Testimony
of
The Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor
Before
The New York City Council Committee on Public Safety

Hearing on Operation Crew Cut and Crime Reduction Strategies

Steven M. Goldstein
Chief Assistant District Attorney

April 28th, 2014
Council Chambers
City Hall

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL NARCOTICS PROSECUTOR
I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the City Council’s Committee on Public Safety on an important law enforcement strategy, the New York City Police Department’s (NYPD) Operation Crew Cut. Over the past two years, working collaboratively, and with great assistance from the Bronx District Attorney’s Office, the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor (OSNP) and the NYPD developed innovative investigative techniques that enabled us to prosecute members of four violent gangs within a targeted enforcement zone, in and around the Morrisania section of the Bronx. These prosecutions dramatically reduced violence in that community, and represent important changes in the way law enforcement approaches the investigation and prosecution of gangs.

Overview

While much of New York City has seen historically low crime rates, not every neighborhood has enjoyed the same sense of safety and security. Violent street gangs have had a destabilizing effect on many of the residents of our communities, including those living in the 44th Precinct and Morrisania section of the Bronx. There, groups of teens and young adults were at war with one another over territory, status, and rivalries, and recklessly turned petty grudges into violent disputes. These gang members engaged in public gun battles that left innocent victims shot, and brazenly displayed on the Internet their weapons and the cash they amassed from selling drugs and engaging in a range of other, often violent, criminal activity.

The media articles attached to this testimony in Appendix 1 contain disturbing accounts of the violence the community experienced as a result of these crews, and many details regarding the cases that were built during our investigations. I encourage you to look at those articles, and I won’t recount to you the specifics of those cases here today. What I’d like instead to do is focus my comments, by briefly touching on four areas.

First, I’d like to provide some insight into the challenges law enforcement
faces in bringing cases against these violent crews, and why a different approach was required. Second, I will describe the impact that these cases have had in stemming violence in the community. Third, I’d like to provide you with a sense of the tremendous resources required to bring successful cases like these. Finally, I’d like to emphasize that the gains from cases such as the ones we are talking about here today, can only be maintained through persistence and strong partnerships between law enforcement and the communities we serve.

Responding to New Challenges

As many of you know, OSNP has citywide jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute narcotics trafficking. Our work ranges from investigating, usually through long-term wiretaps, international drug and money laundering cartels shipping large shipments of narcotics into New York City, to addressing the prescription drug epidemic that has so impacted on our city and country. However, street level drug organizations, and the crime associated with drug selling, have always been a central focus of our office. Often these crimes are investigated and prosecuted through “buy operations,” where, over a period of time, undercover police officers buy drugs from dealers operating on the street or in apartment buildings. For example, earlier this month, a long-term buy operation resulted in the prosecution of a gang operating in the Inwood section of Manhattan. A buy operation was successful in investigating this type of gang that primarily sold drugs, and did so brazenly and “around the clock” inside apartments, in lobbies and stairwells on Nagle Avenue.

The street crews operating in the 44th Precinct and elsewhere in New York, represent a different challenge for law enforcement. While they support their criminal activity, in part, through drug selling, they do not operate like the Nagle gang did, selling in an organized, brazen fashion, and their drug selling activity is not susceptible to a buy operation. These gangs may engage in a wide range of criminality, from drug crimes to robbery to identity theft. The violence associated with these crews is random and unpredictable. It is fueled by geographic rivalries, grudges, and the desire to gain status in a gang through acts of violence that are then followed by spiraling retaliatory violence. The difficulty of investigating this kind of random and wide-ranging criminal activity is further exacerbated by two other factors.

First, despite often being young, the leaders of these gangs are quite savvy when it comes to law enforcement. For example, during our investigations of these crews we learned that gang leaders, conscious
of the penalties for being caught with a gun, implemented the practice of maintaining communal firearms that were moved from place to place. Moreover, they often delegated the task of hiding or carrying firearms to the youngest gang members, knowing that the penalties for a juvenile caught with a gun is less severe. Another example of their savvy is what gang members would do if they were shot. Knowing that the police would canvass local hospitals, gang members would travel to more distant hospitals to avoid police inquiry. If the police did find the shot crew members, they would know to provide the police with false locations where the shooting occurred, sending officers on “wild goose chases,” searching “crime scenes” where no crime had occurred.

Second, these crews rely heavily on witness intimidation to prevent civilians from cooperating with law enforcement. Today’s “snitches get stitches” culture is powerful, widespread, and growing. It has evolved from an underground street code to a social norm, creating communities and subcultures in which cooperation has consequences for a witness that range from ostracism to far worse. Witnesses are also vulnerable to harassment and intimidation of a whole new type – through Facebook and Instagram postings, Twitter, and e-mail. In fact, the Internet has spawned a virtual cottage industry devoted to deterring cooperation with law enforcement and punishing those who transgress. Appendix 2 attached to this testimony contains a sampling of webpages, including a posting from one of our cases, which illustrate the role the Internet is playing in creating a pervasive “code of silence” in many communities in New York and throughout the country.

These challenges required a new approach to gang investigations. And in 2010, two years before Operation Crew Cut was announced, while working on gang cases in the 73rd Precinct in Brooklyn, OSNP began to take a look at social media to see if gang members were communicating and using social media to plan and further their criminal activity.

What we found in our 73rd Precinct cases was illuminating. Gang members used social media to fuel violent rivalries, direct crimes, boast about victories, attract new recruits, and identify and intimidate witnesses. What we found presented compelling evidence of gang activity and crimes.

This social media and digital information, coupled with police surveillance and other evidence developed during the course of an investigation, allowed OSNP to build stronger cases and gain a more complete picture of how these gangs operate – their criminal schemes, shifting alliances and violent rivalries. That more complete picture allowed prosecutors to hone in on the more significant gang members.
whose arrest and prosecution would have the greatest impact on community safety. Success in gang cases is not simply measured by the number of defendants arrested. “Fifty gang members arrested,” may make for a good headline, but it does not necessarily mean that the investigation and prosecution will have an impact. More important is making sure the right people are arrested, and social media and digital evidence helped us to do that.

**Impact of Crew Cut Cases**

Our investigations in the Bronx, resulted in successive indictments against four gangs: “280,” “6 Wild,” “WTG,” and “Dub City.” A total of 24 guns were seized during the course of the investigations. Our success in effectively using both traditional and new investigative tools to identify and build cases against the right people, can be measured by the impact these cases have had on violence in the 44th Precinct. What we have seen is that as successive waves of arrests occurred in connection with the four indictments, the 44th Precinct experienced a significant decline in shootings. Between 2011 and 2013, the 44th Precinct recorded a dramatic 34% drop in overall shootings. (Overall shootings include incidents in which one or more individuals are shot, and are not limited to gang-related shootings.) The 44th Precinct recorded an overall total of 51 shooting incidents in 2011. By the end of 2013, following the completion of the “Dub City,” “WTG,” and “6 Wild” investigations, the number of overall shooting incidents in the 44th Precinct had dropped to 34.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>44th Precinct Shootings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the same time period, the NYPD recorded a 75% decline in shooting incidents specifically linked to these four gangs throughout the Bronx. In 2011, the four gangs were responsible for at least 15 shootings in which 18 individuals were shot. In 2012, the gangs were responsible for at least 16 shooting incidents in which 22 individuals were shot. By the end of 2013 – after three waves of arrests, but before the final “280” arrests – there were 3 shootings linked to members of the “280” gang and none to “Dub City,” “WTG,” or “6 Wild.”
This reduction in crime also speaks to the strategic way these cases should be approached. A mistake that is sometimes made in gang cases is that members of a particular gang are arrested without having carefully considered what will occur after the arrests. The approach taken in these Bronx Crew-Cut operations, tried to avoid that mistake. We honed in on a targeted geographical zone, looked at the various warring crews within that area, and collectively and carefully planned and coordinated successive investigations, indictments and arrests, so that one set of arrests did not merely result in the ascension of another gang and continued violence.

**Resources Needed to Sustain and Continue Results**

Whether we are able to sustain these gains in the 44th Precinct, and successfully address violent crews in other communities will depend on the resources that we can devote to these cases. These kinds of gang prosecutions require experienced Assistant District Attorneys and detectives, forensic experts, and intelligence analysts, all able to devote substantial time to the investigation and prosecution of these cases.

Obtaining social media from an ever-expanding array of social media providers, and digital evidence from the myriad variety of electronic devices, requires the preparation of search warrants and court orders by experienced lawyers versed in a complex and evolving area of the law.

The challenges to forensic experts who are tasked with extracting and handling digital evidence secured by these orders are substantial. OSNP is in the process of expanding and staffing our forensic unit as the demands on that unit have increased exponentially. And citywide, there is a shortage of skilled staff that can perform these tasks causing backlogs in the retrieval of this important evidence.

Once the evidence is obtained and retrieved in a format where it can be examined and analyzed, Assistant District Attorneys and intelligence analysts begin the time consuming work of reviewing the information for potential evidence. Just a few years ago, OSNP had only two intelligence analysts, now we have eight and are in need of more.

The task of carefully reviewing these new forms of evidence, and making legal determinations as to whether conspiracy charges and other crimes can be charged in a grand jury, is challenging and time consuming for the prosecutors handling these cases. All of this must be done, before an Assistant District Attorney can even step into a Grand Jury or begin the prosecution. Once a case is indicted, the litigation often involves complex motions and legal proceedings that may go on...
for a year or more before the cases goes to trial or result in a plea. In short, the additional resources required to bring these types of cases are considerable.

**Safe Neighborhood Initiative**

In closing, I’d like to address the importance of maintaining the gains achieved when drug organizations are removed from a community, by providing alternatives to young people in those communities and by improving the relationship between residents and law enforcement. To that end, OSNP, in coordination with the Police Athletic League (PAL) the NYPD, and our partner District Attorneys’ Offices, sponsor Play Streets and Teen Impact Centers in locations previously dominated by drug crews and violent gangs. These programs provide a safe haven for youth to participate in recreational activities. Following the four gang prosecutions described above, OSNP, the Bronx District Attorney’s Office, the NYPD and PAL announced the opening of a Teen Impact Center and a PAL Summer Play Street in the Morrisania section of the Bronx.

OSNP and the District Attorneys’ Offices have spearheaded similar programs following major investigations in New York City neighborhoods, including locations at the Albany Houses, a New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) development in Crown Heights Brooklyn, I.S. 229, the Roland Patterson School, in the Morris Heights section of the Bronx, the Douglass Houses, a NYCHA development in upper Manhattan, and 3333 Broadway, also in Manhattan.

As a prosecutor’s office, we recognize that, first and foremost, our role is to preserve public safety and to do that by investigating and prosecuting criminal activity. By sponsoring these programs, however, we hope to build on the success of those prosecutions by bringing positive recreational opportunities to young people who are vulnerable to gang-related violence and recruitment.
Daily News

Members of Bronx gang '280' who bragged on Facebook indicted

The 10 members were charged with conspiracy to commit murder, assault, narcotics possession and weapons possession as prosecutors described battles the gang fought with rival crews, including the 'Dub City,' 'WTG' and '6 Wild' gangs.

BY TINA MOORE

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Monday, March 3, 2014, 9:43 PM

Diamond Brown, 21, also known as 'Bo Gotti,' is the leader of the '280' gang. Investigators say Brown and his gang members used social media such as Facebook to threaten each other, attain recruits and brag about exploits.

Ten gang members who terrorized the Morrisania section of the Bronx and brazenly bragged about their criminal exploits on social media were indicted on conspiracy murder charges, authorities said Monday.

In an eight-count indictment, prosecutors described shootings over drug and turf battles as the “280” gang fought with other area crews, including “Dub City,” “WTG” and “6 Wild.”

“Today’s indictments are the culmination of a much larger investigation into four of the city’s most violent street crews, who since 2011 were responsible for murders, shootings,
gun trafficking and narcotic distribution throughout the communities of the Bronx,” police Commissioner Bill Bratton said in a statement.

Also on Monday, Diamond Brown, the 21-year-old leader of “280,” was pepper sprayed in Manhattan Criminal Court during an altercation with court officers, officials said.

Kati Cornell, a spokeswoman for the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor, said Brown was hospitalized and his arraignment was postponed until Tuesday. She said she didn’t have details about the fight.

Diamond Brown, aka ‘Bo Gotti,’ and Jesus Perez, aka ‘Juice Bambino,’ are among the gang members arrested on Friday and indicted Monday on charges of conspiracy to commit murder, assault, narcotics possession and weapons possession, according to a police statement.

Brown, aka “Debo” and “Bo Gotti,” authorized and directed numerous shootings, prosecutors charge. He and his two top lieutenants, Jesus “Juice Bambino” Perez, 21, and Guess “Guess Loc” Carter, 21, were all arrested Friday.

The gang members were charged with conspiracy to commit murder, assault, narcotics possession and weapons possession, the statement said. Gang members who were arraigned were held on bail in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, Cornell said.

The NYPD’s “Operation Crew Cut” led to the busts that were part of a larger probe in which investigators indicted 50 gang members and seized 24 weapons over the past 18 months, officials said.
Investigators found that gang members used social media to threaten each other, attain new recruits and incite violence against rival groups.

The NYPD's 'Operation Crew Cut,' which led to the recent gang busts, has resulted in a 34% drop in shootings in the 44th Precinct and nearby areas, according to a statement from Bridget Brennan, New York's special narcotics prosecutor.

Brown sent a barely legible text message to a new recruit in August 2012 demanding a cash payment for guns and stating that the money would help cover the cost of “beefs” with other crews, the statement said.

“YU GOTTA AT LEAST PUT IN MONEY 4 dhat set severy chance yu get...cause dhis beef s--t aint cheap” and “im supplyin dha hood soo wee can stay on dha map.”

During the investigation, Brown was shot at least three times between October 2012 and June 2013. Three days after he was shot in June 2013, he posted a message to his Facebook profile stating, "IT REALLY COST TO BE THE BOSS."

In some of the shootings between rival gangs, innocent bystanders were sent ducking for cover.
FACEBOOK

Pictures from Facebook were also used in evidence against 11 members of the '6 Wild' Bronx gang charged in violent home invasion robberies in 2013.

A member of “6 Wild” fired into a restaurant where members of “280” were gathered in 2011, hitting a “280” member, prosecutors said.

The same year, members of “280” exchanged gunfire with “WTG” while shooting a YouTube video. Bullets struck two bystanders.

The operation resulted in a 34% drop in shootings in the 44th Precinct and nearby areas, Bridget Brennan, the city’s special narcotics prosecutor, said in a statement.

"Reckless, wanton shootings detailed in the indictment forced innocent bystanders to take cover and neighborhoods to conduct daily business in great fear for their safety and security," Brennan said in a statement. "Targeting drug gangs involved in violence has significantly diminished shootings in these neighborhoods."
Daily News

Leaders of Bronx ’6 Wild’ Gang Arrested

Gang posts photos of stolen goods from violent home invasions

By Joshua Philipp, Epoch Times | June 21, 2013

NEW YORK—A photo showing wads of cash piled on the floor and another with “wild” written in $20 bills are among those posted to Facebook by members of the “6 Wild” gang in the Bronx. The cash and jewelry the gang flashes around allegedly came through a series of violent home invasions, and on Thursday, 11 leaders of the gang were arrested.

The gang would often use a young girl to gain entry to a targeted home, according to a press release. After gaining entry, they allegedly threatened the people inside with firearms, beat them with heavy objects, and choked them. They carried out around two home robberies a month for a two-year period between June 2011 and June 2013.

“This group carried out vicious assaults, robberies and drug dealing. Each and every activity they were involved in threatened the safety of the people in their community,” Bridget Brennan, Special Narcotics Prosecutor, said in a press release. “They swore allegiance to only one thing—the Gucci bags full of cash that they collected from committing their crimes.”

The 6 Wild were also involved in at least a dozen shootings, which were part of turf battles with rival groups—particularly a gang known as “280” and its associated groups, “Clay...
Avenue Boyz” and “Morris Avenue Gunners.” They used juveniles to transport their communal firearms.

Among those arrested were the gang’s leader, Jameekga Joseph, his brother Wakimi Joseph, and two others, Dashawn Hill and Lionel Johnson. The ages of the 11 gang members arrested range from 19 to 24. The leader and his brother were already in police custody for other charges.

The defendants are facing a 58-count indictment for crimes that often left victims severely beaten. These include conspiracy to commit attempted murder, robbery, strangulation, assault, burglary, and other crimes.

The robberies were carefully planned to target people they believed had stashes of cocaine and heroin. They would send a girl to make friends with their intended victim to learn where the drugs were kept, where the money was kept, and what would be the best time to rob them. Some of their victims were not drug dealers, however, and were merely swept into their collection of targets.

Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly said in the press release, “The ’6 Wild’ crew thought that by using young women, juvenile boys and stashed guns they would evade police. They were wrong.”

Arrests were made after a long-term investigation by local law enforcement, including the Special Narcotics Gang Prosecution Unit. They used testimony from witnesses, surveillance from security cameras, and Facebook and text messages sent by the gang members.

The 6 Wild gang operated in the Morrisania section of the Bronx, somewhere between Clay Avenue to College Avenue, and from East 165th Street to East 167th Street. They operated out of two adjacent buildings at 1041 Findlay Ave. and 1055 Findlay Ave.

Bronx District Attorney Robert Johnson said in the press release, “Our office has had many dealings with the decent, hard-working residents of Morrisania. Their message to us has always been a loud and clear desire for crime-free streets. We will never give up the effort to provide them with the quality of life they deserve.”
NEW YORK (CBSNewYork) — Ten members of a street gang in the Bronx have been indicted, in connection with multiple shootouts on the streets, and a recruitment campaign that targeted children as young as 14 through Facebook.

Ten alleged members of the Walton Townsend Gang, commonly known as WTG, were hit with conspiracy to commit murder, assault, and drug and weapons charges.

Nine leaders of the gang were arrested Wednesday in the Eden section of the Bronx, and one more in Duluth, Ga., authorities said. Among those arrested were all the members of the “Top Five” leaders in the gang – Shaquille Holder, Taury Wells, Joshua Colon, Dominique Boyd, and Raiquan Brundidge – as well as five second-tier leaders known as “Big Homies” – Ronald Davis, Winston Williams, Jarrell Daniels, Shaun Deleon, and Darren Bird.
The Top Five allegedly ordered shootings, assaults and other acts of retaliation against rivals, controlled communal firearms, and recruited new members – among them juveniles. The WTG gang made money selling guns and drugs – including cocaine, PCP and marijuana – and by collecting cash payments from new recruits, police said.

The gang controlled an area of 170th and 174th streets between Grand Concourse and Jerome Avenue, police said. They engaged in shootouts with rival gangs, including Dub City – which operates on 175th and 177th streets between Walton and Jerome avenues, and the Eden Boyz, who operate along 170th Street between Mount Eden and Jesup avenues, police said.

WTG members made extensive use of social media and developed their own jargon to communicate on Facebook. They also posted photos on Instagram, police said. The gang used Facebook as a primary means of recruitment, police said.

New recruits were required either to put up money for communal firearms or buy a gun themselves to join the gang, police said. Minors as young as 14 and 15 were asked to transport and store guns so the higher-ups would not get arrested, police said.

“If you an western union me 125 right now you can be WTG under me and b official,” Holder allegedly told a prospective gang member on Facebook.

In another message, Williams told another prospective gang member: “yu need 100 to put toward da pot for gloks (firearms) n yu need to be approved by da top 5.”

Defendants Holder and Williams, as well as Davis, were charged with criminal recruitment in connection with the Facebook activity.

The gang members also allegedly used Facebook to plan and discuss shootings, police said. In one exchange last year, defendant Colon wrote a message to defendant Brundidge saying he was planning to retaliate against Dub City for using a gun that had been stashed in defendant Holder’s apartment.

“We a go,” Colon wrote, “Grip in boogz set fully loaded like a BB.”

“Grip” is jargon for a gun, while “Boogz” was Holder’s nickname.

The gang allegedly followed through with their planned shootouts.

Defendant Daniels was charged with the near-fatal shooting of an alleged Dub City member, Dramel Elliott, in a confrontation on Walton Avenue last year. Daniels allegedly shot and wounded Elliott after getting his face slashed by a Dub City member.
Defendants Boyd and Wells were charged in another shootout this past September on a busy stretch of 171st Street at Jerome Avenue. The shootout, which was captured by multiple surveillance cameras, targeted members of the Eden Boyz, police said.

Police released the surveillance clips as a YouTube video.

No one was wounded in the September shooting, but numerous innocent pedestrians and motorists could have been hit, police said.

New York City Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget Brennan said it is time to get violent gangs off the streets.

“For too long, this community has been terrorized by gang members whose primary allegiance is to their guns. They steal, sell drugs, and take initiation fees from young recruits – all with the goal of buying more guns, which they use with reckless disregard for human life,” she said in the release. “When WTG was settling a dispute on Jerome Avenue, no one was safe – from innocent passersby to neighborhood shopkeepers. With today’s arrest of the gang hierarchy, those who stoked the violence have been taken off the street.”
Daily News

Bronx gangsters indicted on assault, drugs and weapons charges; used social media to plan attacks

Special Narcotics Prosecutor, 44th Precinct cops take down "Dub City" gang

BY TANYANIKA SAMUELS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
Published: Friday, August 31, 2012, 6:00 AM

COURTESY NYPD
One of the guns seized during investigation of the Bronx’s Dub City gang.

Authorities have squashed a violent feud between rival drug dealing Bronx gangs who used Facebook, YouTube and text messaging to plan their attacks.

Fourteen revenge shootings in Morris Heights in the last 16 months were sparked by the April 2011 murder of Dontae “Tay” Murray, a member of the Dub City gang, who was shot in the head in front of a building on E. Burnside Ave., authorities charged.

In a 35-count indictment released Thursday, 17 members of the “Dub City” gang were charged with conspiracy and assault, weapons and drug charges.

“This gang’s reason for being was to exact revenge against rivals and stake out their turf by creating mayhem and terrorizing their community,” said the city’s Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget Brennan. “Blatant text messages and Facebook postings exhibited a disturbing attachment to their guns.”

Dub City blamed rival gang “280” for Murray’s death, police said, and continued to fuel an ongoing feud with the “WTG” street gang.
Inspector Kevin Catalina, commanding officer of the 44th Precinct, said the investigation started in March, targeting a gang based in the neighboring 46th Precinct.

"They were committing a lot of acts of violence toward residents of our precinct,” Catalina said.

During the investigation police seized drugs and 10 guns. Among those arrested are two minors who will face weapons charges in Bronx Family Court. The gang used them to hold their guns.

Dub City’s turf lay between E. 175th St. and E. 178th St., from Walton to Jerome Aves. Authorities said gang members sold drugs and committed robberies to make money to buy guns, jewelry and other goods.

The Dub City gang used distinctive code words to plan assaults in their thousands of text message and recorded phone calls. Many of the text messages used codes like “grips,” “slammers” and “jackies” that reportedly referred to guns.

In a March 2012 text message, authorities said defendant Michael Busgith allegedly wrote: “I just cop dis slammer and dyin to use it.”

Dub City members used communal guns. "Some days it would be hidden in the park, the next day in a garbage can. They had a million different places for their guns,” said Catalina.

Such was the case on June 10, when one gang member sent out a text message looking for a gun that read, “Were grip? I need it asap,” authorities said.

The next day, a “280” gang member was shot in the back. Later, authorities said, a Dub City member wrote on Facebook, “BanG BanG!!!”

Dub City also recruited minors into their violent world.

On May 18, defendant Bruce Silva allegedly told a 14-year old boy to shoot into an apartment of a rival “WTG” gang member. Police later arrested the boy with a loaded .22 caliber pistol.

A 15-year-old girl carried guns for the gang; she hid one in her pants, Catalina said.

Dub City was also responsible for at least two slashings and a brutal baseball bat beating of rivals, authorities said.
Eleven of the 17 indicted defendants were scheduled to be arraigned Thursday and Friday. All but one live in Morris Heights or Mount Hope, and all were charged with conspiracy:


Several had additional charges of weapons and drugs.

With Barry Paddock and Barbara Ross
In Harlem, Paula Shaw-Leary talks of her youngest, Matt, who got his college degree in May and was accepted to graduate school, a soulful-eyed young man with a broad nose and an impish sense of humor.

Cassell Brooks, with a picture of Kemar Brooks, 14, the youngest of his three sons, in the Bronx. Kemar was killed by a random bullet in July. He had just finished playing tennis in Haffen Park.

Paula Shaw-Leary wept in the bedroom of her son, Matt Shaw, 21, in Harlem. Matt, the youngest of seven children, had graduated in May from college with a finance degree. He was killed by a random bullet in July as he was talking with friends.

“Nobody can make friends laugh like Matt,” Ms. Shaw-Leary says. “They are walking in circles waiting for him to come back.”

In the northeast Bronx, Cassell Brooks, a car service driver, sits on a stoop and talks of his son Kemar: a swift runner, a gifted tennis player, an A student with the
certificate to prove it. “A classic boy,” Mr. Brooks says in his rich Jamaican baritone, his smile wistful. “A classic.”

One night in early July, Matt grew restless and stepped outside to talk with old friends on 128th Street and swap a few jokes. One night in late July, as Kemar played tennis in Haffen Park, a thunderstorm cracked and flashed. He turned to sprint the 80 yards back to his family apartment.

A bullet fired mistakenly at Matt, 21, struck him in the back; a random bullet struck Kemar, 14, in the head. Both died.

And parents are left with holes in their hearts that will never heal over.

Ms. Shaw-Leary leans across her couch and touches the urn that holds Matt’s ashes; a Yankees cap and a Snickers bar sit on top. “Matt always told me, ‘Don’t worry, I’m going to do a lot of stuff in my life, I’m young!’ ” Ms. Shaw-Leary recalls. “And he was right — he was so young.”

We celebrate New York City as the safest big city in America. We talk of new parks, restaurants, theaters, food festivals and tourists’ piling on in. If you are lucky enough to live in the right upper-middle-class neighborhood, housing values float upward.

That is a reality of this city.

As is this: New York has experienced a summer of shooting, bullets ripping through young backs and spleens, exploding chests and filling lungs with blood. A 4-year-old girl took a bullet and died, as did a young boxer in Brownsville. Just last week, a 9-year-old boy was struck in the leg as he walked down Walton Avenue in the Bronx with his mother.

Shootings through Aug. 26 were up 5.2 percent compared with the same period in 2011; the number of shooting victims is on the rise, up 6.1 percent, to 1,166.

It is so easy to demand that the police do more, but that’s silliness. For 20 years, the police and mayors have tightened gun laws and labored to remove semiautomatics and AK-47s, often called slammers. But the flood tide of armaments keeps running in.
Dub City, Hood Starz, 280, Wave Gang — the members of these gangs are so many Billy the Kids in do-rags, posting YouTube videos of beat-downs and sending texts like this intercepted by the police last week: “I just cop dis slammer and dyin’ to use it.”

And too many parents embrace cluelessness like an old friend.

That was not the reality for Matt and Kemar. “My daughter Princess called me Sergeant Strict,” Ms. Shaw-Leary says. “I still set the Cinderella curfew for the older ones: You’re in by midnight or I’m calling you.”

Ms. Shaw-Leary is a Jamaica-born force of nature, her black curls surrounding a mouth that can light up like a many-megawatt beacon. She laid down a rule for her seven children: No marriages and no children before you get a college degree. Her next youngest, Princess, is working on a master’s at Fordham.

In wintertime, Ms. Shaw-Leary patted her sons’ coats. “I like stop-and-frisk,” she says. “I stop and frisk my own kids! I tell Matt, ‘If a police officer stops you, don’t get macho. They are doing their jobs.’ ”

She leads me to his room, where his SpongeBob doll sits near his favorite gold sneakers. She keeps his television on, tuned to “Sports Center” on ESPN.

“It’s his favorite television show,” she says. “He loves it.”

Ms. Shaw-Leary and Mr. Brooks speak of their boys like this, present tense becoming past becoming present again. Your child does not go easy to the grave.

Ms. Shaw-Leary knew violence lurked. Matt was killed on 128th Street, which had been renamed Cheyenne Baez Way, after a soft-eyed 17-year-old girl who was killed by a stray bullet in 2010. So she persuaded Matt to stay with a sister in Atlanta after he graduated.

“I was at peace for a month,” she says. “I begged him to stay. He told me he missed my cooking. I told him ‘I’ll teach you how to make ziti on the telephone.’ ”

Matt returned to New York in late June.

Mr. Brooks was a laborer in Kingston, Jamaica; he left for America two years ago. He found an apartment in a working-class neighborhood just yards from Haffen Park.
He was struck by how peaceful it seemed. Then he sent for Kemar. “We shared the great American dream,” he says.

Kemar enrolled in high school. He ran track, but tennis was his true love. He beat even adults.

“He told me, ‘I’m your prodigy,’ ” Mr. Brooks recalls.

That July night, Mr. Brooks searched for Kemar in the rain. At 5 a.m., he found his son lying on the ground, his tennis racket beside him.

“I came from a broken home. I didn’t get a proper education. My dreams were crushed,” Mr. Brooks says softly. “This child, my God, with luck, he would have surpassed us all.”

Ms. Shaw-Leary planned to drive with Matt up to graduate school in Albany in August. Then she got a phone call at work on July 5: Matt was shot. Please God, please God, please God. A taxi took her to Harlem Hospital Center.

The doctor led her into the room where Matt lay. She caressed his head, spoke softly into his ears and, with her hands, closed her son’s eyes forever.

Two young sons of New York, lost to its violence.
Appendix 2

The following sampling of webpages illustrates the use of the Internet to identify witnesses and to threaten and intimidate them.

1. “Snitches R Us”
   https://www.facebook.com/pages/Snitches-R-U{}s/495882637108713

   Facebook group dedicated to exposing “snitches” by posting their photos and personal information. The group also posts threatening status updates, and warnings related to “snitching” like those pictured below.
2. “Keep it gutta presents...Holly Gangsta Grand jury minutes (official paper work) part 1”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8972Z4ZTrk

YouTube video in which Grand Jury minutes are read out loud by the older brother and female friend of the defendant. The video then posts a caption claiming that the Grand Jury witness “got shot in the head!” This video has 1,500 views on YouTube.

3. “Snitches get stitches”
https://www.facebook.com/pages/Snitches-get-stiches/129851527059369

Facebook group that posts photos of “snitches” and “rats,” along with “status updates.”
4. “HORRIBLE! Gang Of Violent Hoodlums Brutally Confront Thug For Snitching”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2IWNW9BDc4

YouTube video depicting young male being beaten up for “snitching.” This video has over 1,300 views.

5. “Get That Snitch”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFxxWQTjhnk

YouTube rap music video about “snitching.” This video has almost 214,000 views and discusses the consequences of “snitching.”

Lyric examples:
• “you wanna tell tell, midnight you’ll be swimming with the seashells”
• “Get that snitch, get the strap, don’t give a fu*k, pop pop pop”
• “Boom boom boom boom let a snitch know” (with gunshots in the background)
6. “SnitchWire”
   http://snitchwire.blogspot.com/

   This blog exists for the purpose of “investigating and objectively reporting on the existence and actions of known informants, infiltrators, rats, snitches, and provocateurs.”

![SnitchWire Banner](image)

7. **One of many witness intimidation postings in the Bronx Crew Cut cases.**

   ![Witness Intimidation Posting](image)
July 17, 2012
PAL Play Street Opens at Douglass Houses in Manhattan’s Upper West Side: Year-long investigation Launched in Response to Widespread Drug Dealing and Violence

July 13, 2011
New PAL Summer Play Street Site Opens at I.S. 229 in the Bronx: Follows Closing of Neighborhood Drug Market
July 24, 2012
New PAL Play Street to Serve Youth at 3333 Broadway: Sponsored by the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor and the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office

April 7, 2014
PAL Teen Impact Center at J.H.S. 22 in the Morrisania Section of the Bronx: 50 Members of Four Warring Gangs Charged in Series of Investigations through NYPD’s “Operation Crew Cut”
July 10, 2013
PAL Play Street Opens at Mott Playground in the Morrisania Section of the Bronx

February 24, 2011
PAL Teen Impact Center Opens at Brooklyn’s Albany Houses, a New York City Housing Authority Development: Investigation Dismantled Heroin and Crack-Cocaine Trafficking Group