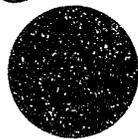


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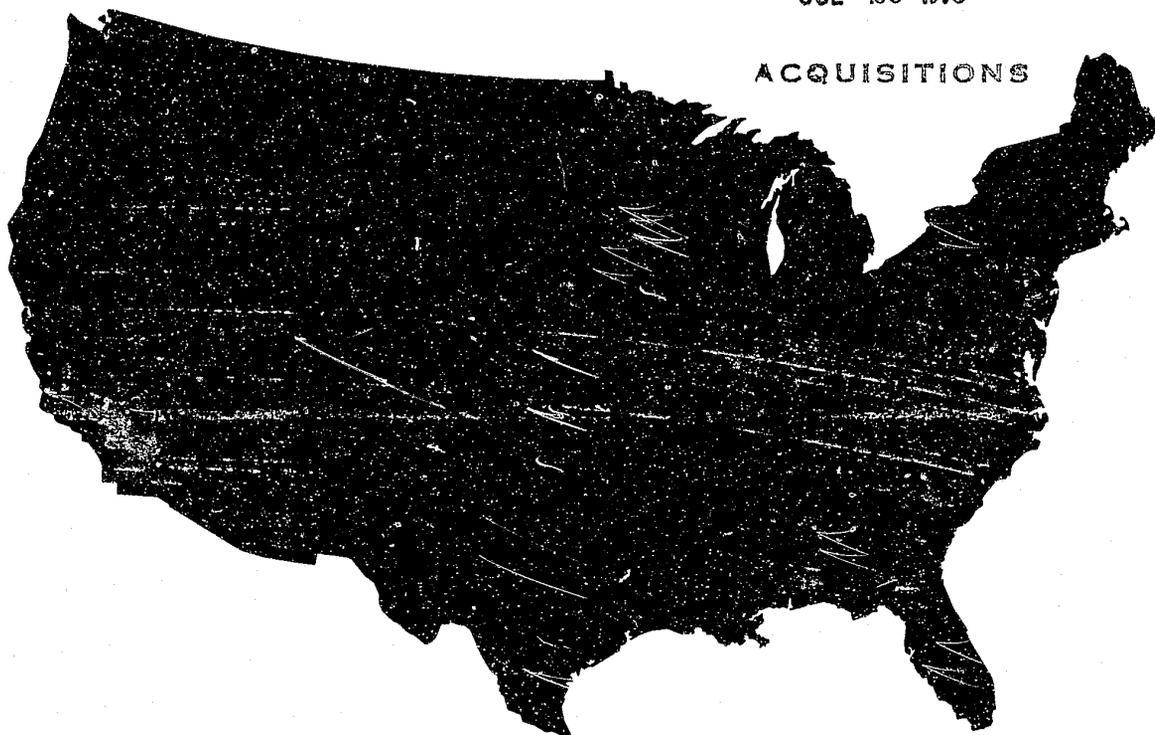
Mobile Enforcement Teams

Response of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration
to Violent Crime in America

NCJRS

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MOBILE ENFORCEMENT TEAMS
RESPONSE OF THE U.S. DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION
TO VIOLENT CRIME IN AMERICA

January 1995

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States is the undisputed leader among developed countries in rates of homicide, says the Journal of the American Medical Association. Americans today stand a greater chance of being a victim of violent crime than of being injured in an auto accident. Through the flurry of yearly statistics that claim either a rise or fall in crime, several trends have remained clear and constant. One, incidents of violent crime occupy a growing share of overall crime. Two, America's young people are the most common victims and offenders of violent crime. Three, the illicit drug trade is behind most of the nation's violent crime. Last, drug usage among teens is again on the rise and another surge in crime is expected within the next five to ten years among young people. In the coming months, the Drug Enforcement Administration will expand dramatically its cooperation with State and local law enforcement. In this time, the DEA will launch its most ambitious and far-reaching effort, aimed at attacking violent drug-related crime, while reaffirming its commitment to community-based policing.

VIOLENT CRIME AND DRUGS

Recently, a car-bomb exploded in Charlestown, Massachusetts, intended for a witness about to testify against the killers of her father and brother; in Atlanta, a gang member murdered two infants after throwing a fire-bomb into the apartment of their 18 year-old mother; and morning newscasts continue to report with grim regularity the body counts of those killed overnight in Washington, Detroit, and Los Angeles. Violent drug-related crime is also reaching into smaller cities. Law enforcement agencies in Kansas City, St. Paul, New Haven and elsewhere are seeing an increased number of drive-by shootings, arson, and other random acts of violence generally associated with the drug trade.

Violent crime, according to the *International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)*, grew steadily from 1960, before exploding across the country in the mid-1980's with the introduction of crack cocaine. During this time, the rate of violent crime - murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault - increased over 370 percent, a rate nine times faster than the U.S. population growth. Homicides tripled, forcible rapes and robbery each rose 500 percent, and aggravated assault increased over 600 percent. And, again, violent crime is up. The National Crime Victimization Survey, just released by the Department of Justice, says violent crime last year increased three times as fast as crime overall.¹

¹ 10.9 million incidents of violent crime, a 5.6 percent increase over last year.

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Driving most of the violent crime in America are drug trafficking and abuse. Consider that over one-third of all violent acts and almost half of all homicides are drug-related.² The *Mobile Enforcement Team (MET)* initiative is DEA's most ambitious plan ever to attack domestic drug trafficking and the violence it generates. The MET initiative was designed to overcome the most severe challenges facing State and local agencies in areas of drug enforcement. First, the MET initiative reaffirms DEA's commitment to community-based policing. This initiative places DEA in a supportive role in investigations that are targeted by State and local agencies based on their own priorities. The MET concept also provides local law enforcement, particularly in small communities, with additional personnel and expertise to help penetrate gangs and trafficking organizations. Last, the MET initiative was designed to meet future challenges in drug-related crime. These include random violence, witness intimidation and gang reprisals, as well as violence hidden within the criminal community, which threatens and terrorizes the innocent.

RISING DRUG-VIOLENCE: THE VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS

Although the direct link between drugs and violence tends to blur, most experts agree that violence and drugs are not only tied, but are mutually sustaining. Studies conducted between 1978 and 1988 in Miami, New York, and Washington found that approximately one-quarter to one-half of homicides were drug-related. Another study of over 400 homicides in New York City in 1988 found that over half of those were

² The two causes most frequently cited for the growth of violent crime are drug lords protecting and expanding their drug turf, and drug users seeking to obtain money for drugs.

directly linked to drugs or alcohol.³

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Survey of State Prison Inmates, 1991*, the State prison population increased almost 60% between 1986 and 1991, with drug offenses accounting for 44% of this increase.⁴ The study also found that drug usage is common factor among most inmates, and played a part in the commission of their crimes.⁵

Again, in a 1994 study, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* drew a correlation among homicides, firearms, and cocaine use. Among the 4,300 killings in New York City between 1990 and 1991, two-thirds of those were between the ages of 15 and 34, 86% were male, and 87% were African-American or Latino. The rate of homicide was highest for African-American males aged 25 through 34 years. Almost three-fourths of all homicide victims were killed by firearms. And young adult victims were more likely to have had cocaine in their system at the time of their death than other age group.

³ Eighty-four percent of those homicides involved cocaine in any form, and 60 percent of the drug-related homicides involved crack cocaine.

⁴ The report also states that while the percentage of prisoners serving time for violent crime fell from 55% in 1986 to 47% in 1991, the actual number increased 34% to 328,000.

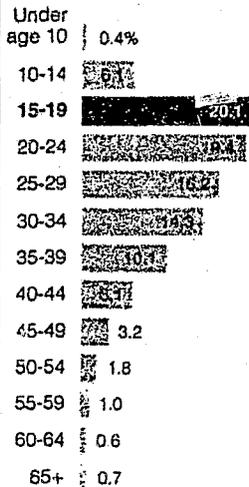
⁵ Approximately 80% of jail inmates, state prisoners, and youth in long-term public juvenile facilities between 1987 and 1991 had used drugs at some point in their lives. Sixty-one percent of violent offenders said they or their victims were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of their offense. Half of all inmates had used cocaine in some form, while 30% of those serving time for homicide were under the influence of drugs at the time of their offense.

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Young Toughs: Teen-Agers and the Crime Rate

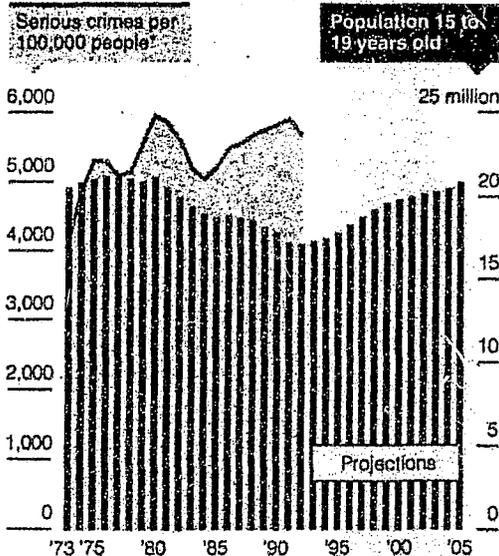
Arrests Soar At Ages 15 to 19...

Percentage of 1992 arrests in cities.



Sources: Federal Bureau of Investigation (arrests, crime rate); Census Bureau (population)

... And That Population Will Be Climbing



* Murder, manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft and arson.

Source: *New York Times*, 11/13/94

America's Youth: Victims and Offenders

Both offenders and victims of violent crime are male, minority, and young. Although trends with young age groups tend to fluctuate, young people ages 16-24 consistently have the highest violent crime rates, and this overall rate is increasing. The IACP reports that criminal homicide arrests for people 15 years of age rose over 217% since the early 1980's. Not surprisingly, violent offenses adjudicated in juvenile courts have risen 31% since 1986.

Some recent studies suggest that violent crime may be levelling off.⁶ Many experts, though, do

⁶ Among the more recent was a 1994 study by the New York City Police Department. According to that study, there were fewer reports of murder, robbery, and assault in the nation's largest cities during

the first half of this year than were reported during the same period last year.

Worse still, drug usage appears to be on the rise. A recent PRIDE study indicates that, after more than a decade of steady decline, drug usage among young people is increasing, adding significantly to the prospects of more violence in the coming years. "To prevent a blood bath in the year 2005," says Professor James Alan Fox, "when we will have a flood of 15-year-olds, we have to do something today with the 5-year-olds."

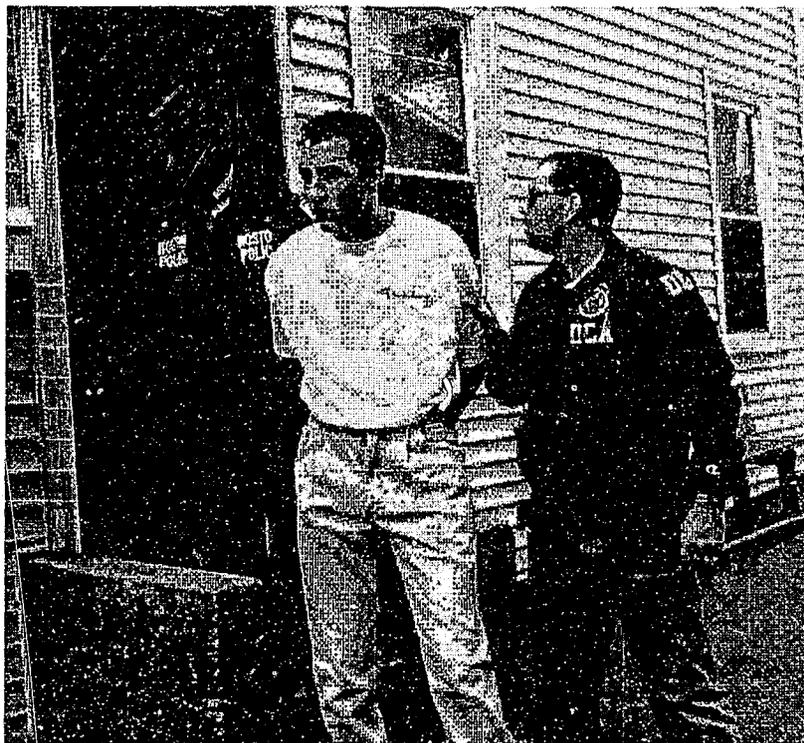
the first half of this year than were reported during the same period last year.

⁷ *The New York Times*, Nov. 13, 1994.

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SHARED RESPONSIBILITY:
MODELS FOR FIGHTING
VIOLENT DRUG-CRIME

In the mid-1980's, largely in response to the violence set off by crack-cocaine, the DEA launched two innovative programs to counter the growing number of drug-related homicides. These programs - Operation Redrum and the Violent Traffickers Program (VTP) - share the same objective: to marry the skills that local law enforcement has in homicide investigations with DEA's expertise in drug investigations in order to take the most violent offenders off the streets for good.



Gang member arrested in Charlestown, July 1994

The goal of these two initiatives is to target the most violent drug offenders and assist local law enforcement in rescuing terrorized communities. These programs, therefore, combine the resources and unique expertise offered by Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies in areas of homicide, drug, and gang investigations.

All told, Redrum task forces, since 1990, have accounted for 110 investigations, 883 arrests, and \$6.5 million in seized assets.⁸ Also, since 1989, the VTP in Philadelphia alone has accounted for over 1,000 arrests, \$14.3M in seized assets, and 300 confiscated weapons. Following are summaries of investigations that reflect the strength of these multi-agency efforts.

⁸ Redrum and VTP task forces have been successful in cities across the country, including Ft. Lauderdale, Boston, Washington, D.C., Oakland, Chicago, New Orleans, and New York.

The Code of Silence Broken

Since 1975, the town of Charlestown, Massachusetts had 49 murders, 33 of which went unsolved. There had not been an arrest in a Charlestown murder since 1990, which has been attributed in large part to witness intimidation, specifically the notorious *Code of Silence* and the ruthlessness against those who broke it. In addition to murder and violence, the gang directed a \$10,000-a-week PCP/cocaine distribution network. After an intensive three-year investigation, officials from Massachusetts State Police, Boston Police Department, Boston Housing Police, and DEA developed information that eventually led to the arrests and indictments of 40 gang members on charges ranging from murder to drug trafficking. *Savannah's Ricky Jivens Organization*

In 1991, Savannah had 59 homicides, a third of which was attributed to one crack organization

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led by 23-year-old Ricky Jivens. The Jivens gang thrived on violence, terror, and drugs, and was believed to have been responsible for as many as 20 homicides in 1991. In addition to murder, Jivens distributed some 25 kg of crack-cocaine weekly, and relied extensively on juveniles to act as gang enforcers. As part of initiation, prospective gang members were expected to "get down" - to kill anyone, innocent or not. Those who refused were targeted for murder themselves. Federal, State, and local law enforcement collected evidence that resulted in the September 1991 indictments of 18 of the organization's members. Today, six of the members, including Ricky Jivens, are serving life sentences. According to one newspaper account, Savannah in 1990 had the highest murder rate per capita in the nation. But after this inner-city crack cocaine bust, the homicide rate fell 25 percent.

Washington's First Street Crew.

Law enforcement agencies effectively shut down the *First Street Crew*, one of Washington, D.C.'s most notorious crack organizations. The First Street Crew controlled a wide share of the city's crack-cocaine market with murder, violence, and terror. Shortly after an informant was murdered, local homicide units and DEA launched an investigation of this group, which resulted in the arrest of five of the gang's principal members. The subsequent trial of the defendants shocked when it learned of the ruthlessness of gang members to silence and intimidate witnesses. Eleven witnesses were shot, six fatally, and the house of another was set afire. DEA and US Marshals immediately protected some 35 other potential witnesses. Finally, after four months of testimony, three defendants were sentenced to life without parole; a fourth defendant was sentenced to 25 years; and the last pled guilty to murder, receiving 8-15 years.

Each of these cases reveals several common characteristics: that violent crime and drugs are

inseparable; that gang-terror and witness intimidation paralyze entire communities and jeopardize prosecutions; and that a quick, surgical attack on these gangs by State and local agencies, with Federal support, can break gang terror and drive down crime rates.



Members of Washington's First Street Crew

MOBILE ENFORCEMENT TEAMS: DEA'S RESPONSE TO VIOLENT DRUG CRIME

The DEA *Mobile Enforcement Team Initiative* (MET) is designed as a support-service to help State and local police departments combat violent crime and drug trafficking in their communities.

The METs are tactical, quick-response teams. At the request of a police chief, sheriff, or district attorney, a MET will be deployed as a street-level enforcement team that will work in concert with

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local police to dislodge violent drug offenders from the community. In coordination with State and local agencies, a MET will conduct surveillance, collect intelligence, cultivate investigations obtain indictments and help with arrests, before returning to its base-division.

Mobile Enforcement Team members are not homicide investigators. The MET's mission is to cultivate drug intelligence and investigations against violent offenders, and then share that information with State and local authorities to further their homicide cases and prosecutions.

Why the MET Initiative is Needed

As most violent crime is linked directly or indirectly to drugs, the MET initiative was designed to overcome the two challenges that face State and local agencies in drug enforcement:

- *State and local law agencies suffer from limited resources - equipment, funding, and diversification of personnel - that are needed to effectively perform narcotics enforcement.*
- *Local law enforcement personnel are known by local narcotics users and sellers, making undercover buys and penetration of local distribution rings difficult and dangerous.*

The MET design also considers the major factors that are connected with the 30% decline in the nation's homicide closure rate.⁹ Those factors are:

Limited Resources: State and local law enforcement agencies are expected to investigate more crimes with less financial, material, staffing, and technical resources. The MET initiative provides financial and technical support to investigations, as well as a diverse group of

⁹ The IACP reports that the homicide closure rate has dropped 25% since 1960.

Agents whose involvement would minimize risk of exposing local undercover officers.

More violence and fewer police officers: The number of police officers has dropped, while violent crime incidents surged. In 1990, says the IACP, the nation had fewer than one officer to respond to every three violent crimes.

Increased teen violence: Young people - the most violent of all age groups - are committing more random violence and killing strangers more frequently than adult criminals. Police investigations, therefore, are weakened with fewer ties between victim and offender.

Witness intimidation: Witness intimidation has had a profound negative impact on investigations, prosecutions, and the closure rate. Gangs' increased use of intimidation has undermined numerous investigations and has prevented an untold number of potential witnesses from providing crucial testimony.

Violence within the criminal community: Still, another reason for the declining closure rate, is that many homicides and other violent acts are committed within the criminal community, yet still terrorize the innocent. These would include enforcement actions within gangs, reprisals between drug lords, and crimes among criminals to obtain money for drugs.

METs: Mission, Objectives, Procedures

Specific objectives of the MET Initiative are to:

- identify major drug traffickers and organizations who engage in homicide and other violent crime;
- collect, analyze, and share intelligence with State and local counterparts;
- cultivate investigations against violent drug offenders and gangs;
- Arrest drug traffickers and assist in the arrests of violent offenders and gangs;
- seize the assets of violent drug-offenders and gangs; and

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provide appropriate support to State, local, and Federal prosecutors.

In addition to law enforcement agencies, the METs will also reach out for the unique expertise that can be offered by specialized housing agencies. Numerous communities across the country have shown that improvements to public housing, which often serve as gang-havens, can help drive out gang activity and lower crime rates. Such agencies that might be included in this effort are public housing police forces, building inspectors, and city tax and finance departments.

The DEA will give priority attention to certain circumstances when dispatching METs to State and local communities. These include:

- Complaints of drug distribution in and around schools, playgrounds, and other areas where youths congregate;
- Areas that are prone to, and have reflected, a high incidence of violent crime that are directly related to street-level drug trafficking; and
- Areas that are plagued by an extremely high volume of drug trafficking or by blatant dealing in public places where little or no regard is shown for authority figures or local law enforcement efforts.

Methods of Operation

DEA will assign 10-12 METs in as many DEA Divisions across the country beginning in early 1995. When contacted by a local counterpart, the DEA Special Agent in Charge will first ensure that the gang or organization to be targeted is known to traffic drugs and engage in violence. He will then dispatch to that city an advance team consisting of two to three Special Agents. Over the following two to three weeks, the advance team, using state-of-the-art equipment, will take surveillance videos and collect intelligence on gang members. Also during this time, the advance team

will meet with local counterparts to discuss key issues. These issues include: the handling of evidence and defendants, seized assets, warrants, publicity, expenditures, actual and potential informants, funding the investigation, processing defendants, press releases, and follow-up procedures.

Afterwards, the advance team will return to its base-division, where it will review the surveillance intelligence with the other team members and then collectively draft an action plan. The entire team, consisting of 10-12 Agents, will then return to the city, outfitted with the latest surveillance and raid-planning equipment. Then, in cooperation with local agencies, the team will raid the targeted gang-havens and make arrests.

Following a MET-assisted operation, DEA officials will meet with representatives of the requesting agency to evaluate the long-term success of the operation. Measures of effectiveness of the operation include: visible drug sales and use reduction, the stability of the target area, community reaction and involvement, resource development, resource implementation, media coverage, and a comprehensive assessment by the requesting agency.

Last, the DEA will not involve itself in any way with the press, make press releases, or public announcements regarding these operations. All media relations and press announcements concerning the progress and outcome of the investigations will reside solely with the requesting agency.

METs: Division of Responsibilities

- Identifying the targets and goals of the MET operation will be the responsibility of the requesting agency;
- Methods of investigation and surveillance will be the responsibility of DEA-MET personnel;

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Media events and press releases will be at the discretion and sole responsibility of the local law enforcement executive, not DEA:

Upon completion of its assignment, the METs will turn over all cases to the requesting agency for further development.

METs: Structure, Staffing, Training

DEA has allocated \$3 million for FY-95 to train, equip, and support 10-12 Mobile Enforcement Teams, which will be based in as many DEA offices across the country. Approximately 200 DEA Special Agents will be assigned to the MET Initiative. Approximately 60 Special Agents will come from DEA Headquarters, and an additional 120 from Operation Snowcap. All Agents will undergo additional training at the FBI/DEA Academy in Quantico to prepare them for this assignment. Specific training will be provided in homicide investigation methods, lie-detection, evidence procedures, surveillance, informant handling, as well as detailed intelligence reports on gang activity around the country.

A Message from the Administrator

The Mobile Enforcement Team Initiative is DEA's most ambitious program ever undertaken to attack drug-related violence in America, and I am confident in its success. The MET initiative, I believe, stands to be successful because its planning reflects not only the strengths of two highly successful DEA operations, but also shares the principles of an equally successful strategy that I had launched as Superintendent of the New York State Police.

As for my personal philosophy, I want to be clear. No other issue is more important to me than reducing violent crime in this country. I applaud the leadership of State and local law enforcement agencies in their efforts to rescue so many of our communities from the violence of gangs and drug traffickers. Having served the

New York State Police for over 32 years, I share the satisfaction that comes from protecting your own. And, now, as DEA's Administrator, I want to reaffirm my support and commitment to community-based policing.

Drug trafficking, violence, and community terror cannot go on. We must step forward and take our places. Please accept my invitation to call the Special Agent in Charge of the DEA office nearest you to discuss the MET Initiative and how it might support your agency and community.

*Thomas A. Constantine
Administrator
Drug Enforcement Administration*

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