known gang members; or has been arrested several times in the company of identified gang members for offenses which are consistent with usual gang activity; and where the law enforcement officer believes there is reasonable suspicion that the individual is involved in gang-related criminal activity or enterprise.

**Gang-Related Crime:** A criminal incident in which the nature of the crime increases the power or reputation, albeit in a negative manner, of a criminal street gang.

Some of the major gangs present in Chicago in 1996, their ethnic majority and common criminal activities are listed as follows (this list is representative, not all-inclusive):

| Gang | Ethnicity of Most Members | Criminal Activities |
|---|---|---|
| Vice Lord Nation | African-American | homicide, street narcotics sale, weapons violations |
| Gangster Disciples | African-American | street narcotics sale,weapons violations |

| Gang | Ethnicity of Most Members | Criminal Activities |
|---|---|---|
| Latin Kings | Latino, Caucasian, African-American | narcotics sale, drive-by shootings, weapons violations, robbery, theft |
| Black P Stones | African-American | narcotics sale, aggravated battery, weapons violations, auto theft/burglaries |
| Black Disciples | African-American | street narcotics sale, homicide, weapons violations |
| Two Sixers | Latino, Caucasian | street narcotics sale, weapons violations, drive-by shootings, assault/battery |
| Black Gangsters | African-American | narcotics trafficking, weapons violations, extortion, homicide |
| Latin Disciples | Latino, Caucasian | street narcotics sale, weapons violations, aggravated battery, theft/burglary |
| Insane Popes | Caucasian | street narcotics sale, burglary |

As is apparent from this chart, Chicago's gangs were responsible for numerous violent crimes such as homicides and assaults, as well as for narcotics sales, thefts and burglaries, and therefore posed a significant problem for Chicago's communities and law enforcement officers.

Gangs in Chicago were loosely affiliated with one of the two supergangs, which adopted specific methods of identification. On one side were the Gangster Disciples and affiliates, commonly referred to as "Folks," and on the other side were the Vice Lords and affiliates, the "People." Regardless of which gang an individual belonged to, most gang members claimed affiliation with one of the supergangs and, in theory, were allies with any gang member claiming affiliation with that supergang. Commander Donald Hilbring of the Gang Investigation Section reported in 1996, however, that these affiliations were not as strong as they once were, with the lines becoming blurred. "The gangs are about making money and drug trafficking," remarked Hilbring. "Friction exists between gangs and some will break away from the allegiance if they feel it's in their best interest." Asian gangs typically operated on their own, with no affiliation to the People or Folks, while Hispanic, white and black gangs claimed these affiliations to some extent.

Narcotics sale and trafficking were intertwined with gangs in Chicago. Robert Dart, who was commander of the former Gang Crimes Section, observed in 1992 that

> Gangs are changing in the United States and Chicago. Street gangs are becoming narcotics cartels. Youth gangs no longer can be placed in a box and dealt with as they used to be—they're now crossing over into organized crime involving narcotics. Surprisingly, gang violence in some cases is no longer acceptable behavior for gang members involved in narcotics sales. Being economically motivated, stereotypical activities such as representing [making hand signs indicating gang membership], fighting or drawing attention are shunned to avoid police attention which would adversely affect income from drugs.

Different gangs were involved in different levels of drug activities. Some "franchised" street corners and had non-gang members actually sell the drugs, while others sold the drugs themselves. Some had connections with Nigerians, Colombian or Mexican suppliers.

As in a number of other large cities, Chicago saw a steady decrease in index crimes in the mid-1990s, after steady increases from the late 1980s until 1991. Index crimes totaled 272,175 in 1995—the lowest total since 1983—and decreased by 3.9 percent in 1993, 1.2 percent in 1994 and 4.4 percent in 1995. In 1995, all of the index crimes declined except theft, which increased by only two-tenths of a percent. The number of murders rose by over 9 percent between 1993 and 1994, but then declined by 11 percent in 1995. According to the Detective Division, street gang violence and altercations were the most common causative factors in both 1994 and 1995. Of the 930 murders in 1994, 293 (32%) were attributed to street gangs, while 212 (26%) of the 827 murders in 1995 were attributed to street gangs.[6] The proportion of juvenile offenders who commited murders was on the rise. The percent of offenders under 18 rose from 9 percent in 1985 to 28 percent in 1994.

The Chicago Police Department tracked gang-related crimes. In 1995, the following crimes were labeled as gang-related:

- 218 homicides,
- 2,245 assaults,
- 495 robberies/thefts (not including burglaries),
- 780 weapon possession cases,
- 1,529 instances of threatening or intimidation,
- 11,083 vice offenses,

- 644 cases of criminal damage to property,
- 10 sexual assaults, and
- 2 arsons.

Hilbring reported that, in addition to these crimes, gangs were increasingly involved in technology-related crimes, such as cellular phone fraud, computer fraud and credit card fraud. Kidnapping of rival drug dealers was also on the rise.

Gangs and gang-related crimes were major concerns in most Chicago neighborhoods. In an evaluation conducted by the Chicago Community Policing Evaluation Consortium in June 1995, residents in five Chicago police districts stated that their top two concerns were drug dealing and youth problems. Residents in four of those districts identified gang violence as one of their top four problems, while the other district named graffiti among its top four problems.[7]

## The Chicago Police Department's Response to Gangs

### The Chicago Police Department's Response to Gangs, 1991–1992

Interviews with top-level command officers in the early 1990s revealed that their priority in responding to gangs was identifying and arresting gang members involved in criminal activity. Then-Superintendent LeRoy Martin stated in 1992 that

> Our approach is to track the leadership of gangs and, whenever possible, charge them with federal crimes since the federal institutions still have jail room for them. Locally, there's a liberal policy of bonding criminals out partly because of a lack of jail space.

Under Superintendent Martin's leadership from 1987 to 1993, the department employed an enforcement-oriented approach to gangs that relied primarily on the 455-officer Gang Crimes Section.

The Gang Crimes Section was originally formed as the Gang Intelligence Unit in 1967. Before that, individual districts had formed unofficial gang units to combat localized gang problems. Staffing of the Gang Crimes Section fluctuated over the years from fewer than 100 officers to its peak in the early 1990s at 455 officers. Organizationally, it was located in the Special Functions Division of the Bureau of Operational Services.

Many of the staffing changes over the years were in response to community and political pressure to address increasing gang violence and juvenile crime. In 1982, the Gang Crimes Section received a large staffing boost when then-Mayor Jane Byrne responded to public concern over increasing gang homicide rates. She authorized increasing the unit from under 100

to nearly 400 officers, who were to deal with increasing street violence and problems in public housing. At that time, Gang Crimes was elevated to a bureau-level unit of the department and headed by a deputy superintendent. The resulting crackdown by police led to allegations of civil rights violations and heavy-handedness, including a lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union. The political costs of the unit's independence and tactical methods were recognized by the new mayoral administration that took office in 1984. At that time, Gang Crimes was reassigned to a unit of the Patrol Division and its staffing was cut.

The Gang Crimes Section was divided into three geographic areas, each commanded by a captain who reported directly to the section's commander. Each geographic area had two working watches, each commanded by a lieutenant, and provided daily shift coverage from 9 a.m. to 2 a.m. Two types of officers were on duty on each watch—tactical officers and gang crimes specialists.

Tactical officers were the enforcement arm of the Gang Crimes Section and could be assigned to enforcement missions in any portion of the city on short notice. For the most part, they were assigned to teams of six to eight officers, supervised by a sergeant, and worked one of the three areas of the city.

Gang crimes specialists were police officers specializing in intelligence gathering—the identification of street gangs, their members and gang operations. Individual specialists were assigned specific gangs about which to develop intelligence information and prepare periodic reports describing the number of members, geographic areas where they were located, allied gangs and crimes committed. As with tactical officers, six to eight specialists were assigned to a team and supervised by a sergeant. Each of the three area gang units maintained its own files. Gang Crimes did not have much access to computers or automated recordkeeping systems.

The Gang Crimes Section's tactics were primarily controlled by the section commander. In the early 1990s, Commander Dart of the Gang Crimes Section developed an enforcement-oriented strategy that was characterized as a "battle plan" to control gangs. Dart described one of their tactics as follows:

> One of the tactical operations used by the gang units [assigned to particular areas] is a 'quadrant' mission for their area of operation. These missions are strategic in nature and specifically designed to impact select locales for a predetermined time period. The officers then move en masse to an adjoining quadrant of approximately four to six city blocks and proceed to make their anti-gang presence felt. The criminal element is kept off balance not knowing if the police are still close by or if and when they will return. Frequent street stops of individuals on foot and lurking in cars are made to ferret out the guns on the street.

A popular element of the Gang Crimes Section was the Concentrated Community Gang Enforcement Unit, commonly referred to as the "Flying Squad" in the media, which consisted of 44 uniformed tactical officers. According to Dart,

> This aggressive and mobile unit meets nightly in predetermined staging areas and is sent on nightly missions to challenge the gangs. The officers are in uniform so there can be little doubt who they are when they exit a car and approach the gang bangers. The key to their success has been working different areas each night and the mobility to quickly saturate a 'hot spot' as the need arises. The squad saturates the designated communities, strictly enforcing nuisance laws to ensure minimal gang activity.

To supplement these enforcement activities, about 50 Gang Crimes officers participated in a variety of federal, state and local task forces dealing with gang problems. The section commander spent considerable time meeting with representatives of the various law enforcement agencies to share information concerning gangs.

The following description of gang-related operations on the South Side of Chicago is an example of how Gang Crimes officers dealt with gangs in one section of the city. In the early 1990s, Captain Duffy was in charge of Gang Crimes South, which responded to gang activity in the Wentworth district (a high-crime area with a large number of public housing units) and all other districts on the city's South Side. Duffy had 75 tactical officers and 28 gang specialists assigned to his unit. Partly due to the above-mentioned legal challenges to aggressive gang enforcement and intelligence gathering, Duffy found that developing reliable information on local gangs was difficult. Although gang specialists gathered information on specific gangs, there was no consistent system for information sharing. Duffy pointed out that "gang specialists know all of the gangs and the players, but there is no system to pass it along to the troops." Most information was passed along informally, but many officers were protective of their information.

Gang specialists reviewed the daily 24-hour detective log for cases that may have been gang-related. From this, they could assist detectives with investigations involving gang crimes and develop information about gang activity. When assisting with investigations, they would take information from existing investigative reports and prepare a Major Gang Incident Notification report. These reports were then manually filed after review by a Gang Crimes sergeant. Other information, such as gang arrest information cards, nickname cards, vehicle cards and Polaroid photos could be filed in folders maintained for each of the 17 identified major gangs in the South area. When criminal investigations were cleared by detectives, the Major Gang Incident Notification report was removed from the gang file. Generally, though Gang Crimes specialists assisted with investigations, their role was limited to providing gang information to the detectives and collecting whatever intelligence was uncovered during the process.Both tactical officers and gang specialists reviewed daily complaints about gang activity received over the gang hot line or other means. According to Duffy, almost all of the complaints they received were somehow related to narcotics. He remarked that the South Gang Crimes Unit was handling more narcotics arrests than the Narcotics Section, and there was pressure to refrain from targeting narcotics violations.

Communication among Gang Crimes, Narcotics and the district tactical teams was somewhat limited, though their activities overlapped. The district commanders, however, did frequently call Gang Crimes requesting help in their areas. Duffy would assign a gang squad to a district for up to a month if necessary to deal with a problem reported by a district commander. For example, at one time a split of the Disciples gang in a district resulted in six weeks of major gang warfare. One hundred Gang Crimes officers were assigned to that district daily for six weeks to deal with the violence.

**The Chicago Police Department's Response to Gangs, 1993–1996**

With the introduction of CAPS and its community policing emphasis, some changes took place in the Chicago Police Department's response to gangs, though some pieces of the above strategies remained.

In 1993, the CAPS implementation process involved police representatives attending community meetings to determine what problems were most pressing from the citizens' perspective. In many communities, one of the number-one problems was gangs, and the community did not perceive the department's centralized Gang Crimes Section as an effective response. "We realized," said Hilbring, "that because we were centralized, even though we were divided into three areas, this wasn't an effective approach from the community's perspective. The Gang Crimes Section would spend a lot of time addressing a 'major' gang problem in one neighborhood while spending less time on a supposedly less pressing gang problem in another neighborhood. But in the community's perception, their gang problem was just as important as another neighborhood's gang problem, and they weren't seeing an effective police response in their neighborhood."

The department realized that anti-gang activities needed to take place in communities, with neighborhood officers addressing gang problems with the support of gang specialists. Therefore, the Gang Crimes Section was decentralized. The tactical officers who had formerly been part of the section were dispersed to the districts and became responsible for working "with beat officers and community residents to identify and address local gang problems, such as drug dealing and turf battles."[8] When this plan was implemented, each district had one sergeant and eight gang tactical officers.

The gang specialists remained in a centralized, though much smaller, section called the Gang Investigation Section. In 1996, the Gang Investigation Section was staffed with one commander, one lieutenant, 11 sergeants and 83 gang specialists. As with the former Gang Crimes Section, the focus of the Gang Investigation Section was on targeting gang leaders and high-level offenders, with the goal of initiating major cases against gang leadership to take them out of circulation. The section investigated such gang-related crimes as homicides, drive-by shootings, narcotics offenses, assaults, batteries, intimidation and gang recruitment. They also tried to determine gang structures, and analyze data to build conspiracy cases against gang hierarchies. The section was located under the Organized Crime Division, in the Bureau of Investigative Services, because, according to Hilbring, "the majority of gangs [in

Chicago] are organized crime entities. We focus on gang structures, organization and criminal enterprises with the idea of coming up with criminal prosecutions to dismantle the gang structures."

The gang specialists in the Gang Investigation Section were broken down into various teams with specialized functions. The investigative teams focused on long- or short-term investigations of gangs' criminal activity in particular locations. Other gang specialists were assigned to the Detective Division, which investigated violent crimes. They focused on gang violence in a particular area, gave support to detectives working on gang-related investigations and provided intelligence to district officers. The gang specialists assigned to the intelligence function gathered gang information from detectives, patrol officers, other gang specialists, community surveys and other sources, and then supplied that information to those who needed it. Because most gangs were geographically based, with particular areas that they frequented, much of the gang specialists' work was focused on particular neighborhoods or areas. However, because they were centralized and not responsible solely for a particular neighborhood, as the gang tactical officers were, they tried to look beyond particular districts to determine if gang activity was being coordinated throughout a larger geographic area. For example, a district gang officer may have identified a gang leader, but if that gang leader lived in a suburb rather than in that district, the officer was unable to target that leader. The Gang Investigation Section specialists, however, could address gangs on a citywide and regional basis.

The Gang Investigation Section did not employ the same techniques that the Gang Crimes Section once used to "sweep" gang-infested neighborhoods, but they did have procedures to help districts deal with especially problematic gang presence. A district commander who saw a high concentration of gang activity in his or her district could request that gang tactical officers from other districts come in for a day to target gang members. They used various techniques, such as "zero tolerance" for code violations or minor offenses by gang members. The Special Operations Sections, which included several officers formerly of the Gang Crimes Section, would do the same if for some reason the gang tactical teams were unavailable.

After the decentralized/centralized approach was initiated in 1993, the department eventually doubled the original number of gang tactical officers. By 1996, each district had two sergeants and 16 officers, who were divided into two teams per district.

These two primary responses to gangs by the Chicago Police Department were supported by a variety of regional task forces, neighborhood-specific programs, anti-gang ordinances and other efforts.

To further support neighborhood-level problem solving in response to gang problems, the Chicago Police Department, with a 1996 grant from the COPS Office, instituted a two-tiered project aimed primarily at gang and narcotics activity. This project involved 1) imple-

menting a relational database with a gang module to allow for greater and more consistent information sharing among the various personnel addressing gang problems, and 2) a Strategic Inspections Task Force that would, in part, focus on cleaning up buildings that had become headquarters for gang and/or narcotics activity. These two initiatives would be supported by additional training for officers on analyzing and applying gang-related information to better respond to gang crime. As stated in the COPS proposal,

> The enhancement of current information systems, along with the additional information gathered through the Strategic Inspections Task Force will directly address the department's pervasive information problem as it relates to gangs and will enhance the current centralized-decentralized approach to fighting gang crime.[9]

*Relational Database.* Inadequate mechanisms for gathering and sharing gang-related information among the various personnel responding to gangs remained a problem for the Chicago Police Department, even after CAPS implementation. Different units and sections had their own stand-alone systems for maintaining information files, and information sharing was usually paper-driven.

To reduce duplication of effort and link gang data to other crime data, thus allowing for a greater capability to identify and analyze crime patterns, the department planned to set up a relational database. The analytical capabilities of such a system were particularly important to the department. As stated in the proposal to COPS,

> With its existing resources, the Department has spent considerable time documenting Chicago's gangs and their criminal activity. However, members have focused most of their activity on "counting" this information rather than analyzing it. While this practice may suffice as traditional evidence gathering, without the analytical component it is insufficient as applicable intelligence information and as such falls short as a crime management tool. As gangs continue to become more sophisticated, with growing evidence that some of the most sophisticated gangs are beginning to infiltrate legitimate businesses, it is more important than ever that data collected is appropriately analyzed and developed into applicable intelligence information.[10]

Better information gathering and sharing started with a departmentwide system of collecting and recording crime information. The Oracle Corporation agreed to assist the department with designing and developing a Criminal History Records Information System (CHRIS). Various modules, including a gang module, would be linked so that data could be correlated across modules.

The gang module would classify gang information according to the gangs involved, the affiliations among gangs, locations where gang activity takes place, property (including vehicles) associated with gangs, and affiliations and/or roles of particular individuals with particular gangs. The gang module would also store personal characteristics of known gang members (physical characteristics, modus operandi, etc.).

All of the various units and sections involved in anti-gang initiatives, including the tactical teams, Gang Investigation Section, Organized Crime Division, Detective Division, and Youth Division, would store the information they collected in this database. Because that data would be stored on a main server, it would also be accessible to all of those personnel to be used for crime analysis.

*Strategic Inspections Task Force.* The department identified gang- and narcotics-related criminal activity in non-owner-occupied, multi-unit buildings as a major problem in the city. Not only were the crimes themselves problematic, but the presence of such buildings created fear among neighborhood residents, which made them fearful of being outdoors and of reporting crime. This contributed to a cycle of crime in certain neighborhoods. The department also identified negligent building owners as another piece of this problem.

As a result of the CAPS community-policing focus, the department decided to focus problem-solving efforts on buildings where gang- and narcotic-related activity took place. The Strategic Inspections Task Force would address the "crime triangle" of offenders, victims and, perhaps most significant in this effort, locations. The task force would also build on one of the cornerstones of CAPS—networking with other city services—by engaging a variety of city departments in a joint effort to address problem locations. One of the goals of the Strategic Inspections Task Force was to regenerate "many gang and narcotic strongholds which have been previously impenetrable by law enforcement due to owner negligence."[11]

The task force would include staff from the police, fire, health, buildings, law and revenue departments, and would merge with the Criminal Housing Task Force—an existing group that had intervened in situations where landlords failed to address building problems. The task force would operate out of the Department of Buildings.

The police and other task force members would identify problem locations, using police department beat and district plans (problem-identification and -solving plans generated at the neighborhood level) as one source of data. For each problem site identified, the task force planned to go through the following steps:

- Review additional information about the site, including information provided by community residents, maps of criminal activity in the area, data available from tactical and beat teams, and police reports of gang and narcotics activity.
- Inspect the site, accompanied by district tactical police officers.
- Assemble a case file for that site including all of the information collected.

At that point, appropriate enforcement and response activities would take place. Criminal offenders could be arrested, and/or ordinances used to force building owners to address code violations. A new ordinance was being considered that would allow criminal sanctions to be

imposed against building owners who do not respond to administrative requests. Under another proposed new ordinance, an action to abate a public nuisance could be brought against building owners who knowingly allow gang and narcotics activity to take place on the premises of their buildings. Such actions would be heard by an officer from the Department of Buildings' Code Enforcement Board, rather than in the courts. Owners who did not respond to changes required by the Board (such as evicting problematic tenants or procuring security personnel) would be subject to criminal charges.

In addition to the administrative and legal portions of the Strategic Inspections Task Force initiative, a landlord training program would teach such topics as tenant screening, effective security and how to evict criminally active tenants.

The department saw the task force, though not solely a police department initiative, as an important piece in its anti-gang strategies. It would operate in tandem with the relational database initiative, with the task force providing information on criminal activity to the database, and information stored in database records being used to help identify and analyze problem locations. The task force, with its emphasis on interagency cooperation and neighborhood-level problem identification, illustrated how community policing in the form of CAPS was being brought to bear on the gang problem.

## Conclusion

The Chicago Police Department has been faced with gang-related problems for decades. The department's response grew from officers in individual districts investigating gang activity using their own scarce resources, to a large, centralized Gang Crimes Section focused on suppression, and finally, to an approach that paired a centralized investigative and intelligence-gathering body with decentralized tactical officers devoted to anti-gang responses. The department's community policing philosophy, formalized in the CAPS program, influenced the response to gangs significantly. With community input, the department realized that neighborhood-level officers would be best equipped to deal with neighborhood-level gang problems. But they also realized that those officers would benefit from the support of a centralized unit that could maintain citywide gang information, examine the "big picture" of gang activity, and provide specialized assistance in targeting gangs and gang members. At the time of this study, the department planned to further improve its response to gangs through improved information systems and an interagency task force to address the specific problem of gang and drug activity in rental properties.

# Chapter 4
# Kansas City Police Department's Response to Gangs

As is the case with many midsized to large cities in the United States, Kansas City, Mo., had to deal increasingly with the issues of gangs and gang violence starting in the mid- to late 1980s. Part of a metropolitan area of more than 1.5 million people, Kansas City had a gang problem in the 1990s that was compared with that of Los Angeles 25 years ago. The community and the police department were at a point where decisions they made regarding gangs would have significant implications for the future. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, the Kansas City Police Department's response to gangs and related drug crimes evolved as the nature of gang activity evolved and as the department focused its approach to gang problems.

In the late 1980s, the Kansas City Police Department's first major gang-related initiative approached gangs as organized crime. Their efforts then broadened as they utilized the various approaches of proactive enforcement, investigation and intelligence gathering. With the formation of a Gang Squad in 1993, the department's anti-gang efforts became more centralized than they previously were. The Gang Squad focused on proactive enforcement and investigation of gang-related crime, particularly violent crime committed with firearms. In 1996, with federal funding support, the Gang Squad was actively incorporating community policing and improved information systems into its response to Kansas City gangs.

## Overview of Kansas City

Two separate political units—Kansas City, Kan., in the northeastern part of its state, and Kansas City, Mo., on the western side of its state—make up the Kansas City metropolitan area. Kansas City, Mo., had a 1996 population of 435,146 people and a land area of 322 square miles. The inner-city area was predominantly black, and outlying suburban areas were home to a cross-section of races and income levels. The city was 66 percent white, 30 percent black, and 4 percent Hispanic. The city had a council-city manager form of government, under which council members were elected from geographic wards within the city.

## The Kansas City Police Department

The Kansas City Police Department (KCPD) was unique in that it was guided by a Board of Police Commissioners appointed by the governor. The governor, with the consent of the Missouri Senate, appointed four citizens to serve on the board for a term of four years; one member's term expired each year. The fifth member of the board was the mayor of Kansas City by virtue of his or her elected office. A secretary/attorney was appointed by the board as legal advisor. The board oversaw the Office of Citizen Complaints, which received and

processed complaints from citizens regarding misconduct by the police department's employees. Members of the Board of Police Commissioners had active professional lives and acted much like a corporate board with responsibilities for setting general policy. The board appointed the police chief, who implemented policy and provided day-to-day leadership and guidance to the organization.

The state legislature required that a certain percentage of the city's general revenues be committed to police operations. According to Steven Bishop, police chief from 1990 to 1995, although the department tried to be responsive to all segments of the community, it did not have the same relationship with the city council that departments in other cities had, implying that the city council's input on police matters was limited by the state's role in controlling the department. Various department members said that efforts were made to change the state's role, but such efforts were unsuccessful.

Chief Bishop reorganized the department in an effort to streamline some operations. The Narcotics and Vice Division was placed under the Investigations Bureau, and the Intelligence Unit was placed under the chief's office. The chief oversaw four bureaus: Administration, Patrol, Operations Support and Investigations. Within the chief's office was the Executive Services Bureau, which included the Fiscal Division and the Professional Standards Division (internal affairs, intelligence and media relations). In 1996, the department was staffed with 1,196 sworn officers.

In 1990, there were over 56,000 Part I offenses, or 13,280 per 100,000 population, while in 1995, there were 12,192 offenses per 100,000 population. In 1995, Kansas City saw significant decreases in Part I crimes since 1994, including murder (down 25%), robbery (down 10%) and burglary (down 18.5%).

In 1995, Gang Squad detectives investigated 423 criminal offenses that were believed to be gang-related, resulting in felony charges against 294 defendants. Of those charges filed, 118 were for narcotics possession, 118 were for narcotics sales and trafficking, and 54 were for firearms violations. A review of the 108 homicides that occurred in Kansas City in 1995 revealed that four of the homicide victims and eight of the suspects charged were known gang members or affiliates. Investigators cautioned, however, that this number was probably lower than actual gang involvement in homicides because of strict defining criteria. Investigators had to prove beyond a doubt that a crime was gang-related for it to be labeled as such.

## The History and Nature of Gangs in Kansas City

In 1985, drug trafficking patterns changed in Kansas City. Before 1985, the drugs of choice on the street were marijuana and pharmaceutical drugs diverted from the legitimate market. In late 1985, however, crack cocaine appeared in the inner-city drug houses. Crack had been encountered by the police in some drug possession cases, but not to the extent of being packaged for retail sale. However, citizens began reporting an increased number of crack houses in

their neighborhoods, and by the end of 1986, reports of new houses had increased by 360 percent over 1985. At the same time, sources indicated that Jamaican gangs, known as posses, were moving into the Kansas City area. Due to Kansas City's central United States location and its large airport and rail and bus transportation corridor, it soon became a prime location for crack distribution.

Through coordination with federal agencies, Kansas City developed a strategy for dealing with this new threat as organized crime (a full description of this strategy appears later in this chapter). After the Jamaican posse problem was addressed, a new problem arose. Drug investigators' intelligence information revealed that Los Angeles-based Crips and Bloods gangs had begun entering the metropolitan Kansas City drug market. Members of the Los Angeles gangs established themselves in the area through relatives who had relocated from Southern California. This provided the LA gangs with insider contacts to Kansas City drug connections and networks. Distribution was either through family members or others who were willing to use their residences as crack houses. Once established in the neighborhood, the gangs maintained control through the threat of violence.

Rather than operating crack houses themselves, the LA gangs began supplying large quantities of crack cocaine to recruited local distributors. Rented apartments and motel rooms were used as distribution points. Young black residents were recruited as street dealers, many of whom modeled themselves after apparently wealthy LA gang members. At this lower sales level, disputes often broke out over territory and profits.

The gang group referred to as the LA Boys showed up in Kansas City about 1989 and entered the crack cocaine market. Some were members of the Los Angeles Bloods and Crips. The LA Boys influenced local juveniles, who were easily convinced by the high profits in drug sales and their perception that juvenile laws were lenient. The LA Boys began educating local youths about gangs, including signing with hands, color and style of dress, talk, and the use of weapons. By the early 1990s, local Kansas City youths were firmly entrenched in the gang culture imported from LA. "Initially it was easy to identify the LA gang members," said Deputy Chief Lomax in 1991, "because if you were a local you were a 'wannabe.' Now it's not that easy because we have our own version. Now there is a local core of gang members that are operating crack houses and competition between gangs is occurring."

In early 1990, the department confirmed that numerous gang members from Chicago had made their way to Kansas City. The Chicago gangs, including the Black Gangster Disciples, Vice Lords, Latin Kings and Latin Counts, were involved in drug trafficking and prone to serious violent confrontations with each other and with law enforcement.

Sergeant Dave Starbuck, supervisor of the KCPD's Gang Squad since its inception in 1993, stated that locals' involvement in gangs continued to grow. "Kansas City was a textbook case of gang migration. In 1987 and 1988, when LA gangs began migrating throughout the country, a lot of people in the law enforcement community thought that the purpose

of this migration was to spread their gang empire. But it really had to do with the spread of drug markets. There was a glut of cocaine in Los Angeles, so older gang members popped up in the Midwest because profits here were 10 times what they were in LA. They got local kids caught up in the gang culture that they brought with them." Starbuck estimated that, in 1996, about 95 percent of Kansas City gang members were locals. He referred to the existence of "hybrid" gangs that adopted the culture and symbolism of LA or Chicago gangs, but also added their own elements that distinguished them from gangs in other cities.

In the early 1990s, the Kansas City Police Department's Street Gang Task Force estimated that there were as many as 80 gang sets and over 460 gang members. In 1996, approximately 75 to 100 gang sets were active in the metropolitan area, but many were very small and/or had only been heard of once. In 1995, felony charges were filed on suspects affiliated with 63 different gang sets. Estimates were that 3,500 to 5,000 "hard core" gang members were active in the Kansas City metropolitan area in 1996. But definitive numbers on gangs and gang members were hard to come by. Starbuck illustrated the difficulty of accurately counting gangs with the following story: At one time, the KCPD investigated a series of armed robberies where apparent gang members would rob teenagers of a particular type of jacket while they were walking home from school. At first, all of the suspects said they were members of the 12th Street Crips. Several weeks later, the same suspects claimed to be members of the 24th Street Crips. Later, they said they were affiliated with the 36th Street Gangster Crips. And finally, when the case was wrapped up, they identified themselves as members of the Death Side posse. "That's a perfect example of how, if you're not flexible and watching your intelligence-gathering techniques, you could think you have four different gangs when you really just have 15 kids claiming gang affiliations using various names," remarked Starbuck.

According to Starbuck, Kansas City gangs were not highly structured or organized, with the exception of those involved in drug networks. Gang leaders became prominent simply because they stayed out of jail or had a reputation for violence. "We have found that if we identify a group or gang it usually becomes very obvious who the leaders are," said Starbuck. "If you attack them, the gang dissolves." Starbuck also stated that "We see things here that are unheard of in Los Angeles. Gang members will change the name of their gang set or change their affiliation, and gangs will disband and form new groups."

The structures that were in place served the gangs' drug activities. Major David Barton, when he was commander of the Narcotics/Vice Division and director of the KCPD's Regional Police Academy, stated that in order to protect themselves against other gangs, retain power in their areas and earn money, Kansas City gangs relied on drug sale profits. Though gangs also committed other crimes, such as theft, burglary and intimidation, gang activity and drugs were inseparable. As one officer said, "It's the glue that bonds the gangs." Starbuck remarked that drug possession and sales were one of the most common denominators among Kansas City gangs. Most gang involvement was in street-level distribution, and most of the gang members the KCPD came into contact with were small-time dealers. There were several gangs, however, that were known to have drug network connections with gangs in Southern California, Texas and Arizona.

Gangs had a steadily increasing influence on many facets of city life, and were spreading to all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Though black gangs, such as the Bloods and Crips, were the most numerous gangs when the problem surfaced in the late 1980s, gang activity was not solely a black issue. Other gangs, including the 9th Street Dawgs (a prison gang) and the Latin Counts were present, though not to the extent of the Bloods and Crips. Starbuck remarked that, "The gang culture here has spread. It used to be that gangs were all black, all Mexican or all white. Now they're made up of people from different backgrounds." The gang culture was also not just an inner-city phenomenon. The major trend Starbuck identified, besides gang involvement in drug activity, was the spread of gangs to wealthy suburban areas. "Kids there are attracted not so much by socioeconomic factors, but are fascinated by the darker side of gang life," said Starbuck. "I stress that point [that gangs affect all ethnic and socioeconomic groups] when I talk to citizen groups. There's a lot of denial out there that the gang problem will never impact them."

## The Kansas City Police Department's Response to Gangs

Perceptions of the complexity of the gang problem and what should be done about it have varied in Kansas City. In the early 1990s, KCPD patrol officers saw gang violence increasing and the LA connection continuing. An investigation of a shooting, for example, revealed that the same gun was used in another crime in Los Angeles a week later. Patrol officers said that they frequently encountered gang members, both juvenile and adult, who did not hesitate to become violent toward them.

Major Dennis Shreve, commander of the Central Patrol Division, referred to a 1991 study done by the Ad Hoc Committee Against Crime (a citizen activist group that dealt with crime and police issues) that concluded that Kansas City was in the early 1990s where Los Angeles was 25 years ago—only at the beginning of its gang problem. Thus, according to Shreve, Kansas City needed to focus on the problem or it could end up facing the same gang problems and violence that Los Angeles has been contending with.

Officers at various levels of the department interviewed in 1991–1992 indicated that the prosecutor's office was too lenient on gang-related cases. They had the sense that as long as gang members kept shooting each other, the prosecutor's office would give the matter little attention. The impression was that there were so many shootings that unless the victim died, was not a gang member and perhaps not a minority, little would be done. Other comments by officers indicated that federal officers did not work well with the Jackson County prosecutor's office, and that hindered prosecutions as well.

Several police department officials cited the inner-city schools as a major roadblock in addressing the gang problem. One sergeant stated that the schools let students bring electronic beepers and cellular telephones to class. Police administrators indicated that school principals did not report crimes to the police, fearing rebuke by superiors who disagreed as to whether there was a gang problem. In a Sept. 15, 1991, article in the *Kansas City Star,* a

high school principal was quoted as saying, "We don't have a gang problem." He went on to say that, as in any area, there were groups from different neighborhoods that did not get along from time to time, but they were not gangs.

Chief Bishop stated that through his conversations with school officials he thought there was a perception that if a principal called the police, it would reflect negatively on the principal. The chief noted that it had taken him several years to get Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) programs on school campuses.

The police department's response to gangs went through three major stages: the organized crime approach (1986 to 1989), the task force approach (1990 to 1993) and the post-1993 approach of having a centralized Gang Squad to focus on gang-related problems.

**The Organized Crime Approach, 1986–1989**

With the first signs that Jamaican posses were moving into Kansas City, detectives from the department's narcotics unit began working street-level and sporadic mid-level cases involving the gang in concert with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF); and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). As problems with Jamaican posses continued, the department adopted a new approach—attacking the gang and drug problem from an organized crime perspective. Major David Barton led an effort to apply for Bureau of Justice Assistance grant funds to start a task force that would treat the gang as an organized crime entity. The department was awarded a grant of $250,000 for 1989–1991. Funds were to be used for investigative costs, informant fees and evidence. The grant application identified the following goals:

1. Develop a gang narcotics intelligence program for gathering information from throughout the police department, using all available sources of information.

2. Identify gang narcotics distribution networks through a complete analysis of automated gang intelligence and other information sources.

3. Once identified, target upper- and midlevel gang organization members utilizing all available resources and law enforcement techniques and strategies.

4. To complement all existing multiagency efforts, prosecute organized narcotics trafficking hierarchies.

5. Establish a strong unified prosecution strategy, using both state and federal resources on gang-related investigations.

6. Complement existing efforts to seize gang narcotics organizations' financial assets, using both state and federal forfeiture and seizure statutes.

7. Measure and reduce the number of organized gang-related incidents of violence, including homicide, aggravated assault, kidnapping and rape.

8. Develop systems to share organized gang narcotics intelligence and investigate information with other gang or task force projects to assist in stopping the spread of gang narcotics activity.[12]

The program was intended to limit obvious gang activity and related drug sales in areas of Kansas City. Progress toward achieving the goals was measured by arrests, prosecutions, amounts of seizures, public response, and the effectiveness of sharing intelligence information.

The department initiated two efforts to achieve the goals. First, they established a reporting procedure for collecting gang intelligence information. The information was processed by computer for easy retrieval in a variety of categories. Second, once intelligence information had identified organizations or individuals, available resources were assessed, targets prioritized and organizations attacked by the methods deemed most effective, such as executing state and federal search warrants on identified "stash" houses and distribution centers, using the Street Narcotics Unit to attack crack distribution networks and develop evidence for conspiracy charges, and conducting investigations in conjunction with the Financial Investigations Squad to maximize seizures and prosecution under federal money-laundering statutes.

Under this grant, Kansas City began to target gangs as organized crime, in particular Jamaican posses, the LA gangs and the Moorish Science Temple, a gang with affiliations in Chicago and New York City. As a result of this effort, several Jamaican gang members were arrested and successfully prosecuted, and several thousands of dollars and quantities of narcotics were seized. A second target was the Los Angeles gangs with their Crips and Bloods connections; the investigation centered on the LA Boys. In August 1989, a search warrant resulted in the seizure of 4,331 grams of crack cocaine, worth over a half million dollars. In addition, officers seized guns and over $64,000. From November 1989 through September 1990, several other investigations were conducted that resulted in arrests of gang members and the seizure of large quantities of crack cocaine, cash and weapons. Through the identification of distribution points and information obtained by investigators, a clear connection between the LA gangs and Kansas City was confirmed.

According to Major Barton, the DEA was reluctant about participating in the task force because it involved crack cocaine, which was not considered a major threat. The Jamaican gangs were also regarded as a "local" problem and not organized to the scale that federal agencies should become involved. However, the ATF assisted in task force efforts and was successful in several cases. Seeing this success, according to Barton, the DEA participated more fully in the task force.

**The KCPD's Response to Gangs, 1989–1993**

As the influence of LA gangs spurred the growth of Kansas City gangs, at first, "nobody wanted to face the problem that we had gangs in Kansas City," said a high-ranking officer. One official reported attempting to advise superiors and peers that Kansas City had a gang problem: "Here I was looking at the outside wall of my police station sprayed with gang graffiti and being told there were no local gangs in Kansas City." The resistance by some police command staff was partially due to a view that Kansas City had always had gangs and this was not anything new. There was some indication that since gang violence was generally directed against other gang members, no one was concerned. Moreover, because the local gangs were not organized, with no heads or leaders per se, they were not viewed in the same light as gangs that had been encountered previously.

Some patrol command officers tried to establish limited gang intelligence and patrol enforcement efforts at their local level by assigning some of their officers to address gang problems and identify gang members in their area. They made some progress but could not continue the effort because calls for police patrol services were increasing, and they did not have the officers to devote to gangs. Detective Reyes, assigned to the Intelligence Unit, began an informal process of gathering gang information. She shortly became the expert on current gang activity. She talked to beat officers and in-custody gang members to identify gang members, become familiar with the connection between drugs and gangs, and discover intelligence information that might link gang members to crimes. Some officers reported that she was told to stop doing gang intelligence and return to her other duties. A high-ranking officer said that this was evidence of how support for gang suppression was stopped in an area if the commander did not think there was a problem. Detective Reyes eventually joined the department's Street Gang Task Force after its formation in 1991.

Those interviewed could not identify the specific action or group that initiated the pressure to more fully address gang problems, but as a result of that pressure, the KCPD formed the Street Gang Task Force within the Investigations Bureau in January 1991. The task force's purpose was intelligence gathering, not field or enforcement work, and it was coordinated by Sergeant Hardy Smith. According to Smith, the task force was to develop a coordinated effort to accumulate intelligence information about gang members and their activities. The information was to be channeled to the Perpetrator Information Center (PIC) for analysis and made available to department personnel and other law enforcement agencies. Task force members were drawn from different segments of the department and met regularly to share information. The task force also facilitated training for officers on gang activity and provided information to the public.

On behalf of the task force, Smith presented anti-gang public information programs to schools, business associations and public service organizations. He developed informational material to help the public identify gang behavior, and presentations and written materials to help the business community cope with gang activity that affected their businesses.

The task force encountered a number of problems during the first three months of operation, as reported by Sergeant Smith, including the following:[13]

1. Task force members had no prior knowledge or experience with street gangs and their activities.

2. Half the task force members were assigned from investigations and half from patrol, which led to communication problems. Each group had different command structures and did not always report information from the task force back to their superiors. Moreover, information from the task force was being challenged by commanders who had previously stated there were no gang problems.

3. Gang intelligence compiled prior to the organization of the task force was found to be unsubstantial and unreliable. Sergeant Smith cited the following example: "If an LA gang member was intercepted in Kansas City at the bus station or airport and it was later determined he was with the 74 Hoover Crips out of Compton, California, it was entered as a Kansas City-based gang." Another example cited a problem in identifying the extent of gang activity: "We found the computer listed the Kansas City gang '12th Street Hoover Crips' as '12th Street Boys' and '12th Street Crips.' The data entry error caused the computer to count one gang as three different gangs."

4. Significant time was spent in educating task force members about gangs so that they could make public presentations and provide departmental training.

5. Distribution of information gained by various members of the task force was difficult.

6. Providing training to officers so they could articulate why an officer believed an individual or activity was gang-related was difficult.

7. The quality of written reports from officers, from which gang intelligence was to be obtained, was poor.

8. Obtaining intelligence information from the schools was difficult because they denied having gang problems.

The task force initiated a key project called "J-11." This was a computerized database of known gang members that could be accessed by patrol officers in the field. The Perpetrator Information Center established criteria for documenting gang involvement and coordinated the input of data regarding gang activity.

Although the task force seemed a significant first step in gathering gang information, some officers thought the project was ineffective. Officers at all levels said that a gang unit was needed that targeted gang-related crimes. At that time, gang enforcement was handled by tactical officers assigned to the patrol divisions. These officers, who were primarily tactical response officers (SWAT), patrolled in marked cars for signs of gang activity and took action on incidents they observed.

When asked about the information provided by the task force, officers said that much of the information that finally reached the beat officers was old and that information from the Perpetrator Identification Center was not always what the field officers needed. They reported a reluctance to share intelligence information between bureaus or work units. One officer said, "You have to really know what to ask for from PIC [Perpetrator Identification Center], otherwise you don't get useful information. They really don't have the time to help you develop information." Command-level officers stated that the task force was a good start but that the department now needed to do something with the information and take action. Tactical units in each area station targeted gang members and their narcotics activity, but they seemed to rely on information they developed themselves rather than intelligence gathered by the task force.

Officers Peter Schillino and Patty Marnett were assigned to the Central Patrol Division as uniformed officers/crime analysts. The officers reviewed all division reports and developed crime bulletins and other information for the division's officers. Both officers thought that their area of the city had a significant gang problem, including drive-by shootings. They reported a definite connection with the LA gangs.

Schillino and Marnett thought that more effort was needed on tracking gangs and developing intelligence information. When asked how they would handle the problem if they had the opportunity and resources, they cited the success of one particular beat officer, who worked the same area for several years and knew everyone in the community. That officer developed an information network and nothing happened in his area that he didn't know about. They said he was constantly asking them for crime information regarding his area and he, in turn, passed on intelligence information to them. "It's like we have to return to the basics—the cop on the beat like it used to be in the old days," one of the officers said. "We need to be in closer contact with the public in order to develop a trust with the citizens. Right now they won't tell us much because they don't know us and they are afraid of the gangs and the police."

**The KCPD's Response to Gangs, 1993–1996**

In October 1993, the department realigned and formed the Gang Squad. Starbuck, chosen to lead the new unit, had formerly been on the Street Gang Task Force. The Gang Squad, unlike the task force, had responsibility for gang-related investigations and proactive enforcement in addition to intelligence gathering. In 1996, there were eight detectives assigned to the Gang Squad, and it was part of the Street Narcotics Unit, which was part of the Narcotics and Vice

Division. "Even though we're assigned to the Narcotics Unit," said Starbuck, "we work on all gang crimes, including property and violent crime. But since so many of the crimes we investigate are drug-related, we're assigned to the Narcotics Unit."

On the reasons for forming the Gang Squad, Starbuck remarked, "I think there were a lot of concerns that we had a 'hit or miss' approach to gangs. There was no centralized attack. If it was a robbery, the robbery unit would handle it. If it was a homicide, the homicide investigators would handle it. Every patrol station had their own internal base of gang member intelligence. There needed to be a central repository...A lot of gang-related crimes are different from other crimes. We have the luxury of devoting more time to cases that other elements would not have the time to investigate fully. For example, with a drive-by shooting where victims, witnesses and suspects are all gang members, it takes a lot of digging to get all the information you need."

The Gang Squad dealt with every facet of gang problems, with a particular emphasis on building criminal cases against gang members involved in violent crimes and firearms violations. In fact, the Gang Squad evaluated its work in part on the number of firearms confiscated or recovered, reductions in drive-by shootings, the number of criminal cases instituted, and community awareness and involvement in anti-gang activities. The Gang Squad was the central repository for gang intelligence not just for the KCPD, but also for the entire Kansas City metropolitan area, and they tried to make that information readily available to those who needed it. "Some agencies have gang units that work from 8 to 4, then lock their information in a file cabinet," said Starbuck. "We go out of our way to get the information we have out to officers and make it available."

The Kansas City Police Department was one of 15 cities to receive a grant from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), U.S. Department of Justice, to improve their response to gangs. One facet of this grant was $500,000 to improve their gang-related information systems by setting up a relational database and a geographic information system (GIS) to track patterns, migrations, hangouts and locations of gang activities. The relational database would be on a mainframe computer and would contain information on gang members' names, scars, tattoos, cars, hangouts, friends and other identifying factors. Officers could query the database using a name or any of the other factors. At the time of the grant, the department had 500 computers, including PCs and laptops, available for officers to use, and the new system would allow officers to enter data via laptops in the field, and then upload the data onto the mainframe. The KCPD was already hooked up to a network with 106 law enforcement agencies in the greater Kansas City area, in both Missouri and Kansas. All 106 agencies could both access and add to the database.

"Populating the database is the hard part," according to Judy Robinette of the KCPD's computer services. "The challenge is to get appropriate information from patrol officers." The department planned to develop a field interview form to help guide officers on what information to retrieve. The database would also have a source field to indicate who entered the

information. Robinette implied that the Gang Squad would use this field to try to determine the accuracy of the information. For example, a patrol officer may not be as familiar with the various gangs as the Gang Squad officers, so the Gang Squad might question the accuracy of a patrol officer's identification of a particular person with a particular gang.

The Gang Squad also developed an additional gang member profile that included information such as family history and education levels—the kind of information usually gathered by social workers. This information was stored on a PC in the Gang Squad's office and accessible only to them.

The Gang Squad was involved in investigations of any crime that was gang-related. They did not have hard and fast rules for how incidents were defined as gang-related. "It's almost a waste of time," said Starbuck. "I'm not sure anyone can really tell you whether something is gang-related. Fifteen cities have 15 definitions of what is gang-related." Gang squad detectives investigated auto thefts, burglary, drug possession—any crime in which a gang or gang member appeared to be involved. They did not assume primary responsibility for homicide cases involving gangs or gang members just because of the time involved in investigations. But Starbuck would assign one of his detectives to assist the homicide unit with such investigations if needed.

The squad picked up cases in a number of ways. Gang detectives often picked up new cases while investigating current cases; while interviewing someone in custody, they would focus on culling additional information from that person. Officers throughout the department received training on gang issues, and the Gang Squad was on 24-hour call to respond to incidents if patrol officers had reason to believe a crime was gang-related. Starbuck estimated that about 75 percent of arrests made by gang detectives were generated from situations encountered by patrol officers. The Gang Squad made an effort to touch base with community policing and patrol officers frequently, feeding back information on cases those officers were involved in.

Each morning, a gang detective received a print-out of everyone in the city jail on felony charges. The detective compared the names of those individuals with those known to be gang members. A number of cases were self-initiated by the gang unit detectives, who used informants and other tactics to find out what was happening. For example, in 1996 detectives investigated a large-scale auto-theft ring and some drug organizations as a result of this proactive intelligence gathering and investigation.

Finally, the gang detectives were also involved in proactive enforcement. They went into neighborhoods where there was known gang activity, wearing clothing that identified them as the Gang Squad, focusing on serious problems involving firearms and drugs, and using such tactics as surveillance, serving of warrants and saturation patrols. They did not adopt "zero tolerance," arresting people for jaywalking or littering. "I don't want officers tied up in municipal court every day," remarked Starbuck.

Confiscating firearms from gang members was a significant emphasis in the Gang Squad. They began working more closely with ATF to trace recovered firearms to try to locate and eventually prosecute illegal firearms sources. The department's Anti-Gang Initiative proposal to the COPS Office stated that, "Experience has shown that a concerted proactive response to gang-related violence in a specific area has helped to reduce violent crimes in that area and to increase the quality of life in neighborhoods." That evaluation was based on reduced drive-by shootings, as well as on the testimony of residents of those areas where the Gang Squad concentrated its efforts. Drive-by shootings decreased 11 percent between 1993 and 1994, and 14 percent between 1994 and 1995.

The Gang Squad also worked closely with undercover squads within the Street Narcotics Unit, and Starbuck believed that this was a good working relationship. If the Gang Squad identified a house that was obviously being used by gang members as a drug distribution point, the narcotics officers were called on to conduct undercover buys and surveillance. Armed with the resulting information, the gang detectives could then arrest those involved and confiscate their guns and drugs.

The gang detectives did some lecturing and training with community groups, but they saw themselves as primarily an intelligence, investigative and enforcement unit. They were very supportive of community groups conducting gang intervention programs, as well as of the department's own DARE and GREAT programs. They also embraced the department's community policing emphasis and encouraged officers to do informal "counseling" and have discussions with youths on the streets. "One of the characteristics I require in gang detectives is good communications skills," said Starbuck. "They're always talking to gang members and making lots of contacts."

Dave Lynch, a deputy chief in charge of investigations, commented that the department's community policing emphasis was an integral part of their response to gangs. "We focus on identifying gang members involved in criminal activities...By involving more officers and citizens through community policing, we're getting a lot of help in identifying who the gang members are, and we're educating the community about gangs."

The above-mentioned COPS grant had several other components, in addition to improved information systems, that incorporated the department's community policing emphasis. The Gang Squad, in partnership with investigative personnel from other units, officers working in Community Action Network Centers and those working with Community Action Teams, planned to focus their anti-gang efforts on a neighborhood in the Metro Patrol Division that had significant drug-related and violent crime problems. With the improved information-sharing system in place, the Gang Squad planned to work with these other entities to expedite problem-solving plans in areas where gang activity was a problem, before the areas became hot spots.

The prevention-oriented components of the grant included Gang Squad and Community Action Network officers contacting parents of known gang members. These "Knock and

Talks" were meant to inform parents of their childrens' gang involvement, refer them to appropriate social services, and obtain voluntary parental consent to confiscate firearms or contraband in their childrens' possession. Neighborhood survey forms would be distributed to residents in the target area to measure their perceptions of safety before and after the grant period.

Though the department's leadership changed since the Gang Squad was formed in 1993 (Chief Floyd Bartch led the department after Bishop's retirement in 1995), there were no major changes in the squad's mandate from 1991 to 1996. The original mandate—to identify gang members, particularly those involved in repeated violent crimes, and establish strong criminal cases against individuals—remained in place. "Though we're focused on enforcement," said Starbuck, "we are oriented toward community, as the rest of the department is. We deal with community policing officers and try to be aware of neighborhood needs. We've gotten a lot of support from throughout the department."

Other than the statistics available on drive-by shootings and criminal charges filed, there were no hard-and-fast evaluative measures for the Gang Squad's efforts. Starbuck believed that "there is less flaunting of the gang lifestyle now because they know that they're under scrutiny from communities and law enforcement, and it's not as fashionable to be part of a gang." He also believed that there were effects of the Gang Squad's activities that were impossible to measure. "We try to send the message that this is a lifestyle that's going nowhere. Somewhere there are kids who see friends, relatives and acquaintances whose lives are ruined. They may choose not to adopt the gang lifestyle as a result. We're never going to see those consequences. But I think there are a lot of success stories out there that we'll never find out about." Deputy Chief Lynch concurred: "One of our goals is to make gang life unattractive to young kids. If we can do that, we've won half the battle."

## Conclusion

The Kansas City Police Department identified gangs as a significant problem and applied resources to address that problem from the earliest indications that LA gangs were taking root in their city. Though a number of department employees expressed frustration that commanders and city officials seemed to downplay the gang problem at various times, generally, the department recognized and responded to the problem with a variety of approaches. According to Starbuck, there was never a single incident that sparked intensive response to gangs; it was instead a steady effort to determine the best possible response. "There has not been a denial problem in this department," stated Starbuck, "even if some people have downplayed the gang problem."

By 1996, the department had centralized gang intelligence gathering and enforcement in the nine-person Gang Squad, with the squad collaborating with other department elements on investigations and community awareness and prevention programs. This effort came after other efforts to address gangs as organized crime, and to use a Street Gang Task Force to assist

other units with anti-gang activities when needed. In 1996, the department was planning to improve its information systems as one way of better tracking gangs and gang members, and building successful criminal cases to undermine gang activity.

# Chapter 5
# Metro-Dade Police Department's Response to Gangs

The Metro-Dade, Fla., Police Department committed considerable resources to responding to gangs and the broader issue of juvenile crime in the late 1980s and 1990s. Concern over issues of drug dealing and use, and the growth of youth and street-gang criminality, was heightened in metropolitan Dade County because of southeastern Florida's well-documented reputation as one of the primary entry points of illegal narcotics into the United States.

According to narcotic experts in the Metro-Dade Police Department (MDPD), the drug cartels that controlled the illicit trafficking of narcotics posed a significant threat to outsiders and prevented youth street gangs from entering their markets. Some have speculated that, as gang membership grows, the potential for gangs to use their organization for the distribution of drugs may also increase. During the period covered by this study, however, street gangs in metropolitan Dade County primarily limited their drug-related activity to street-level sales.

To respond to increases in gangs and gang-related problems, and to prevent a nexus between drugs and gangs, the MDPD, under the leadership of Director Fred Taylor, adopted a three-tiered strategy in the late 1980s and early 1990s to curtail gang activity. In 1996, that strategy remained largely in place, with only minor modifications from the original plan. The first tier consisted of MDPD's leadership in implementing and coordinating a countywide task-force approach to gang enforcement. The second tier was a centralized gang unit designed to monitor gang activity and gather intelligence on gang members. The final tier involved detectives placed in each of the department's eight policing districts, where they specialized in investigating gang-related crimes and acted as liaisons between patrol officers and the gang unit.

The Multi-Agency Gang Task Force (MAGTF) was begun in 1988 to draw on the resources of law enforcement agencies throughout Dade County, including MDPD, to both prevent gang-related crime at events, and provide a countywide system for collecting and sharing intelligence information among law enforcement agencies.

## Overview of Dade County

Located in southeastern Florida, Dade County is surrounded by Collier and Monroe counties to the west, Broward County to the north, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east and south. It comprises 2,139 square miles.

According to 1990 U.S. census data, the population of the unincorporated portions of Dade County served by the MDPD was 1,037,221, a 30 percent increase since 1980. County

researchers estimated that the 1996 population was approximately 1,150,546, and expected the population to exceed 1.3 million by the year 2000. The population of school-age children, from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, was expected to increase by almost 200,000 between 1995 and 2015. The ethnic makeup of Dade County changed significantly over the past 20 years. The percentage of non-Hispanic whites decreased by nearly half, and the percentage of Hispanic whites more than doubled; in 1995, approximately 55 percent of the population was Hispanic. This change was attributed to a sharp increase in immigrants from Cuba and Central and South America. This trend was expected to continue. It was expected that the Hispanic population would grow to over 60 percent by 2005.

## The Metro-Dade Police Department

Responsibility for law enforcement in Dade County evolved through a diverse history. From 1900 to 1966 the office of Dade County sheriff was an elected position. In 1957, a metropolitan form of government was adopted and the Dade County Sheriff's Office became known as the Public Safety Department (PSD).

A long-standing controversy over the selection/election procedure for choosing the sheriff was resolved by voter referendum in 1966. The county manager was empowered to appoint a "Director of the Public Safety Department and Sheriff from Metropolitan Dade County" to replace the sheriff's position. The county's charter specified the structure of the Public Safety Department, which had approximately 850 sworn officers at that time. In addition to police functions, the PSD assumed responsibility for fire protection, the jail and stockade, civil defense, animal control and motor vehicle inspection.

By 1973, the PSD had divested itself of many of its responsibilities to concentrate solely on policing services for one of the fastest growing regions in the nation. The PSD had increased in size to approximately 1,200 sworn positions. In 1981, the department was reorganized and became known as the Metro-Dade Police Department. Through the establishment of home rule, the MDPD was given jurisdiction over enforcement throughout the county.

During the period covered by this study, Dade County was governed by the Metro-Dade Board of County Commissioners, made up of the Metropolitan Dade County mayor and 13 commissioners elected by the public. The board appointed the county manager, who was responsible for the day-to-day operation of county departments. The county manager appointed the MDPD director (metropolitan sheriff). The director answered exclusively to the county manager, and was prohibited by statute from taking direction from any of the county commissioners.

At the time of this study, the MDPD was the largest police agency in the southeastern United States. In 1996, it had 4,239 personnel (2,938 sworn and 1,301 civilians) and an authorized budget of almost $280 million.

According to its 1996 mission statement, the MDPD "will commit its resources in partnership with the community to promote a safe and secure environment, free from crime and the fear of crime, to maintain order, and provide for the safe and expeditious flow of traffic, while practicing our core values of integrity, respect, service, and fairness." The department achieved accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) in the early 1990s and was preparing for reaccreditation in 1998.

The MDPD director formulated plans and policies and provided managerial coordination of departmental operations. The second in command was the deputy director, who executed departmental operations as prescribed by the director. In the absence of the director, the deputy director assumed command of the agency.

The department was essentially divided into two primary groupings—Police Services and Support Services—each under the direction of an assistant director. Police Services comprised the North and South Operations Divisions, which included the department's eight district stations. It also included the Uniform Services Division, comprising the Airport Station, the Police Operations Bureau and the Special Patrol Bureau. Support Services comprised four divisions: Administrative Services (personnel, resource management and training); Criminal Investigations (including specialized bureaus for domestic crimes, homicide, etc.); Information Services (records, communications, information systems); and Sheriff Services (crime lab, property and evidence, court services, crime scene investigations).

Until February 1996, the Juvenile Investigations Bureau was located in the Criminal Investigations Division. Following a departmental reorganization, it was renamed as the Juvenile Investigations Section, and moved to the Criminal Intelligence Bureau, which was under the direct supervision of the MDPD deputy director. The section comprised two units: the Street Gang Unit and the SHOCAP (Serious Habitual Offender Comprehensive Action Program) Unit, which focused on youths involved in serious repeat crimes. The Street Gang Unit included both detectives involved in investigative and enforcement functions, and the Gang Clearinghouse, which gathered and disseminated criminal street gang intelligence to law enforcement agencies throughout Dade County and Florida.

In the multiyear plan for 1995 through 1998, Director Taylor outlined 13 primary objectives for the department. Objectives 7 and 8 dealt specifically with juvenile crime, including gangs. The department was committed to dealing proactively with juvenile repeat offenders, using innovative programs such as the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program, and continuing to support and help lead the Multi-Agency Gang Task Force.

## Crime in Dade County

The 1995 countywide crime rate, based on the unincorporated population, decreased from the previous year to 120 crimes per thousand, slightly below 1990 levels. With the exception of aggravated assaults, Part I crimes exhibited a downward trend in 1995. The crime rate,

however, was projected to increase along with the population, with projected levels of 140 crimes per thousand by the year 2000, and 157 crimes per thousand by 2015. The department did not maintain statistics on gang-related crimes specifically.

## The History and Nature of Gangs in Dade County

In 1984, a newly impaneled grand jury examined gangs in Dade County to determine their impact on the community. After reviewing documentation and hearing testimony from local police, school and community leaders, the grand jury issued its final report in the spring of 1985. The grand jury concluded that the presence of gangs was "far below [that of] urban cities of comparable size," but warned that gangs appeared to be "an emerging phenomenon which could expect to grow if not controlled." At that time, the MDPD had two specialized detectives responsible for gang operations.

In the fall of 1987, a second grand jury investigation was conducted to determine if the level of gang activity had changed since 1984. In its final report, issued in May 1988, the grand jury said that gang membership had grown by 47 percent, and the number of identified gangs had increased from 36 to 53 since 1984.

The 1988 grand jury report made nine recommendations for addressing gang-related criminal and anti-social behavior. Two of the recommendations relating specifically to law enforcement became the blueprint for Dade County's response to gangs:

1. Develop a computerized central registry, accessible to police officers 24 hours a day, containing information on youth gang membership, crimes and activities throughout Dade County. All of Dade County's police departments should be involved in the collection, storage and distribution of this information to other agencies.

2. Improve interdepartmental and crossjurisdictional cooperation among all law enforcement and other appropriate agencies both within Dade County and between agencies in Broward and Palm Beach counties to better track gang members and their criminal activities.

In addition to the grand jury report, a number of events during this period heightened the public's awareness of gangs.First, on Oct. 16, 1987, while working in an extra-duty capacity at a local theater, a South Miami police officer was confronted by a group of youths and stabbed. The officer later died from his injuries. Following the death of his officer, Chief Perry Turner of the South Miami Police Department became dedicated to preventing the spread of gangs in South Miami and nearby communities.

Second, a *Miami Herald* newspaper article of Sept. 18, 1988, described the increasing presence of youth gangs in Dade County. That same day, a fight broke out in Tropical Park, in

Metro-Dade's Kendall district, and two gang members were shot. Police in riot gear were needed to stop the brawl, and an estimated 75 gang members were arrested. Before order was restored, two officers and 20 citizens were injured. The combination of the article and television footage of the gang fight was believed to have greatly increased the public's fear of gangs.

Finally, on March 12, 1989, during the annual Calle Ocho street festival in Dade County, gang members from all over the county engaged in hand-to-hand combat. One member was shot by a rival gang member, and police were once again called in to restore order. Police made 223 arrests, many of juveniles. The gang problem once again engaged the public's attention.

An analysis in the early 1990s of gang crimes in several of the 27 independent Dade County police jurisdictions showed that gangs were highly mobile, lacked a traditional "turf" or neighborhood orientation and were composed mostly of juveniles.

In 1991, the Multi-Agency Gang Task Force estimated that there were 96 street gangs in Dade County and approximately 4,700 gang members. Of that number, 60 to 65 gangs were considered active, with an active membership of 2,500 to 3,000. In 1996, there were 60 documented gangs that met the definition of "gang" in Florida State Statute 874, with 4,880 members and associates. There were an estimated 23 additional gangs that were active but had not been officially documented and defined under the above-mentioned statute.

Based on a sample listing of Dade County youth gang members provided by the City of Miami, the MDPD's Habitual Offender Unit, when it was responsible for gang-related investigations and intelligence gathering in the early 1990s, developed a profile of known juvenile gang members. Fifty-three young adults or youths were randomly selected for study and the following profile was developed:

- Sorted by zip code, the geographic distribution of gang members was strikingly clustered. The cities of Hialeah and Miami had the greatest concentration of gang members sampled.

- By a significant percentage, the average member sampled was white and likely to be of Hispanic origin. Sixty-one percent had Spanish surnames indicative of a Hispanic heritage, 33 percent were classified as white and 6 percent were identified as black. Almost all were male (94 percent).

- Seventy-nine percent had an arrest referral history with the Human Resource Services Delinquency Intake unit. Of those, less than 1 percent were referred for weapons violations, but 62 percent had referrals for crimes against persons. The average number of violations charged was nine, and the range was from one to 32.

Sergeant Joseph Rimondi of the Miami Police Department conducted a separate study of gang members residing in Miami. The study revealed the following ethnic makeup of gang members: 50 percent Cuban, 20 percent Puerto Rican, 15 percent Nicaraguan, 10 percent American black, 3 percent Haitian and 2 percent "other." Gang members ranged in aged from 10 to 34 years, but the majority of police interventions were with individuals 14 to 21 years of age. Approximately 3 percent of the gangs had female members, who were as dangerous and violent as the males and often held weapons and narcotics for male members. A 1996 analysis of computer records revealed that 70 percent of documented gang members were white males (this included Hispanic members), 15 percent were black males, 8 percent were white females, and 1 percent were black females, Asian males or Asian females.

In 1996, Sergeant Gary Sellers of the Juvenile Investigations Section reported that, "Several of the gangs are mixed [ethnically], but the majority of gangs go along racial lines. Most gangs appear to be Hispanic. Some new gangs coming in are Haitian, and they have been active in Miami." Sellers also said that gang members ranged from 11 to 24 years in age, and that the increasing number of older members caused the MDPD to stop referring to gangs as "youth gangs," and refer to them as "criminal street gangs" instead.

The extent of criminal behavior by gangs ranged from vandalism (graffiti) to murder. The most common crimes were auto theft, aggravated assault and battery, auto and residential burglaries, strong-armed robberies, and weapon and narcotic violations.

By the mid-1990s, gangs were apparently becoming more involved in drugs, and street-level, small-time dealing remained the focus of enforcement efforts (such as undercover buys and confidential informants). The MDPD was working with the FBI to investigate more highly organized gangs, but it was still true that most area gangs were not highly organized. Gangs appeared to be increasingly mobile; gang movement among Florida counties underlay MDPD's collaborative efforts and information sharing with other law enforcement agencies, as discussed below.

## Countywide Gang Strategy

As the various communities in Dade County formally acknowledged a gang problem, Chief Turner of the South Miami Police Department met with MDPD Director Taylor in 1987. At that time, Taylor was the president of the Dade County Association of Chiefs of Police (DCACP). Turner and Taylor discussed the concept of an interagency gang task force to address the perceived lack of a coordinated effort. They recognized that one agency might not have the individual resources to address the gang problem, but collective resources, used on an ad hoc basis, might improve effectiveness. On Jan. 26, 1988, the idea was presented to DCACP's Executive Board for its support. As a result of that meeting, a resolution was passed that called on all police agencies in Dade County to "participate in a county wide gang inter-agency task force, to pro-actively thwart illegal youth gang activity in Dade County."

The chiefs agreed that the MDPD, as the largest agency, with the most resources and authority throughout the county, would provide logistical support for a countywide gang task force. Regardless of jurisdiction, all task force members would have unrestricted enforcement authority under the provisions of an existing agreement on "Mutual Aid for Pro-Active Operations/Investigations Throughout Dade County."

The countywide response to gangs took shape as the Multi-Agency Gang Task Force (MAGTF), which consisted of two elements mirroring the recommendations of the 1987 grand jury. MAGTF focused on 1) deploying officers from participating agencies at special events that might attract gang members, and 2) maintaining a centralized computer database to collect and evaluate criminal street gang information (the Gang Clearinghouse Project). Several years after MAGTF's inception, the first element was somewhat expanded; MAGTF agencies collaborated not only on special event deployment, but also on training, intelligence gathering and dissemination of gang-related information throughout Florida.

The MAGTF goals and objectives were as follows:

1. Support the interagency task force comprising representatives from federal, state, county and municipal law enforcement agencies.

2. Take advantage of the numerous resources made available by the multiple jurisdictions.

3. Target gangs, gang members and associate gang members for proactive law enforcement.

4. Support intelligence gathering and sharing through the use of a computer database, with each participating agency designating a gang data contact person and the MDPD Juvenile Investigations Bureau [since renamed as the Juvenile Investigations Section] serving as the central repository.

5. Support the MDPD Juvenile Investigations Bureau [Section] as the vehicle for interagency coordination and cooperation.

6. Support and assist all member agencies when requested and operationally feasible.[14]

**The Gang Clearinghouse Project**

The Gang Clearinghouse portion of MAGTF was housed in the Street Gang Unit of the MDPD's Juvenile Investigations Section. The clearinghouse came about as part of MAGTF due to studies underwritten by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) that convinced MDPD members and their colleagues in other departments that a small percentage of juveniles was responsible for a disproportionate number of crimes. Based on grand-jury testimony by local

enforcement officials and the grand jury's recommendations, gathering intelligence on that relatively small group of individuals was critical to police enforcement efforts.

In January 1989, the Metro-Dade County Commission approved the purchase of a computer system and related equipment to establish the clearinghouse. The county's Law Enforcement Trust Fund, a repository for asset forfeiture money, funded the project. Under the supervision of MDPD Sergeant Larry Neill, responsibility for gathering, maintaining and analyzing information on gang members and their activities was centralized in the clearinghouse.

When the project began, data were kept on a personal computer and maintained by MDPD computer staff. The clearinghouse eventually purchased the Gang Reporting, Evaluation and Tracking (GREAT) system, which they used for several years, and later made a change to the Gang Offender Tracking (GO/TRAK) system.

The goals and objectives of the Gang Clearinghouse were as follows:

1. Provide a comprehensive criminal street gang database using an appropriate computer system.

2. Provide all cooperating law enforcement agencies with database information on a 24-hour basis.

3. Maintain the computer database within Florida state guidelines, and provide gang member tracking for criminal penalty enhancement.

4. Provide maximum system security to prevent unauthorized access to the computer database. Additionally, provide for complete system back-up in the event of a system failure.

5. Provide monthly gang activity reports to the Multi-Agency Gang Task Force, and special reports required by MAGTF supervisors and approved by the MAGTF commander.

6. Furnish portable computer capability for database queries at events staffed by MAGTF personnel. Provide analysis of information to assist MAGTF detectives in targeting active gang members involved in criminal activity.

7. Maintain all database intelligence files according to appropriate laws, regulations and departmental directives. Maintain current hard copy files with complete information on all database records.[15]

The Gang Clearinghouse was staffed with a sergeant who supervised the activities of a

police crime analysis specialist, a secretary and a police record specialist, all overseen by the Juvenile Investigations Section lieutenant. The staff entered data gathered from gang information cards, which were standardized throughout the county, as well as information provided by daily field interview reports that identified new gang members or updated information on existing members. Information was also supposed to get funneled from MDPD district stations to the clearinghouse when appropriate; incident reports had a box for officers to check if the incident was gang-related. This system was somewhat problematic, as patrol officers had to use their own discretion to determine whether an incident was gang-related.

To standardize as much as possible the information gathered from various law enforcement agencies throughout the county, the clearinghouse adopted definitions of gangs and gang members as outlined in Florida State Statute 874 on "Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention." According to that statute, a criminal street gang is a formal or informal ongoing organization, association or group of three or more persons who

- have a common name or common identifying signs, colors or symbols;
- have members or associates who, individually or collectively, engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal street gang activity.

A criminal street gang member is a person who engages in a pattern of criminal street gang activity and meets two or more of the following criteria:

- admits to criminal street gang membership;
- is a youth under the age of 21 years who is identified as a criminal street gang member by a parent or guardian;
- resides in or frequents a particular criminal street gang's area and adopts their style of dress, their use of hand signs, or their tattoos, and associates with known criminal street gang members;
- is identified as a criminal street gang member by an informant of previously untested reliability and such identification is corroborated by independent information;
- has been arrested more than once in the company of identified criminal street gang members for offenses which are consistent with usual criminal street gang activity;
- is identified as a criminal street gang member by physical evidence such as photographs or other documentation; and/or

- has been stopped in the company of known criminal street gang members four or more times.

Participating law enforcement agencies not only contributed information from their jurisdictions to the clearinghouse, but could also obtain information by submitting a request to the MDPD Juvenile Investigations Section.

**Other MAGTF Activities**

Two primary activities of MAGTF, in addition to the Gang Clearinghouse, were 1) mobilizing member agencies for any large-scale event in the county that had the potential to attract gang members, and 2) holding monthly meetings to develop common goals and exchange gang information in a timely manner.

All MAGTF call-outs for events were coordinated through the MDPD Juvenile Investigations Section, with the lieutenant in charge of that section serving as MAGTF commander. The coordination and planning of MAGTF were overseen by an advisory board consisting of supervisors from the largest participating agencies. When an upcoming event had the potential to attract gang members, the task force was mobilized through the collective use of Dade County gang enforcement resources. When activated, the task force's authority fell within mutual aid agreements among agencies and extended countywide jurisdiction to municipal officers for the term of the event or incident. By policy and practice, the agency that had primary jurisdictional authority for an event had overall responsibility for the use and deployment of the task force, and was responsible for providing all logistical information needed to formulate an effective deployment plan.

An event's promoter often shared the cost of providing police services, often agreeing to reimburse police agencies for all or some of the overtime funds expended during the event. Thus, police agencies' budgets were not adversely affected by an event in their jurisdiction.

The task force used the tactics of high visibility, immediate contact and surveillance of gang members to deter illegal activity at large public events where public safety could be jeopardized. The task force was first deployed at the 1988 Dade County Youth Fair at Tamiami Park Fairgrounds. Previous Youth Fairs had been marked by gang disturbances. Gang specialists from the Metro-Dade, Miami, Hialeah, South Miami and other municipal police departments "greeted" arriving gang members from their respective jurisdictions. This approach eliminated the anonymity of gang members and was believed to have deterred gang activity at the event. Although many gangs were in attendance, no major incidents occurred. The task force continued to provide these services at the annual Youth Fair, Calle Ocho (an annual street fair) and other events, such as the 1996 Olympic soccer matches at Miami's Orange Bowl. There were no serious gang-related incidents at recent Youth Fairs, Calle Ocho festivals or the soccer games.

Monthly meetings of MAGTF representatives were coordinated by the sergeant who oversaw the Gang Clearinghouse. Guidelines and deadlines were in place for participating

agencies to provide monthly reports and information to the Gang Clearinghouse either just before or at the monthly meetings. Those reports included data to be entered on the database, which had to be supplied on computer disk, and other information or special reports that could benefit members of the task force. Information was compiled into a monthly report, including such information as names of active gang members and their affiliations, and distributed to MAGTF agencies.

The meetings included an open forum discussion, during which attendees could either solicit or provide information on specific cases or crime trends in their jurisdiction. Though chiefs from MAGTF agencies attended monthly meetings on occasion, the meetings were primarily targeted to line supervisors and officers. Ranking officers were viewed as a resource for the task force, rather than vice versa.

## MDPD Internal Strategies

### The Street Gang Unit

MAGTF activities, including the Gang Clearinghouse, were significant responsibilities of the MDPD Juvenile Investigations Section; however, there were several internal initiatives to combat gang-related problems as well. Director Taylor did not believe that MAGTF and the clearinghouse were a panacea for gangs, so MDPD internal efforts complemented county-wide efforts.

The Street Gang Unit was responsible for investigating and gathering intelligence on criminal street gangs and their activities, conducting surveillance, documenting street gang activities and conducting proactive enforcement, in addition to their participation and support of MAGTF and the clearinghouse. A lieutenant oversaw both the Gang Clearinghouse and the Street Gang Unit, which was staffed by a sergeant and six detectives in 1996, though it was budgeted for 10 detectives.

According to Director Taylor, this unit was designed to pass on information about criminal activity to the appropriate agency or specialized unit responsible for criminal investigation. For example, if the unit discovered that gang members were involved in street robberies, that information was passed on to robbery detectives, who handled the criminal investigation up to and including arrests. Proactive intelligence gathering, documentation and information sharing was the unit's primary responsibility, though they did some proactive enforcement and assisted in investigations as a resource to other units. Patrol officers could ask gang detectives to come to a crime scene if they believed an incident was gang-related. The information-gathering portion of the gang detectives' job was formalized in a requirement that they make weekly contacts with individuals in other MDPD districts and units, as well as in other police agencies, to get new information. They wrote weekly reports on the information they received.

### Decentralized Gang Detectives

Each of the eight police districts had one or two detectives who specialized in cases involving gang activity. These detectives acted as liaisons between their district and the Street Gang Unit

and were responsible for responding to gang activities in their district. They were responsible for follow-up investigations of gang-related incidents. They also attended monthly gang task force meetings.

**Anti-Gang and Diversionary Programs**

The MDPD's gang intelligence and enforcement efforts were supplemented by programs to divert children from the temptations of gang activity. The following were some of the MDPD's anti-gang and diversionary programs:

- **School Resource Officers:** School resource officers performed their duties on school campuses, developing rapport with students and gathering intelligence information. They also served as a liaison between the police department and school administration, gave presentations on narcotics and gangs to parents and teachers, and participated in special events. They also conducted various programs for elementary through high school children, such as safety presentations and drop-out prevention programs.

- **Police Athletic League (PAL):** PAL provided an opportunity for youths in economically deprived areas to participate in athletic activities. Good sportsmanship, teamwork and interaction with positive police role models were combined in an effort to redirect juveniles who might otherwise get involved in crime.

- **Police Explorer Program:** A part of the Boy Scouts of America, the Explorer Program provided youngsters with positive role models and an opportunity to interact with police officers.

- **Join a Team, Not a Gang:** This program used players and coaching staff from the University of Miami to discourage youths from joining a gang and suggest positive alternatives.

- **Adopt a Wall:** Officers coordinated and participated in graffiti eradication by getting local high school students to "adopt a wall" and pledge to discourage graffiti at that location. The students used donated paint and supplies to cover graffiti that did appear.

- **Task Force Against Graffiti (TAG):** The objectives of the TAG program were to increase public awareness of the graffiti problem, arrest vandals responsible for graffiti and restore those neighborhoods most victimized by graffiti.

## Conclusion

Through its participation in the countywide Gang Clearinghouse Project and Multi-Agency Gang Task Force, the Metro-Dade Police Department took a strong, proactive approach to

addressing gang activity in the county. A central feature of the MDPD's response was enhanced communication, coordination and information sharing among county law enforcement agencies.

MDPD's internal gang-response strategies complemented the countywide efforts, but MDPD officers involved in gang-related activities were primarily associated with the countywide MAGTF initiative.

# Chapter 6
# San Diego Police Department's Response to Gangs

In the 1990s, the twin problems of gangs and drugs were not new to San Diego. Gang problems mostly developed in the mid-1970s, while drug problems, particularly the sale and use of crack cocaine, exploded between 1984 and 1987.

The local law enforcement community in San Diego responded to gangs and drugs in five key ways. First, the San Diego Police Department (SDPD), with primary responsibility for law enforcement, maintained a Narcotics Unit for addressing street-level drug activity and a separate Street Gang Unit for investigating gang activity. Second, the department charged its line personnel with responding to problems that occurred on the street. The department's leadership in the 1990s was dedicated to neighborhood-oriented policing, in which patrol officers were front and center in the agency's response to community problems.

Third, a countywide Narcotics Task Force, made up of representatives from local police and sheriffs' agencies, working in cooperation with federal agencies, handled problems related to drug trafficking. Fourth, the San Diego District Attorney's Gang Prosecution Unit, which included SDPD gang detectives, coordinated gang prosecution efforts from inception to disposition—a technique known as vertical prosecution. Finally, the SDPD coordinated a number of proactive efforts designed to intervene in what might otherwise be a maturation of youths from gang affiliates to gang members and/or drug dealers.

## Overview of San Diego

An urban area of over 1.1 million people, San Diego sprawls southward along the Pacific coast to meet the northern border of Mexico. The majority of the 1990 population was white (59%), while the remainder of the population fell into the following ethnic categories: Hispanic (21%), Asian/Pacific Islander (11%) and black (9%). Approximately 13 percent of San Diego's population fell below the poverty line.

In 1996, the violent crime rate was decreasing for the fourth year in a row, while the overall crime rate was decreasing for the seventh consecutive year. Data for the first six months of 1996 compared with the first six months of 1995 showed that robbery was down by 3.2 percent, aggravated assaulted by 9 percent, burglary by 24 percent, larceny by 4 percent and motor vehicle theft by nearly 12 percent. This trend followed a significant increase in violent crime in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which police attributed partly to the volatility of drug abuse and sales in the city, much of it linked to gangs.[16]

## Overview of the San Diego Police Department

The chief in 1996, Jerry Sanders, rose through the department's ranks to become its chief executive in 1992. Sanders implemented community policing in San Diego, restructuring police beats to better suit community needs. In doing so, Sanders built on the work of his predecessor, Robert Burgreen, who served as chief from 1988 to 1992. An advocate of neighborhood-oriented policing, Burgreen reorganized and flattened the agency's hierarchy, and though he created a number of special units to target drugs, gangs and other problems, Burgreen encouraged special units to be resources for neighborhood-level beat officers, rather than viewing special units as solely responsible for addressing certain crime problems.

The department had 1,987 sworn officers in 1996—a ratio of 1.8 officers per 1,000 population, which was below the national average of 2.4 officers per 1,000 population. This scarcity of human resources was a major factor in how the department responded to any long-term problem. For example, in order to find 70 sworn officers dedicated to community problem solving, Burgreen in 1992 effectively dismantled the department's Special Enforcement Unit (SEU), a walking patrol of more than 40 uniformed officers charged with proactively targeting gang problems throughout the city. This dismantling changed the nature of the department's response to gangs, as uniformed gang officers went back to patrol duties as part of the neighborhood-oriented policing effort.

## The History and Nature of Gangs in San Diego

The first manifestation of gang violence occurred in the early 1950s (some say the 1940s), when several well-established Hispanic gangs (known as youth clubs) began engaging in inter-gang rivalry within the Hispanic community and in criminal activity. For the most part, these barrio-based gangs were protected by those who lived there because the gangs' actions were viewed as protecting the community from outsiders. These youth clubs evolved into car clubs, which later metamorphosed into street gangs.

According to a former gang unit commander, Mexican car clubs, the equivalent of youth gangs, existed in San Diego since at least the late 1950s. These car clubs were initially considered social groups, in which members were organized around maintaining their automobiles in a particular way. The car clubs had such names as Latin Lowriders, Brown Image, Latin Image and the Casinos, and were formally structured with a president or leader, who made and enforced rules for the group.

As Hispanic gangs were evolving in San Diego, black gangs were emerging as well. It was commonly believed in San Diego that black street gangs were "exported" from nearby Los Angeles as part of a "resettlement" of Crips factions by probation and parole officers. These relocations were believed to have occurred about 1972, and it was around this period that street gangs began to increase at an alarming rate in the San Diego area. In 1975, police estimated that there were three gangs and fewer than 300 gang members. In 1996, police documented 63 known gangs with over 4,500 members, ranging in age from 14 to 30 years.

Contrary to popular belief, more than 70 percent of the members of so-called youth gangs were adults—that is, over 18 years old. The city's documented gangs also reflected a greater racial, ethnic and cultural diversity than is often assumed. The majority of the city's gang members were Hispanic (about 45%) or black (about 40%), although Asian participation in gang activity was accelerating in the 1990s. In 1996, department staff cited a noticeable rise in the number of Indo-Chinese, white and Filipino gangs, which accounted for about 15 percent of gang membership.

From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, some dimensions of gang-related violence rose to new heights, although the numbers were not unidirectional. From 1987 to 1988, the number of documented gang-related homicides rose 250 percent (from eight to 28), and more than 90 drive-by shootings occurred in 1988. By 1990, the number of gang-related homicides fell to 12 and drive-by shootings declined to 52, but rates for both crimes peaked again several years later, with 30 homicides in 1993, 107 drive-by shootings in 1992 and 102 drive-by shootings in 1993. By 1995, both crimes had again decreased, with 14 homicides and 57 drive-by shootings.

The number of gang-related assaults with a deadly weapon, which more than doubled (from 91 to 193) from 1987 to 1988 and sharply increased again to 257 in 1989, remained high, reaching a peak of 325 assaults in 1992. 1988 was also the first year that gang-related car thefts showed a significant increase; after three years of fewer than 10 gang-related car thefts, the department recorded 55 in 1988. After 1988, the number of car thefts fluctuated from a high of 74 (1989) to a low of 37 (1993).

Despite the gangs' proclivity for violent and criminal activity, police believed most gangs had little formal organizational structure; members simply followed the leadership of the boldest in the group. In general, the gangs' organization was tiered according to the members' degree of commitment to a criminal lifestyle and their criminal sophistication. Police categorized gang members as hard-core, active participants or peripheral members (affiliates). The latter group adopted the external manifestations of gang membership but were generally not fully immersed in the gang culture.

Gang members participated in a wide range of criminal behavior, from misdemeanor incivilities that required police intervention to property and violent crime. Generally, police believed the city's black gangs were most involved in drug sales. The black gangs also participated in strong-armed robbery, burglary and auto theft, as well as a pastime known as mad driving, in which a gang member stole a car, smashed through a store window, and stole as much merchandise as possible before the police arrived. Asian gangs often participated in residential robberies, auto thefts and extortion from other Asians. Hispanic gangs participated in drug use and sold small quantities of drugs, but usually only within the neighborhood and to selected outsiders. The police believed that all gangs were involved in drug activity at some level, ranging from personal use to street-level dealing to wholesale distribution.

A dramatic change occurred in the composition of San Diego gangs in the 1980s. Police attributed this change to factors such as the city's proximity to Los Angeles, its international airport and proximity to Mexico, its year-round tourist industry, the presence of numerous naval and other military installations dominated by males under the age of 25, and the number of major universities in the area. These factors translated into a ready market for drugs and large quantities of readily available narcotics for street-gang drug traffickers.

SDPD detectives believed that gang members became involved in the sale of rock cocaine around 1982, and that the nature of gang problems changed with the increased popularity of crack use. Some of the black gang members established sophisticated drug organizations that yielded enormous profits, which the gang members invested in high-powered weapons, expensive vehicles, mobile telephones, countersurveillance equipment and real estate.

Prominent San Diego gangs included the West Coast Crips—a majority black gang; the 5-9 Brim, East Side Piru and Lincoln Park—all factions of the Bloods; the Linda Vista Crips—an ethnically mixed gang known for its violence toward other street gangs and the police; the Oriental Killer Boys—a group of Vietnamese and Laotian males who engaged in auto theft; Sherman—a predominately Hispanic gang engaged in drug sales and use; and Logan—a Hispanic gang in existence since the 1940s that engaged in violent assaults and murder.

The West Coast Crips and East Side Piru—the two largest gangs—were rivals. The Crips were believed to be the first black street gang to operate in San Diego after the relocation of a paroled gang member from Los Angeles in the early 1970s. The animosity between San Diego factions of the Bloods and Crips was cemented in 1976, when a major interstate highway (I-805) dividing the city was constructed. Following the opening of the highway, all Crips on the east side of the highway joined Piru or Blood factions, and the remaining Crips established themselves and their territory on the west side of the highway. Crips engaged in a great deal of property crime, and some members matured into drug sales, armed robbery and murder. The East Side Piru was primarily involved in property crime and street and commercial robberies, especially of grocery stores. The gang became the major supplier of rock cocaine in the city, although marijuana remained the drug of choice for many of its members.

## The San Diego Police Department's Response to Gangs

The SDPD was concerned about gang problems since at least 1974, when the department appointed one of the agency's School Task Force officers to monitor the activity of gangs and car clubs. In 1975, the department formed the Gang Enforcement Team, staffed by four officers, to monitor car clubs and gangs. By 1978, some 25 street gangs, with an estimated membership of 1,500, had been identified in the city. In response to growing gang problems, the department expanded the Gang Enforcement Team to include a supervisor and 10 plainclothes officers, and renamed it the Group Activities Section. This section's objective was to gather intelligence, identify individual gang members and monitor gang activity. In the early 1980s, the unit was renamed the Gang Detail and its officers were given detective status. Their mission was expanded to include investigation of all gang-related incidents.

In 1989, rising gang violence and several well-publicized gang-related incidents, including the killing of a police officer, led the department to form its Special Enforcement Division—a 109-member unit staffed with 21 gang detectives, SWAT personnel, the 40-officer Special Enforcement Unit (SEU), 16 School Task Force officers, seven mobile police station officers and a motorcycle unit. The SEU was especially noteworthy, with 36 uniformed officers and four sergeants whose primary responsibility was to target gang- and drug-related violence, particularly drug-related drive-by shootings. For nearly three years, SEU personnel worked hand-in-hand with the gang detectives in the division to augment their resources and maintain a high-visibility profile. The division had included gang detectives among its personnel in order to form a single command and enhance communication, but the separation of gang detectives from other investigatory units made some internal communications more difficult. By early 1992, as part of Chief Burgreen's move toward less specialization and more community-based efforts, the department disbanded SEU. The gang detectives were reunited with the Investigations Division (in the form of the Street Gang Unit), and uniformed gang officers were assigned to patrol districts to augment the department's neighborhood policing efforts.

**The Street Gang Unit**

The Street Gang Unit, with 46 sworn officers (detectives and sergeants) in 1996, investigated gang-related crimes and tracked known gang members and affiliates. Each gang detective was assigned responsibility for a number of gangs, based on the gangs' common ethnicity, and handled a case load of about 10 cases. Cases normally consisted of reported crime incidents, which the detectives investigated. The unit was considered reactive, whereas the SEU was more proactive. However, the unit did implement a Gang Suppression Team—a uniformed arm of the gang unit that was more proactive in targeting gangs and gang activity.

For the first few years, the gang unit kept manual archives of gang information and photographs. They used information from patrol officers, often gained through field interviews, to augment their own information. The gang unit eventually adopted the GREAT (Gang Reporting and Tracking) database system to maintain its gang files. The files were maintained and purged by gang detectives. Patrol officers could request information from the gang unit, and homicide detectives often requested information about known associates and other data.

To be included in the database, a gang had to meet the department's formal definition of a gang:

- It must have a name.
- It must claim a territory, turf or neighborhood.
- Its members must associate internally with each other on a continuous basis.
- It must be involved in criminal activity.

Gang detectives used a variety of tactics to carry out their investigations, depending on the type of criminal activity involved. A prevalent activity among gang members was drug sales. A 1989 study of documented gang members who were on probation in San Diego revealed that 75 percent had drug convictions.[17] Gangs' involvement in drug activity provided an opportunity for police. Despite the diversity of gang-related criminal activity, "narcotics is an easy way [for police] to get into the gang," remarked Captain Kraig Kessler of the Investigations Division. By using undercover officers, police were able to infiltrate some gangs. Asian gangs were more difficult to penetrate because of language barriers and their being closed to outsiders. The department also lacked the cultural diversity among its personnel to infiltrate these ethnic gangs.

The detectives also used other infiltration tactics, such as sting operations, to get into gangs. For example, police once set up a "chop shop" to front for stolen automobiles; it provided access to gangs engaged in auto theft. Conversely, tactics such as surveillance of a single gang member were rarely used because of the extensive human resources necessary to carry out an effective surveillance effort. The unit's approach was largely to identify an illegal activity that gang members were engaging in and focus on that activity, using documentation of gang affiliations and other intelligence information to develop leads for investigation.

Management of the investigative gang unit presented some challenges to supervisors. Gang detectives were not evaluated in terms of quantifiable activities. Instead, supervisors looked at such factors as the detective's cooperation with other departments, the thoroughness with which cases were presented, the detective's success in getting cases issued, and punctuality.

Supervisors also looked at the role of the investigator. For example, Detective Felix Aguirre and another detective were responsible for a segment of the Hispanic gangs in southeast San Diego—groups that engaged in drive-by shootings, stabbings, assaults and intergang conflict. The pair served as a resource to detectives based in division stations. "We monitor, document and know the gangs—no one else knows them like we do," said Aguirre. The unit's primary mission was to gather intelligence, investigate gang-related incidents and document gang members.

Gang-related activity throughout the city was tracked by the Street Gang Unit. Detectives in the gang unit used the Argis computer system, which was accessible by all local law enforcement agencies, to make gang information available within the department and to other agencies. The system identified matches on individuals for any law enforcement contact and was known as "Officer Notification System." Data in the system included results of field interviews, arrests, incident reports and jail censuses.

As part of the data management and quality control process, detectives reviewed all violent crime reports daily, an average of 75, that involved a member of a minority group. The distinction by race was a reality for the city; in 1996, there were no documented white gangs that met the definition criteria outlined in the state penal code. Although the incident reports had

a box for officers to indicate the incident was gang-related, the boxes often went unchecked. Thus, detectives were alert to any potential evidence of gang involvement in a crime, and used the information to update files and pass them along to appropriate personnel.

Communication was important in the operations of the gang unit, and procedures for internal and external communication were set out in written policies and procedures. For example, members of the unit engaged in public outreach to community and school groups, the media and others. Gang detectives also regularly presented information to citizens and other law enforcement officers (e.g., at patrol line ups) on key issues, including how to identify gang activity. Because of time restrictions, such presentations were often squeezed in on a detective's personal time. Most detectives made five or six presentations a month.

The gang unit maintained internal communication through several mechanisms. A gang incident log was one means of exchanging information. "The formalized point of contact is this book," said one sergeant. Information was also frequently exchanged informally, for example, when personnel ran into each other.

For new gang detectives, members of the unit prepared a resource document. The compendium profiled all the major gangs in the city, including common locations, rival gangs, graffiti used, and documented number of members. The unit also developed an overview of street gangs in the city called "Street Gang History" to provide information and a historical perspective to new gang detectives.

Despite the prominent role of the gang detectives in the SDPD's response to gang problems, special units were viewed as resources for the beat officer. The department was organized into area commands and service areas, each managed by a patrol captain. This captain had the authority to address problems within that division as appropriate. Thus, from beat officer to investigator, the captain had the latitude to use resources to meet divisional objectives.

Gang detectives were highly supportive of that vision. "As far as I'm concerned, the beat officer is the key" to addressing gang problems, said Detective Aguirre. Thus, the presentations by gang detectives at line ups could facilitate communication between line and detective personnel. Detectives were also required by written policy to maintain regular contact with administrators and patrol officers in relevant command areas.

To increase officers' knowledge of gang problems, personnel from the gang detective unit also taught at Advanced Officer Training, a four-day program all officers had to attend. Two hours of this training were on gangs in San Diego. "We tell them how to identify gang members, how to understand graffiti and...how to contact us," said Aguirre. Both investigators and patrol officers worked to maintain open communication regarding gang-related intelligence. Aguirre routinely monitored the radio to identify and assist in potentially gang-related incidents in partnership with patrol officers.

Being transferred into the Street Gang Unit was considered desirable by many line officers. Supervisors responded by selecting the best candidates possible. Some of the qualities supervisors sought in gang detectives were the ability to write thorough reports and submit them on time, self-motivation and the ability to work with little supervision. Historically, line officers tried to provide or request information from gang detectives, at least partly because it enabled them to make a connection they could follow up on later in an effort to earn a spot in the unit. Some patrol officers, for example, routinely carried cameras to snap photographs of gang members to add to the detective unit's gang file.

Other units in the agency also had responsibility for gang-related problems. The department's Narcotics Unit had primary responsibility for addressing street-level drug problems in the city. Potentially conflicting responsibilities of units were coordinated through supervisors. For example, lieutenants of all units met daily to discuss operations, including informing one another about operations currently under way. This communication was particularly important between Narcotics and Street Gang Detectives while the two units were separated divisionally; the department's reorganization rejoined these two units in the Investigations Division, which facilitated communication. Communication between the two units was often informal; however, whenever gang detectives were working on a gang involved in drug activity, their directive was to work with the narcotics street team.

Communication was less critical but still important with the countywide Narcotics Task Force, which merged all city and county narcotics units with personnel from the Drug Enforcement Administration and U.S. Customs Service. The unit focused on wholesale drug activity. Communication among the various specialized units was facilitated through the use of a Narcotics Information Network, in which investigators entered addresses and subjects' names to avoid conducting simultaneous investigations.

**Joint Investigations with the District Attorney's Office**

The San Diego District Attorney's Office also took an active role in addressing gang problems in the city. The office began its systematic efforts to address gang problems with a $250,000 grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance in 1990. The grant proposal laid out a plan for conducting vertical prosecution of gang members. The effort was launched with a major operation conducted in tandem with the police department, called Blue Rag, which focused on members of the Crips gang. This special investigation lasted about five months and netted more than 75 indictments. A subsequent operation, Red Rag, targeted hard-core Bloods gang members. Operation Bandanna, conducted in late 1991 and 1992, was a similar operation directed at Hispanic gang members.

As a result of these focused joint investigations, many gang members were arrested. Most of the original members of the West Coast Crips were taken into custody as a result of Operation Blue Rag. "We have been really successful in solving black gang crime," said Detective Joe Howie. Then-gang detective Lieutenant Dennis Gibson agreed: "We were successful with the arrest and prosecution of black gang members because of their involvement with drug deals."

These operations were part of a multiagency investigation and prosecution effort designed to disrupt gangs by targeting hard-core and violent gang members. Red Rag, for example, targeted hard-core gang members belonging to eight of the city's 10 black street gangs involved in drug trafficking. The strategy of the operation included four key elements:

- A gang member was identified and used as a confidential informant.
- An integrated vertical prosecution team was organized, including assistant district attorneys who participated in the planning process to ensure solid felony drug sales cases. This team maintained responsibility for coordinating all evidence.
- Video corroboration of undercover purchases was arranged by installing a video camera in the rear of the informant's car.
- Arrangements were made to use state grand jury indictments thereby avoiding the time-consuming preliminary hearings usually required for such cases.

The operation was carried out by establishing a buy pattern for each day of the operation, providing buy money to the confidential informant and briefing the informant about targets for the buy. Police personnel conducted loose surveillance of the confidential informant, relying on the two-hour videotape in his car to monitor and record both his activity and the controlled buys. At the conclusion of the buys, personnel conducted a debriefing of the informant, which included marking evidence and photographing the informant with the evidence. The team maintained a log with all information related to the individual buy, including date, time and amount of drugs involved.

An important element of the investigations was that targets were often known only by their street name. Thus, after a completed buy on a target, police would conduct field investigations to verify the identities of the targets or have officers view photographs from the field interviews to identify them.

Based on their formally specified goals, the directed operations were extremely successful. For example, in the Red Rag operation, the team conducted 149 buys from 121 gang members over 90 days in the fall of 1991, at a cost of $21,000, primarily for rock cocaine. All the cases were reviewed by the district attorney's Gang Prosecution Unit and 102 cases were filed. All of the defendants pleaded guilty and 77 suspects were indicted. Judges were briefed in advance and probation officers began revocation procedures immediately. Only two defendants were able to get out on bail.

A key player in the multiagency vertical prosecution effort was Keith Burt, who headed the Gang Prosecution Unit for the District Attorney's Office. The unit was formed in 1981 when the police chief (William Kolender) called the district attorney: "We've got a great gang

unit but when our cases get the to the D.A., they die," Kolender was reported to have said.

In its early days, the prosecutor's gang unit spent a lot of time with police gang personnel, riding with officers to "learn the ropes" of gang activity. Conviction rates climbed from 37 percent to the 88 to 90 percent rate of the past 10 years, said Burt. At first, the unit had to beg cases away from other assistant district attorneys to build a case load. The unit's case load eventually became extremely heavy, and prosecutors took only those cases with a good chance of ending in a conviction. "The key to a successful (prosecutor's) gang unit is a reduced case load," said Burt. "Previously if a witness called, we would go over and hold their hand even if there were no danger." Time restrictions later halted that practice. Still, prosecutors claimed they were available 24 hours a day and asked to be "called out" by police to the scene for major gang-related incidents. "You cannot underestimate the value of having a D.A. at the scene when the scene is hot," remarked Burt. The unit had about 23 members, including nine attorneys, six investigators, at least one police officer and support staff.

Working jointly with the police department and other agencies proved valuable to the District Attorney's Office. "We could never do a thing like this [by ourselves] and get rid of 200 people at one time," said Burt. Despite the apparent strengths of the collaborative approach, relations with the police department were not always smooth. Difficulties centered around access to resources, supervision of personnel and related issues. Nonetheless, both agencies were committed to the approach and planned to continue cooperative efforts.

**Other SDPD Anti-Gang Activities**

The anti-gang efforts of the police department were not solely enforcement-oriented. Juveniles Out of Gangs was a three-week, add-on curriculum to DARE that taught youths how to resist peer pressure, and other practical anti-gang tactics. The city council was supportive of the department's DARE initiative and mandated an expansion of the program, which used uniformed but unarmed officers to provide a 17-week anti-drug curriculum in elementary, middle and junior high schools. Competition among police personnel for participation in DARE was stiff. Prospective candidates were interviewed using a structured questionnaire designed to determine whether they had the skills needed to interact effectively with young people. In the Juvenile Intervention Program, another proactive effort, officers counseled parents and first-time juvenile offenders.

Additionally, the department's School Task Force consisted of two sergeants and 13 officers responsible for enforcing laws at the city's 59 secondary schools. The focus of this effort was predominately drugs and gangs. "Gangs are probably our major focus," reported Sergeant Bob O'Donnell, although the task force directly handled minor narcotics problems. Major problems were referred to the department's Narcotics Unit.

Chief Sanders anticipated that the department would move to more prevention-oriented response to gangs as their approach evolved. "I think what we're trying to do is look at all investigative units and work more on the prevention model," remarked Sanders. "I think

gangs is one area that we'll be putting more resources into because we know it's possible to prevent gang crimes. We've seen a decrease in gang crimes by putting more people into anti-gang roles." Sanders stated that he would be overseeing a restructuring of investigative units to meet the department's increased emphasis on problem solving and community policing.

## Conclusion

Like many other police agencies in the nation, the San Diego Police Department struggled for several years to find the right organizational strategy for addressing drug- and gang-related problems that had taken hold in the city. The struggle included revamping the organization several times and experimenting to find the right approach. The constantly changing nature of gang and drug problems contributed to the challenge of determining the best use of scarce resources. "The common wisdom on gangs changes from one year to the next," said one gang expert. To stay abreast of the changing panorama of gang-related misconduct in the city, the department showed itself willing to experiment and use alternative approaches to address well-entrenched although volatile problems related to drugs and gangs.

# Chapter 7
# Summary and Conclusion

Gang-related problems and police strategic and organizational responses to these problems vary widely in San Diego, Chicago, Kansas City, Austin and the metropolitan county of Dade, Fla.—a variation that is probably typical of the range of gang types and gang problems manifested in the rest of the nation. A review of the five preceding case studies suggests that contemporary police agencies repond to local dynamics of gang problems and craft institutional and strategic responses that generally "fit" the agency's orientation to crime and disorder. Thus, rather than implement a "one size fits all" approach to gang problems, police agencies orient themselves to local conditions and change or refine their approach over time. Given the wide variation in gang problems between and within cities, the examination of police responses to gangs in this document consists largely of a descriptive comparison. It was impossible to measure the amount of or compare differences, for example, in agencies' gang prevention activities. However, one can discern clear trends in the evolution of police responses to gang problems. This chapter identifies and discusses distinctions and similarities in police responses.

## Variety of Organizational Configurations

A variety of police organizational arrangements to address gang-related problems were observed in the five jurisdictions in this study. In 1991, two agencies had large specialized gang units, two agencies used a more generalized approach to gangs with a one- or two-person gang intelligence unit, and the remaining agency used an information-gathering and dissemination approach that included gang specialists placed in patrol areas. By 1996, the organizational and strategic approaches of these police agencies to gang problems had become more similar. The two agencies without specialized units in 1991 later formed specialized gang units, while the two agencies with large specialized gang units decreased the number of personnel assigned to special units and redirected more responsibility for gang enforcement to patrol officers. The combined specialist-generalist approach in the remaining agency remained intact over the five-year study period. Now, the most common organizational response to gangs pairs a centralized investigative and intelligence-gathering unit with decentralized patrol personnel.

The similarity of police organizational responses among the cities studied is consistent with Curry et al, who found that 65 percent of large city (more than 200,000 population) police departments reporting a gang problem had a specialized gang unit, while among smaller cities (less than 200,000), 49 percent had a gang unit. Since Curry's 1992 survey, there probably has been an increasing trend in large cities forming specialized gang units.[18]

Despite growing similarity in organizational approach to gang problems, there remained significant differences in the strategic approach of agencies to gang problems. Consistent with

Spergel et al., who wrote that "police approaches [to gang problems] are surprisingly complex and variable, and not easily categorized"[19], the five agencies in this study combined elements of intelligence gathering about gangs, enforcement efforts, investigation of gang-related crimes and prevention activities. Because this study was not designed as a cross-sectional study, it is difficult to compare the relative emphasis in each agency on each of these strategic approaches. These differences are discussed later in this chapter.

## Variations in Gangs and Gang Activity

The manifestation of gang problems varied significantly among cities in this study. The population of gang members in each jurisdiction—and their growth in the last five years—is not fully descriptive of the variation in problems. San Diego, Kansas City, Austin and Metro-Dade all identified approximately 4,000 to 5,000 active gang members in their city. The number of individual gangs in these cities varied from approximately 60 gangs each in Metro-Dade and San Diego to 70–75 gangs in Austin and Kansas City. Chicago had more gang members than the other four jurisdictions combined—an estimated 100,000 gang members belonged to 132 gangs in Chicago. The variation in numbers of gangs and gang membership is clearly equated with the onset of gang problems and the city size. At 3 million population, Chicago had about three times the service population of San Diego and Metro-Dade and about six times the service population of Kansas City and Austin. Chicago also had a long history of gang problems, while criminal gangs were a relatively new phenomenon in the other jurisdictions.

Ethnic variation among gangs was a distinguishing characteristic in all of the cities studied. Ethnicity of gangs was used as an organizing characteristic by most of the police departments studied. For example, black and Hispanic gangs were considered most problematic and dominant in Kansas City and Chicago, while Latino (the term used in San Diego) or Hispanic (used in Austin, Chicago and Metro-Dade) gangs were more prevalent in Austin, Metro-Dade and San Diego. In Austin, many gangs were racially mixed while most other gangs in other cities appeared to be predominantly racially segregated. In discussions, police personnel frequently referred to gangs by ethnicity rather than name and gang assignments in some cities were made according to ethnicity, so that Detective Smith handled only Latin gangs while Detective Jones handled Asian gangs. Despite ethnic predominance in many gangs, the increasing ethnic diversity within some gangs is an important trend. This trend may continue over time, suggesting that departments may move away from ethnic-based assignments. Since some ethnic gangs have unique features or language, the growing ethnic diversification of gangs may make some gangs easier for police to investigate.

The type of criminal activity among gangs also appeared to vary widely. As a class of crime groups, gangs were found to be highly versatile regarding their participation in crime. Some crime types, however, were the focus of police investigations. Gang-related violent crime was a priority in most cities, but investigations of automobile theft were prevalent in Austin and gang-related robberies were of key concern in Metro-Dade. In 1991, most gang unit personnel concentrated their investigations on violent crime, making referrals to property crime

investigators as appropriate. At least some gangs in each of the cities were perceived to engage in a variety of drug activity—use, street sales, trafficking—although the nature and extent of the activity varied as did the locus of the department's participation in drug enforcement.

Despite specific efforts in this study to identify and elaborate on the extent of the nexus between drugs and gangs in these five jurisdictions, it is unclear to what extent such a relationship exists. Information about the connection was only anecdotal and points to the need for further research on this issue. Police response to drug-related problems took precedence over response to gang-related problems in Metro-Dade, where the drug trade was probably more chronic and more entrenched than in the other cities. In Chicago and San Diego, gang problems existed for many years before drug problems emerged. Thus, the contrast between Metro-Dade and Chicago/San Diego suggests that where drug trade predates gangs, the trade is operated by more sophisticated entrepreneurs who may be more organized than youthful street gangs. In Chicago and San Diego, where some gangs have become heavily involved in the drug trade, these gangs have apparently become more organized in order to participate in the industry. Police clearly recognized varying levels of gang participation in drug activity across all five sites.

Chicago, San Diego, Austin and Metro-Dade reported gang members' participation in drug trafficking and street sales to be much more common among their city's African-American gangs rather than among Hispanic or other ethnic groups. Narcotics investigations were considered to serve as easy entree to many gangs; police actions ranged from extensive undercover efforts or use of confidential informants to the more pecuniary possession charges used to disrupt gang activities. Kansas City's earlier response to gang problems took the shape of responding to drug trafficking being conducted by the Jamaican posses. The department used an organized crime approach, developing a gang-intelligence system targeting upper- and mid-level gang members and a coordinated prosecution effort. The San Diego Police Department, in conjunction with the local district attorney's office, extensively and successfully used narcotics violations to target members of specific gangs for arrest and prosecution. Some police agencies also used weapons violations (and tracking of their origin) as a method to break up gangs.

Based on the information collected in this study, it appears likely that many gangs are highly involved in street drug activity and drug use and somewhat less involved in drug trafficking. Because of the wide variation of activity among numerous gangs, sweeping generalizations about gang participation in the drug trade are misleading. In some places, gang activity, drug activity and weapons violations are nearly synonymous terms; in other areas of the same city, the nexus may be much looser, with drug activity peripheral to other criminal activity. In other areas, drug usage is merely a recreational activity of gang members.

It is important to note, however, the comments of Chicago's 1991 gang crimes commander: "Gangs are changing in the United States and Chicago...street gangs are becoming narcotics cartels. Youth gangs no longer can be placed in a box and dealt with as they used to

be—they are now crossing over into organized crime involving narcotics...They are heavily armed and in some cases highly organized." While it is clear that some gangs may be metamorphosing as the commander described, there is no data available to document the nature or extent of this transformation. Of the gangs in the jurisdictions studied since 1991—a volatile period relative to gangs—Chicago's gangs were the most highly organized gangs in terms of participation in the drug trade. These highly organized drug trafficking and street sales gangs so dominated the landscape of gangs in Chicago as to almost eclipse the participation of gangs in other types of crime. It is important to note that Chicago gangs are the exception and not the rule. Indeed, the other four jurisdictions in this study have continued an emphasis on youth gangs or youthful offenders participating in street gangs.

In addition to variation among gangs relative to crime, gangs within cities also varied widely in terms of their size. In one area of Chicago, there were an estimated 10,000 gang members, most of whom were members of five specific gangs. Gang officers kept wall maps defining which blocks were controlled by which gangs. A few of San Diego's largest gangs accounted for several hundred members while most consisted of much smaller groupings.

With the exception of Chicago, police consistently reported gangs as being less structured and organized than commonly believed and also reported a range in the sophistication and organization of various gangs. For example, a targeted gang in Kansas City, a Jamaican posse, was viewed as well-organized and engaging in well-defined criminal activity of drug trafficking. This gang was an exception.

Many police believed that gang behaviors also varied from common perception. At least some police officers believed that gang members rarely "represented" or wore colors for fear of retaliation or identifying themselves to police (based on information from San Diego, Austin and Chicago). As reported from Chicago, "being economically motivated, stereotypical activities such as representing, fighting or draw attention are shunned to avoid police attention which would adversely affect income from drugs."

In several cities, gang specialists and patrol officers believed gangs emigrated to their area. Personnel from both Kansas City and San Diego believed their problems with African-American gangs originated in Los Angeles. Metro-Dade officers attributed the origin of their gang problems to migration of gang members from Chicago. Police in all three cities pointed to known individuals who emigrated from these larger metropolitan areas and to named gangs and gang activity. Latino gangs of San Diego and Austin, however, were considered home grown, having existed in those municipalities for many years albeit in the less harmful form of car clubs.

From the studies of the five jurisdictions it is clear that police increasingly see a wide variation among gangs, particularly a deviation from common stereotypes of gang members.

## Variation in Police Responses

Consistent with the wide variation in gang problems is a wide variation in police responses to gang problems. Over the five-year period of this study, however, the institutional and strategic responses of agencies to gangs changed significantly, resulting in greater conformity across the sites.

In 1991, most departments studied used a combination of prevention, suppression, intelligence-gathering and investigation strategies. But the emphasis of each department's approach to gang problems had changed by 1996. The changes were most clear in four agencies—Austin, Kansas City, San Diego and Chicago. Only Metro-Dade's organizational response remained intact over that period of time. At the beginning of the study, although departments combined anti-gang strategies (such as enforcement and investigations), most departments—particularly those with specialized units—had a clear focus. For example, in 1990, Chicago's large specialized unit focused primarily on suppression; although personnel engaged in other strategies as well, suppression was the dominant approach and involved concentrating on the arrest, prosecution and sentencing of gang members. By 1996, the department's reorganization and reorientation to community policing through its CAPS effort significantly redefined its approach to gangs. The approach involved decentralizing and reducing specialized gang personnel and relying more on line personnel for gang enforcement. In contrast to Chicago, in 1991, the Austin Police Department had avoided establishing a special unit for gangs, even after public outcry for such a unit. By 1996, a special unit with a new focus on suppression (in addition to investigation and intelligence functions) was up and running. In Kansas City, the department's intelligence-focused Gang Task Force was converted into a Gang Squad, with an emphasis on suppression in addition to intelligence and investigation functions. A transition also occurred in San Diego. In 1991, San Diego Police Department's approach was somewhat split between investigation, with gang detectives having primary responsibility for investigations and carrying a case load, and suppression, with a special unit of uniformed gang officers. An organizational assessment in 1992 and a commitment to neighborhood policing in that city resulted in disbanding of the uniformed gang component and pushed that responsibility to line personnel, leaving the centralized unit focused on investigations. There has been no apparent change in departmental strategy toward gangs in Metro-Dade. The focus in Metro-Dade during the entire study period was on collecting and disseminating intelligence information in a collaborative approach to handle the region's gang problems. Their approach involved a small cadre of centralized gang detectives and decentralized gang specialists posted in patrol areas and working closely with patrol personnel.

Austin and Kansas City, the smaller agencies among those studied, had reflected more of a generalist approach to gangs in 1991; a central focus was less visible although the efforts of both agencies incorporated intelligence gathering. Austin's 1991 approach focused on prevention-oriented activities; by 1996, the approach to gang-related problems was broadened to include suppression, investigation and interagency sharing of gang-related information.

Kansas City's 1991 approach was originally related to investigations of specific drug-dealing gangs; by 1996, different gangs and gang-related problems broadened the agency's approach to include some significant prevention and intervention activities, such as conducting searches (with parental consent) of gang members' homes.

As police departments used various strategies and altered their strategies over the five-year period of this study, the number of personnel dedicated to gang activity in departments also varied. In 1991, the number of gang personnel varied among the agencies studied, ranging from one primary person in Kansas City and two gang liaison officers in Austin to more than 450 personnel in Chicago. Metro-Dade's gang unit consisted of about 15 centralized detectives and supervisors, and one or two gang investigators in each of the department's eight patrol districts. The large range of personnel among agencies reflected both a variance in agency size as well as the focus of the department's effort. Suppression efforts required more personnel than intelligence gathering and investigative efforts.

By 1996, the number of personnel dedicated to gang problems had changed. Kansas City's Gang Squad consisted of nine personnel, while Austin's Gang Suppression Unit consisted of approximately 17 personnel. San Diego's sworn complement was reduced from a 109-member Special Enforcement Unit to 46 personnel in its Street Gang Unit. Metro-Dade had slightly fewer centralized gang detectives in 1996 than in 1991—10 authorized. The biggest personnel change occurred in Chicago. From a high of 455 personnel in its Gang Crimes Section, Chicago reduced its centralized staff to a 96-person Gang Investigation Unit—a complement supplemented by tactical personnel in district stations.

The significant changes in organizational responses to gangs during the five-year period were not unexpected. For the most part, excepting Chicago, severe gang problems were relatively new to these cities in 1991. At that time, gang units in all the departments studied had been formed within the last 10 years. Kansas City began its Gang Task Force in January 1991 for intelligence gathering. The focus of Austin's response developed after a major gang incident in 1990. Metro-Dade began its current approach in 1988 with the formation of the Multi-Agency Gang Task Force and its Gang Clearinghouse project. San Diego's gang response had consisted primarily of investigators until 1988 when a uniformed assignment more than doubled the department's response. Even in Chicago, which has had gangs since the turn of the century, the department's specialized gang unit underwent a major overhaul and was boosted from 100 to 400 personnel in 1982 by Mayor Jane Byrne. As Spergel observed (from his Chicago perspective), gang units "tend to be frequently reorganized or to come under political or community pressures to deal more vigorously with rising gang crime problems..."[20] One may observe that each of these agencies indeed responded to community outcry to "deal more vigorously" with gangs; however, these initial—often suppression-oriented—efforts were no doubt influenced over time by the national trend toward community policing and have evolved into more comprehensive, agencywide approaches to enduring gang problems. The smaller cities in this study—Austin and Kansas City—moved toward larger, centralized and suppression-oriented units (maintaining other anti-gang functions)

while San Diego and Chicago both moved toward a smaller centralized gang unit (focused on investigations and intelligence gathering), relying on collaboration between patrol personnel and gang specialists in patrol divisions. In important ways, the 1996 approaches of the Chicago and San Diego police agencies mirrored the approach taken in Metro-Dade for a number of years.

The presence of a centralized gang unit in all five cities raises organizational questions about its placement within the organization. Indeed, the organizational placement of the unit is a clue to the department's vision of the unit's role. The gang units of each city resided uniquely in operational divisions of the police agencies.

San Diego's original large Special Enforcement Unit was located in a stand-alone Special Enforcement Division. The streamlined Street Gang Unit, with its focus on investigations, was located in the Investigations Division and co-located with the Narcotics Unit.

Chicago's large Gang Crimes Section was located in the department's Special Functions Bureau. The streamlined Gang Investigation Section was located in the Investigations Bureau.

Metro-Dade's Street Gang Unit was co-located in the Juvenile Investigations Section of the Criminal Intelligence Bureau with the department's SHOCAP, a serious habitual offender unit that focused on repeat offender youth.

Austin's Gang Suppression Unit was located in its Intelligence Division. Gang activities were previously in the Repeat Offender Division and Gang Liaison Unit.

Kansas City's Gang Squad was located in the Street Narcotics Unit in the Narcotics and Vice Division. The previous Street Gang Task Force was located in the department's Investigations Bureau.

Two major trends in police response to gang problems were identified in the period from 1991 and 1996—increased efforts at interorganizational collaboration and improved information-management and -sharing systems. These trends are discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

## Reporting Variations and Accuracy of Information

Spergel suggests that little is known about gangs in the aggregate because of systematic differences in reporting across cities;[21] however, it has become clear that gangs and their criminal patterns differ significantly across and within cities. A gang in Chicago does not look much like a gang in Florida; in fact, many gangs in Chicago don't look like other gangs in Chicago. These differences among gangs between and within cities raise doubts about the

utility and validity of standardized reporting of gang problems. Nonetheless, virtually all of the cities studied used incident reporting forms that gave uniformed officers responsibility for identifying gang members and gang events by checking a box on an incident form labeled "Gang Related" or "Gang Motivated." Specialist gang officers attested to underreporting by patrol officers; on occasion, an officer's narrative would describe gang characteristics but the box would not be checked, necessitating scrutiny of incident reports by specialists. In 1991, most patrol officers said they had no training in how to identify gang activity by reading gang graffiti or becoming familiar with gang signs. Officers in Austin received two hours of in-service training related to gang recognition and reporting provided by two gang liaison officers. In 1991, Kansas City had introduced academy training related to gangs and provided in-service gang awareness training to patrol officers.

Despite the occasional training, gang specialists doubted the accuracy of reporting. Several departments (such as San Diego) routinely manually reviewed incident report narratives (particularly those of violent crimes) to identify possible gang activity. In contrast to the patrol officers, many of the gang specialists were familiar with individual gang members, claiming that police need rapport with the gang members to accurately document gang affiliation and build meaningful intelligence files.

Police stated that documentation of any gang-related crime also suffered from typical crime reporting problems such as lack of victim cooperation and underreporting of crime. Documentation was also affected by failure to recognize gang association, victim intimidation, false reporting to focus police attention on rival gangs, and other factors that seriously compromised the reliability of documentation.

If the five departments studied are typical, gang reporting is inconsistent and highly unreliable. Thus national efforts to estimate the scope of current gang problems may be troubled not only by differences in reporting guidelines (such as nonstandardized definitions) but also by variations in the quality of reporting.

All the departments studied had developed and maintained background information about individual gang members and gangs for investigative purposes, using their own standardized definitions of what factors justify the label of gang membership. (Metro-Dade used a definition included in the state of Florida statutes.) In 1991, three of these police departments had automated intelligence files (Metro-Dade, Austin, Kansas City), while the San Diego and Chicago departments maintained manual files. Both San Diego and Chicago had automated their files by 1996.

In 1991, Austin and Metro-Dade both used an automated system developed for the Los Angeles Sheriff's Office (Gang Reporting, Evaluation and Tracking, or GREAT system); Kansas City used a Perpetrator Information Center for gang intelligence information. Austin published widely distributed weekly intelligence bulletins. Intelligence files on gang members were used to investigate crimes such as looking for associates of a specific gang member, iden-

tifying hangouts, weapons, vehicles and so forth. Many investigators were able to describe cases that were solved quickly because of the information contained within the intelligence files. By 1996, three of the cities—Chicago, Austin and Kansas City—were engaged in significant efforts to update and expand their data management capability related to gang information. Access to intelligence files was regulated and restricted to other law enforcement officers, but access for officers wishing to contribute or tap information was consistently available across all five agencies even in 1991. At that time, officers were required to have some specific knowledge of what information needed to be accessed, an issue posed as problematic in Kansas City where many police personnel were new to gang problems. Many of these issues were resolved over time by a trend toward greater involvement of line personnel in responding to gang problems.

The findings in this study related to record keeping are consistent with other national studies. For example, among large cities surveyed in Curry's study, 97 percent with youth-based organized gang crime problems (consisting of gangs, crews, posses or similar groups) maintained records on the extent of the problems in their jurisdiction. Despite some variation in recordkeeping, the majority of these jurisdictions kept information on groups, individual members and incidents occurring. Of the agencies maintaining records, 89 percent maintained records that were fully or partially automated. Among smaller cities and counties included in the same survey, 62 percent kept records on group members and incidents, while 20 percent kept partial information. Fully 60 percent of this group had an automated system.[22]

## Evidence of Effectiveness

In 1991, none of the agencies engaged in any identifiable long-term planning processes or conducted research to monitor the changing nature of the problem. None provided extensive training to personnel or engaged in meaningful evaluations of effectiveness of specialized or other departmental efforts related exclusively to gang enforcement. As Spergel et al noted "[N]o research evaluations of police efforts in respect to youth gang programs exist... [T]herefore, any analysis of criminal justice system [sic], and in particular police or law enforcement programs, must be largely descriptive and tentative at this time."[23] None of the departments studied presented information on their effectiveness, although the district attorney in San Diego tracked conviction rates, pleas, dismissals and related evidence of effectiveness. Some departments relied on arrests by gang investigators while other agencies reviewed qualitative information regarding effectiveness—pointing at successful investigations. All the departments cited gang-related crime incidents as a benchmark for comparisons of both the extent of the problem and the agency's relative success in addressing the problem.

From 1990 to 1991, Austin cited a 20.5 percent reduction in the number of drug-related offense reports and 21 percent reduction in number of offenses while the number of gang-related arrests dropped by 20.6 percent. Drive-by shootings fell from 60 to 50 or 16.7 percent. However, by 1996, overall crime, as well as gang-related crimes were rising in Austin. Gang unit officers still believed they were having an effect, citing fewer gang-related investi-

gations in 1996 than they had conducted in 1995. The gang unit also believed that they were preventing violent retaliatory crime.

In Chicago, police in 1990 made 9,074 arrests for gang-motivated crimes including 71 arrests for homicide and 1,601 for felony battery and assault crimes. In the process of these gang-motivated arrests, police recovered some 3,141 guns. Similar statistics were not available in 1996. However, Chicago's crime rate—including murder rate—was declining in the mid-1990s. The department cited street gang altercations as the most common causative factor of murders in 1994 and 1995. In 1995, the department recorded over 17,000 gang-related crimes.

Crime declined in Metro Dade in 1990, the first decline since 1984 and during a period of rapid population growth when other Florida cities were experiencing double-digit crime increases. The decline was fed by a reduction in motor vehicle theft (-6.1%) and burglary (-3.6%). Robbery, considered to be the county's biggest crime problem behind drugs but ahead of gangs, rose 5.2 percent in the one-year period compared with a rise of 60 percent over the last five years. Overall crime rates continued to decline through the first half of the 1990s.

Monthly tallies of drive-by shootings in Kansas City at first rose steadily after a count was begun in January 1990. By August 1991, the city witnessed 53 shootings in a single month. Drive-by shootings then decreased 11 percent between 1993 and 1994, and 14 percent between 1994 and 1995. By 1995, Kansas City saw significant decreases in Part I crimes since 1994, including murder (down 25%), robbery (down 10%), and burglary (down 18.5%). Kansas City also cited arrests and seizures of drugs, cash and weapons as measures of anti-gang efforts. In 1995, Gang Squad detectives investigated 423 criminal offenses that were believed to be gang-related, resulting in felony charges against 294 defendants. Of those charges filed, 118 were for narcotics possession, 118 were for narcotics sales and trafficking, and 54 were for firearms violations.

Although San Diego had witnessed a rise in gang-related crimes since 1987, by 1990 some gang-related statistics fell dramatically. In 1990, gang-related homicides fell to 12 and drive-by shootings to 52, from 28 and 90, respectively, in 1988. Other gang-related crimes, however, increased during that period, including assaults with deadly weapons, shootings and robberies. Rates for both gang-related homicide and drive-by shootings peaked again in 1993, with 30 homicides and 102 drive-by shootings that year. By 1995, both crimes had again decreased, with 14 homicides and 57 drive-by shootings. By 1996, the violent crime rate was decreasing for the fourth year in a row, while the overall crime rate was decreasing for the seventh consecutive year. During the first six months of 1996, robbery was down by 3.2 percent, aggravated assaulted by 9 percent, burglary by 24 percent, larceny by 4 percent and motor vehicle theft by nearly 12 percent, compared with the same period in 1995.

Whether the anti-gang efforts used by any of the police departments studied resulted in

the various measures of effectiveness cited is of question. Research indicated that departments tended to rely on available data, sometimes of questionable quality, because it was the only information available. The reader should be cautioned that this information may be less useful than it may appear at first glance.

## Common Themes Among Police Responses

Some common themes related to police responses to gangs emerged in each of the cities studied. For example, by 1991, all the departments had been subjected to political or community pressure to respond to or beef up their responses to gang problems. These pressures were often related to major incidents that occurred within the jurisdiction, such as a well-publicized homicide or major youth confrontations. In Metro-Dade, those events included a riot in Tropical Park in 1988 and altercations at the Calle Ocho annual street fair in March 1989. In Austin, the Congress Avenue shooting in 1990 showcased major warfare between the Esta Grande Varrio and the Latin Kings. Gang-related killings of police officers occurred in San Diego and Metro-Dade (a South Miami police officer in the latter), standing as crystallizing events in these jurisdictions. The element of violence and potential for its spread appears to have significantly raised public attention to the issue and motivated most departments to respond specifically to gang problems. The violence generally took the form of increased assaults, robberies and homicides, particularly drive-by shootings.

From a five-year retrospective, police departments characteristically responded by forming some type of special unit—often suppression-oriented—as an initial response to major episodes of gang violence. Over time, these units evolved into a broadened response to gangs integrating investigations, intelligence gathering, prevention and enforcement activities. There appears to be wide recognition of the need to be comprehensive in approach and to avoid the political panacea of assigning police with sole responsibility for anti-gang efforts.

Police were widely concerned about the growth of gangs and the impact of police actions on encouraging gang activities. For example, departments took quite similar approaches to responding to the media on gang-related events. Almost universally, police did not report the names of gangs involved in criminal activity, nor those of victims or offenders. Reporting of the gang or gang member's name in relation to a criminal incident was often cited as contributing to the notoriety that gang members often seek. And the reporting of gang or gang members' names was seen as contributing to possible retaliatory actions by other gangs. Similarly, reporting the name of a gang-affiliated victim was believed to invite retaliatory action by the victim's gang or affiliated gangs.

In 1991, all of the departments engaged in some limited form of community outreach—prevention—making presentations to community groups, including how to recognize if a youth had joined a gang and so forth. Sometimes, the gang specialist or detective conducted this activity. In Chicago, the district neighborhood relations sergeant served this function as did personnel in the department's downtown Preventive Programs Division, although there

was no specialized training in gangs or drugs. In Kansas City, one sergeant made most presentations and disseminated information about gangs. By 1996, all of the departments in this study had made concerted efforts to build stronger ties with community organizations to collaboratively address gang problems. In illustration, Chicago now systematically involves the community in identifying gang problem locations, reflecting the agency's new approach to community involvement.

It was mentioned previously that two major trends were identified in police strategic responses to gang problems—better data collection, management and dissemination; and enhanced collaboration with agencies external to the police agency.

A new and significant emphasis on improved data and information systems was an important change in the responses of these five agencies to gangs over time. These information systems enhanced the exchange of information between gang units and patrol officers and other groups. An emphasis on these efforts to improve databases and increase information sharing was identified in Kansas City, Austin and Chicago, and these efforts were being underwritten with significant financial support from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) in the U.S. Department of Justice. Metro-Dade continued its long-term focus on information gathering and sharing. Of important note was Chicago's intention to use the data for analytical purposes, enhancing the agency's ability to understand patterns of gang behavior and identify trends.

Another trend that occurred in most of the agencies studied was a significant increase in collaboration with agencies external to the police department—schools, local code enforcement agencies, probation departments, federal agencies such as ATF and DEA, community groups and others. For example, Metro-Dade successfully administered the Multi-Agency Gang Task Force as a vehicle to facilitate communication among the numerous metropolitan law enforcement agencies operating in the county. San Diego police took part in a similar countywide information exchange. From the onset of its gang problems, Austin emphasized interagency collaboration. Even in 1992, Austin gang personnel worked closely with the district attorney and departments of probation and parole, using a gang hot line to network with the community. Interagency collaboration was a key focus of the department's anti-gang effort. Similarly in Kansas City, formation of the original task force occurred in order to exchange useful information throughout a wide network.

Despite these improved communications with outside agencies, in 1996, as in 1991, intra-agency communication—for example, between narcotics units and gang specialists—remained a challenge to meeting departmental objectives. An important side effect of the formation of specialized gang units is the contribution of the arrangement to difficulties in communication within departments. Although several chief executives viewed gang personnel as support personnel for patrol, officers often viewed these specialized units as elitist, and aspired to join the units, in which officers were generally freed from constant demands of handling calls, could work flexible hours and usually steady shifts, and gained a sense of excitement

absent from the routine handling of calls for service. Gang unit personnel were generally assigned to detective positions, and although the units did not have the perceived status of homicide or other investigative units, the gang unit was seen as entree to more prestigious units.

In 1991, communication difficulties were a common theme in each agency studied. Decentralized gang efforts, such as the configuration in Metro-Dade, appeared to least stymie communication among district officers, district gang detectives and other specialists, such as school resource officers. Centralized efforts, such as San Diego's, despite the fact that gang detectives were formally tasked with communicating with district personnel, appeared to make communication more difficult. This was certainly true in Chicago in 1991. Some formal efforts at communication were made in San Diego in 1991, such as gang detectives occasionally attending roll calls to inform patrol officers about gang activity; for the most part, these roll call briefings appeared to take the form of a gang detective seeking assistance in locating a particular gang member or other specific information.

In most departments studied, patrol officers in 1991 appeared to have only peripheral or ad hoc knowledge about gangs. In incident reports, these officers were able to identify gang members if the members self-identified their participation in a gang or identified a gang as an offender in an incident. Otherwise, patrol officers were largely unable to articulate specific information about gangs even in heavily gang-infested areas of their jurisdiction. In departments with heavy call loads, supervisors reported that patrol officers had little time to identify gang-related incidents because they were under pressure to respond to other calls that were stacked and awaiting a response. Since a return site visit to each jurisdiction was not made in 1996, it is unclear the extent to which the isolation of patrol officers from gang information continued. However, departmental recognition of the centrality of the patrol officers' role suggested increasing efforts to bring these personnel into the information loop. Indeed, improving the information and accessibility of gang information databases was an important agenda item in several agencies.

Communication and collaboration between gang units and other specialized units, even narcotics, was seldom in evidence in 1991. These problems were also identified in 1996. Most departments had a policy among gang personnel of handling narcotics problems only if the activity involved a small amount of drugs. In 1991, for example, in Chicago, it was understood that gang specialists were not to target drug activity; the implication was that "running across" drug activity was acceptable but specifically seeking drug arrests was not. There was little evidence of cross-training occurring between any specialized units, such as gang officers offering recognition tips to narcotics officers or vice versa.

Informal communication between most specialized units occurred at ranks above that of sergeant. Unit commanders reported that they would call other unit commanders if coordination or communication was needed. More formal meetings between units occurred regularly in some cities. For example, San Diego's gang detective lieutenant met regularly with

unit commanders of other investigatory units, including narcotics. This kind of formalized interaction appeared to be easier within departments with centralized commands located in a single building. In Chicago, for example, the gang unit and narcotics unit were housed away from each other and communication was difficult.

## Directions for Future Research

This study raises a number of questions about the efficacy of police responses to gang problems. For example, what is the utility of dedicating extensive police resources to building gang intelligence files, particularly those in which names are not regularly purged? All cities studied focused their efforts not exclusively on characteristics unique to gangs but on networks and participation in criminal activity. Such investigative tactics thus represent activities in which departments would participate regardless of an offender's affiliation with a gang. If "gangness" is unimportant, is much intelligence information thus gathered for rather unclear proposes? The purpose is particularly unclear when the information is not routinely shared with other law enforcement personnel.

For example, an advisory panel member made the following comment regarding the Chicago Police Department's 1991 intelligence-gathering efforts:

> They can't give it to field officers for use or store it in any meaningful way—so why do it? It has very limited use. Seems like a waste of time and energy under the existing rules and organization.

The importance of sharing information within an agency and across multidisciplinary agencies surfaced in each of the sites during the 1991 study. Many of the personnel in the departments appeared to collaborate more easily with external agencies than with other personnel in their own departments. This difficulty may have been exacerbated when departmental reward structures recognized individual production (that is, arrests) rather than collaborative efforts.

Departments uniformly lacked ways to determine the effectiveness of their anti-gang efforts. Although police articulate some dissatisfaction with citing numbers of arrests; numbers of gangs and gang members; numbers of reported incidents; and numbers of weapons, drugs and cash seizures, police consistently rely on this data as their sole measure of effectiveness. Given the lack of reliability of gang-related incident reports, is it useful to document these incidents as evidence of trends in gang activity? Even with highly reliable data, the simple before-and-after design implicit in self-declared statements of success is insufficient to document effectiveness with any degree of confidence.

Despite the breadth of knowledge about local gang problems, the police departments studied engaged in little research or documentation of significant facts about gangs, including their participation in drug activity. Do local agencies need more guidance on how to analyze

their gang-related problems, and more resources for identifying appropriate responses?

Further, local knowledge is often interpreted through the lens of a national paradigm, imposed by news media or other law enforcement agencies. Does this process generate a false national consensus about local gang problems that are likely to be quite different from one another? And, if it does, how does that national paradigm shape local policies toward gangs? A national approach may inappropriately lead agencies to adopt national tactics to local problems.

Future studies are clearly needed to flesh out the information collected in this research effort. In future studies, comparisons between cities may be most useful for similar cities but only when there are striking similarities between those cities. This study has determined that gang problems are so widely varied that problems clearly must be disaggregated to be studied in any useful way. The research has shown it to be exceedingly difficult to make summary statements that are applicable to more than one or two agencies. Thus, seeking common themes in police responses to these various problems is an exercise in futility. Although there is no evidence of effectiveness, it appears that specific strategies used by police agencies work best when targeted at specific behaviors, locations or individuals. Intuitively, most police personnel can readily describe targeting specific activities, yet many agencywide discussions, reports and policies tend to generalize widely about gang members and approaches. References to "the gang problem" as a definable issue are common, particularly above patrol level.

The research in this study intentionally looked at diverse settings and manifestations of gang problems, with expectations that some common problems and themes would be identified. Instead, many more differences than similarities were found. Many questions about police responses to gang problems have been raised by these case studies, making a significant contribution to the field and pointing clearly to the need for future research. Such research should include mechanisms for guiding police agencies to analyze their local problems and develop appropriate and measurable responses.

# Notes

## Chapter 2

1. *Austin American-Statesman.* Nov. 3, 1990.

2. *Austin American-Statesman.* Sept. 20, 1990.

3. *Austin American-Statesman.* March 12, 1991.

4. *Austin American-Statesman.* May 19, 1991.

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5. Chicago Police Department (1995). *Biennial Report 1993 & 1994.* 7–9.

6. The Detective Division's figure on gang-related murders in 1995 differs slightly from the figure given by the Gang Investigation Section.

7. Chicago Community Policing Evaluation Consortium (1995). *Community Policing in Chicago: Year Two—An Interim Report.* Chicago: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

8. Chicago Police Department (June 1996). *Anti-Gang Initiative—Section IV: Strategy Development and Implementation.* 2.

9. Ibid. 3.

10. Ibid. 4.

11. Ibid. 5.

## Chapter 4

12. U.S. Department of Justice. "Applications for Federal Assistance." Bureau of Justice Assistance Grants for Kansas City, Mo., Police Department. 10/1/90 to 9/30/91.

13. Hardy Smith. "Street Gang Activity, Identification and Problem Solving Report (1/9/91 to 3/31/91)." Kansas City, Mo., Police Department.

## Chapter 5

14. Multi-Agency Gang Task Force (1995). *Standard Operating Procedures.* 7.

15. Ibid. 8.

## Chapter 6

16. San Diego Police Department (Feb. 6, 1991). *Quarterly Crime Briefing: A Report to the Public Services and Safety Committee.*

17. Office of the District Attorney (1990). *Urban Street Gang Drug Trafficking Enforcement Demonstration Project.* Proposal to the Bureau of Justice Assistance.

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19. Spergel, Irving et al. (1991). *Youth Gangs: Problem and Response.* Chicago: The School of Social Service Administration.

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23. Spergel. 177.

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