

Urban Exacerbation: The Ineffectiveness of Drug Treatment and Law Enforcement in  
1970's Detroit  
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In June of 1971, two parallel heroin wars emerged in national headlines. Detroit, Michigan served as a backdrop for a “Savage ‘Dope War,’” where in a prototypical display of the city’s drug violence, four killers met mid-level heroin dealer Robert Lee Gardner at the door of his dope house with a barrage of bullets and proceeded to tie up and shoot to death the seven heroin users they encountered inside.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, a heroin “epidemic” erupted in Vietnam, where some 26,000-36,000 American soldiers reportedly waged war against the Vietcong under the regular influence of heroin.<sup>2</sup> Despite the gravity of both battlegrounds, it was the Vietnam “epidemic” that provoked a massive emergency federal response in the form of president Nixon’s 371 million dollar “War on Drugs.”<sup>3</sup> That it took an overseas war to provoke the first ever large-scale response to what had been a domestic problem for years was a result of the fact that heroin had previously been confined to mostly black, urban ghettos.<sup>4</sup> Widespread use by soldiers in Vietnam signified that, as a *Time* Magazine journalist wrote, “the disease [had] come to invade the heartland of white, middle-class America.”<sup>5</sup> Put another way, one Vietnam Veteran recounted, “you never saw the system and the establishment really pay any damn attention to drugs at all until their own lily-white middle-class kids were

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<sup>1</sup> *The Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> “The Nation: The New Public Enemy No. 1.” *Time* Magazine (June 28, 1971)  
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,905238,00.html>>

<sup>3</sup> *The New York Times*, June 18, 1971.

<sup>4</sup> “The Nation: The New Public Enemy No. 1.” *Time* Magazine (June 28, 1971)  
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,905238,00.html>>

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

getting hooked in Nam.”<sup>6</sup>

The news cycle that brought both the Vietnam drug issue and Detroit’s heroin wars to national attention held particular consequence for Detroit. With the nation transfixed by sensational journalism like *Time*’s “Detroit: Heroin Shooting War,” which touted the potential for “weapons trained, addicted combat veterans joining the deadly struggle for drugs” in Detroit, the city emerged as a violent dystopia where kidnapping, torturing, beating and shooting “all had one thing in common: an affiliation with heroin.”<sup>7</sup> While solidifying an identity that has since become inextricably linked to Detroit in national discourse, news coverage of the brutal reality of heroin culture within Mack Avenue and Cass Corridor dope houses and their surroundings functioned as an effective rallying cry for the need for a War on Drugs. A prime example of the national reaction to Detroit’s exceptional violence, nationally syndicated columnist James Kilpatrick proposed that the United States, and Detroit in particular, use Iran as a model for its punishment of heroin dealers. In a provocative suggestion that in fact resembled incidences in Detroit’s War on Drugs more accurately than not, Kilpatrick wrote, “Suppose Detroit were to erect a public gallows on Twelfth Street or Mack Avenue, and...hang...one heroin pusher at high noon every day.”<sup>8</sup> Regardless of the hostility it entailed, rather than contributing to the city’s gross number of heroin users, the heroin habits developed by G.I.s in Vietnam brought national attention to an issue that had plagued inner-city Detroit for many years.

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Gillingham, *Wasted Men: The Reality of the Vietnam Veteran*. Veterans World Project. (Edwardsville: University of Illinois Press, 1972), IX-11.

<sup>7</sup> “DETROIT: Heroin Shooting War,” *Time Magazine* (June 21, 1971)  
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,905180,00.html>>

<sup>8</sup> *Toledo Blade* June 23, 1971

The absence of viable options for economic stability lay at the root of Detroit's competitive, violent heroin markets. With more and more businesses leaving inner-city areas, drug dealing grew increasingly attractive as a means of sustenance. One 16-year-old "young black brother" explained that dealing was "an economic necessity if I am to stay in school at all, have lunch money, car fare, and the other things that I need."<sup>9</sup> However, rather than addressing the underlying causes of Detroit's heroin culture, city efforts aimed disproportionately at eliminating the city's drug dealers and the heroin users they supplied. The two-pronged strategy of aggressive policing and drug treatment programs closely resembled the binary approach assumed by Nixon's national War on Drugs, which following its declaration in 1971 amplified Detroit's methadone and law enforcement programs in the form of small grants. In a confluence of local and national programs and policies, Nixon-era approaches to "destroying the drug menace" in Detroit served only to heighten tensions and violence, not to mention heroin use, in an already volatile city.<sup>10</sup> Consequentially, Detroit retained its exceptional status in national news. Into the mid 1970's, publications called attention to Detroit's 30,000 heroin users, which gave it the highest number per capita of any American city.<sup>11</sup>

After a brief summary of federal War on Drugs initiatives, this paper will examine drug treatment, specifically methadone clinics, and heroin and crime policing in Detroit in the first half of the 1970's. Detroit will serve as a case study in what is in fact a greater argument about the inadequacy of drug treatment and aggressive policing in curbing

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<sup>9</sup> "A Young Black Brother Talks About Drugs," *The Spike*, December 1970.

<sup>10</sup> *The Chicago Daily Defender*, July 20, 1971.

<sup>11</sup> *The New York Times*, December 13, 1976.

heroin addiction, trafficking, and related crime, in the absence of addressing the larger social problems of which they are symptomatic.

### **Historiography**

By now, there is little debate amongst historians over certain facts with regard to Heroin use amongst Vietnam Veterans. For example, in *Bringing the War Home* and *Smack* by John Helmer and Eric Schneider consecutively, both authors purport that widespread heroin use in Southeast Asia was a direct result of U.S. military crackdown on marijuana smoking. Heroin was just as easily obtainable (like cannabis plants poppies grew wildly in the region) but could be hidden much more easily because, unlike marijuana it was odorless, and didn't have to necessarily be smoked, as it was in powder form. Once the military made marijuana illegal, to the many soldiers who felt a mind-altering substance was critical to their survival in the physically and psychologically brutal jungle warzone, the switch to heroin use was a no-brainer. Along with a slew of other scholars, Helmer and Schneider also agree on the CIA's complicity in opium smuggling which made for the fact that as Schneider writes, "soldiers found heroin everywhere in Vietnam," from roadside stands, to children peddlers, barracks maids and hospital attendants.<sup>12</sup>

One of the places in which the two authors' work diverges is evident in one of Schneider's main arguments: that heroin addiction is situational and most deeply rooted in social setting. While Helmer would likely agree with this claim, his belief in the impossibility of concluding whether more men became addicted after Vietnam or if Veteran addiction in society was a continuation of habits picked up while soldiers were

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<sup>12</sup> Eric Schneider, *Smack: Heroin and the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 161.

abroad<sup>13</sup> sheds light on the narrow sightedness of Schneider's argument. Schneider's treatment of heroin addiction within the Veteran population is entirely devoid of a discussion of racial differences—his assertion that heroin use is above all, situational is based largely on a race blind study which concluded that the majority of Veteran heroin users were able to stop using the drug relatively rapidly upon return to the U.S.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Helmer's focus on race presents an important complexity. While the demographic of heroin users in American cities like Detroit was at the time largely black, Vietnam Veteran heroin users were exceptional in their whiteness, their age and their higher likelihood of having graduated from high school. Returning home to environments devoid of heroin or the stressful situations that prompted the drug's use as a sort of psychological shield, it is not surprising that white veterans didn't join the "gangland-style...struggle for drugs...in Detroit" despite journalists' anxious predictions that they would.<sup>15</sup>

In *Wasted Men: The Reality of the Vietnam Veteran*, Peter N. Gillingham writes about the widespread belief that a higher percentage of white rather than black GIs used heroin in Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> If Schneider's "situational" argument is applied to this particular racial disparity—black GI's lesser use of heroin based on what Gillingham suggests as a superior ability to cope with the stress and ambiguity of jungle warfare and mass death—what is that saying about the environments in which these black soldiers grew up? The prevalence of heroin in their neighborhoods both before and after service in Vietnam

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<sup>13</sup> John Helmer, *Bringing the War Home: The American Soldier in Vietnam and After* (New York: Free Press, 1974), 82.

<sup>14</sup> Schneider, *Smack*, 179.

<sup>15</sup> "The Nation: The New Public Enemy No. 1."

<sup>16</sup> Peter Gillingham, *Wasted Men: The Reality of the Vietnam Veteran*. Veterans World Project. (Edwardsville: University of Illinois Press, 1972), IX-11.

meant that regardless of their choices to use or not in Southeast Asia, inner-city black Detroiters were more likely to use heroin both pre and post military service. Viewed in this way, habits developed overseas were independent of the increased heroin use in Detroit, which continued to rise until it peaked in what coincidentally was the same year that Saigon fell.

In her book *Whose Detroit?* Heather Thompson defines the 1970's as a major turning point for the city of Detroit. Ripe with ideas for transforming motor city so as to retain its vitality in a new day and age, conflicting visions divided white and black radicals from white conservatives. Because she focuses largely on labor and black nationalist movements, it is no surprise that Thompson takes a positive view of the transition, characterizing the period as one filled with determination rather than decline or decay.<sup>17</sup> In the context of such a monumental change during which many families, both white and black were deciding whether or not to stay or leave the city, the prevalence of heroin and crime was yet another divisive issue, while one which Thompson does not address. Nixonian "War on Drugs" era backed responses, namely methadone maintenance clinics, a special unit of plainclothes cops and an expanded narcotics unit impeded the reconciliatory efforts the city so badly needed rather than the behaviors they set out to curb. In 1971 Nixon claimed, "If we cannot destroy the drug menace in America, then it will surely destroy us."<sup>18</sup> An inevitably more negative interpretation of the era than Thompson's, in Detroit, efforts to "destroy the drug menace" had objectively failed by 1976. Because of the transitional period in which the efforts transpired, it was less the drug menace itself, and more the city's own federally backed War on Drugs that

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<sup>17</sup> Heather Thompson, *Whose Detroit?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 8.

<sup>18</sup> *The Chicago Daily Defender*, July 20, 1971.

contributed to the city's divisive decline.

### **A National “War on Drugs”**

In the same emergency speech to congress in which he declared a national “War on Drugs,” on June 17th, 1971, Nixon issued an executive order establishing the temporary Special Action Office of Drug Abuse Prevention (SAODAP) within his office.<sup>19</sup> Due to the “magnitude of the problem” as well as the “limited capacity of states and cities to deal with the problem at all,” Nixon designed SAODAP as an umbrella agency that would coordinate the activities of seventeen other federal agencies in addition to a full fifty state-level drug agencies and local treatment networks.<sup>20</sup> SAODAP also immediately arranged a response to the heroin crisis in Vietnam through the Department of Defense and Veterans Administration, and developed acceptable regulations for the use of methadone in treatment centers, programs that it then funded through subsidiary agencies like the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).<sup>21</sup> In its first two years of existence, SAODAP developed more federally funded drug treatment capacity than had administrations over the previous fifty years combined.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to authorizing some 2,000 new Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs officers, and freeing Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) grants from federal constraints, Nixon's establishment of the Office of Drug Abuse Law

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<sup>19</sup> *The New York Times*, June 18, 1971.

<sup>20</sup> David Musto, Pamela Korsmeyer, and Thomas W. Maulucci, *One Hundred Years of Heroin*. (Westport: Auburn House, 2002), 46.

<sup>21</sup> Musto et. al. *One Hundred Years of Heroin*, 47.

<sup>22</sup> Musto et. al. *One Hundred Years of Heroin*, 47.

Enforcement (ODALE) embodied the law enforcement arm of his War on Drugs.<sup>23</sup>

ODALE allocated substantial federal resources to strike forces in an effort to, as Nixon stated, “drive drug traffickers and drug pushers off the streets of America”.<sup>24</sup> The agency utilized pooled intelligence data from federal, state and local law enforcement agencies that allowed task forces of narcotics agents operating in 38 target cities, including Detroit, to execute investigations often originating in “no-knock” searches.<sup>25</sup> Throughout its short life, ODALE put the war in Nixon’s War on Drugs. Its agents’ mistaken, violent and illegal raids of households throughout the country nullified its motto “caveat vendor,” may the seller beware. Instead of targeting drug dealers, ODALE terrorized the public indiscriminately.<sup>26</sup>

## **Methadone**

In the early 1970’s, Detroit’s heroin addicts had three major treatment options: therapeutic communities, community service centers and methadone maintenance clinics. Based in the idea that one’s environment primarily instigates heroin use and perpetuates a heroin habit, the therapeutic communities provided housing for reformed addicts wanting a new setting within which to try to stay clean. Community service centers planned neighborhood activities and job training services as well as offered other forms of crucial

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Nixon, “Special Message to the Congress on Special Revenue Sharing for Law Enforcement,” *The American Presidency Project*, (December 1, 2010) <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3334>>

<sup>24</sup> Richard Nixon, “Statement on Establishing the Office for Drug Abuse Law Enforcement,” January, 28, 1972, *The American Presidency Project*, (December 11, 2010) <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3552>>

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, “1970-1975.” *DEA History Book* (December 15, 2010) <<http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/history/1970-1975.html>>

<sup>26</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, June 25, 1973.

social support in an attempt to enrich lives and steer citizens away from the desperation associated with serious heroin addiction. By later in the decade, the third city option, methadone maintenance, which involved distributing doses of synthetic heroin so as to slowly wean addicts off of the high, was the most prevalent as well as controversial.

On a federal level, the Nixon administration viewed methadone maintenance as an inexpensive way to reduce street crimes committed by addicts in need of financing their next dose while simultaneously putting a humane face on the Nixon administration's new Drug War.<sup>27</sup> In this vein, critics of SAODAP point to the agency's disproportionate funding of methadone treatment programs in comparison with therapeutic communities and other drug-free programs.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps a reflection of the conservative Roman Gribbs mayoral administration's dedication to lowering crime statistics in Detroit, the rise in federally funded methadone programs dwarfed treatment models like therapeutic communities and community service centers to such an extent that from 1973 to 1976 the majority of clients in Detroit drug-abuse programs were enrolled in methadone maintenance.<sup>29</sup> Though the Nixonian political vision held that financing a national network of methadone clinics could, with successful crime statistics to back up the programs, discredit calls for large scale spending on the social services of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society,<sup>30</sup> such was not the case in Detroit. Instead, the haphazard way in which methadone clinics operated in the city drew attention to the crucial absence of social services and the need for a more thorough approach.

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<sup>27</sup> Baum, *Smoke and Mirrors*, 44.

<sup>28</sup> Musto et. al. *One Hundred Years of Heroin*, 47.

<sup>29</sup> Criminal Justice and Drug Use Committee Meeting Notes. (April 17, 1978) Ken and Shiela Cockrel Collection, Box 9. The Walter Reuther Library. Wayne State University.

<sup>30</sup> Baum, *Smoke and Mirrors*, 44.

Federal funding for methadone treatment reached Detroit in the form of National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) grant money, an agency that operated under the wing of SAODAP after its creation by the same Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act.<sup>31</sup> Whereas only five methadone programs existed in 1970 in combination with therapeutic communities and community service centers,<sup>32</sup> when NIDA funds arrived in the coffers of three major medical contractors, Detroit upped its count to thirteen total public methadone programs throughout the city.<sup>33</sup> Because of methadone's ability to stabilize the lives of addicts by avoiding the painful symptoms of withdrawal, the drug theoretically provided an opportunity for reintegration into society beyond drug using communities.<sup>34</sup> However, methadone maintenance promptly became problematic in a variety of ways. Most clinics throughout the city were disorderly. Their tight budgets meant that they solely functioned as distribution points for the drug, and distribution alone was inadequate. In the absence of what one Detroit clinician called any sort of federally funded supplemental "support services that are so critical to treatment and subsequent cure" which could have, combined with methadone treatment assisted addicts reintegrate, the clinics were at best a band-aid for the city's heroin problem.<sup>35</sup> At worst, in addition to drawing more negative press attention to Detroit, the clinics contributed to

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<sup>31</sup> The National Institutes of Health, "The National Institute on Drug Abuse," *The NIH Almanac*, (December 7, 2010)

<<http://www.nih.gov/about/almanac/organization/NIDA.htm>>

<sup>32</sup> "Report of Drug Abuse Treatment Facilities Available within the City of Detroit." Undated document. Roman Gribbs Papers, Box 15. The Detroit Public Library. Detroit, Michigan.

<sup>33</sup> Criminal Justice and Drug Use Committee Meeting Notes. (April 17, 1978) KSC Collection, Box 9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Edward Washington. *Heroin: who Profits? Who Suffers?* From the Ground Up Task Force Conference Pamphlet. Wednesday May 16, 1973. KSC Collection, Box 9. The Walter Reuther Library. Wayne State University.

instability within the city. Lack of supervision and early discharge compounded with the absence of supplemental programs was as one Detroit doctor described, “like taking out a guy’s appendix and telling him ‘Here, sew yourself up.’”<sup>36</sup>

Following the Vietnam heroin “crisis” in light of the fact that by the 1970’s the majority of U.S. heroin users were black and concentrated in urban areas, Detroit’s black power groups as well as anti-war Veteran groups were deeply suspicious of the federal governments involvement in the nation’s significant level of heroin use. One conscientious objector to the Vietnam War Gerald Smith recounted, “it wasn’t until after 1967 and 1968 that you had a high influx of ‘skag’” in the city.<sup>37</sup> Skeptics like Smith purported that Nixon’s 1969 Operation Intercept was to blame. The initiative, which involved slamming shut the boarder between Mexico and the United States overnight in an attempt to intercept and confiscate marijuana at its illegal point of entry, accomplished little more than piling up miles of stop and go traffic that extended for miles. As certain Detroit residents saw it however, temporarily steep marijuana prices due to its scarcity turned “people who would otherwise not have given it a second thought” to experiment with more dangerous drugs like heroin which was then available at competitive street prices.<sup>38</sup> The Vietnam Veterans Against the War similarly asserted that the CIA was responsible for bringing heroin into Vietnam for the purpose of pacifying G.I.’s who would otherwise rebel against what they saw to be a purposeless, bloody, imperialist

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<sup>36</sup> *The New York Times*, November 15, 1972.

<sup>37</sup> Elaine Latzman Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918-1967*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 394.

<sup>38</sup> Rick Goranowski. *Stress and Trial in the Streets of Detroit*. Undated. Ken and Sheila Cockrel Papers, Box 9. The Walter Reuther Library. Wayne State University.

war.<sup>39</sup> Disheartened by the extensive amount of time it took the federal government to respond to a problem so deeply affecting their communities and by the war in general, such explanations allowed black power and anti-war veteran groups to rationalize the otherwise irrational.

Black activists were particularly critical of the “humane face” the federal government intended to give itself by supporting the expansion of methadone programs. In 1973, the grassroots educational organization From the Ground Up began an Anti-Dope campaign in Detroit, publishing literature that espoused similar conspiracy theories with regard to both heroin and methadone. As one collaboratively written brochure read, “smack dilutes the political growth and functional capacity of the most oppressed and exploited sectors of the economy.”<sup>40</sup> Government controlled methadone clinics, the brochure continued, were a less incriminating way of maintaining control over the lives of a population which would otherwise organize to fight against the racist system which economically and socially marginalizes whole communities.<sup>41</sup> In addition to providing employment to thousands of white-collar bureaucrats and ensuring a market for the profitable, patented drug, From the Ground Up conference participants held that methadone’s highly addictive properties kept those attempting recovery in a non-political, apathetic daze, thereby enabling the establishment to hold on to their positions of power, unchallenged.

Conspiracy theories aside, methadone quickly proved harmful. In the fall of 1971,

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<sup>39</sup> Program of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Chicago: VVAW National Office, 1976, 8. The Labadie Collection. University of Michigan.

<sup>40</sup> “The Crime of Heroin.” Heroin Industry: An Epidemic. From the Ground Up Anti-Dope Campaign. KSC Collection.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

the Detroit Children's Hospital declared that, based on 40 recent cases, the number of children being poisoned by methadone was reaching epidemic levels.<sup>42</sup> Although critics were quick to blame the federal government for not packaging methadone in any way that would inhibit easy child access, by 1972 the scope of unintended methadone use had transformed into something greater than issue of packaging. In the early months of the year, employees of the city's methadone-maintenance programs began noticing that the majority of visiting addicts were free of track marks and had no established history of heroin addiction.<sup>43</sup> A result of Detroit's loosely operated clinics which lacked the staff to provide full treatment and rather ended up operating as dispensaries, it appeared that the emerging black market for street methadone was so pronounced that as Dr. George Wilson, the special assistant to Michigan's Director of Mental Health worried, "we may be on the verge of creating a new generation of methadone addicts."<sup>44</sup>

In contrast to the understaffed, chaos ridden public methadone clinics, success stories of heroin addicts' full treatment in private establishments demonstrates the crucial multi-dimensional approach to treatment that was lacking in the case of public methadone dispensaries in Detroit. Instead of the sudden discharge, or lack of any sort of supervision which was the characteristic weakness of public methadone programs, one exceptional drug treatment program run by General Motors allowed heroin-addicted employees to retain their jobs and medical benefits while placed in full treatment programs entailing detoxification, methadone maintenance, urinalysis and counseling.<sup>45</sup> While the comprehensive nature of treatment was undeniably reason for the GM program's success,

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<sup>42</sup> *The Lawrence Journal World*, October 21, 1971.

<sup>43</sup> *The New York Times*. August 14, 1972.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *The New York Times*, November 15, 1972.

more significant was the dual incentive to recover and financial stability that continued employment provided. Within the span of four months, one engine line GM worker Marvin Allen transitioned from stealing enough from stores to finance his three-a-day on the job heroin habit to full sobriety for, what at the time of his interview had been a full six months. Allen's successful treatment is undoubtedly tied to the fact that he was stable enough to hold a job throughout his addiction in the first place as well as that he had the privilege of treatment in a resource abundant private institution in contrast to a lot of the more desperate and unstable addicts seen at sparsely funded public clinics. Nevertheless, that methadone treatment in a more thorough form proved successful is noteworthy. Again, more significant is the fact that employment was key to Allen's recovery. In this light, it is no wonder that, ignoring the link between heroin use and unemployment, clinics focusing mainly on methadone were inadequate and unsuccessful.<sup>46</sup> Crippling for Detroit was the fact that the majority of employers were *not* on board for employing ex-heroin addicts as was General Motors. In a resignation letter to the president of Detroit's Narcotics Addiction Rehabilitation Coordinating Organization over his opposition to the organization's proposed ordinance to prevent employment discrimination for drug ex-addicts, Chrysler Corporation's Thomas E. Metevier spoke to a hesitation on the part of businesses to open shop in a city with the highest number of heroin users per capita of any US city.<sup>47</sup> Giving equal opportunity in employment to ex-drug addicts would,

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<sup>46</sup> Criminal Justice and Drug Use Committee Meeting Notes. April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1978. KSC Collection, Box 9.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from Thomas E. Metevier to President of NARCO Mr. James McTevia. October 21, 1974. Detroit Urban League Papers, Box 79. The Bentley Historical Library. The University of Michigan.

Metevier wrote, “be a formidable barrier to bringing new jobs to the city.”<sup>48</sup> Stuck in a sort of catch-22, the high number of heroin users in Detroit impeded the very expansion of employment opportunities that held the potential to assist in permanently turning heroin addicts away from their habits.

In 1972, Detroit’s overall crime rate declined a significant 15%.<sup>49</sup> Had the crime rate continued to decline, it may have indicated some degree of methadone programs’ success as the federal government had postulated it would. However, Detroit’s plunge in crime soon proved anomalous. After 1973, the city’s crime rate rose from 1974 through 1977,<sup>50</sup> years during which methadone treatment was the near exclusive form of publicly funded treatment.<sup>51</sup> Over a similar period, from 1972 to 1977, the city continued to represent the highest number of heroin users per capita of any city nationwide.<sup>52</sup> As it appeared, the channeling of resources to clinics that merely dispensed methadone had done little more than create a new population of drug users and a new market through which methadone users could finance their habits, while not even sustainably reducing crime.

Laden with frustration towards publicly funded methadone clinics in their inability to curb crime or heroin use, the 1978 Detroit Criminal Justice and Drug Use Committee meeting notes reveal participants’ desire to free the city’s drug treatment funding mechanisms from the bureaucratic red tape that tied up National Institute for

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Letter written by Executive director of Detroit Urban League, Francis A. Kornegay “To Whom it may Concern.” August, 1974. Detroit Urban League Papers, Box 79. The Bentley Historical Library. The University of Michigan.

<sup>50</sup> *The Detroit Free Press*, June 15, 1977.

<sup>51</sup> Criminal Justice and Drug Use Committee Meeting Notes. (April 17, 1978) Ken and Shiela Cockrel Collection, Box 9. The Walter Reuther Library. Wayne State University.

<sup>52</sup> *The New York Times*, December 12, 1976.

Drug Abuse (NIDA) funds in city methadone coffers.<sup>53</sup> The Committee discussed refocusing treatment of Detroit's heroin problem by organizing communities around the underlying social, economic, political and psychological problems which participants identified as primary contributors to drug abuse. However, the present funding structure was such that the federal government's allotment of NIDA funds flowed systematically through the Michigan Office of Substance Abuse (OSAS), a state agency and on to either the Detroit Health Department (DHD) or the Wayne County Department of Substance Abuse Services (WCDSAS), necessarily terminating in the city's public methadone dispensaries. Because the mayor and city council were unable to redirect funds originating at the federal level, participants identified funding structures originating in state and city funds as the only effectual means of enacting their new approach.<sup>54</sup> The implication was that spent on poorly maintained methadone clinics, federal funding was doing more harm than good.

## **Law Enforcement**

As in many urban centers across the country, police-community relations in Detroit already had a troubled and lengthy history. Although black community members were the first to acknowledge crime as a serious problem in their neighborhoods, a significant portion of which were acts of violence committed by black people against other black people, a major contributor to the violence in inner-city Detroit neighborhoods had to do with what one Black Power Conference participant described as

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<sup>53</sup> Task Force: Criminal Justice and Drug Issue Council Meeting Report. April 19, 1978. KSC Box 9.

<sup>54</sup> "Prospectus for Primary Prevention of Heroin Use." Criminal Justice and Drug Use Committee Meeting. June 19, 1978. KSC, Box 9.

“over-zealous police, who pick up Negroes, book them, and give them police records unnecessarily.”<sup>55</sup> Racial tensions surrounding poor police-community relations had become a national calamity in the wake of the 1967 race riots, and then mayor Jerome Cavanaugh responded by making marked efforts to change the Detroit Police Department’s (DPD) hiring practices so as to have the what was in 1965 2.8 percent black police force more accurately represent the fifty percent black city which it was supposed to be serving rather than bullying and do away with the us-versus-them mentality so divided along color lines. Despite Cavanaugh’s good intentions, the incredible depth of race-based resentment hindered a real improvement in police-community relations.<sup>56</sup> These tensions amidst heightened policing of black areas at a time during which the presence of heroin in Detroit’s inner city black neighborhoods was on the rise compounded with what Eric Schneider has defined as the irresistibility of police regulation of the monstrously lucrative heroin markets, resulted in a city increasingly more volatile.<sup>57</sup>

Because of his hard-line stance on law-enforcement, Mayor Roman Gribbs’s election in 1970 ensured the further heightening of said tensions. Ex-sheriff Gribbs’s victory was based in his ability to rally conservative white Detroiters around a “law and order with justice” platform nearly identical to that upon which Nixon had based his campaign.<sup>58</sup> He attributed the city’s high crime rates to permissiveness—a problem he

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<sup>55</sup> “Police Action and the Black Community.” Black Power Conference Philadelphia, PA. August 29-September 1968. DUL Papers, Box 55.

<sup>56</sup> Thompson, *Whose Detroit*, 38.

<sup>57</sup> Schneider, *Smack*, 106.

<sup>58</sup> Thompson, *Whose Detroit*, 81.

pledged to crack down on as mayor.<sup>59</sup> Once in office, Gribbs took no time at all to boost the city's law enforcement capabilities in the most visible ways possible. Receiving more than four times what the city had in 1969, the 908,258 dollars in funds from the Department of Justice's Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), a favorite agency of the Nixon administration, enabled Gribbs to invest in the law enforcement tools which would allow him to best perform on his election promise to end permissiveness.<sup>60</sup> Among the most noticeable war-like investments bankrolled by LEAA grant money was a new sophisticated alarm system that allowed for a near immediate police response to retail store reports of criminal activity, as well as twin choppers the DPD fittingly named for wartime, The Sentinel and Alpha I and II.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, early in 1971, Gribbs and newly appointed police chief John Nichols formed a special unit of plainclothes cops that they called Stop the Robberies Enjoy Safe Streets (STRESS).<sup>62</sup> Born out of efforts to combat a record 23,000 street robberies and 85 associated homicides in 1970, STRESS was not initially intended to combat the city's heroin problem. However, it didn't appear on the department's organizational chart and was recognized as a sort of "wildcard" operation. Because Gribbs and Nichols instructed the mostly white plainclothes officers to "follow their instincts, whether that involves drugs or homicide,"<sup>63</sup> the special unit operated within their own jurisdiction. Racial tension and the lure of high profile, lucrative heroin policing combined to create a drug-driven civil

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<sup>59</sup> *The Windsor Star*, November 5, 1969.

<sup>60</sup> United States Government Memorandum. Department of Justice. LEAA. April 19, 1971. To George B. Trubow, Director of Law Enforcement Programs. Roman Gribbs Papers, Box 173. DPL.

<sup>61</sup> *The Detroit Free Press*, December 27, 1971. Roman Gribbs Papers.

<sup>62</sup> *The Detroit News*, Monday January 28, 1974.

<sup>63</sup> *The Detroit News*, Monday January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1974.

war.

### *STRESS*

STRESS rapidly came to represent a form of legalized white-on black-murder fueled by the racial tension that had erupted in the 1967 race riots. In its first year of operation, decoy tactics and the use of fatal force to “apprehend fleeing persons suspected of a felony,” defined STRESS incidents.<sup>64</sup> Among the first reported skirmishes was STRESS officer Michael Worley’s fatal shooting of Clarence Manning. On May 29<sup>th</sup>, Manning and his companion Nathaniel Johnson, both young black men, approached Worley, who was at the time on duty dressed in “civilian clothes” and a fake beard, and proceeded to rob Worley at gunpoint. Per usual STRESS tactics, Worley shot and killed Manning as he fled the scene with an unreported object he had taken from Worley. Despite the absence of a weapon to verify that the incident was indeed an armed robbery, the incident elicited no further investigation.<sup>65</sup>

As clashes continued, STRESS officers acted more and more the part of provocateur. On September 17<sup>th</sup>, STRESS officer Worobec killed two boys who attempted to take his watch as he played the part of belligerent local drunk.<sup>66</sup> A few days later at 1:30 am on September 21<sup>st</sup> a Detroiter named Donald Saunders passed STRESS officer Robert Miller and asked for 20 cents. Miller said no, and when he sat down on a nearby stoop, Saunders caught up with him and asked a second time. Although he later admitted he had several single dollar bills on him, he told the blatantly drunken Saunders that he only had a twenty and then got up and crossed the street. Miller reported that

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<sup>64</sup> *The Detroit News*, September 21, 1971.

<sup>65</sup> *The Detroit Free Press*, Wednesday December 8, 1971.

<sup>66</sup> *The Detroit News*, September 21, 1971.

Saunders followed him across the street, threatened him with a knife, demanded his wallet and then pushed Miller to the ground. Fleeing on foot, Miller and his backup officer Siebert took the liberty to fire five bullets, followed by four subsequent rounds of fatal barrage.<sup>67</sup> As in the case of Michael Manning's execution by officer Worley, Miller was able to offer few details on the location of Saunders's knife at specific moments during the incident.

By the fall of 1971, such incidents had become commonplace in the city. Prosecutors effectively authorized the killings by overlooking police crimes and even complied in covering them up.<sup>68</sup> The Detroit Police Department—especially but not exceptionally STRESS—was above the law despite the fact that in many cases the officers themselves acted in more criminal ways than the criminals they themselves were pursuing.<sup>69</sup> As a result, by the end of 1971, the DPD had secured the highest number of civilian killings of any police department in the nation.<sup>70</sup>

Saunders' death marked the tenth fatal shooting of suspected criminals by STRESS officers.<sup>71</sup> As the number of police-responsible fatalities grew, resident and leader opinions increasingly diverged over whether or not the loss of human life outweighed a decrease in robberies. Naturally, Police Commissioner Nichols, himself responsible for STRESS, was quick to praise the special unit's success by citing a drop of

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<sup>67</sup> Frank Joyce, "One Plus One Equals One," *The Cell: The Official Publication of the Labor Defense Coalition* (May 1972).

<sup>68</sup> "Statement by 'The Cell' Calling for Resignation of Head of Wayne County Prosecutor's Office William Cahalan." *The Cell: The Official Publication of the Labor Defense Coalition* (May 1972).

<sup>69</sup> "Statement by 'The Cell' Calling for Resignation of Head of Wayne County Prosecutor's Office William Cahalan." *The Cell: The Official Publication of the Labor Defense Coalition* (May 1972).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> *The Detroit News*, September 22, 1971.

606 robberies in the first eight months of 1971 as compared to 1970.<sup>72</sup> Moderate responses to the unit recognized its success to a certain extent and agreed on the city's dire need to continue to innovatively reduce street crime. STRESS, however, had taken it too far. As head of the Detroit Urban League Francis Kornegay put it "we must let the punishment fit the crime, and death is not the punishment for mugging and purse snatching."<sup>73</sup>

Many Detroiters were in favor of STRESS operations. Noticing the drop in robberies and similarly connecting such success to Nichols' highly publicized special unit, Detroit resident letters to Mayor Roman Gribbs depicted overwhelming support for STRESS's new approach to crime control. Over a two week or so period from September 21<sup>st</sup> 1971 through October 6, 1971, out of 99 letters to the mayor, 92 voiced support for the unit while a mere 7 letters called for its abolition or at least curbed jurisdiction.<sup>74</sup> Strong Pro-STRESS sentiments indicated a frustration with the violent state of the city and a willingness to support anything necessary to remove those responsible. As one Mr. E.Z. Warren wrote to WJBK TV, "when a person embarks on a life of crime, he forfeits his rights to life, liberty and a lawful pursuit of happiness. Criminals are no longer human beings, they are predatory animals and should be treated as such. The STRESS program is a mighty good idea."<sup>75</sup> In another letter to WJBK TV, a local businesswoman saw STRESS as an economic question. "In order to have a decent city, we must free it of its high crime rate...if STRESS is abolished it will be the reason for one more business to

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<sup>72</sup> *The Detroit Free Press*, December 8, 1971.

<sup>73</sup> *The Detroit News*, Wednesday September 22, 1971.

<sup>74</sup> Memo from Pete Kinnahan to Phill Jourdan. Subject: Citizen Response to STRESS issue. November 2, 1971. Roman Gribbs Papers, Box 173.

<sup>75</sup> WJBK-TV2 Detroit Saturday December 25<sup>th</sup>. "1971 Opinions." Roman Gribbs Collection, Box 173.

move from the city—OURS!”<sup>76</sup>

Amidst pro-STRESS sentiments, the anti-STRESS camp quickly gained support and momentum. The day before STRESS officer Miller killed Saunders—at which point STRESS officers were already responsible for nine citizen deaths—the State of Emergency Committee, a group led by local black leaders and joined by local white radicals, called for an end to the unit whose behavior they classified as “obvious genocide against blacks.”<sup>77</sup> From this point on, tireless anti-STRESS protests showcased “black unity” met by white radical support. Four days after their initial declaration, the Committee staged a march attended by 4,000 or so representatives from local chapters of the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the more radical Republic of New Africa and Black Panther Party. Beginning at Cass Park, the march turned onto Woodward and culminated at the county jail where inmates and participants cheered in response to one another.<sup>78</sup>

As anti-STRESS protests continued, the call for the unit’s abolition grew increasingly antagonistic. Despite the fact that Commissioner Nichols had detailed new criteria for the special unit involving stricter supervision and psychological testing of officers prior to their placement in the unit,<sup>79</sup> according to anti-STRESS protesters at a March 26<sup>th</sup> University of Detroit event, these measures were an inadequate response to a police unit directly responsible for so many deaths. Certain members of the STRESS opposition community like militant lawyer Kenneth Cockrel called for an end to the “police state” put into effect by Roman Gribbs and Police Commissioner John Nichols by

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> *The Detroit News*, September 21, 1971.

<sup>78</sup> Clipped, dated newspaper article, September 24, 1971, KSC Collection, Box 4.

<sup>79</sup> *The Detroit Free Press*, March 23, 1972.

removal of the two men from their public service positions.<sup>80</sup> Other members expressed the fomenting of a more violent frustration. According to one self-proclaimed black militant Dave Mundy, “if the STRESS problem isn’t taken care of [by local political leaders] then we can get the names of the STRESS officers from the Guardians and they will be taken care of.”<sup>81</sup> However, the Michigan Guardians, an organization of Detroit’s black police officers, were willing to do much more than distribute names. As one member Tom Moss stated, if Commissioner Nichols and Mayor Gribbs continued to deny protesters’ demand for the disbandment of STRESS, the Guardians would have to “handle it themselves.”<sup>82</sup> That Mundy and Moss’s verbatim threats come from a Detroit Police Department Inter-Office Memorandum detailing the March 26<sup>th</sup> rally indicates the DPD’s explicit awareness of the black community’s vehement opposition to the unit’s actions. Nevertheless, mindful of the danger that their combative tactics brought upon each and every assigned officer’s life, STRESS officers continually upped the ante.

The climax of troubled STRESS-community relations began in December of 1972 at the home of well-known heroin dealer Jack Crawford. Because of the freedom with which STRESS operated, and the emphasis the department placed on heroin busts after receiving 1.28 million in the form of Department of Justice LEAA grants for cracking down on the drug, STRESS, along with the rest of the DPD, grew progressively more involved in the city’s heroin trade in both legal and illicit ways.<sup>83</sup> Community members suspected such, which only added to the already racially charged tension and mutual

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<sup>80</sup> *The Detroit Free Press*, March 23, 1972.

<sup>81</sup> Detroit Police Department Inter-Office Memorandum. Subject: Anti-Stress Rally at University of Detroit Field House. March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1972. KSC Collection, Box 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *The Crime of Heroin. From the Ground Up Anti-Dope Campaign.* KSC Collection, Box 4.

skepticism surrounding police-community relations. Accordingly, opinions vary as to the three young black men and four white STRESS officers respective roles in the interactions with well-known heroin dealer Jack Crawford that preceded the December events. “White news media” portrayed Mark Bethune, John Boyd and Hayward Brown as gunmen for dope pushers, when in actuality the three men were young black activists, frustrated with the prevalence of heroin in their community.<sup>84</sup> Echoing the opinions of many Detroiters who saw narcotics policing as intentionally ineffectual, Brown believed in the DPD’s protection of dealers like Crawford simply based in the fact that heroin was “still out there, isn’t it!”<sup>85</sup> The three young men had regularly distributed anti-drug literature to children in their neighborhood for some time, but by December of 1972 surmounting frustration with heroin’s constancy in the area led them to take a more vigilante approach.<sup>86</sup> On the other side of the spectrum, anti-STRESS skeptics have suggested that officers Robert Rosenow, Billy Price and Eugene Fular and Sergeant Richard Grapp were themselves involved with Crawford’s operation in a DPD attempt to maintain full control of the heroin market.<sup>87</sup> However, according to the officers’ testimony, on December 4<sup>th</sup> they were in fact on duty in the 12<sup>th</sup> precinct and had stopped outside of Crawford’s house for about thirty minutes and were waiting to legally intercept a heroin deal.<sup>88</sup>

In any effect, the two parties crossed paths on December 4<sup>th</sup> when the three young

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<sup>84</sup> Families Under Stress Community Pamphlet. 1973. KSC, Box 9.

<sup>85</sup> Kenneth Cockrell. *Heroin: who Profits? Who Suffers?* From the Ground Up Task Force Conference Pamphlet. Wednesday May 16, 1973. KSC Collection, Box 9.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Rick Goranowski. *Stress and Trial in the Streets of Detroit*. Undated. KSC Collection, Box 9.

<sup>88</sup> *People of the State of Michigan vs. Hayward Brown*. Recorder’s Court of the City of Detroit. Plaintiff No. 7209659 (1973).

men decided to apply direct pressure on Jack Crawford's heroin house<sup>89</sup> and arrived to the Stoepel Ave address with weapons, as they explained, "for the purposes of self-defense because it is a known fact that dope man are armed."<sup>90</sup> When the Bethune, Boyd and Brown drove by the STRESS officers who allegedly suspected the three men of being heroin dealers looking to replenish their supply, the officers followed the VW in which Bethune, Boyd and Brown rode, intending to use their uncurbed jurisdiction to make another bust.<sup>91</sup> After following the VW as it turned off onto Santa Clara and then onto Livernois, the unmarked cop car pulled up beside the three men at a stop light and officer Rosenow held his badge to the window together with a flashlight in an attempt to pull the three men over.<sup>92</sup> Because Bethune, Boyd and Brown had been operating their vehicle in accordance with the law of Michigan,<sup>93</sup> the attempt to pull the VW over was unexpected. When the three men didn't respond to Rosenow's unassertive badge flash, the unmarked cop car attempted more assertively to drive the VW off of the road. Unaware that the four men in the unmarked vehicle were police officers, Bethune, Boyd and Brown interpreted the increasingly aggressive behavior of the car following them as Crawford's henchmen hoping to terminate their vigilante activity that jeopardized the lucrative neighborhood heroin trade.<sup>94</sup> Thus, Bethune, Boyd and Brown defensively fired at the unmarked car on their tail,<sup>95</sup> wounding all four officers badly enough that they were

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<sup>89</sup> Rick Goranowski. *Stress and Trial in the Streets of Detroit*. Undated. KSC Collection, Box 9.

<sup>90</sup> Thompson, *Whose Detroit*, 147.

<sup>91</sup> *People of the State of Michigan vs. Hayward Brown*. Recorder's Court of the City of Detroit. Plaintiff No. 7209659 (1973).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *People of the State of Michigan vs. Hayward Brown*.

<sup>94</sup> Thompson, *Whose Detroit*, 148.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

unable to shoot back until the vigilantes had already sped off in their car.<sup>96</sup>

The events that transpired after STRESS's December 4<sup>th</sup> provocation resembled as much of a war as the savage battles between heroin dealers that STRESS heroin busts ultimately sought to curtail. In attempt to locate Bethune, Boyd and Brown who the DPD hoped to prosecute for shooting officers in the December 4<sup>th</sup> skirmish, teams of STRESS officers circulated downtown Detroit neighborhoods where they suspected the men might have been hiding. In most cases without warning or warrant, teams of officers began invading the homes of those close to the three men.<sup>97</sup> On December 5<sup>th</sup> one team broke the door off of the hinges of Boyd's mother's house and continued to ransack the home and arrest Boyd's stepbrother, sister and girlfriend.<sup>98</sup> Unable to locate the three men, warrantless searches carried into the homes and lives of innocent and unrelated community members, closely resembling ODALE agents' often mistaken, violent "no knock" police raids occurring the same year.<sup>99</sup> On December 7<sup>th</sup>, STRESS officers killed a 60 year old man when he answered his door in response to investigations.<sup>100</sup> As what was essentially martial law ensued, the situation grew to resemble what anti-STRESS activist Rick Goranowski characterized as a "search-and destroy-mission on a hamlet in the Nam."<sup>101</sup> A community pamphlet entitled "Families Under STRESS" similarly recognized the war that STRESS had instigated, and encouraged community preparedness for what the authors portrayed as imminent attack. It asked, "What will *you*

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<sup>96</sup> Rick Goranowski. *Stress and Trial in the Streets of Detroit*. Undated. KSC Collection, Box 9.

<sup>97</sup> Families Under Stress Community Pamphlet. 1973. KSC, Box 9.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, June 25, 1973.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Rick Goranowski. *Stress and Trial in the Streets of Detroit*. Undated. KSC Collection, Box 9.

do when they come to bust in your door?”<sup>102</sup>

Recognizing them from “wanted” posters in their patrol car, STRESS officers crossed paths again with Bethune, Boyd and Brown in a fatal December 27<sup>th</sup> skirmish. Charged with animosity towards what they saw as racist “white pigs,”<sup>103</sup> Brown fired and killed STRESS Patrolman Bradford who he observed to be following Bethune with a shotgun.<sup>104</sup> The three men managed to escape once more, and STRESS officers’ hunt for them transformed into a war of retribution.

On January 12<sup>th</sup> 1973, Hayward Brown allegedly firebombed a local Planned Parenthood Association clinic and proceeded to shoot at Wayne State University police officers as he fled the scene.<sup>105</sup> A series of photographs of STRESS’s hunt for Brown following this incident document the urgent militancy that ensued. One image depicts a team of six men, two of which have rifles aimed towards a window of a house in which they suspect Brown to be hiding. Another shows an armed policeman blocking off a portion of an abandoned street near Wayne State University as the manhunt intensified. Still another, in which five men scour a street amidst the backdrop of smoldering, collapsed houses, depicts a scene on par with Goronowski’s characterization of the bellicose situation as a “search-and-destroy mission.” Later that day, the DPD finally apprehended Brown, who confessed to firebombing the clinic. Soon after convicted of “damaging by means of an explosive device an institution receiving federal financial assistance,” the US Court of Appeals later reversed his charges based in the conclusion

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<sup>102</sup> Families Under Stress Community Pamphlet. 1973. KSC, Box 9.

<sup>103</sup> Thompson, *Whose Detroit*, 149.

<sup>104</sup> Recorder’s Court of the City of Detroit File 72-10249. January 23, 1973. KSC Collection, Box 15.

<sup>105</sup> *The Detroit Free Press*, April 14, 1974. KSC, Box, 9.

that his confession was involuntary and a result of police intimidation.<sup>106</sup>

From their initial vigilante action taken in attempt to rid their neighborhoods of “the tragedy of dope,” Mark Bethune, John Boyd and Hayward Brown acted with police resentment in mind. Their vigilantism was a sort of desperate reply to what they saw as the DPD’s unresponsiveness to the presence of dope pads in their community.<sup>107</sup> When caught up in STRESS’s provocative pursuit of the three men’s VW on December 4<sup>th</sup>, their resentment combined with the need to match STRESS’s offensive resulted in increasingly violent, even ruthless actions of their own. Because of the incendiary nature and freedom with which STRESS operated, the unit was as one contributor to a Labor Defense Coalition publication put it, a “cure which is at best worse than the disease,” one that “creates more fear and crime than it eliminates.”<sup>108</sup> Tellingly, homicide rates peaked at 55/100,000 in 1974, the same year that newly elected Mayor Coleman Young disbanded STRESS, and proceeded to decline thereon after.<sup>109</sup>

### *DPD and Heroin*

There are a number of theories with regard to the level of involvement of Detroit’s Police Department (DPD) in the undercover narcotics world. The most conspiratorial and indicative of black Detroiters’ distrust in the DPD as well as local and federal governmental institutions, holds that certain events in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s placed the heroin market almost exclusively into the hands of Detroit’s law enforcement officers. According to this theory, as the Nixon administration’s “Operation

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<sup>106</sup> *The United States of America Vs. Hayward Leslie Brown*, 557 F.2d 541, (1977).

<sup>107</sup> *The Detroit News*, April 8, 1973.

<sup>108</sup> Frank Joyce, “One Plus One Equals One,” *The Cell: The Official Publication of the Labor Defense Coalition* (May 1972).

<sup>109</sup> Detroit Health Department Bureau of Substance Abuse, “Drug and Alcohol Abuse Indicators Report for Detroit 1976 and 1977.” KSC Collection, Box 9.

Intercept” hugely inflated the number of Detroit’s heroin users—what had previously been a small-scale while serious and undeniably problematic in various mostly black Detroit communities—one man, Henry Marzet rose to power to become almost exclusively in control of the heroin underworld.<sup>110</sup> When Marzet died in 1971 of kidney disease, factions of the DPD involved in narcotics took advantage of the power vacuum. Replicating the intimidating practices upon which Marzet had based his monopolistic success, STRESS and DPD narcotics representatives worked after hours to comprehensively chart the activity of the city’s heroin hustlers through a series of a shakedowns, making sure to identify the addresses of both small and large scale transactions. The theory holds that free market principals governed departmental strategy from there on out. Police competed against one another for assignments that would reap the highest profits in the form of massive quantities of cash and valuable drugs.<sup>111</sup> While this notion is indeed an extreme, a certain level of DPD involvement was undeniable. As one LA Times journalist put it, “virtually everybody—police, ministers, community organizers—believes that dope could not flow as freely as it does throughout [Detroit] without some form of police involvement.”<sup>112</sup>

From 1971 through 1975, the Detroit Police Department integrated itself into the city’s heroin trade in three markedly different ways: confiscation, pay-offs and complicity. Beginning in the first months of its creation, STRESS officers focused on intercepting and seizing as much heroin as possible while simultaneously catching the perpetrators of street crime. In 1972, STRESS officers reported to have confiscated 2,191

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<sup>110</sup> Goranowski, *Stress and Trial in the Streets of Detroit*.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *The LA Times*, June 28, 1971.

packets and 1,219 capsules of heroin, along with 2,190 tablets of methadone, which, as discussed in the previous section had entered the street market by 1971.<sup>113</sup> As Judge Justin Ravitz explained during a From the Ground Up conference entitled “Heroin: who Profits? Who Suffers?” these confiscations and ensuing heroin possession cases constituted some 16-20 percent of Detroit’s annual 14,000 felony cases.<sup>114</sup> Indeed the DPD could flaunt some good-looking statistics, but in no way was this offensive beneficial to the communities through which heroin flowed. Such measures served only to herd users to court at the expense of almost 800 dollars per case, place them on probation and return them, unchanged and 800 dollars worse off, to the same city streets where the combined forces of unemployment, desperation and high prevalence pushed them to continue with their old heroin habits.<sup>115</sup> What STRESS should be doing, Judge Ravitz claimed at the conference, was targeting “higher layers of heroin traffic in this community.”<sup>116</sup>

However, as seen in the following examples, it was hard for officers to tell the difference between high-level heroin traffickers and fellow DPD officers. In 1973, the Wayne County Citizen’s Grand Jury indicted Sergeant Rudy Davis and officers Craig Pollard and Henry Meadows for accepting drug payoff money from admitted dope pusher Milton Battle to protect his heroin operation.<sup>117</sup> Such indictments explained citizen complaints about the unresponsiveness of Detroit police, who so often failed to act on

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<sup>113</sup> Detroit Police Department Untitled Document Reporting STRESS statistics for 1971-1973. DUL Papers, Box 71.

<sup>114</sup> Justin Ravitz. *Heroin: who Profits? Who Suffers?* From the Ground Up Task Force Conference Pamphlet. Wednesday May 16, 1973. KSC Collection, Box 9.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> *The Detroit News*, May 24, 1975.

citizen reports of suspected neighborhood drug centers.<sup>118</sup> Additionally, instead of facing potential prosecution, Milton Battle provided the names of more than 100 people he claimed to have dealt with in exchange for having his charges dropped.<sup>119</sup> In spite of the opportunity to finally prosecute a kingpin in Detroit's heroin network, the need to investigate police complicity impeded any real attempts at controlling Detroit's heroin trade.

By January of 1976, the same investigation led to the indictment of twenty-six people, including twelve police officers, on charges of operating an enormous city drug cartel in the tenth police precinct. Although Judge Justin Ravtiz only convicted three officers and five citizens of conspiracy to deliver narcotics, Milton Battle's testimony implicated many other people who successfully dodged convictions. Ultimately the narcotics ring, which operated successfully from 1971 to 1973, had the effect of as Judge Ravtiz told his court, "sucking the blood from thousands of decent people."<sup>120</sup> According to a city report, the tenth precinct, triangularly bounded by Livernois, Davidson and West Grand Boulevard, corresponded to heath areas in which the death rate from heroin use was on the rise from 1973 through 1976.<sup>121</sup> More generally, as police contributed rather than eliminated sources of the addictive drug and the illicit activity and violence surrounding the trade, the gross number of Detroit heroin users rose through 1975.<sup>122</sup>

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>118</sup> *The New York Times*, June 15, 1971.

<sup>119</sup> *The Detroit News*, May 24, 1975.

<sup>120</sup> *The Detroit News*, May 24, 1975.

<sup>121</sup> Detroit Health Department Bureau of Substance Abuse, "Drug and Alcohol Abuse Indicators Report for Detroit 1976 and 1977." KSC Collection, Box 9.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

In spite of the national panic surrounding the thousands of American soldiers using heroin during their service in Southeast Asia, by 1973 heroin use amongst G.I.'s had effectively ceased to be a prominent issue.<sup>123</sup> Although many G.I.'s experimented or frequently used heroin while overseas, upon return the same quantity of heroin cost exponentially more than it had in Vietnam, and outside of the stressful environment of jungle war, many found drug use unnecessary. In one study based on interviews conducted with 617 Vietnam veterans, while a fifth of the sample population had been addicted to heroin in Vietnam, only 12% reported a relapse at any time and a mere 1% reported addiction to heroin during their first year back from service.<sup>124</sup> Commendably, heroin use amidst the demographic that provoked the War on Drugs had all but disappeared as a result of successful SAODAP treatment undertakings. Yet in a display of federal policy disproportionate to and disconnected from the enduring inner-city heroin problem, the population that remained invisible prior to the Vietnam epidemic failed to benefit from Nixon initiatives.

In the first half of the 1970's, Detroit essentially failed at curing heroin addiction through methadone treatment and curbing heroin related crime through policing. Surely the already racially and politically tense atmosphere of the time conflated by the haphazard nature with which city clinics distributed methadone and the violent, corrupt tendencies of Detroit Police officers resulted in further destabilizing the city. However, fundamentally problematic was the federal government's financial neglect for dying urban spaces like Detroit. While Nixon had indeed targeted cities using War on Drugs

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<sup>123</sup> *The Los Angeles Times*, December 24, 1973.

<sup>124</sup> Lee N. Robins, John E. Helzer, Michie Hesselbrock, and Eric Wish. "Vietnam Veterans Three Years After Vietnam: How Our Study Changed Our View of Heroin." *American Journal on Addictions*. (2010), 203-211.

funds aimed at increasing law enforcement personnel and expanding methadone treatment capacity, as seen in the case of Detroit, such undertakings functioned at best as a band-aid and at worst as a catalyst for more heroin use and violence. Increasingly unable to pay for city programs, what Detroit needed was federal money to address the underlying social, economic, political, and psychological problems that underpinned the city's heroin culture.