

Crack's Legacy of Guns and Death Lives On

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CHICAGO, Dec. 12 — On a spring morning four years ago in a dead-end neighborhood in Chicago, it was Jovan Rogers's turn to sell a little bag of crack that, added to the bags that he figured were sure to follow, could buy him gym shoes and girlfriends and maybe keep the electric company from turning off the lights at his mother's apartment again.

He was 14, and not sure he was ready to be out there on his own. He had been playing lookout for the older boys, watching for police cars and yelling "Five-O" when he thought he saw one. He had not yet had to look a customer in the eye and wonder if this was an undercover police officer trying to make an arrest or a rival dealer there to rob him.

In another time and place, he might be doing something safer to get money, like cutting people's grass or bagging groceries. But there are mostly dirt lawns where he lives, and there are no supermarkets.

He was too young to work at McDonald's. And anyway, in his neighborhood, the biggest employer is the drug business, which pays more in a day than flipping hamburgers would in a month.

Jovan stood nervously by the curb in front of his apartment building and waited for people old enough to be his parents to line up to buy his

When Trouble Starts Young

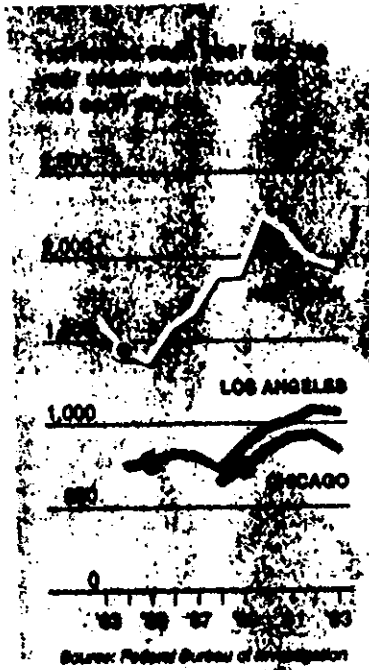
A periodic report:
Examining Causes

merchandise. "I was shaking, man, hearing noises," he said. "Everybody who came up to me, I was asking, 'Man, you ain't the police, are you?' I kept jumping every time a car would pull out of the alley."

Jovan soon found that he had more than just the police to worry about. With crack came violence. And before he was finally arrested for drug dealing and put on probation in 1982, he had lost a half-dozen friends to gunfire, witnessed executions and fired on rival gang members in turf wars. In his business, it was understood that there would be casualties.

Violence caught up with Jovan when he was shot in an early morning rampage by rival gang members two years ago when he was barely 17. After that, he never left home without his .38. Without it, "you feel empty, bare, naked," he said, "because you ain't got your friend with you."

Crack was not the only reason Jovan carried a gun — he says he needed it for protection — but crack was his passport to violence. Rock, as people here call it, and the scattered street market it feeds, gives



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation

The New York Times

teen-agers like Jovan a dangerous way to make fast money in a world without stock clerks or paperboys.

Crack, the highly addictive, smokable form of cocaine, became widely available on the streets of many American cities in the 1980's when

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When Trouble Starts Young

The Offenders

- MAY 15 The life of a murderer, 16.
- MAY 16 A 10-year-old predator.
- MAY 17 28 murder defendants.
- MAY 18 Killers in the heartland.

The Victims

- DEC. 1 The prey: usually the young.
- DEC. 2 Where adults fear children.
- DEC. 3 Brooklyn's young guns.

The Causes

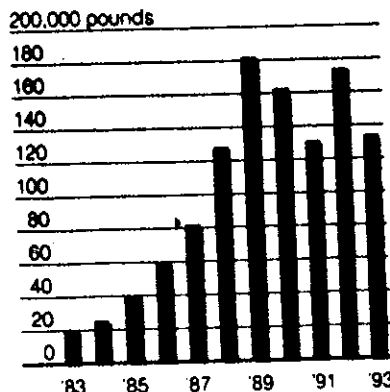
YESTERDAY The family.

TODAY The toll of crack and guns.

Future articles will examine other possible sources of violence, including television and biological causes.

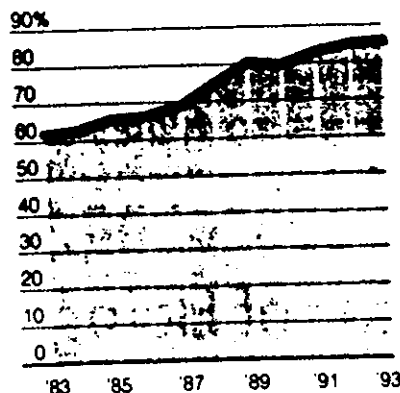
Tracking Cocaine and Killing

Crack and cocaine seized in the United States by the Drug Enforcement Agency.



Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics; Federal Bureau of Investigation

Percentage of 15- to 19-year-old homicide victims killed each year with firearms.



The New York Times

himself independently of the gang. He reported him into the violent orbit of gangs

dealers began to market the drug at relatively cheap prices. It became widespread in Chicago by 1990. Consumption leveled off in the last year or so as heroin made a comeback.

But the corrosive effects of crack and its role in youthful violence are only now being understood by criminologists and police departments.

Crack has been like a bullet wound to the communities that were already suffering. Even if the bullet can safely be extracted, it has left these neighborhoods deeply scarred.

The most visible signs are the guns that crack dealers started to carry the way accountants carry calculators. "Guns multiplied right after crack came," said Jeffrey Fagan, a professor of criminal justice at Rutgers University, who has studied the connection between crack and violence. "They filtered down into the hands of kids and are still in circulation. When the epidemic subsided, the guns stayed behind."

Wherever it landed, crack took a definable course: The drug's fleeting highs and long, desolate lows created a frenetic field of customers who again and again had to come back for more. In all the chaos, small-time dealers could set up shop practically anywhere, and did.

Teen-agers who might have otherwise stuck to hustling or shoplifting suddenly had a shot at the big time. As kingpins and upstarts competed for prime locations, disputes were settled with violence. With more guns on the street, homicides skyrocketed.

No matter the city, homicide charts tell the same story. Whatever year crack took hold, in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago, the homicide rates soared. The rate has leveled off in these cities, but the toll is still much higher than before crack arrived, because the guns remained, even as crack use declined.

And the survivors, have found that crack has turned the social order of their neighborhoods upside down. Armed teen-agers control the streets, residents say. They decide who can stroll on the sidewalk or who can enter an apartment building, while the adults are afraid of the children or depend on them for drugs.

"The boys stand there and almost dare us to say anything," said Gwen Clay, a resident of North Lawndale, Jovan's neighborhood, where teen-agers had removed her gates so they could cut through her yard when they wanted.

"The adults seem powerless," said Barry Krisberg, president of the National Council

on Crime and Delinquency in San Francisco. "That is very frightening to kids. So they jump in on the side of what they see as the strength, which is the drug dealers."

The Allure

Winning Money, Girls and Status

Ask Jovan Rogers why he got into the drug business and he will tell you about the three younger sisters he has to take care of, about his mother, an on-again, off-again welfare recipient who gave birth to him at 14 and had trouble making ends meet, about her boyfriend who went to prison for selling drugs, about the family refrigerator that did not have enough food in it and an apartment with no electricity because his mother lacked money to pay the light bill.

"You feel so sorry," Jovan said of the times his mother had asked him for help. "If there's nothing to eat at night, who's going to go buy something to make sure something is there? I was the only man in the house, and they had to eat. They knew I was out there hustling for us."

Ask him about crack, and he will also tell you about the seductive idea of being somebody when you have nothing. "If you weren't selling drugs, you weren't nobody," Jovan said. "If you sell drugs, you had anything you wanted. Any girl, any friend, money, status. If you didn't, you got no girlfriend, no friends, no money. You're a nothing."

To make money, he used to take out the neighbors' trash and run to the store for them. They didn't have much money either, and the 50 cents they would give him didn't go far. But the dealers were hiring.

Jovan had to compete to get a job with them. He would wake up early and stand outside his building hoping one of the older boys, most of them members of the Vice Lords street gang, would choose him to be a lookout. He could make \$75 a day just watching for the police.

Over time, Jovan got used to the job, became good at it and started selling drugs himself, independently of the gang. He learned that all he had to do was to stand at his spot, and grown-ups in the neighborhood would flock to him for a 20-minute high. Mothers would bring their children with them, offering food stamps for crack. Men, who in another day and place would tell boys like him to go inside and behave themselves, would give him their cars as collateral for a few bags of crack.

He began as a sidewalk dealer but had to move whenever the bigger fish decided to take his spot. He found fighting the gangs over street corners a losing battle. Unable to beat them, he joined with the Vice Lords, in drug-dealing terms entering the big leagues. Soon he was making \$800 a day. It was not a lot of money for people in his business, he said.

Jovan was a retailer, not a drug lord. He was never one of the wildly successful ones who had lines outside a crack house of his own, pulling in hundreds of thousands of dollars a week. But crack did to him what it had to thousands of inner-city boys. It transported him into the violent orbit of gangs and guns.

The Violence

Watching Killing, Taking Bullet

In an urban rite of passage, Jovan got his first gun at 15 after he had proved himself as a dealer and lookout man. It was a training weapon, so to speak, a small .22-caliber pistol that gang sergeants barely in their 20's, give the younger boys when they are ready for greater responsibility.

More powerful guns would come in time — .45's, 9 millimeters, Glocks and Techs. But for now, the boys would have to content themselves with the smaller guns.

Whenever gang members went to parties or other social events, younger boys were assigned to stand guard so the older ones

could enjoy themselves without having to watch their backs.

"While the rest are partying, I'm the one in the back of the crowd with my hood on my head and my hand in my pocket," Jovan said, describing his duties.

There was little instruction on how to use a gun. "You just grow into it," Jovan said. "Once you get a gun, it's your responsibility. Don't get caught without it. That's the first thing they tell you."

The gang imposed a \$500 fine for losing a gun.

It was after one of those parties at the neighborhood hangout that he first used his gun, he said. Some rival gang members ambushed members of Jovan's gang outside. There was no time to be scared or to think. At times like this, he said, when it was shoot or be shot, he did not think about right or wrong, about how a victim might feel as a bullet pierced his body or about somebody's grieving mother at a funeral.

"Either we had to shoot them things or get shot," Jovan said. "I didn't wait to see if somebody got hit. I don't know what happened."

That year, the drug spots in the neighborhood were plagued by a string of holdups by a certain crack addict. The word was that the man was wanted by the gangs and should be shot on sight. The day the man was caught, Jovan said, he stood frozen as older gang members cornered the robber and exacted street justice with 17 bullets from a semiautomatic.

"You could see sparks flying, jumping from the body," Jovan said, cupping his hands over his face and shaking his head.

Two years ago, in the dark hours of a December Sunday morning, Jovan lay on a cold pavement in a pool of his own blood after a party outside the same makeshift hangout where he had fired his first shot. Members of a rival gang had opened fire as Jovan and his fellow gang members fled.

A bullet from a .45-caliber semiautomatic hit one boy's leg and scraped the hand of another before striking Jovan in the left buttocks and emerging above his pelvic bone.

A friend named Boo-Boo ran the few blocks to get Jovan's mother, Verna. "Oh, my God! They took my boy from me!" Ms. Rogers wailed as she rushed toward her son to await the ambulance.

The wound has now healed, but Jovan still carries the memory of that night. When it is cold or rainy outside, his left leg aches, and he walks with the limp of an old man.

The family is saving the two-inch bullet as a symbol of his survival. His mother keeps it

The Decisions

Wielding Power Seeking Control

The shooting only pulled Jovan deeper into the cave. He started packing a .38 wherever he went. He said he no longer cared who was hurt in the streets as long as he survived. And until his arrest for trying to sell heroin to an undercover officer in April 1992, he wielded great power in his small world made up of mostly of drug addicts, choosing who would get drugs and who would not. He had his own kind of street logic and morality.

For instance, he said he would sell to anybody except pregnant women and mothers who brought their children. "You can't buy nothing with your shorty with you," he would tell them.

"I'm sorry, baby," the customers would say, then leave their children at the corner and come right back to make their purchase.

The customers had to do what the dealers told them because of their obsession with crack. "They have to be nice," Jovan said. "They need it. You don't."

Jovan is a melancholy figure, tightly contained. Off the streets and away from the drug world, he is an obliging and quiet-spoken teen-ager who rarely smiles, who opens doors for people or reaches over to help pick up something they have dropped. He always looks as if he is in the middle of a difficult chess game.

His father died of an overdose when Jovan was 5. Jovan met his father only once. "I thought I was bad luck," Jovan said, "because right after I saw him, he died."

With only his mother's boyfriends as guides — one beat him, another sold drugs — Jovan learned to be a man on his own. "I've never called a man 'daddy,'" Jovan said. "I've never used that word. I don't even know what a daddy is."

Jovan's mother, who is 33, has had her own struggle with drugs, pleading guilty last year to trying to buy cocaine from an undercover officer.

His grandmother Ida Sherrod, who has lived off and on with the family, does what she can. "I can't give them what they want," Mrs. Sherrod said. "All I can do is pray to God and hope I don't get that phone call that he's in jail or hurt."

Jovan is fatalistic. Asked where he thought he would be 10 years from now, he said, "To tell you the truth, dead. The way the streets are now, I think I'll be out of here. History."

For now, though, he is trying to gain control of his life. He no longer wears the gang colors of black and gold or the \$100 gym shoes and gold chains that were part of his uniform as a drug dealer. He says he leaves his .44-caliber automatic with an aunt on the South Side.

He was on probation until last year, and his case worker, Bill Glover, said Jovan had abandoned drug dealing as far as he could tell. Mr. Glover has become a mentor for Jovan. He picks up his report cards and lends him a couple of dollars when he can.

After being kicked out of school for a year because of his involvement in the gang, Jovan is now a senior in high school. He should do well this time, Mr. Glover said, because he got A's and B's without even trying before. Mr. Glover wants him to go to college.

Jovan's dream is less grandiose. He says he would be happy to find a job paying \$6 or \$7 an hour. But so far, he said, no one but the drug dealers seem willing to hire him.