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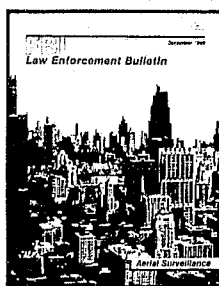
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Graffiti Wipeout



By
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Today, the crime of vandalism has become a frightening reality in the lives of many Americans. However, vandalism in the form of graffiti is one crime that exists in almost every community throughout the United States, from the small country town where names and telephone numbers are etched in bathroom stalls to the Nation's most populated cities where every subway concourse is a drawing

board for artistic vandals. Throughout the country, its effect is pervasive and devastating.

Graffiti is a forgotten crime. It is ignored and often times even accepted. However, the costs associated with it can be staggering. Everyone pays for it in taxes, increased transit fares, and insurance premiums. And, although it is not viewed as serious as major crimes, graffiti is an expensive form of art.

This article focuses on how the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), whose jurisdiction covers five counties in the Philadelphia area, manages to contain its graffiti problem, which costs the area over \$2 million a year.

As is typical in many major cities, graffiti has become part of the urban environment. An entire subculture (gangs) exists which places great emphasis on commit-

ting this type of vandalism. In fact, the sole purpose of some of these groups is to write graffiti. However, SEPTA was able to significantly reduce incidents of vandalism and graffiti in the transit system by 75 percent in just over 1 year despite the continued efforts of graffiti writers. Not only have the results been outstanding, but the authority's anti-graffiti program has served as a model for cities such as Philadelphia, Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. It has also gained international attention from cities such as London, England.

The Problem

Graffiti has existed throughout the ages. But, in 1971, the mayor of Philadelphia decided to break from tradition. He declared that he wanted the city "cleaned up and kept clean" of graffiti.¹ As a result, a new unit was formed which consisted of six detectives attached to the Philadelphia Police Department's Intelligence Unit. Although this special unit did make some arrests, incidents of graffiti continued to increase over the next decade. Despite the fact that while numerous persons were involved, most of the handwriting was done by only 15 to 20 people. And, unfortunately, after the mayor left office, the unit was disbanded.

Over the next decade, graffiti grew at such a rate that in some neighborhoods, it could be seen on almost every wall. During this time, graffiti artists generally worked alone; however, on occasion, high profile writers would band together, go out on the town, and spray their names in rather

risky and daring places, such as the tail of an airplane. Gradually, graffiti became more elaborate in style, and it became apparent that the vandals were helping each other to create murals.

By the late 1970s, these graffiti gangs, which met in underground stations, train yards and subway tunnels, were in full gear, and the Philadelphia area seemed to be experiencing a graffiti epidemic. In fact, graffiti could be seen throughout the city, and the mass transportation system became a prime target for the devastation. What better way to publicize a name or a gang than to have it sprayed on an elevated train or bus that continuously travels around the city every day!

Who are these latter-day Kilroys, and how have they continued to flourish in spite of multimillion dollar campaigns to combat them? In 1980, a New York Transit Authority report described the typical graffiti artist as "male, of a lower socioeconomic status,

fourteen to sixteen years of age, who seeks recognition by placing his 'trademark' where his peers will see it and possibly identify it. He does not feel he is destroying property by his action."² Despite the fact that the typical artist is usually male, one graffiti artist named Kim, 17 years of age, who asked that her last name be withheld, described herself as more than a "writer." With a black address book crammed with 170 names, she is a human switchboard for Philadelphia's most dedicated graffiti artists.³

The Solution

In December 1981, the general manager of SEPTA initiated an anti-graffiti program designed to increase ridership by providing a clean, safe system controlled by the Authority. From its inception, all departments within SEPTA have participated in this program in some way. Because graffiti breeds graffiti, the program's emphasis was to remove it as

" Since SEPTA's anti-graffiti program began, over 2,700 arrests have been made relating to vandalism. "



Detective Lieutenant Scott

quickly as possible. Even so, removal efforts for a 6-month period involved up to 3,000 man-hours, 900 gallons of shellac, paint and thinner, and 30 gallons of cantol.

Throughout the program, daily inspections of all city division subway stations and elevated

SEPTA's graffiti attack and allocated a courtroom to hear all SEPTA cases.

Violators are most often charged with defacing public property (prohibited conduct), criminal mischief, and found in violation of a law entitled "Liability for Acts."⁴ This law places financial

mation on the student's offense. One SEPTA detective is also assigned to process graffiti arrest cases, beginning with the preparation of a weekly graffiti/vandalism arrest memorandum compiled from the daily control log. Copies of this memorandum are sent to specific departments responsible for providing itemized material and labor cost estimates. These damage estimates are forwarded to the court liaison detective, who records them for use at the judicial hearings.

All graffiti arrest cases, both juvenile and adult, are held at a special court every Wednesday. These cases are heard by a trial commissioner and attended by the court liaison detective.⁵ Arresting officers are not required to attend.

At this time, defendants and/or parents are informed by the court liaison detective of their respective damage costs. First-time offenders who admit their guilt are permitted to pay the cost of damage and have prosecution withdrawn. Those who wish to pay, but are unable to do so at the initial hearing, sign a restitution agreement. They are then given a copy of the signed agreement which lists the court status date and the date by which the restitution is to be paid. Defendants may also appear at status hearings and request additional time in which to pay the restitution. Such requests are honored by SEPTA and sanctioned by the court.⁶ They also receive a court notice to appear (subpoena) that must be adhered to only if the restitution is not paid. If the restitution is paid by the agreed time, the court liaison detective attends the status hearing and requests that prosecution be

“ ... SEPTA was able to significantly reduce incidents of vandalism and graffiti in the transit system by 75 percent in just over 1 year ”

stations were conducted and maintenance employees were assigned to remove the graffiti and/or repaint if necessary. A list of the stations which suffered from the heaviest graffiti damage was also sent to the SEPTA Police Department each day. Plainclothes officers were then assigned to those locations.

SEPTA's Police Department, in conjunction with the Philadelphia Police Department, the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office (County Prosecutor) and the Municipal Court System, agreed that vandals would be arrested and processed through the Philadelphia Police Department. To reflect the seriousness and costliness of this form of vandalism and to seek restitution for damages, members of the District Attorney's Office and an attorney from SEPTA's Legal Department prosecute all offenders. In addition, the President Judge of the Philadelphia Municipal Court issued a memorandum informing all municipal court judges of

liability on the parents of juvenile offenders. Many of the acts of graffiti amount to less than \$100 for labor and removal. However, if this cost exceeds \$5,000, it is a felony offense.

After each arrest, a SEPTA police control number is assigned to the case and the information is recorded on a daily control log. The control log contains the following information:

- Name, age, sex, race and address of the person(s) arrested
- Date, time and location of arrest
- Specific graffiti written and the size and color of the markings
- Method used (magic marker or spray paint)
- Philadelphia Police Department district control number
- Hearing date
- Arresting officer

The arrestee's school principal is also sent a letter containing infor-

NYC'S CLEAN CAR PROGRAM



For nearly 2 decades, graffiti has blighted every surface and rail passenger vehicle operated by New York City's Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA). Today, signs of this crime of vandalism have been eliminated from the system's 6,200 subway cars and 3,800 buses.

It has taken 5 years of coordinated effort for the Metropolitan Transit Authority to accomplish this feat, which became a reality when the last graffitied train rolled out of service in May 1989. According to the President



of the Metropolitan Transit Authority, "Credit for our success goes to the men and women who work for the MTA. This was truly a team effort with some 16 different departments working together toward a common goal."

The MTA's Clean Car Program began in May 1984, with one train on each of two different lines. Within a year, both lines were graffiti-free and the cleaning program began to spread, line by line, throughout the system.

Once a car was enrolled in the program, it could not be

placed into service with graffiti—inside or out. Cleaners were stationed at terminals, and any graffiti applied enroute was immediately removed. This speedy removal discouraged vandals who could no longer see their "tags" traveling throughout the system.

Key to the program's success was a reallocation of resources and increased productivity. One street shop turned out 10 completely rebuilt cars every month, a 100-percent increase from 5 years ago, even though there was a substantial decrease in the number of employees. According to the Chairman of the Metropolitan Transit Authority, "I think it is important to note that while we have cleaned up our surface and rail fleets, we have also made important gains in both safety and reliability. The almost weekly front page headlines about major fires and derailments have, along with graffiti, become part of our past and not our future."

withdrawn. If it is not paid and the defendant fails to appear, a bench warrant is issued.

If defendants deny guilt, their cases are relisted at another special court, but this time before a municipal court judge who decides guilt or innocence. Arresting officers and/or witnesses are needed at these hearings and are notified to appear by the court liaison detective who also attends.

Second-time offenders, however, are not given the option of paying restitution and having pros-

ecution withdrawn. These cases are relisted before a municipal court judge. If found guilty, the judge can impose a fine in addition to ordering that restitution be paid to SEPTA.⁷

Since SEPTA's anti-graffiti program began, over 2,700 arrests have been made relating to vandalism. These arrests are primarily the result of observations made by the SEPTA Police Department. The Philadelphia Police Department, SEPTA employees and an

increasing number of citizens also played a vital role in the number of arrests.

Conclusion

After 6 months of concentrated effort, a substantial decrease in graffiti in the subway stations and elevated train stations was noticed. However, despite these efforts, SEPTA began to experience moderate amounts of graffiti on surface vehicles, particularly near junior and senior high schools. As a result, plainclothes

Book Reviews

personnel were increased in these areas to contain the problem.

Since many graffiti artists get involved in this type of crime for attention-seeking purposes, the general position of the Authority is not to publicize the names of offenders with the media. However, at the beginning of this program, an aggressive public and press relations program was implemented. This included an anti-graffiti pamphlet, news articles and an agenda for a graffiti conference. SEPTA, through its community relations division, also addressed elementary school children to point out the destructive nature and the penalties of being apprehended for graffiti writing.

SEPTA's program has proven to be a success. As SEPTA's program increased, graffiti and vandalism decreased. Indeed, because of the program, graffiti has been limited to a level low enough to be maintained with only a minimum number of plainclothes officers.

Today, as a result of SEPTA's efforts, graffiti will not revert to being a hidden and forgotten crime. Through this program, the Philadelphia area has curtailed its pervasive graffiti problem and has provided other areas and jurisdictions with the methods and techniques to control vandalism on their home fronts.

Footnotes

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¹Alan L. Phillips, "Police Squad to Clean up on Scrawlers of Graffiti," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1971.

²Bill Moseley, "Graffiti," *The Arts, Omni Magazine*, March 1982, p. 114.

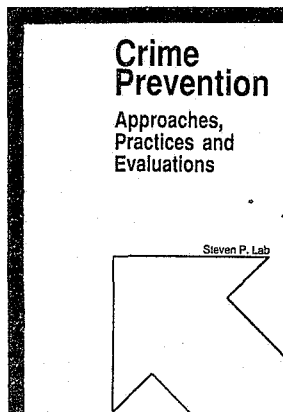
³Michael Marriott, "Graffiti—Fingers on the Triggers," *Philadelphia Daily News*, October 28, 1985, p. 20.

⁴Pa. Stat. Ann. tit. 11, Sec 2001, et seq. (Purdon 1967).

⁵Grace Joyner, "SEPTA's Program on Graffiti," November 1984.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.



Crime Prevention: Approaches, Practices and Evaluations, by Steven P. Lab, Anderson Publishing Co., Cincinnati, OH, 1988.

This book was born out of the author's search for a text which approached crime prevention from an academic orientation. As the author states in the preface, "The emphasis [of the text] is on presenting a brief description of the more well-known and recent crime prevention approaches and then presenting the results of evaluations which have been performed on each technique."

Lab stresses that the numerical level of crime should not be the only concern of crime prevention because the "fear of crime" poses a greater and more far-reaching problem for society and its members. His subsequent treatment of the "fear of crime" demonstrates a crucial point which has been overlooked in crime prevention discussions.

The author then goes on to explain throughout the text that the key criterion for assessing the

effectiveness of various crime prevention methods is lower subsequent offenses and/or the fear of crime. The major questions posed by the author in the evaluations deal with the extent to which the programs reduce crime and/or the fear of crime.

The discussion of the future of crime prevention includes advances in electronic surveillance technology, improved alarm systems, and the use of sociobiological principles. However, the author concludes that the evaluation of crime prevention techniques will continue to be a pivotal issue in dealing with crime and the fear of crime throughout the future.

Accompanying the text is an "instructor's guide," which synthesizes and outlines each chapter of the text and includes questions on the subjects covered. The guide not only serves as a testing instrument but also alerts students, law enforcement trainees, and the average citizen/reader as to what they really know and don't know about crime prevention and the methods that work for their security and protection.

Both the book and the instructor's guide are practical and insightful guides for law enforcement officers, as well as for the classroom. The bottom line, once again, remains *education* to prevent crime and the fear of crime.

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Electronic Bulletin Board

Individuals and organizations involved in criminal justice policy research can now have immediate access to online information with the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) Electronic Bulletin Board. The electronic bulletin board is designed to help practitioners share information and enhance criminal justice networking. Anyone with a modem and a personal computer can use the bulletin board.

Through this service, users are provided press releases, program announcements, research findings, and online reports, as well as other information packages. Users can also add their own information, download questions, access electronic mail, communicate with other users, participate in online surveys, and receive news releases, announcements, and reviews of criminal justice developments, activities, and new publications.

For more information or technical assistance with installation or access, call NCJRS toll free at 1-800-851-3420. For callers in Maryland and the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, the number is 1-301-251-5500.

Injuries From Crime

A special report compiled by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) revealed that on the average, more than 2.2 million persons suffered injuries from violent crime each year between 1979 and 1986. The report, *Injuries From Crime*, examines the type and severity of injury, the amount of medical care that victims received, and the crimes that caused the injuries. It identifies how these factors are associated with the sex, race, ethnicity, age, income, occupation, and place of residence of crime victims.

Between 1979 and 1986, an estimated 63 million persons in the United States were victims of rape, robbery, or assault. Of this total 17.7 million suffered an injury during the crime. Those injured represented about 28 percent of all the rape, robbery, or assault victims counted by BJS's National Crime Survey during the 1979-1986 period. Offenses such as murder, manslaughter, and child abuse are not reported in the survey.

Among the injured crime victims, an estimated 1 percent suffered gunshot wounds, 3 percent received knife wounds, and 6 percent had their bones broken or teeth knocked out. Each year on

the average, an estimated 350,000 victims had these injuries, were hurt internally, lost consciousness, or were otherwise injured seriously enough to require hospitalization for 2 or more days.

Injury rates were highest for males, blacks, people from 19 to 24 years old, separated or divorced people, and people with a reported family income of less than \$10,000. Elderly and black victims were substantially more likely than were others to require overnight hospitalization. Injuries to 82,000 crime victims annually resulted in more than 700,000 days of hospitalization.

Crime injury rates differed markedly by occupation. Recreation workers, law enforcement officers, bartenders, and students had rates above the national level. Postal workers, truck drivers, and teachers had injury rates below the national level.

Single copies of the special report may be obtained from the Justice Statistics Clearinghouse, National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850, or call the toll-free number 1-800-732-3277. For Maryland and Washington, DC, metropolitan area callers, the number is 301-251-5500.

The Bulletin Reports, a collection of criminal justice studies, reports, and project findings, is written by Kathy Sulewski. Send your material for consideration to: *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Room 7262, J. Edgar Hoover Building, 10th & Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20535.

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