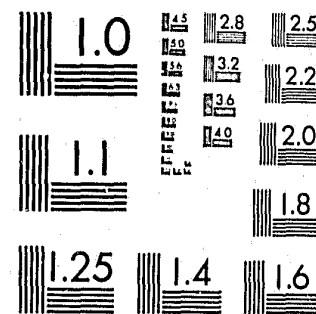


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STUDY OF ANTI-FENCING OPERATIONS IN ILLINOIS

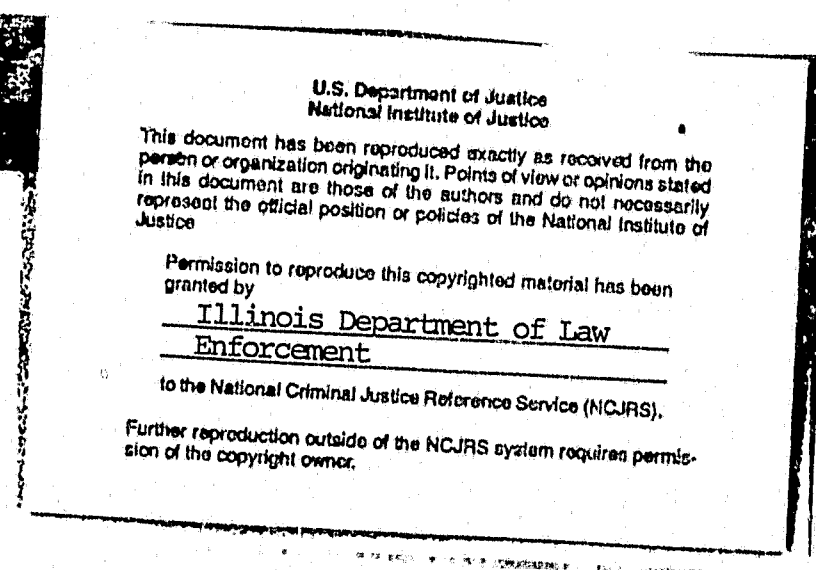
Illinois Department of Law Enforcement
Division of Administration

Richard A. Raub

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**STUDY OF ANTI-FENCING
OPERATIONS IN ILLINOIS:**

An Analysis of Their Effectiveness



ABSTRACT

Most of the evaluations of anti-fencing operations have been concerned with the value of goods recovered and the numbers and rates of convictions obtained. One study attempted to determine the overall effect of an anti-fencing operation on subsequent crime and the value of those crimes. This study showed mixed results. One question not answered is the effect of such operations on crime during their existence.

Two programs in Illinois were examined for their effect on crime both during and after. The results of this study show that crimes do not appear to increase during the operation. At the same time, no longer term reductions can be found. To make these comparisons, areas with and without anti-fencing operations were compared.

Department of Law Enforcement
Division of Administration

Richard A. Raub
September 1983

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STUDY OF ANTI-FENCING OPERATINGS IN ILLINOIS

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

While numerous articles have described anti-fencing or sting operations, there are few evaluations. With some exceptions, the evaluations tend to compare only dollars recovered versus dollars spent. Because of the many resultant arrests, a sting is assumed to reduce crime. Not answered is the question of whether or not sting operations encourage crime or if they are cost-beneficial in terms of total expenditures including fixed and variable costs. The Illinois Department of Law Enforcement examined two anti-fencing operations to determine what affect they had on the occurrence of property crimes during and after the operation. A longer term study is proposed to examine the cost-benefit of such operations.

Two programs conducted by the Department were used for this analysis. The first was Operation JJ. It operated in Sangamon County, Illinois from October 9, 1979 through June 30, 1980. The second program consisted of two overlapping undercover operations both in the Rock Island-Moline area. One was Operation Quad Cities which opened on June 5, 1981 and closed on March 23, 1982. Shorter in duration was Operation Blackhawk. It began operation on June 30, 1981 and closed on December 31 the same year. Arrests in both these operations started after March 1982.

Undercover anti-fencing projects provide a source for purchasing stolen goods. During the operation of the projects in Illinois, several hundred thousand dollars of stolen goods were recovered ranging from small appliances to vehicles.

More than 100 arrests resulted; convictions usually have been certain. According to the Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) who conducted the operations, most of those arrested were local residents. Likewise, the victims from whom the property had been stolen lived within the locality where the sting operated.

This report will evaluate the programs in terms of their effect on the amount of criminal activity. The analyses will be based on records of thefts and burglaries. These are maintained by the Department of Law Enforcement (DLE) as part of the Illinois Uniform Crime Report Program (I-UCR). Data are reported to DLE by local law enforcement personnel.

The analysis used in this study represents a before and after comparison of crimes in different geographic areas, one of which had a sting operation compared to one of similar geographic and socio-economic characteristics that did not have an operation. To reduce variations in accuracy that occur in data either seasonally or as a result of reporting they were aggregated into six-month or nine-month periods correspondent to the operation of the programs. These data then were treated with a two-way analysis of variance. This technique helps determine if changes observed among areas could have occurred by chance and which factor (time or location) played a more important role.

The criminal activity used for analysis includes the following categories:

- Burglary
 - Forcible entry
 - Unlawful entry (no force)
 - Attempted forcible entry

- Burglary from Motor Vehicles
 - More than 300 dollars (through 1981, more than 150 dollars)
 - Less than 300 (150) dollars
 - Attempted burglary
- Theft
 - More than 300 (150) dollars
 - Less than 300 (150) dollars
 - Attempted theft

In order to obtain sufficient data, they were summarized on a county-wide basis. Data from January 1976 through December 1981 were used. Those statistics that had been collected for 1982 were preliminary. Their variation was so large that the data would not have been meaningful. Therefore, information for 1982 is not used. No attempt was made to look at individual crime categories. This would have created frequencies too small for statistical analyses.

DISCUSSION

Review of Other Programs and the Literature

The objective of an anti-fencing operation is to recover stolen goods and identify those who handled the items. The expectation is that the operation will reduce property crime because of the arrest and conviction of a large number of criminals. As has been pointed out by the U.S. Department of Justice, these arrests, because of the documentation accompanying them, also have a high rate of conviction.¹ Klockars in his treatise on Jonathan Wild clearly identifies the sting as one of the most potent weapons in detective policing.

"Wild's career suggests that working as a fence, at least as long as one can sustain that role successfully, is a more powerful method of detective policing than any other which existed in the eighteenth century.

"... It suggests that the sting operations (today) have the potential to produce more impressive results than conventional methods...".²

The results in Illinois parallel those in some 42 projects which have been reported.³ Many of these projects involve two or more fencing operations. All have been successful in apprehending criminals. More than 100 persons, for example, were arrested in the Illinois operations. Further, substantial amounts of stolen property were received. What has not been examined in depth, however, is the effect of these projects on crime.

The expected outcome is that crimes will decrease. In a report to the Administration, the United States Department of Justice examined eight fencing operations which were conducted in three midwestern and western cities during a period from July 1976 through October 1978.⁴ The cities are unnamed. They ranged in population from 300,000 to 800,000 persons. As the summary of this report states:

"Anti-fencing projects examined show decreases in property crime at the termination of their operations."⁵

The data and statistical analyses presented in the report, Justice Department, contradict that summary statement. In each case, the amount of property crime did not change significantly. A report from San Diego echoed these

findings.⁶ Neither document attempted to compare different areas, some of whom had sting operations and some that did not.

Further, this report did not address changes in crime during the project. None of the few analytical studies available appear to have made this examination. The only note available is a comment by G. T. Marx in an article called "The New Police Undercover Work". He states:

"While such police fencing units are operating (at least six months in most cases), they may serve as a stimulant for theft and help generate capital for other illegal activities."⁷

A review of this article as well as the author's references lends no support to this statement. One concludes that Marx is restating an assumption without validating it. The data provided in the 1979 U.S. Department of Justice Report What Happened are sufficient to examine this question in general terms.⁸ Table 1 summarizes the data. Using a Kruskal-Wallis Analysis of Variance (H), significant differences in the number of property crimes from one year to the next can be found in all three cities. These variances exist regardless of whether or not an anti-fencing operation took place. In all cases, the data seem to be affected by the crimes occurring during the 1975/1976 period.

If this period is eliminated from the analyses, then three different findings occur. Jurisdiction A had no difference in property crimes before or during the operation of a sting. The crimes increased significantly in Jurisdiction B, and decreased by a significant amount in Jurisdiction C. All three cities had fewer crimes than the 1975/1976 period which was eliminated. There is not support for the hypothesis that anti-fencing operations increase crime.

TABLE 1
ANALYSIS OF PROPERTY CRIMES
IN THREE U.S. CITIES

Monthly Property Crimes

Month	Jurisdiction A				Jurisdiction B				Jurisdiction C			
	Before	Before	During		Before	Before	During		Before	Before	Before	During
	1974/ 1975	1975/ 1976	1976/ 1977		1974/ 1975	1975/ 1976	1976/ 1977		1974/ 1975	1975/ 1976	1976/ 1977	1977/ 1978
September	1820	1910	2320	July	1920	2240	2000	July	2200	2740	2800	2370
October	2050	2210	2100	August	2000	2200	2400	August	2320	2950	2800	2250
November	1950	2150	1950	September	1990	2220	2210	September	2290	2820	2370	2160
December	2060	2300	2050	October	2050	2300	2260	October	2390	2770	2300	2150
January	1870	2190	1900	November	2040	2380	2170	November	2300	2910	2250	2090
February	1750	2190	1890	December	2250	2390	2200	December	2500	3120	2350	2350
March	2000	2300	1920	January	2200	2390	2400	January	2390	2720	1990	2000
April	1840	2100	1800	February	1950	2250	2200	February	2060	2400	2180	1630
May	1650	2200	1790	March	2110	2410	2250	March	2170	2770	2350	2060
June	2000	2210	1810	April	2040	2290	1860	April	2300	2700	2100	1900
July	2100	2670	1950	May	2050	2100	2100	May	2270	2900	2000	2100
August	2040	2550	1990	June	2080	2010	2090	June	2500	2810	2020	2140
Average	1930	2250	1960	Average	2060	2270	2230	Average	2350	2800	2290	2100
H = 16.235 df = 2 p .01												
excluding 1975/1976												
H = 0.003 df = 1 NS												
H = 12.825 df = 2 p .01												
H = 27.574 df = 3 p .01												
H = 11.8 df = 1 p .01												
H = 7.875 df = 2 p .025												

Source: What Happened, An Examination of Recently Terminated Anti-Fencing Operations, U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Conspiracies Division, Washington, D.C., 1979, Figures 3-1 through 3-3.

Basis for Analysis of Illinois Data

Two sting programs operated in Illinois. The one in Sangamon County operated for a nine-month period from October 1979 through June 1980. Comparable data are derived for the periods October 1978 through June 1979 (before), October through June 1979/1980 (during), and October through June 1980/81 (after the operation closed).

The program in Rock Island County comprised two operations. The common period for the two, however, was seven months from June 1981 through December 1981. The before period is June 1980 through December 1980. Because data are available since 1978, two other seven-month periods are included in the analyses. No complete data were available for a comparable "after" period.

The method chosen for analytical purposes was a two-way analysis of variance. One axis was the comparable periods before, during, and after. The other axis was comparable geographical areas, in this case a county. Two reasons are given for the selection of a county rather than a smaller geographical unit. First, only on a county-wide level are there sufficient data for meaningful analysis. Second, the property crimes which contributed to the stolen goods would encompass wider boundaries than a city.

A larger unit such as two or more counties also would not contribute meaningfully. Most of the stolen property and those arrested came from within the county of operation. However, a series of analyses were run using a multi-county region. For this analyses, counties were included if they lay within 30 miles of the site of the sting. The analyses did not change any results presented in this paper. Therefore, only the analyses of changes in property crimes in individual counties are described.

In addition to the two counties in which sting operations were conducted, two other counties, Peoria and Champaign, were chosen for comparative purposes. An assumption was made that had the sting operations not taken place, crimes in all counties would have changed in similar fashions. Because this assumption could be challenged on the basis that each county might behave differently, a larger number of counties also were examined. The findings, however, remained consistent. Peoria and Champaign were chosen because each has a relatively large metropolitan area (Peoria and Champaign/Urbana) but are located 70 to 100 miles from the sting operations. Further, these counties do not border on larger metropolitan areas. They are similar to Sangamon and Rock Island counties in this respect. The expanded analysis included other counties with major metropolitan areas: Winnebago, Macon, McLean, Kankakee, and Effingham. The results of both analyses are presented.

Because the number of crimes varies from approximately 100 per month in Effingham County to more than 1000 per month in a number of other counties, a method was needed to describe the data on a common basis. Chosen was a standardized score. In this case, the basis for standardization was the average number of property crimes in each county for 1978, along with the standard deviation in those crimes. Taking the actual number of crimes, subtracting the average, and dividing by the standard deviation gives the standardized or "z" score.

$$z = \frac{A - M}{s}$$

where:

- z - Standardized score
- A - Actual number of occurrences
- M - Mean number of occurrences
- s - Standard deviation

The interpretation of changes and variations become simplified with the use of a z score. For example, if the number of actual occurrences at any period is the same as the average, then z equals zero. A greater number yields a positive z; a lesser number yields a negative z. Approximately 68 percent of the cases should fall within z equals plus or minus 1.0 and 95 percent within $z = \pm 2.0$. Further, if the trend of z is positive, then crimes are increasing. When it becomes negative, crimes are decreasing. Most importantly, all counties are now shown on the same, and therefore comparable, basis.

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSES

Sangamon County

Shown in Table 2 are the number of burglaries and thefts recorded in Sangamon, Peoria, and Champaign Counties during three, nine-month periods from 1978 through 1981. The first period represents the time before the project began. The second occurs during Operation JJ (in Sangamon County - Springfield), and the third after the operation had closed. Shown also are the z scores for these data.

Inspection of the data shows that property crimes in Sangamon County remained constant during the first two periods and dropped during the third period.

TABLE 2
BURGLARIES AND THEFTS
COMPARISON BETWEEN SANGAMON COUNTY,
AND PEORIA AND CHAMPAIGN COUNTIES
THREE-YEAR PERIOD

		Frequency			Standardized Score		
1978/79		Sangamon	Peoria	Champaign	Sangamon	Peoria	Champaign
Before	Oct	983	1019	708	.300	.942	-.129
	Nov	1218	956	680	1.189	.531	-.353
	Dec	1486	922	734	2.203	.309	.079
	Jan	613	576	530	-1.099	-1.947	-1.555
	Feb	604	473	508	-1.133	-2.619	-1.731
	Mar	760	798	657	-.543	-.499	-.537
	Apr	841	842	675	-.237	-.213	-.393
	May	893	896	758	-.040	.140	.272
	Jun	793	1083	785	-.419	1.359	.488
	Avg	910.1	840.6	670.6	.024	-.222	-.429
1979/80							
During	Oct	955	1185	870	.194	2.025	1.169
	Nov	960	1171	767	.213	1.933	.344
	Dec	947	1121	757	.164	1.607	.264
	Jan	900	1031	648	-.014	1.020	-.610
	Feb	781	730	531	-.464	-.943	-1.547
	Mar	846	858	755	-.218	-.108	.248
	Apr	879	954	785	-.093	.518	.488
	May	948	1143	895	.168	1.751	1.369
	Jun	981	1194	919	.293	2.083	1.562
	Avg	910.8	1043	769.7	.027	1.098	.365
1980/81							
After	Oct	804	1126	970	-.377	1.640	1.970
	Nov	784	1105	762	-.453	1.503	.304
	Dec	819	1079	718	-.320	1.333	-.049
	Jan	676	860	664	-.861	-.095	-.481
	Feb	586	752	723	-1.202	-.800	-.009
	Mar	707	920	799	-.744	.296	.600
	Apr	745	991	802	-.600	.759	.624
	May	816	1007	811	-.332	.864	.696
	Jun	939	1089	805	.134	1.398	.648
	Avg	764	992.1	783.8	-.528	.767	.478

Based on an analysis of variance, this decrease in crimes in Sangamon County during the period after the sting had closed was statistically significant at $p = 0.01$ (less than one time in 100 that the difference could have occurred by chance) when compared to Peoria and Champaign Counties. Property crimes in Peoria County rose substantially during 1979/80 and fell during 1980/81. In Champaign County, crimes continued to increase. Even in Peoria County, the 1980/81 period had a higher rate of property crimes when compared to Sangamon County. This had not been the case prior to the start of the sting.

More important, however, is analysis of crimes during the period of the sting. There was no increase in Sangamon County. On the other hand, both Peoria and Champaign showed sizable and significant changes. There is no evidence that the anti-fencing operation in Sangamon County encouraged crime.

One criticism which immediately arises is that perhaps Peoria and Champaign Counties are too different to be compared to Sangamon County. Comparison of changes between these two counties, and within the two counties themselves, show that these two counties are not different statistically. Further, changes in property crimes in Sangamon County before the start of the project behaved similarly to those in the other two counties.

Rock Island County

In Rock Island County (Rock Island-East Moline), there are three periods of data before the operation of the two separate stings. A seven-month period is used in the analyses because this represents the concurrent period between Operation Quad Cities and Operation Blackhawk. As shown in Table 3, property crimes in

TABLE 3
BURGLARIES AND THEFTS
COMPARISON BETWEEN ROCK ISLAND COUNTY,
AND PEORIA AND CHAMPAIGN COUNTIES
FOUR-YEAR PERIOD

		Burglaries and Thefts					
		Rock Island	Peoria	Champaign	Rock Island	Peoria	Champaign
1978							
Before	Jun	763	784	709	.072	-.591	-.121
	Jul	668	1031	846	-.507	1.020	.977
	Aug	831	1017	963	.487	.929	1.914
	Sep	850	1065	848	.603	1.242	.993
	Oct	1044	1019	708	1.786	.942	-.129
	Nov	917	956	680	1.011	.531	-.353
	Dec	767	922	734	.097	.309	.079
	Avg	834.3	970.6	784	.507	.626	.480
1979							
Before	Jun	896	1083	785	.883	1.359	.488
	Jul	924	1152	986	1.054	1.809	2.099
	Aug	804	223	988	.322	2.449	2.115
	Sep	797	2249	1020	.279	.811	2.371
	Oct	830	1185	870	.481	2.025	1.169
	Nov	726	1171	767	-.153	1.933	.344
	Dec	739	1121	757	-.074	1.607	.264
	Avg	816.6	1169.1	881.9	.399	1.713	1.264
1980							
Before	Jun	995	1194	919	1.487	2.083	1.562
	Jul	1014	1162	988	1.603	1.875	2.026
	Aug	1030	1331	1041	1.700	2.977	2.539
	Sep	854	1109	1047	.627	1.529	2.587
	Oct	802	1126	970	.310	1.640	1.970
	Nov	703	1105	762	-.294	1.503	.304
	Dec	728	1079	718	-.141	1.333	-.049
	Avg	875.1	1158	920.7	.756	1.849	1.563
1981							
During	Jun	908	1089	805	.956	1.398	.648
	Jul	974	1147	881	1.359	1.777	1.257
	Aug	963	1275	964	1.292	2.612	1.922
	Sep	802	1063	999	.310	1.229	2.203
	Oct	931	1083	947	1.097	1.359	1.786
	Nov	889	981	861	.840	.694	1.097
	Dec	675	944	752	-.464	.453	.224
	Avg	877.4	1083.1	887	.770	1.360	1.305

Rock Island prior to the sting decreased then rose slightly. None of the changes were significant. During operation of the two anti-fencing projects, the average number of crimes per month rose by only two from 875.1 to 877.4. With the exception of November 1981, the variation from month to month was similar to the previous year. There was no difference in the number of crimes that occurred during the sting operations. This matches the finding in Sangamon County.

The comparison with Peoria and Champaign Counties also shows that slight decreases occurred in both counties during the period crimes remained constant in Rock Island. According to a two-way analysis of variance, the only differences found are among counties themselves. All of the differences could have occurred by chance. This finding, while not as clearly drawn as that for Sangamon County, suggests that there is no link between the operation of sting and changes in crime.

Comparisons to Other Counties

The initial comparisons were drawn between the two counties in which sting projects operated and two other counties similar in size and population base. An anti-fencing operation in Rock Island or Sangamon County should not draw from Peoria or Champaign. Yet, in respect of criminal activities, all counties should behave in a similar fashion. In order to determine if the two counties used for comparison represented extremes, additional counties were included. Table 4 shows standardized data for Sangamon County, and for Winnebago, Kankakee, McLean, Mason, and Effingham Counties for the three periods before, during, and after the Sangamon County anti-fencing operation also are shown. An analysis of variance in which property crimes in Sangamon County were excluded shows no

TABLE 4
BURGLARIES AND THEFTS
COMPARISON BETWEEN SANGAMON AND
OTHER COUNTIES WITH MAJOR CITIES

	Standardized Score Burglaries and Theft					
1978/79	Sangamon	Winnebago	Kankakee	McLean	Macon	Effingham
Oct	.300	1.034	.032	1.252	.277	.136
Nov	1.189	.342	-.384	.529	.307	-.616
Dec	2.203	-.454	-.142	-.397	-.624	1.515
Jan	-1.099	-1.155	-1.364	-1.111	-1.309	-.491
Feb	-1.133	-1.079	-1.297	-1.207	-1.622	-1.055
Mar	-.543	-.297	-.102	-.021	-.134	.951
Apr	-.237	.565	-.787	.114	.052	-.178
May	-.040	.527	-.370	.008	-.124	1.640
Jun	-.419	1.347	.919	-.002	1.198	1.013
Avg	.024	.092	-.388	-.093	-.220	.324
1979/80						
Oct	.194	2.863	.556	1.425	1.893	.073
Nov	.213	1.607	.408	-.059	1.404	.324
Dec	.164	1.484	.395	.432	1.061	.512
Jan	-.014	.304	-.437	.374	-.163	1.076
Feb	-.464	-.558	-.384	-.976	-.849	-.428
Mar	-.218	.551	-.196	.538	.454	.387
Apr	-.093	1.522	.194	.519	1.306	.763
May	.168	2.105	.784	1.011	1.982	.763
Jun	.293	2.659	2.396	1.358	2.128	1.139
Avg	.027	1.393	.413	.514	1.024	.512
1980/81						
Oct	-.377	2.479	1.147	1.175	.973	.198
Nov	-.453	2.048	1.348	1.271	1.139	2.580
Dec	-.320	1.896	1.617	.288	.953	1.828
Jan	-.861	1.333	.650	-.069	.738	1.389
Feb	-1.202	.110	-.545	-.792	.268	-.303
Mar	-.744	1.413	1.362	-.368	1.081	1.577
Apr	-.600	1.389	1.187	.394	1.110	1.327
May	-.332	1.925	1.281	-.445	1.120	.449
Jun	.134	2.200	.784	-.387	1.551	1.891
Avg	-.528	1.644	.981	.118	.992	1.215

significant changes in the overall occurrence of crime among the counties from 1979 to 1980 except for Macon County. The changes in crime in Macon County closely approximated those in Peoria. Both are largely blue-collar communities. However, the important comparison is between Sangamon County and the other counties. During the period of the sting in Sangamon County, property crimes in all other counties, except Sangamon, increased. Further, while crimes in Sangamon County decreased slightly in the 1980/81 period, after the termination of the operation, property crimes in other counties did not. This pattern has not significant.

A similar analysis also was prepared for Rock Island County. The analysis of variance shows that the changes in property crimes in Rock Island were no different from the other counties. Again, the patterns indicate that an anti-fencing operation had little or no effect on property crimes in this county.

CONCLUSIONS

The limited data available in Illinois show that when the anti-fencing projects were operating, property crimes in the affected counties did not change. In the case of Sangamon County, the number of crimes was significantly lower than what might have been expected, given what occurred in other counties. An analysis of property crimes using data reported by the U.S. Department of Justice also showed a similar outcome.⁹ There appears no basis for the contention that anti-fencing operations encourage crime. This suggests that the beliefs of such authors as Marx are based on emotion rather than fact.

Data covering a period after a sting is closed are available only for Operation JJ in Sangamon County. Although property crimes decreased in Sangamon County in the comparative nine-month period, one year later, the change was similar, statistically, to what occurred in other counties. A limited conclusion is that property crimes did not decrease after the sting closed. Again, this conclusion echos that found in the Justice Department's report. While a sting operation nets many persons dealing in stolen materials and recovers substantial amounts of stolen goods, it may not have a significant effect on property crimes. Whether it is cost-beneficial or not depends upon the value attached to recovering stolen goods and the arrest of perpetrators of these crimes, rather than middle-men.

This study was restricted solely to the question of changes in property crimes and relationship of these changes to the operation of a sting. No examination or overall assessment was made of the three projects. A more extensive study of the types and value of stolen goods recovered, the economic aspects including the cost of designing and operating a sting, and the types of persons caught and ultimate sentencing are other important aspects. Only one study, by the U.S. Department of Justice, attempted to analyze some of these other points.

NOTES

1. What Happened, An Examination of Recently Terminated Anti-Fencing Operations, U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Conspiracies Division, Washington, D.C., 1979.
2. Carl B. Klockars, "Jonathan Wild and the Modern Sting," in History and Crime, J. A. Inciardi and C. E. Faupel, ed., Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, Cal., 1980, pp. 239-240.
3. Catherine A. Cotter and James W. Burrows, Property Crime Program, A Special Report: Overview of the Sting Program and Project Summaries, U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Conspiracies Division, Washington, D.C., January 1981.
4. What Happened, op. cit.
5. Ibid., p. iv.
6. Scott H. Green and Susan Pennell, Anti-Fencing Strategy: A Regional Perspective, Comprehensive Planning Organization, San Diego, Cal., November 1979.
7. Gary T. Marx, "The New Police Undercover Work," Urban Life, Vol. 8, no. 4, January 1980, p. 414.
8. What Happened, op. cit., Figures 3-1 through 3-3.
9. Ibid.

END