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National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Program

by Irving A. Spergel and Ronald L. Chance

From the Administrator

In 1990, the number of gang homicides reached an all time high of 329 in Los Angeles and 98 in Chicago, with gang homicide, as a proportion of total homicides, ranging from 11 percent in Chicago to 34 percent in Los Angeles. The average age of gang homicide offenders is 20 to 21 years. The age range of gang members known to the police is 13 to 24 years and older.

Youthful involvement in gangs, gang violence, and gang-related drug trafficking has long been a concern of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Three and a half years ago the Office asked the School of Social Service Administration of the University of Chicago to study what diverse cities and counties were doing to respond to the problem and to identify strategies that seemed to work. This article reports on the study and some of its findings.

An important outcome of this project is that we will be able to provide police, juvenile justice professionals, and community organizations with some concrete suggestions for programs, policies, and procedures they can use to respond to gang problems.

Manuals for dealing with youth gangs have been prepared for specific audiences and are already being tried out by a variety of organizations, groups, and individuals around the country.

When the program and manuals are more widely implemented, local jurisdictions are expected to be in a far better position to control and reduce youth gangs and their illegal activities.

The national scope and seriousness of the youth gang problem have increased sharply since the late 1970's and early

1980's. Gang violence and gang-related drug trafficking have risen drastically in a number of large cities. Even more remarkable, gangs have now developed in many middle-sized and smaller cities and suburban communities around the country.

The gang problem has become more complex as well. Youth gangs are more violent than before, and gangs are increasingly serving as a way for older or former gang youths to engage in illegal moneymaking activity, especially street-level drug trafficking. Our lack of knowledge of the problem's scope is due in large measure to the absence of a commonly accepted law enforcement definition of the terms "gang" and "gang crime incident."

In 1987 the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention established a research and development program to address the gang problem in policy and programmatic terms through a cooperative agreement with the School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago.

The National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Program is carrying out a four-stage process of assessment, model program development, technical assistance, and dissemination. The age of gang youths—at least those known to the police—tends to be in the range of 13 to 24 years and older.

The age range has expanded, especially at the upper end. The evidence also indicates that the problem is predominantly a male one.

Assessing the problem

Our purpose in the first stage of the research and development program was not so much to assess the nature of the organized response to it, particularly in suppression and intervention terms. It became evident early in our analysis that the youth gang fulfilled socialization and survival functions for youths in low-income, socially isolated ghetto or barrio communities and increasingly in transitional areas with newly settled populations.

Social disorganization or failures of basic local institutions such as family, schools, and employment, as well as poverty or lack of social opportunities, were apparent causal factors. A variety of other factors also seemed to contribute to gang membership—racism, particular cultural traditions, different opportunities to commit crime, fragmentation of policy and program

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approaches of criminal justice and social service agencies, as well as simply the presence of gangs in a community.

The assessment stage consisted of three major components: (1) a comprehensive review of the research, reportorial, and program literature on gangs; (2) a national survey of organized approaches to the problem; and (3) field visits to cities and sites where programs had apparently led to a significant reduction in the problem.

To supplement these components, we conducted two law enforcement conferences, two symposia of African-American and Hispanic former gang leaders, a brief survey of the responses of current and former gang members to antigang programs, and an analysis of a data set on the socialization to gangs of middle school youths in four inner-city Chicago communities.

Literature review

We conducted a literature review that covered the history of responses and program approaches to the problem by criminal justice agencies, community-based youth agencies, and grassroots organizations. It also covered such topics as estimates of the number of youth gangs and youth gang members; amounts of gang violence; gang-related drug trafficking; gangs as organizations; membership and demographic characteristics; gang experiences; and the social context of gang development with special attention to family, school, politics, organized crime, and cultural, socio-economic, and neighborhood territorial factors.

The literature review showed that the primary approach to youth gangs in the 1950's and 1960's was to reach out to youth and prevent gang involvement or intervene with social services. In the 1970's and 1980's a police suppression approach prevailed. There is no clear evidence that either approach was successful. On the other hand, a few communities adopted comprehensive approaches that combined social intervention and suppression strategies with jobs for gang youths. In places that used these approaches, there was an apparent reduc-

tion in youth gang activity, but no adequate research exists to verify these results.

National survey of youth gang problems and programs

Our telephone and mail survey of 254 experts from 45 cities and 6 special program sites was conducted in 1988 and 1989, following the literature review. The survey has guided the direction of the project and the subsequent materials produced.

We identified agencies and organizations across the country with articulated programs that specifically dealt with youth gangs or youth gang members. We interviewed knowledgeable persons from a range of police, prosecution, judiciary, probation, corrections, parole, school youth, grassroots, church, and criminal justice planning organizations. We were interested in definitions of the terms "gang," "gang member," and "gang incident." We asked about gang characteristics and behavior, agency policies and program activities, and specific advisory and interagency structures. We asked if agencies provided special training and how effective they were in dealing with the gang problem.

Findings

Our findings revealed that while certain police departments defined a gang incident as dependent on gang-oriented motivations or circumstances of the criminal incident, others defined a gang incident more broadly, basing their definition on whether the offender or victim was a gang member, regardless of the criminal circumstances.

In other cities, especially where the gang problem was new, police officers defined the gang incident simply in terms of any group of youth engaged in a criminal act. Two-thirds of the law enforcement respondents perceived gangs as somehow identified with other gangs or cliques beyond particular neighborhoods or areas. They reported that 25 percent of gang youth known to them had prior police records and that gang youth commit-

ted 22.7 percent of the total index crime in their jurisdictions.

Respondents viewed the gang problem as involving adults in 45.6 percent of incidents related to youth gangs. A majority of respondents believed that one of the primary purposes of youth gangs was to sell drugs, mainly at the street level. However, independent research does not support this perception.

Five strategies identified

Probably the most important survey findings were related to the ways different organizations and cities dealt with the problem. Strategies fell into five groups:

- ◆ *Suppression*, including such tactics as prevention, arrest, imprisonment, supervision, and surveillance.
- ◆ *Social intervention*, including crisis intervention, treatment for the youths and their families, outreach, and referral to social services.
- ◆ *Social opportunities*, including the provision of basic or remedial education, training, work incentives, and jobs.
- ◆ *Community mobilization*, including improved communication and joint policy and program development among justice, community-based, and grassroots organizations.
- ◆ *Organizational development or change*, including special police units, vertical prosecution, vertical probation case management, and special youth agency crisis programs. The organizational development strategy modified the other four strategies.

The survey showed that suppression was the most frequently employed strategy (44 percent), followed by social intervention (31.5 percent), organizational development (10.9 percent), community mobilization (8.9 percent), and social opportunities (4.8 percent).

Prosecutors and judges were most committed to suppression, while social agencies and grassroots organizations chose social intervention. Respondents in jurisdictions with emerging juvenile gang problems dating after 1980 were divided in their approaches, some

emphasizing community mobilization and organizational development, and others depending almost completely on suppression.

Effectiveness

We used our survey data to determine if different strategies, policies, specialized structures, and procedures led to a perceived or actual reduction in gang crime. A large majority of respondents believed that the gang situation had worsened, although law enforcement respondents were less pessimistic than others; 23.1 percent of the police and 10.4 percent of nonpolice respondents saw progress since 1980. In only 17 percent of our 45 cities were there perceptions and quantitative estimates of any level of improvement in the gang situation, and there was no evidence that improvement was related to size of city or duration of the gang problem.

An important step in the search for promising approaches was to analyze the survey data using the type of city (i.e., experiencing emerging gang problem versus chronic one) as the unit of analysis.

In cities with chronic gang problems, several variables were found to be strongly associated with effectiveness in dealing with the gang situation: (1) the use of community mobilization and social opportunity as primary strategies, (2) community consensus on the definition of a gang incident, and (3) the proportion of agencies or organizations that had an external advisory group.

In cities where the gang problem was just beginning, community mobilization was perceived to be the effective primary strategy.

We also obtained quantitative data to validate our respondents' perceptions for the period between 1980 and 1987 on five empirical indicators of improvement in the gang situation: the number of gangs, gang members, gang homicides, gang assaults, and gang-related narcotics incidents.

In summary, community mobilization was the factor that most powerfully predicted a decline in the gang problem. The provision of basic social

opportunities to gang youth, that is, education and employment, was also very important in cities with chronic gang problems.

Field visits

Using the survey findings, we selected five cities and one correctional site where antigang efforts had apparently been effective within a significant time period. We visited them to further validate and elaborate the elements of a promising approach to the youth gang problem. These elements consisted of proactive, sustained leadership by agency representatives and collaboration among justice agencies, community-based organizations, and grassroots groups. These representa-

tives met regularly over several years to develop and maintain a variety of gang control and prevention efforts.

Other elements of a promising response to gangs were mutual trust, similar perceptions about the nature of the youth gang problem, and belief in the complementary use of social control and social opportunity strategies. In addition, in cities where the gang problem was an emerging one, clear and forthright recognition—rather than denial that a gang problem existed—was a key factor. In communities with a chronic gang problem, problem reduction meant forgoing narrow agency interests and unilateral approaches that served mainly fundraising, professional, or political purposes.

Gang Definitions

During the assessment phase, it became apparent that a common definition of what was meant by "gang," "gang member," and especially "gang incident" was essential. Such a consensus was necessary for effective data systems, interagency communication, and public policy, on both local and national levels.

The term street gang is the term preferred by key local law enforcement agencies because it includes juveniles and adults and designates the location of the gang and most of its criminal behavior. The youth gang, for criminal justice policy purposes, is a subset of the street gang. We recommend the following definitions:

◆ A *street gang* is a group of people that form an allegiance based on various social needs and engage in acts injurious to public health and public morals. Members of street gangs engage in (or have engaged in) gang-focused criminal activity either individually or collectively; they create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation within the community.

◆ A *gang* for criminal justice purposes is a somewhat organized group

of some duration, sometimes characterized by turf concerns, symbols, special dress, and colors. It has special interest in violence for status-providing purposes and is recognized as a gang both by its members and by others.

◆ The notion of a *youth gang* incorporates two concepts: often a more amorphous "delinquent group" (e.g., a juvenile clique within a gang), and the better organized and sophisticated "criminal organization." The latter may be an independent group or clique of the gang and usually comprises older youth and young adults primarily engaged in criminal income-producing activity, most commonly drug trafficking.

◆ A *gang crime incident* is an incident in which there was gang motivation, not mere participation by a gang member. If a gang member engages in non-gang-motivated criminal activity (e.g., crime for strictly personal gain), the act should not be considered a gang incident. However, since gang members are likely to be serious offenders as well, information systems should record all types of crime but at the same time distinguish gang from nongang crime.

Developing strategies that work

Our assessment indicated that communities with gangs had socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, generational, and local policy characteristics that distinguished them from other communities.

For example, institutional racism and poverty appear to be particularly potent factors in the development of drug-related gang problems in certain African-American communities. Population movements and certain cultural traditions may be relatively more important to the growth of gang violence in Hispanic communities. Among Chinese and other Asian communities, certain criminal traditions and social isolation may be significant factors. In white communities, personal and family disorganization as well as the declining strength of local institutions may have led to the development of cult and racially oriented gang patterns.

Given this diversity of community factors, it is likely that different kinds of community mobilization and combinations of strategies will be required to deal with the distinct gang problems of these various communities.

At the present time there is a lack of clearly defined prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies. Furthermore, it is not effective or efficient to target large groups of neighborhood youth for gang suppression or to consider that all youths in particular schools or neighborhoods require antigang social intervention or social opportunity services.

Selected younger youth should be identified for prevention or early intervention services based on a combination of certain risk factors (e.g., prior police contact, school failure, drug use, identification with a gang, presence of a gang member in the family).

Certain older youths—even hardcore gang youths—should be identified as ready to leave the gang at a certain age based on their interest in training and a job, battle fatigue, and readiness to settle down with a girlfriend or spouse. When designing gang programs and strategies, we must take into account the youths' ages and the

stage of their identification with the gang.

Program models and technical assistance manuals

We developed 10 program models and manuals based on our findings. The models and manuals are addressed to specific audiences: police; prosecutors; judges; probation, corrections, and parole officers; schools; business and industry; community-based youth agencies; and grassroots organizations. Two additional cross-cutting, systemwide models and manuals are designed for general community planning and mobilization. The program models have been reviewed by experts, and the technical assistance manuals are in the testing phase.

The manuals set forth steps for implementing the program models. Each manual emphasizes distinctive community context and organizational mission and provides criteria for selecting a specific combination of strategies appropriate to that community and that mission.

In each manual we emphasize mobilizing community interest, concern, and resources in a way that neither exaggerates or denies the problem but develops consensus among key actors on the nature, causes, and ways to deal with the youth gang problem. ■

For More Information

The School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago, 969 East 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, has prepared a series of interim reports on the National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Program. The reports are available from the School for the cost of reproduction and mailing.

For general information on youth gangs, contact OJJDP's Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (JJC). The Clearinghouse has prepared a topical bibliography, *Juvenile Gangs* (TB020501), which is available for \$17.50 by checking no. 50 on the order form in the center of this issue. The topical bibliography provides citations and abstracts of approximately 200 documents in the JJC/NCJRS data base of criminal justice literature. A topical search containing 30 abstracts, also titled *Juvenile Gangs* (TS020501), is available for \$5.00 by checking no. 25 on the order form.

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Juvenile Court Property Cases NCJ 125625. No. 12.

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U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Juvenile Justice Bulletin

OJJDP Update
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Administrator

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Part Two: Joe Sorrentino reflects on tough cops, juvenile offenders, and the courts that deal with them.

People in the private sector can help solve the problem of juvenile crime," says Sorrentino. "IBM has built a factory in Brooklyn's Bedford Stuyvesant slum that has provided 1,000 jobs and has given young people their self-respect and pride in becoming constructive citizens. In Memphis, a Man-to-Teen program by the Memphis Life Underwriters Association is helping find work and guidance for teenagers. The Marion Laboratories of Kansas City participates in a mobile unit effort geared to help parents teach their children to avoid drug misuse. The Street Academies of Gary, Indiana, play an important part in juvenile crime prevention by providing a combined program of jobs and education for teenagers."

When Joe Sorrentino began practicing law, he joined the firm of now-Governor, Jerry Brown of California. Later he opened his own law firm in Beverly Hills.

"I began in general practice but then became interested in juvenile law," Sorrentino says. "So I practiced in the juvenile courts of Los Angeles. Later I was invited to sit as a juvenile court judge with the title of 'referee,' but with the full functions of a judge.

"I soon began to see the problems of young people from both sides of the bench. I practiced law when I wasn't working four days a week as a judge, handling up to 30 cases and five or six trials a day.

"There are about 50,000 cases a year in the Los Angeles juvenile courts, mostly felonious offenses such as burglary, armed robbery, assault, attempted murder, on down to purse-snatching and curfew violation. I think we can do more to help young felony offenders so they do not become repeaters or too influenced by hardened criminals. I think we can reclaim the lives of juvenile offenders, and at the same time, give the public more protection on the streets and in their homes.

"Juvenile courts are becoming a 'Disneyland.' They're bending over backwards to give kids a break. The result is that the hardcore juvenile offender thinks, 'What's there to fear?'

"The situation of just a slap on the wrist to the juvenile offender has to stop. It is a deterrent to the courts' credibility. According to the F.B.I., one-half of all felonies are committed by teenagers.

"It would be nice to try to make-over every 14-year-old murderer or rapist

who comes before a judge. But we can't do it. And something is amiss in a court system that sends a young killer back into the streets after three years.

"I feel strongly that the time has come to treat the worst of our juvenile offenders as what they are — hardened criminals. Today's juvenile courts have

X THE INNER CITY BATTLE ZONE

cheapened America by enshrining youth over life, by practically saying that because a kid is under 16, he is allowed to kill.

"Courts must be set up for the purpose of determining whether a teenage offender should be tried as a delinquent or an adult. It is not an exact science, but it must be done.

"I must confess that I started on the bench as a liberal, infused with the most benevolent sense of justice. But once

you're on the bench, you quickly see that being soft with these kids doesn't work. The numbers of people coming through the system preclude personalized feelings.

"Recently, a 16-year-old with 20 previous arrests for robbery and burglary came before me. His lawyer appealed to me, 'Why don't you give him another chance?' he pleaded. I really wanted to help the boy, but then I thought: 'Maybe it's time to give his neighborhood a chance.'

"Our courts have to toughen up. They must let young people know that if they do something wrong, they will have to be held accountable for it. They must be punished in some way.

"But it is not enough to put a young person in a correctional institution. Such institutions must be reformed so they can be more effective. To put 600 or 800 young people in an institution of any kind is to give bad elements a good chance to go to work on them. The influence of society is crushed and there is no way to reach the kids. The ethic of the criminal predominates.

"Large correctional institutions should be dismantled and offenders held in smaller units where they can get more personalized attention. This may be initially more expensive, but once facilities are opened, the cost would be the same or less. Job-training and job placement after a young offender has been put on probation also can help keep them from getting back into trouble."

Sorrentino believes that the same forces that drove him to crime in the streets as a teenager are becoming intensified, particularly in urban areas such as New York and Detroit. He lists the deterioration of the family unit, the mobility of Americans, the loss of respect for the church and all the other commonly cited reasons for lawlessness as reasons that juvenile crime is increasing.

"But I refuse to be a pessimist, although my visits to large urban areas throughout the country surely depress me. I hear horror stories such as the one about an elderly couple in the Bronx who committed suicide rather than go out into the streets. And about sections of Detroit which police won't enter unless they are themselves protected by SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) teams.

"I went back to my old neighborhood in Brooklyn recently. Though I was a Golden Gloves contender, a Marine, and a gang leader, I was frightened walking down the street because of the teenage gangs running around like wild

By Walter Oleksy

"Blacks policing blacks and Latino cops policing Latinos eliminates the sense of white troops occupying the ghettos."



dog packs in Australia, attacking people wantonly.

"I see crime as one of the major threats against Democracy in this country, because it could soon lead to the removal of individual rights.

"It hasn't reached that stage yet, but it is now probably worse than it's ever been in American history. It's like the beginning stages of cancer.

"If the crime level gets too high, then society is going to say that it's willing to give up these rights to suppress these criminals. Another approach, which is already being used in some cities, is to block-off the ghettos with a police cordon, isolating high-crime areas from the bedroom communities.

"There must be a commitment among

citizens to combat the problem of juvenile crime in their communities, until it is wiped out. There must be a fostering of the kinds of educational and information programs that increase sensitivity to the problem among those who are best equipped to resolve the difficulties.

"And if we have legal education in the high schools and elementary schools, and teach young people an appreciation and understanding of the law, respect for it and the law enforcement agencies, I think that the problem will be alleviated enormously."

Sorrentino says that his next book will deal with the concept of diminished capacity and the insanity plea which he feels are being carried to unwise ex-

tremes in courts today.

"Too much psychiatric jargon is intruding in the legal universe," he maintains, "and society can't afford it. The concept of responsibility and accountability is being chewed under by all manner of elaborate rationalizations. Take the Zamorra case in Florida, for example. He killed because he said he watched too much television. And the White case in San Francisco: he ate too much junk food. The Conlin case: she killed because she had bad dreams. It goes on and on, killers looking for extrinsic reasons to justify and excuse socially destructive actions."

Joe Sorrentino's main crusade, however, always remains with young people who, like himself, have been in serious trouble. He likes to tell the story of the boy he met recently in a Michigan reformatory:

"I went there and told the kids I was a judge. Well, at the end of my speech, this kid got up at the end of the hall and shouted, I mean shouted loud at me, 'Hey, Judge, I'm going to take your place!'

"I liked that," Sorrentino says with a smile. "It was kind of nice."

How can cops cope with street crime? Joe Sorrentino believes he has some helpful solutions to the problem.

"A policeman is subjected to tremendous strain, in situations ranging from a confrontation with a cornered gunman to a hysterical teenager who may be armed and drunk on alcohol and/or high on drugs. Police today have to be a lot more than a cop was yesterday. Today's cop has to have maturity, discretion, sympathy, and be cool under conflict and stress.

"I think it's important that a significant increase be made in the hiring of minority representatives to be assigned to ghetto areas. Blacks policing blacks and Latino cops policing Latinos eliminates the sense of white troops occupying the ghettos. It might also increase the police understanding of ghetto problems and lifestyles.

"Germany is way ahead of us, and most other countries, in training police to handle urban problems. German police academies require recruits to complete four years of training, which includes intensive study in psychology, government, and history, with an emphasis on the inhumanities and injustices of the Nazi regime. Copies of complaints against police are studied by recruits so they can avoid repeating past mistakes. In psychology, the need for human understanding and a sense of humor are stressed. At the same time, recruits are alerted to the dangers of

prejudice and stereotyping. The recruit is prepared for the frustrations of traffic jams and emotionally-troubled citizens of all ages so they can see the average person in a total context. In contrast, American policemen tend to be trained to a simplistic narrowness, and it isn't their fault.

"I think that in general, police make a mistake by coming on too tough with street kids and just make the gang toughs more belligerent. Instead of a cop telling a gang of young toughs to get off a street corner by brandishing his nightstick and growling at them to move off, a less aggressive approach might achieve better results. If the cop explained that the youths were blocking traffic or keeping pedestrians from crossing at the corner, he would be avoiding a more personal attack on the potentially dangerous boys.

"There are incurably malignant and hostile youngsters, but the damning approach isn't going to change them one bit. On the other hand, a firm, non-nonsense but friendly attitude may make young people see the policeman as an interested human being who is only doing his job as a referee in the game of life.

"Defensively, too many young people and too many policemen often automatically relate to each other with unmitigated hostility. The average policeman's attitude is cemented in rigid stereotypes. At the California Regional Criminal Justice Training Center, police recruits are instructed that without abandoning caution and shrewd instincts, without endangering themselves, good police officers go beyond reflexively enforcing the laws. They try to find the borderline youth who is not fully committed to the criminal way of life, who is in a state of internalized warfare, pulled by conflicting moral forces, and they try to help nurture the minor in the right direction.

"I remember in the days when I was running with a gang, how responsive I was to the efforts of one concerned and sincere police officer. As part of a cumulative process, he ultimately helped me to become another person. I believe that life is always in the process of becoming, that we all have the potential of becoming another person, a better person.

"To promote the positive aspects of troubled youngsters, the Pasadena Police Department in California has moved forward with several innovative programs, establishing the position of Youth Services Coordinator and an Intensive Care Unit in which specially-trained police officers work on a one-

to-one basis with juveniles who have gotten into trouble with the law, acting simultaneously as informal probation officers, counselors, and big brothers.

"Members of the Intensive Care Unit are assigned to the school system to counsel students who show signs of incipient criminal behavior — the pre-prisoners. Several of these officers have received provisional teaching credentials and actually teach classes. The young people know they are dealing with members of the police department, and the program has received popular acceptance among both students and police.

"Encounter-group sessions between police and residents of the Houston ghettos are being used to promote better mutual understanding. The sessions begin with an intensive examination of the attitudes the police and the community groups have about themselves and each other. 'Why don't you niggers like being called niggers?' one policeman asked. 'You call yourselves that, don't you?' The response was, 'Shut up, you blue honky!' The policeman flushed with fury, but instead of lashing out with a fist or a nightstick, he sat and nodded when asked, 'Now do you understand?'

"Alvin Nierenberg, a former New York Policeman now practicing law in California, believes that the newspapers and television badly hurt the image of police officers by highlighting only the incidents of abuse or brutality. 'How many times do you hear of the cop breathing air into a choking baby's mouth or helping firemen go into a burning building?' he asks.

"He thinks the police should distribute press releases to the news media about the good works of police officers doing their jobs every day."

Sorrentino also takes issue with arrest quotas and believes they are a contributing factor to widening the breach between police and street criminals.

"Considerable uproar has been churned over the alleged practice of arrest quotas, with some groups contending that officers who have not made sufficient arrests will resort to making frivolous or marginally-justifiable arrests and hounding teenagers, to ferret out any minor breach of the law.

"The police generally deny that such quotas exist. The U.S. Commission on Law Enforcement found in both a Midwestern and a Western city that one criterion for evaluating police officers was the number of 'field interrogations' each had made. In one of these cities, a ranking police official stated, 'Our first-line supervisors have a responsibility to

keep statistics on each officer, to find out whether a particular officer's arrest performance is consistent with what his squad's average might be. As a result, if a particular officer is low, we expect an explanation.'

"When my brother Tony was a policeman on the vice squad in New York, his commander frequently issued the warning, 'I don't want anybody back tonight until he gets on the sheet (makes an arrest).' Under this pressure, one ineffectual and unscrupulous policeman tried to arrest a woman who was just standing in front of a restaurant, on charges of soliciting for prostitution. But before the officer could drag her off to the patrol car, her husband came out of the restaurant to stop him.

"Police work is a far too complicated and delicate a job to judge an officer's work or qualifications for promotion on the number of arrests he has made. Furthermore, if arrest quotas do exist as either explicit requirements or implied expectations of police officers, they can lead to improper activity by policemen. Patrolling officers have the complex and difficult responsibility of exercising discretion, and that responsibility should not be weighed by any kind of quotas.

"Many police officers complain that the juvenile courts fail to take strong, positive action. Some police officers feel that probation is not effective as a corrective measure and that referring juvenile offenders to various community programs or welfare and social agencies is practically useless. They are usually eager to see the erring juvenile placed in detention or committed to a security institution.

"To better uphold the purposes of the juvenile court, it would be useful to give police officers seminars on the over-all objectives of the juvenile justice system. It is crucial for all police officers to understand that locking up juvenile offenders is not the only answer to juvenile crime. In fact, it often aggravates the problem by reinforcing the negative influences on the minor.

"Unless the aim of the juvenile justice system is to reinforce the good qualities of the children who come before it, the whole procedure becomes one of self-fulfilling prophecy: all kids are bad, are treated as bad, and come out worse.

"The police officer, as the man on the front line in the fight against juvenile crime, must be the first to change his attitudes toward the kids he deals with. It isn't easy, often requiring a reversal of lifelong prejudices, but it can be one of the most important ways a cop can cope with kids and street crime. Nobody ever said the solutions would be easy."

JOE SORRENTINO

FROM JAIL TO JUDGE

By Walter Oleksy

Joseph Sorrentino, former street gang leader in New York, and now a respected lawyer and former juvenile court judge, tells how young criminals go wrong, how he got off to a bad start and was able to turn his life around:

"Part of the problem of juvenile crime occurs when the juvenile is released from detention hall or camp. He flounders. He has no friends in society. If he had someone in the community, like a businessman such as an insurance salesman, to help place him in a job or help him get back on the right track in school, it would be an enormous advantage.

"I remember how it was for me. Things really started to go downhill when I was only 14. I was in a New York street gang called the Condors, got caught in a rumble and was sent to a reformatory. I was locked up in the New York City Youth House for about a month. The officials there tried to 'sting' us with a bad experience. But the sting wore off. Without any real guidance, kids can get into more trouble.

"In the next two years, I was in about a hundred rumbles and street fights. That's when my life really took a dive. When I was 16, I hit a boy really hard during a street fight. His head hit the pavement and he went into a coma. He was a young guy about my age, and I was

afraid he was going to die.

"While he was in the hospital trying to hold onto his life, I hid out in the Bowery, trying to hold onto my life. I knew the police were out looking for me, and if he died I would be up for manslaughter or murder.

"I worried about that boy dying and about my own future. I gave myself up. I was convicted of assault and sent to Raymond Street Jail. I'd been there about a month when I learned that the boy I hit would live. With luck, he wouldn't have any brain damage from the fall.

"I was put in the adult part of the jail where I was exposed to hardened criminals. I worked with them, ate with

them, and spent leisure hours with them in the yard. It was another very bad influence. The more I was exposed to criminals and hoodlums, the more I was becoming like them.

"After a month in jail, I was put on two years' probation, but I went right back to the streets and the life of drugs, pushers, petty thieves, gangs, and gangsters.

"Something inside me must have begun changing about then, because when I was 18, I joined the Marines. I had become frustrated in the jobs I was lucky enough to get with just one year of high school and thought maybe I could do better there. I hoped I could box a little for them, and I liked the idea of being a Marine because they're tough.

"I did plenty of fighting in the Marine Corps, but none of it was in a ring. A week after I enlisted, I got thrown in the brig for fighting. While I was in the brig, at the Marine Corps' Parris Island Cell for Incurables, I thought that when I got out, I'd try harder. But it wasn't long before I got into another fight and was sent back to the brig.

"I tried to escape after a few days, but got caught. This time I got put in solitary and later was brought before a court-martial. They booted me out with a general discharge for a bad attitude and for fighting.

"Now my record was really getting bad. I had been in reform school and jail and was kicked out of the Marines. The only jobs I could find were on construction crews and docks along the East River. During nights I tried my luck at pro boxing. I was pretty fast and could punch, but I took too many punches and knew I wouldn't survive for long."

Then the tragic event occurred that changed the course of Sorrentino's life. It frightened him even more than that time, four years earlier when he almost killed a boy.

Joe was now 20, and the street gangs in 1957 were even worse than they had been during the Depression years. Drugs and the influence of organized crime and the Mafia were turning trouble-making boys into hardened criminals. Yet, Joe stuck with the Condors, becoming leader of the younger members of the gang while idolizing an older boy who led the older members.

"I wanted to be just like him," Sorrentino remembers. "He was tough and knew a lot about getting money the easy way. All the guys and girls thought he was the coolest. But one night while we were out on a rumble, I saw my hero's head get blown off. I had to identify the body for police and I

suddenly realized something that changed my life.

"Up to then, I thought we Condors were some kind of comic book characters, especially when the papers wrote us up after one of our rumbles. We all thought we were sort of young supermen. But when I looked down at the body of my hero in the coffin, I knew none of us were comic book heroes. We were real live people and one of us wasn't alive anymore."

Sorrentino saw himself in the place of that young man who had been his hero. He hadn't known who shot him — whether it was a rival gang member or, as he believes today, a member of the Mafia, which has grown increasingly unhappy with trouble-making street gangs.

"I knew that if I kept on as I was, it wouldn't be long before I would be lying in a coffin just like my friend. So I made up my mind that I wouldn't let that happen to me.

"I also got encouragement from a man who owned a bowling alley in our neighborhood. He was an Italian immigrant and he kept telling me, 'Joe, in this country, if you have an education you can do something with your life.'

"And I remembered a teacher I had back in my first year of high school. Mrs. Lawson used to tell me that if I put my mind to it, I could be a good student. So I enrolled in night school to make up three years of high school. During the day I took any job I could find.

"I had no thought of going to college. I just hoped that with a high school diploma, I could get a better job than plucking chickens!

"When I got my diploma, I decided I might be lucky enough to get through college. But I didn't want to go to college in the same environment I had grown up in and had so much trouble escaping.

"I assumed that if I really wanted to change myself — and I did — I should leave the New York streets and thrust myself into an entirely new atmosphere. So I went as far from New York as I could and enrolled at the University of California in Los Angeles. I had to use my savings and was fortunate to get a scholarship, but that first year was the hardest struggle of my life.

"I had a vocabulary that was mostly grunts and four-letter words, so studying college material, speaking in class and taking tests were all very hard for me. But by my third year, I was getting straight A's and also was active in sports. I became wrestling champ, won a weight-lifting contest, played inter-mural football, and continued to

improve my vocabulary and speech. In my senior year I became student body president and was graduated Magna Cum Laude."

Then Sorrentino settled an old score. He went back into the Marines. "I wanted to right a wrong," he explains. "I felt I had left a bad mark and wanted to change it to a better one. So I put in a year of active service, then two years of inactive service, and got an honorable discharge.

"By now I thought what I really wanted to do with my life was to learn more about law. Not so I could break it again, but so I could make a living within the law, as an attorney.

"Again this was a big adjustment. I entered Harvard Law School. The Radcliffe girls I tried to date didn't believe I was a law student. I still had the mannerisms and speech of a street person. They thought I was working on Harvard's maintenance crew!

"But I kept studying and working on my vocabulary, and after three years I won the school's forensics competition. Then — it was hard for me to believe — I was selected valedictorian of my graduation class in 1967.

"I spoke on testing and human potential, something I knew from hard experience. I said that at certain times in our lives, especially when we are young, we are given tests to evaluate our potential. Used in balance, such testing can be very useful, but carried to an extreme, it can be dehumanizing. It can rob people of their dreams.

"There are certain qualities in human beings that cannot be measured by aptitude or ability tests, such as courage, drive, determination, and creativity. No matter what you are told negatively on a scale of measurement, you should not become discouraged. Low estimates cannot dim the flame of high aspiration.

"A test result can be a very unromantic decree. It can tell a person at a young age that he can't be anything. I knew that was not necessarily how it had to be. It could have been for me, but I had made up my mind not to let it. I had seen how my life could have ended — on a street or at the county morgue."

Sorrentino's commencement address was chosen by *Time* magazine as the best graduation speech of the year and they reprinted it — full-page.

After Harvard, Sorrentino went to work for the justice department in Los Angeles and soon wrote a book for Prentice-Hall on his experiences as a juvenile delinquent. *Up From Never* was selected as the best young adult book of the year by the American Library Association. ★