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**"Safe Streets, Inc.: The 'Hustle' to End Black Gang Violence
in Philadelphia, 1969-1976"**

By Menika Dirkson

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"Safe Streets, Inc.: The 'Hustle' to End Black Gang Violence in Philadelphia, 1969-1976"

Abstract:

From 1962 to 1968, gang stabbings and murders in Philadelphia drastically increased, inspiring Philadelphia District Attorney Arlen Specter (from 1965-1973) to establish Safe Streets, Inc. in August 1969 as a non-profit, anti-gang program designed to reduce gang violence, end turf wars between rival gangs, and provide social services like job training and academic tutoring to juveniles. Since the program came into existence amidst the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968), numerous cases of police brutality, and over 200 race riots in post-industrial cities, the yearly Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) grant from the federal government offered to cities under the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 became appealing to liberal and conservative politicians alike. Many conservative city officials often conflated civil rights protestors, rioters, social activists, and gang members into a single entity that was a constant nuisance to the police. Additionally, President Lyndon B. Johnson's proposition of the Great Society programs, War on Poverty and War on Crime, led liberals and conservatives to debate on how to reduce crime with the LEAA grant. Conservatives argued police departments should receive the LEAA grant to spend on strengthening its crime-fighting methods. Conversely, liberals lobbied for the funds to finance local social uplift programs that would gradually rectify the issue of urban poverty and effectively reduce crime. Although the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, 1965, and 1968 federally enforced desegregation and equal opportunity employment, voting, and housing respectively, several conservative politicians like Mayor Frank L. Rizzo (from 1972-1980) refused to believe that curing the social ills of poverty, unemployment, and school dropouts would result in massive crime reduction in major cities like Philadelphia. From 1969 to 1976, Specter competed with Mayor Frank Rizzo for funding to rehabilitate youth at Safe Streets' centers in the predominantly black neighborhoods of North and West Philadelphia while Rizzo proposed to utilize the grant to strengthen crime-fighting techniques within the police department. Nevertheless, the battle over federal funding between liberal and conservative politicians influenced police-community relations in the 1970s when violence between police and citizens in Philadelphia was at its highest in forty years.

Word Count: 348 words

Introduction

On the warm Friday afternoon of August 10, 2018, I made a trek to the neighborhood of Sharswood looking for 2201 W. Stewart Street, the location of one of the 1970s Safe Streets, Inc. centers promoting anti-gang activity, as a research tactic that my *cultured* colleagues at Temple refer to as “flâneuring.”¹ By going to the site of the former facility, I hoped to gain a geographic and emotional understanding of the neighborhood where this anti-gang program existed. I wanted to not only be connected to the research, but also acquire insight into how this program functioned in this neighborhood when it was active. More importantly, I wanted to know if Safe Streets left a lasting impact on the neighborhood after it shuttered its doors.

The next day, I felt ambitious and explored the Cobbs Creek neighborhood surrounding 249 S. 60th Street, the location of the second Safe Streets center. I went to these locations alone, on foot, in the heat and rain, and unknowingly through gang territory. At these locations in North and West Philadelphia respectively, I found desolation, poverty, boarded up buildings, and housing projects, but also well-kept homes, murals, revitalization projects under construction, and major landmarks—remnants of the demolished and infamous Blumberg Housing Projects, the Moderne-Art Deco styled Vaux High School, and the Free Library dedicated to 1960s civil rights activist Cecil B. Moore. However, my overall impression and feeling while being in these neighborhoods was one of isolation, abandonment, fear, angst, and vulnerability.

When I started working on this project, I was investigating how politicians, community residents, and police officers attempted to solve tensions between police and the black community with social programs in 1970s Philadelphia. From 1970-1978, there were 469 police-

¹ Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.

involved shootings in which 66% of all suspects shot were black, even though African Americans comprised 33% of Philadelphia's population.² In the 1970s, seventeen officers died by gunfire, assault, and stabbing. Philadelphia had not experienced such a deadly decade for police since the 1920s when 27 officers were murdered at the hands of criminal suspects.³ In several of these 1970s police homicide cases, African American suspects killed white police officers as a response to black citizen-white police confrontations they believed to be police brutality.

In my efforts to investigate how Philadelphians sought to solve this issue of violence between young black male citizens and police officers, I discovered the program Safe Streets, that Philadelphia District Attorney Arlen Specter (from 1965-1973) founded in Delaware in Spring 1969 as a nonprofit organization designed to “*encourage gangs into constructive programs.*”⁴ However, as I researched Safe Streets at Temple University's Special Collections Archives, I kept asking myself, how this anti-gang program is related to the issue of racial tension and violence between police and black citizens? The answer to this question turned out to be more complicated than I imagined it would be.

Gangs have existed in Philadelphia as early as 1836.⁵ In the nineteenth century, citizens living, working, or travelling through gang territory often faced the possibility of experiencing

² Anthony E. Jackson, Esq., “Statement of Anthony E. Jackson, Esq., Director, Police Project, PILCOP, April 19, 1979,” April 19, 1979, PILCOP.org, accessed May 7, 2015, www.pilcop.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/04/Deadly_Force_1.pdf. See the Appendix for statistics on the white and black populations in Philadelphia from 1900 to 1980.

³ “Fallen Officers-Philadelphia Police Department, 1828-2015,” *Officer Down Memorial Page*, accessed, May 8, 2015, www.odmp.org.

⁴ “U.S. gives DA \$80,000 for Gang Control,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* (June 26, 1969), Temple University Special Collections Research Center, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* clippings, box. 3354, call no. SCRC 169-B, vol. Safe Streets, Inc., collection URB.

⁵ Eric C. Schneider, “Crime,” *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, (2014), accessed November 17, 2018, <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/crime/>.

street crime that consisted of pickpocketing, armed robberies, “smash-and-grab robberies in local stores and marketplaces,” pocket watch stealing, or getting caught in the middle of a “bloody rumble” between rival gangs.⁶ In gang-active communities, these organizations survived economically through the operation of illegal activities such as alcohol and drug sales, gambling, racketeering, and prostitution.⁷ For individuals who willingly joined these organizations, gangs provided a sense of belonging, protection from neighborhood outsiders and police, and income to members, especially during periods of economic downturns in American society.⁸

Street gangs like the Schuylkill Rangers (active for 25 years in the mid-1800s), motorcycle gangs like the Ramblers, organized crime syndicates like Philadelphia’s Italian Mafia and the like have all functioned in marginalized and disadvantaged communities, often because of societal stigmas based on ethnicity, class, or immigration status.⁹ From the nineteenth to early twentieth century, gangs were most notably present and policed in working-class, Irish, African American, and immigrant communities in Philadelphia. These were the same groups that often faced housing discrimination where the only affordable homes available to them were located in “undesirable” locations near dockyards, rivers, and swampland. Joblessness, meager employment opportunities (e.g., domestic, bricklayer, or railroad builder), and segregated and underprivileged schools and public facilities kept many individuals from these communities in poverty for generations.¹⁰ Interestingly, several gangs in the nineteenth century provided some

⁶ Kali Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

⁷ Karl E. Johnson, “Police-Black Community Relations in Postwar Philadelphia: Race and Criminalization in Urban Social Spaces, 1945-1960,” *The Journal of African American History*, 89. 2, *African Americans and the Urban Landscape* (Spring, 2004):118-134.

⁸ Phineas M. Anderson, *The Gang Unit*, Washington, D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse, 1970.

⁹ “Crime.”

¹⁰ John F. Bauman, “Black Slums/Black Projects: The New Deal and Negro Housing in Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 41.3, (July 1974): 310-338.

beneficence to their communities, such as assisting volunteer fire companies in gaining access to water supplies and *forcefully* encouraging residents to vote in elections. In the twentieth century, North Philadelphia youth gangs active between 1963 and 1965 stood alongside church women's groups, black-led trade unions, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to protest segregation at the private all-white high school, Girard College.¹¹ However, their criminal activities overshadowed their good deeds and encouraged police and the city to map out their locations of operation, raid their hangouts, and arrest and imprison them in facilities like Eastern State Penitentiary for breaking the law.¹²

By 1947, Philadelphia police officers, under the initiative of Sergeant August "Gus" Rangnow (1892-1972), established the Police Athletic League (PAL) following World War II to deter youth of underprivileged communities from engaging in street crime and drug use.¹³ By the 1960s, there were nineteen PAL centers throughout the city offering free after-school programs for tens of thousands of children from ages six to eighteen. The main goal of PAL centers was to connect police officers with neighborhood children via mentorship, friendship, and sportsmanship in athletic games of boxing, baseball, basketball, table tennis, and marching band.¹⁴ As police commissioner (from 1968-1972), Frank L. Rizzo visited prisons and participated in multiple PAL events like "Commissioner for a Day" in which he gave teenagers assignments at police headquarters.¹⁵ As mayor (from 1972-1980), Rizzo continued his *selective*

¹¹ Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

¹² "Crime."

¹³ Matthew Ward, "Police Athletic League," *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, (2017), Philadelphiaencyclopedia.org, accessed May 3, 2018, <http://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/police-athletic-league/>.

¹⁴ PAL centers also offered children arts and crafts, homework clubs, and literacy programs.

¹⁵ "Sniper shoots down police, setting off a massive manhunt," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Feb 26, 1976): 2-A, Newspapers.com, accessed March 31, 2017, https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9053474/the_philadelphia_inquirer/.

involvement in crime prevention by not only signing autographs for children and assisting police at crime scenes, but also promoting American patriotism at PAL centers. Officers, coaches, and mentors (assigned by Rizzo) at PAL centers encouraged children to say the pledge of allegiance and sign oaths of allegiance that were sent to Mayor Rizzo and other state and national politicians.¹⁶ Furthermore, PAL centers not only used recreation to steer children from crime, but also indoctrinate them into being loyal citizens.

As gang activity and violence persisted into the late twentieth century, racial tension between white police and the black community coexisted along with it as early as the late 1800s. Following the First and Second Great Migrations of 6.6 million African Americans (from 1916 to 1970) from Southern states to Northern industrial cities like Philadelphia, 1940s racial tension between white police and black citizens originated in integrating neighborhoods where unpoliced white racism and violence provoked racial conflict between average whites and blacks.¹⁷ In the 1950s, job flight and white flight to the suburbs left communities economically and racially imbalanced, which inevitably frayed positive relationships forged in schools, residential neighborhoods, and the workplace.¹⁸ In the 1960s, when the United States witnessed peaceful protests as the Civil Rights Movement was undertaken through social and legal channels, there were numerous incidents of police brutality against African American peaceful protestors and criminal suspects that sparked a nationwide outbreak of over 200 race riots in several major U.S. cities.¹⁹ Locally, the 1964 Columbia Avenue Riots in North Philadelphia--stirred by the false

¹⁶ "Police Athletic League."

¹⁷ Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

¹⁸ James Wolfinger, *Philadelphia Divided: Race and Politics in the City of Brotherly Love*, Chapel Hill; University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

¹⁹ Thomas Ferrick Jr., Doreen Carvajal, and Thomas J. Gibbons Jr., "The 25-year-old Scars Of A Riot Violence Of 1964 Devastated A Vital Neighborhood," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, (Aug. 27, 1989), Articles. Philly.com, accessed May 8, 2015, http://articles.philly.com/1989-08-27/news/26150452_1_riot-wells-notices-slides.

rumor that a white policeman beat a pregnant black woman to death--indefinitely etched racial tension between black citizens and police. During the two-day riot, approximately 1,800 officers were called to stop the uprising after African American residents burned cars, destroyed and looted more than two hundred white businesses, and fought with police.²⁰

Amidst this period of social unrest, many conservative city officials often conflated civil rights protestors, rioters, social activists, and gang members into a single entity that was a constant nuisance to the police. Police soon became militarized and schools, housing projects, streets, and mass transportation inhabited by African Americans became criminalized.²¹ Additionally, President Lyndon B. Johnson's proposition of the Great Society programs, War on Poverty and War on Crime, led liberals and conservatives to debate how to reduce crime with the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) grant the federal government offered to cities under the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968. In the first fiscal year of the LEAA, the federal agency received \$59 million from the national budget. In 1970, the LEAA's budget was raised to \$268 million and by July 1st, President Richard M. Nixon requested that U.S. Congress allot \$480 million for the agency.²²

Each year, the LEAA offered grants to states desiring to curb crime through policing and or social programs. Each state dispensed funds to localities following an application and evaluation process. During the fiscal year of 1970, LEAA granted California \$17.3 million, New York received \$16.4 million, and Pennsylvania got \$11.5 million to implement anti-crime planning

²⁰ Countryman, *Up South*, 154-164.

²¹ Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters," *Journal of American History*, 2010.

²² William J. Speer, "The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Feb. 22 1970), Temple University Special Collections Research Center, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* clippings, box. 3354, call no. SCRC 169-B, vol. Safe Streets, Inc., collection URB.

and social programs.²³ Conservatives argued police departments should receive the LEAA grant to spend on strengthening its crime-fighting methods. Conversely, liberals lobbied for the funds to finance local social uplift programs that would gradually rectify the issue of urban poverty and effectively reduce crime.²⁴ Although the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, 1965, and 1968 federally enforced desegregation and equal opportunity employment, voting, and housing respectively, several conservative politicians like Mayor Frank L. Rizzo refused to believe that curing the social ills of poverty, unemployment, school dropouts, and gang violence would result in massive crime reduction in major cities like Philadelphia.

The Formation of Safe Streets, Inc.

In the late 1960s, gang violence gradually became a serious issue in Philadelphia. From 1962 to 1968, gang-related homicides per year jumped from one to thirty.²⁵ In 1969 alone, there were 45 gang-related murders, 267 gang-related injuries, and numerous incidents of “burglary and purse snatching” that affected gang members and innocent bystanders, including children.²⁶ In July 1969, the Pennsylvania Crime Commission released their report on gang violence in Philadelphia stating there were currently 75 active, sporadic, or dormant gangs (each comprised of black, white, or Puerto Rican members), 3,000 gang members known by police, and each gang consisted of 25-250 members ranging from ages 12 to 23 years old. About 84% of gang members were aged sixteen or older.²⁷ In that same year, the Philadelphia Police Department’s

²³ “The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?”

²⁴ Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.

²⁵ “Philadelphia Gangs: Gang-related Homicides in Philadelphia 1965-1976,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* (May 23, 1976), Temple University Special Collections Research Center, *George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Collection*, call no. SCRC 170, vol. Gangs--Miscellaneous, *George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Photographs*, P254Z201411000174B.

²⁶ Anderson, *The Gang Unit*, 2.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 17-18.

Gang Control Unit reported that approximately 20% of the individuals shot, stabbed, or beaten as a result of gang violence were civilians unaffiliated with a gang.²⁸

Similar to previous generations, gang participation among youth and young adults occurred because they sought a place where they belonged, protection from neighborhood rivals and police, and income to improve their impoverished lifestyles. Depending on the gang, boys and young men were inducted into the organization if they voiced their desire to be a member, proved their potential by stealing a designated item, or fought one or more gang members. In a May 1969 interview with a reporter from the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, one gang member described his induction process as: "You have to fight about ten guys to join. You don't have to beat them all up, but you must show that you can defend yourself and that you have guts."²⁹ In other cases, the initiation process was simpler if the individual was related to a current gang member or possessed a gun. It was a rare occurrence for individuals to be "drafted" or forced to join a gang against their will. According to Police Sergeant Joseph E. Rich, supervisor of the Gang Control Unit, the only time youth were coerced to join was when a gang was lacking "troops" in the middle of "warfare" with a rival: "The only time a kid is drafted into a gang is when the gang is over-extended militarily--that is, fighting two or three fights at once. The 'runners' [leaders of the gang] are pretty smart; they know that draftees don't make such good fighters."³⁰

Once in the gang, members were organized into different levels: the "Old Heads" (members aged 18-23), the "Young Boys" (sometimes broken into two sub-levels, "Juniors" and "Seniors," but are between the ages of 14-17), the "Midgets" (ages 12-14 years old), and recruits in waiting

²⁸ Ibid, 20.

²⁹ Ibid, 20-25.

³⁰ Ibid.

known as "Pygmies" or "Swiggetts" (aged 12 years old and younger).³¹ Among the "Old Heads," the "runner" or "warlord" was the leader of the gang. Some gangs had a "runner" who held total responsibility for the gang and a "warlord" who was in charge of "military" affairs. The "second runner" was next in command when the "runner" was not present. Lastly, the "checkholder" was responsible for overseeing the lowest rank of gang members, the "corner boys," and reporting the activity of those "troops" to the "runners."³²

The names gang members selected to identify their groups were based on the neighborhood of their headquarters or defined by one or more of their group's personal characteristics. For example, the 8th and Diamond Streeters referred to the intersection where they lived and occupied, Zulu Nation reflected the gang's racial pride in being black, and the Moon Gang signified how gang members were "active" when the moon appeared at night. In times of "warfare" or "protection," gangs carried a multitude of weapons: rods, shotguns, pistols, zip guns (a makeshift "gun" made of pipe, a block of wood, rubber bands, friction tape, and a door latch), switch blades, razors, car aerials, chains, pipes, and leather straps.³³ Guns acquired for a gang were often illegally purchased in their neighborhood or legally purchased by gang members eighteen years old or older. In Philadelphia, there were no well-established gangs comprised of girls and young women. However, the girlfriends of gang members at times participated in gang activities such as spying on rivals, carrying weapons, or fighting a girl affiliated with another gang.³⁴

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

As gang violence increased, politicians began to publicly voice their concerns, namely Mayor James H.J. Tate (from 1962-1972) who was quoted in 1969 by the *New York Times* saying, “gang violence is giving Philadelphia a bad name.”³⁵ Ironically, in the year prior to Tate’s press statement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported that out of ten major cities in the nation, Philadelphia had the lowest rates in major crimes such as rapes, aggravated assaults, larcenies, and car theft. To Philadelphians aware of gang violence in the city, speculation arose as to where and how the FBI got their data to make such claims. In 1968, critics suspected the crime data was flawed because it ignored the anti-crime work of community activists and the fact that Police Commissioner Rizzo’s “tough on crime” approach may have been the reason for crime reduction in certain situations.³⁶

Since the 1950s, the Philadelphia Police Department came under scrutiny for numerous charges of police brutality when the department pursued a “pro crime fighter” stance that consisted of less emphasis on “emergency services and maintaining order” and more focus on “serious crimes” like rape, murder, robbery, and burglary. As a result, police officers carried out this order by “relying on motorized patrol, rapidly responding to calls for services, and using forensic science to investigate crimes.”³⁷ This focus on “serious crimes” often resulted in excessive force because forcible felonies permitted police to invoke legal deadly force against a suspect when an individual’s life was threatened.³⁸ Additionally, discriminatory policing led to the overrepresentation of African Americans in prisons and their underrepresentation in law

³⁵ Donald Janson, “Gangs Face Drive in Philadelphia” *New York Times*, (Feb. 13, 1972), <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/02/13/archives/gangs-face-drive-in-philadelphia-police-open-crackdown-on-youths.html>.

³⁶ Timothy Lombardo, *Blue-Collar Conservatism: Frank Rizzo's Philadelphia and Populist Politics*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.

³⁷ Police Study Task Force, *Philadelphia and Its Police: Toward a New Partnership, A Report by the Police Study Task Force*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Task Force, 1986.

³⁸ According to Pennsylvania law, a forcible felony crime is rape, murder, armed robbery, or kidnapping.

enforcement. On January 10, 1950, the *Philadelphia Tribune* published an article stating that 40% of the city's prison population was African American, even though black people were only 18% of Philadelphia's population.³⁹

Under Police Commissioner Howard Leary (1962–1965), he sought to improve police-community relations through organizations like the Police Advisory Board (PAB) as an effort to reduce crime. When the 1964 Columbia Avenue Riots occurred under his watch, he ordered police officers (including Deputy Commissioner Rizzo) to stand down and not pursue rioters and looters.⁴⁰ Instead, Leary permitted local church, civil rights, and community leaders to meet with residents and arrange forums where police and citizens could discuss the racially-charged issues that sparked the riot.⁴¹

In the late 1960s, Rizzo rose to the rank of police commissioner by implementing discriminatory policing tactics that involved excessive force and civil rights violations against “objectionable people” who did not fit the mold of what a true patriotic (white) law-abiding citizen was: nonwhite, poor, homosexual, hippie, liberal, or political dissident.⁴² To Rizzo, these “objectionable people” were the catalysts for immorality, street crime, and blight in Philadelphia. As an Italian (seeking white solidarity in an ethnically-biased political sphere), conservative, anti-crime advocate, Rizzo aligned himself with the city's growing “law and order” constituency and remained tough on crime. Furthermore, it was common for activists like Spencer Coxe, the Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union's (ACLU) Philadelphia Branch, to receive numerous complaints of Police Captain Rizzo ordering the illegal raids of coffee houses,

³⁹ Ibid, 122.

⁴⁰ Lombardo, *Blue-Collar Conservatism*, 140-141.

⁴¹ Countryman, *Up South*, 163-164.

⁴² *Amateur Night at City Hall: The Story of Frank L. Rizzo, Dir.* Robert Mugge, MVD Entertainment Group, 1978, Kanopy, Web, accessed November 24, 2017.

public squares, and political offices to disperse “undesirable” people who would offend his “law and order” constituency.⁴³

When Rizzo became police commissioner in April 1967, he not only installed the strict policies of “stop and frisk” and emergency curfews, but also attempted to bolster the police department by purchasing armored personnel transports that his critics likened to “military tanks.” Additionally, Rizzo was not a supporter of the PAB, thought police brutality was rare and required no departmental investigation of misconduct (despite many complaints from civil rights organizations), and if there was a riot it was to be “treated with a firm hand.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, as handgun purchases (legal and illegal) and juvenile crime rose nationally, Philadelphia’s city officials soon became preoccupied with the rapid increase in gang violence and sought to take action in 1969.

In 1968, the Pennsylvania Crime Commission reported there were approximately 14,000 juvenile arrests and 83,000 gang members in Philadelphia with “core” gang members being repeat offenders of violent crime.⁴⁵ In Summer 1968, a series of incidents in North Philadelphia encouraged community residents and politicians to invest in a program to end gang violence. After news spread that a boy was shot and killed in a gang fight and gang rivals, Zulu Nation and the 8th and Diamond Streeters had declared war, Yorktown residents sent a message to the District Attorney’s Office asking for help. On Independence Day, residents and staff from the DA’s Office met with leaders of both gangs on a North Philadelphia street corner to end the

⁴³ *Amateur Night at City Hall*.

⁴⁴ Lombardo, *Blue-Collar Conservatism*, 140-141.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *The Gang Unit*, 19.

violence. Following this series of incidents, politicians became more interested in finding a remedial solution outside of policing to address gang activity in the city.⁴⁶

Taking into consideration the statistics on gang violence, advice from Family Court Judge Paul A. Dandridge, and community pleas for solutions, Philadelphia DA Arlen Specter contacted President Richard M. Nixon to propose his project, Safe Streets, Inc. President Nixon responded with the suggestion that Specter apply for an LEAA grant to fund the non-profit organization. Specter applied for an LEAA grant in May 1968 to fund the pilot, anti-gang program designed to lower the rate of teenage gang homicides and “*encourage gangs into constructive programs.*”⁴⁷ In the LEAA application, Specter stated “gang violence has reached proportions which threaten the entire law enforcement process of the community,” to highlight the urgency of a program that would curb gang violence and juvenile delinquency in the city. Among the proposed activities Specter pitched was four-day retreats at hostels or in rural settings where gang members could gain free counseling from group therapists, an idea inspired by the New York City drug addiction treatment organization, Daytop Village founded in 1963 by psychiatrist Daniel Casriel and Roman Catholic priest Monsignor William B. O’Brien.⁴⁸

In Spring 1969, Specter formally established the organization to lower juvenile delinquency and crime, while also ensuring there was proper procedural action in criminal cases. By June 1969, Safe Streets received a \$80,267 LEAA grant for youth gang control in North Central and West Philadelphia.⁴⁹ The LEAA program granted \$215 million to state and local governments to improve police forces, the courts, and correction systems. One of the conditions for LEAA-

⁴⁶ “The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?”

⁴⁷ “The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?”

⁴⁸ “The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?”

⁴⁹ “U.S. gives DA \$80,000 for Gang Control.”

approved organizations was state and local agencies had to fund between 40-50% of the organization's budget. If an LEAA-approved organization did not meet local and state standards, those agencies could deny it funding. The Pennsylvania Crime Commission disbursed discretionary funding to Safe Streets approximately every six months. As a federally-approved organization, Safe Streets received a list of priorities from the local government, but its LEAA grant status could not be revoked by local or state agencies when it did not meet its goals. In 1969, approximately 75% of Safe Streets' funding came from the LEAA grant, while the remaining 25% (\$25,000) came from a grant given by affiliates of the Greater Philadelphia Movement.⁵⁰

In August 1969, Safe Streets was in operation with a mixture of politicians, police officers, and community activists from the neighborhood surrounding the two centers. At each center, there was a unit director who planned and supervised activities, an assistant director who worked directly with gangs on the street, eight youth workers who worked with gang members, two teachers for tutoring, and a community organizer who facilitated parental and community support for the center's activities.⁵¹ In 1969, the organization's board consisted of: Specter as the program chairman; Police Detective Heywood Matthews as executive director; Clarence Fowler as unit director of the North Philadelphia center; Assistant District Attorney Walter W. Cohen as the project administrator of federal funds; and Assistants Dave Johnson and Bernard Rhodes. The staff at Safe Streets were often men like Bennie Swans, a former gang member turned community activist, who were paid to facilitate recreational and community service activities with youth in and or vulnerable to gang activity near its two locations.⁵²

⁵⁰ "The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?"

⁵¹ "The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?"

⁵² "The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?"

From its inception, the mission of Safe Streets was to be a “*one-stop juvenile center*” where police officers, former gang members, and community activists worked together to teach at-risk teenagers “responsibility and concern for themselves and society.”⁵³ North and West Philadelphia were chosen as locations for the centers because gang activity was most entrenched in those poor and working-class, black neighborhoods.⁵⁴ In its early stages, Safe Streets saw 35 to 50 juveniles enter each center daily with youth workers attempting to develop one-on-one relationships with attendees. Among the activities offered to hundreds of teenaged visitors were academic tutoring, job training, neighborhood cleanup projects, sports, newspaper writing, and publishing. Since many youth who were “directed” to the centers were “troubled,” lived disadvantaged lives, and or faced inequality in schools, housing, and employment, Safe Streets provided group therapy sessions (facilitated by residents from the North Philadelphia drug treatment center, Gaudenzia House) and annual trips to the theater and the Poconos to rehabilitate and provide positive recreation for attendees. According to Specter, events like the four-day retreat to the Poconos for 100 boys during the Summer was a great opportunity to reduce gang violence and end turf wars between rival gangs.⁵⁵

The same year Safe Streets was established, the Philadelphia Police Department received a LEAA grant of \$19,733 for creating a closed-circuit television system linking the city’s police districts. Additionally, with Rizzo as police commissioner, violence between black males and white police officers began to spike with the use of police policies and procedures of stop and frisk, quotidian surveillance, illegal house raids, *public* strip searches, false criminal accusations

⁵³ “The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?”

⁵⁴ The North Philadelphia location was a rowhome in a residential neighborhood, while the West Philadelphia location was a storefront connected to a row of businesses.

⁵⁵ “U.S. gives DA \$80,000 for Gang Control.”

and arrests, and verbal and physical assaults on suspects, average law-abiding citizens, political activists, and protestors at peaceful demonstrations.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Safe Streets, along with other local Great Society programs like Start Towards Eliminating Past Setbacks (STEPS) and Philadelphia's Leaders of Tomorrow (PLOT) became a crucial response to crime where local politicians and community activists made multiple efforts to eradicate gang activity and police-community tension.⁵⁷ Even community and civil rights organizations like the North City Congress (NCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) attempted to curb gang activity and juvenile delinquency by arranging truce meetings between major North Philadelphia gangs, citizens, and police.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, politicians like Mayor Tate doubted these social programs would lead to major crime reduction. In 1969, the Tate Administration attempted to persuade the federal government to allocate only \$44,000 to Specter's program and give the Philadelphia Police Department \$56,000 for crime-fighting initiatives.⁵⁹ Moreover, this was the beginning of a long-term battle between liberals and conservatives over how federal funding would be distributed and spent to combat juvenile delinquency, crime, and rioting.

Specter vs. Rizzo: The Fight for LEAA Grant Funding

In 1970, the high-stakes efforts to reduce gang activity on a shoestring budget became public knowledge when *Philadelphia Inquirer* journalists William J. Speer and Tom Ferrick reported on their visits to Safe Streets' North Philadelphia center in February and July respectively of that year. When Speer arrived at 2201 W. Stewart Street, he saw a three-story, six room storefront that looked like a "neglected 50-year-old building with a swift paint job."⁶⁰ He described Safe

⁵⁶ Frank Donner, "Rizzo's Philadelphia: Police City" in *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America*, Oakland: University of California Press, 1992.

⁵⁷ Tyree Johnson, "Men Needed to Share Skills with Boys," *Philadelphia Daily News*, May 15, 1974.

⁵⁸ Lombardo, *Blue-Collar Conservatism*, 140-141.

⁵⁹ "U.S. gives DA \$80,000 for Gang Control."

⁶⁰ "The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?"

Streets as an “experimental program” open six days a week from 9 AM to 9 PM where juveniles received help with “scholastic and job difficulties” and rival gangs could “rap out” their differences in intense group therapy instead of resorting to violence with “pipes, cleavers, knives, and guns.”⁶¹ For the girls who attended the center, there were “local women” who taught them homecrafts (e.g., sewing), but the organization primarily wanted the girlfriends of gang members as an exploitative measure in which their presence could “win the confidence” of the young men and help them get reformed.⁶² In Ferrick’s article, his description of the contents in the North Philadelphia center demonstrated the financial difficulties the organization had: chairs, a few “ancient desks,” a blackboard, a ping pong table, and a record player “that looks too old to play.”⁶³

In Speer’s article, he depicted the centers’ economic struggles in providing educational resources for youth by describing how the staff at the West Philadelphia center (sharing a facility with the Christian Young Life organization) were tutoring youth with thirty and forty-year-old reading and math books as they patiently awaited the arrival of books donated by the Board of Education. The centers offered meager success in employment for gang members because the facilities did not provide adequate job training in vocational skills.⁶⁴ Speer noted that while the Philadelphia Tutorial Project offered study help to juveniles, the State Bureau of Employment Security provided job counseling, despite its rare visits to the center. In fact, during the existence of Safe Streets a Philadelphia mechanic who read in the newspaper about the organization

⁶¹ “The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?”

⁶² “The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?”

⁶³ Tom Ferrick, “Safe Streets Center Seeks to Expand Effective Work,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 13, 1970.

⁶⁴ “The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?”

volunteered to fund transportation to his shop so that he could teach youth from the centers his trade.⁶⁵

In August 1971, Willard Scott, a 66-year-old proprietor of an auto repair business since 1929, heard about Safe Streets' mission and called the DA's Office requesting to train gang members to be mechanics.⁶⁶ Scott, not fully aware of the social conditions drifting some black youth into gang activity was concerned about the senselessness of gang violence and how simple it could partially be solved:

These black kids need jobs and a challenge. But they keep killing each other and tilling up the jails. I know my own 16-year-old—he's so crazy about hot-rod engines, he can't get into trouble..Send me some of those gang members. I've got a car business and I'll teach them how to work on engines. If it works, maybe we can get some of 'em jobs.⁶⁷

According to Safe Streets' Executive Director Heywood Matthews, Scott was the first businessman to volunteer a vocational training program for the cash-strapped organization. Scott soon welcomed eight youth to his garage at 1501 N. 61st Street and was immediately impressed by their work ethic: "I couldn't believe how nice they were, how hard they'd work. I had 'em tearing down engines eight hours a day, learning the basics. They wouldn't go across the street for cigarettes without asking my permission."⁶⁸

Once Christmas 1971 arrived, six youth dropped the program because they could not afford the bus fare and lunch required to participate. Safe Streets tried to procure a \$40 a week subsistence for the boys' expenses, but the organization struggled to acquire the funds. Instead, Scott, Reverend Marshall Shepard's congregation at Mt. Olivet Tabernacle Church, and

⁶⁵ "The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?"

⁶⁶ "Sandy Grady...On the Loose: Garage Man Tries to Salvage a Program," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, March 9, 1972.

⁶⁷ "Garage Man Tries to Salvage a Program."

⁶⁸ "Garage Man Tries to Salvage a Program."

Reverend Joseph Whearty of Our Lady of Victory Church raised money to cover the costs.⁶⁹ By February 1, 1972, Scott accepted a class of ten gang members with the goal of getting them jobs as mechanics after ten weeks of training at one of the 50 garages and service stations in his community. The *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* journalist covering the story about Scott's partnership with Safe Streets in March 1972 not only demonstrated how appealing and vital vocational training was for gang members, but also concluded his article with a sharp critique of the police state in America's major cities: solving gang violence this way is a "bargain" in the "era of \$100 million police budgets."⁷⁰

Speer's report on Safe Streets also cast doubt on the organization's long-term success when he suggested it had to successfully prove it could solve youth gang violence since it was "being watched" by civic and law enforcement agencies. Safe Streets was not only concerned about attendee retention at the centers, but also possible gang activity at night when the centers were closed.⁷¹ Additionally, the lack of parental, community, and gang member support for the organization troubled not only Speer, but also Unit Director Charles Fowler:

If the problem doesn't hit them [parents] in their own parlor, they just don't get concerned about it...If you get the [gang] leader on your side, you got the whole gang with you...In many cases, the leader has more power over the gang members than the boys' parents...We want the boys to look beyond their present situation. We want them to see that there is no future in being a gang member.⁷²

Nevertheless, the staff at Safe Streets remained committed to their mission to reduce gang violence, as voiced by Project Administrator Walter W. Cohen: "Our central aim is to stop killing, but that is not our final aim—our final aim is to enable these kids to see the senselessness of killing and to participate in normal activities."⁷³ Nine days after Ferrick's article was

⁶⁹ "Garage Man Tries to Salvage a Program."

⁷⁰ "Garage Man Tries to Salvage a Program."

⁷¹ "The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?"

⁷² "The Safe Streets project—Inroads on Phila. Gang Control?"

⁷³ "Safe Streets Center Seeks to Expand Effective Work."

published, the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* reported the LEAA allocated \$150,000 for “Philadelphia’s emergency juvenile gang control project.” Once Specter learned about the allocation, he asked Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott to expedite the funds since the organization was in immediate need of them to continue operations.⁷⁴ The City of Philadelphia also received an LEAA grant (a month prior) in the amount of \$80,267. Despite the brewing competition Safe Streets had with the police department for funds, Specter reiterated the significance of his program in a press release by stating his grant would be used to “increase job opportunities, overcome functional illiteracy, and set up guidance group interaction techniques to instill a more mature social responsible attitude and behavior pattern in juveniles.”⁷⁵

In August 1970, the relationship between the black community and the police took a nosedive when Police Commissioner Rizzo conflated black radicals with black criminals and ordered the raid of multiple offices of the Black Panther Party (BPP) following the shootings of four policemen in two days. On August 29, 1970, 39-year-old Park Policeman James Harrington was sitting in his police wagon a hundred yards from the Cobbs Creek Guardhouse in West Philadelphia when five black men from revolutionary group, the Black Unity Council, shot him at point-blank range.⁷⁶ The men then entered the guardhouse and shot 43-year-old Fairmount Park Police Sergeant Frank Von Colln five times, murdering him as he sat at his desk.⁷⁷ On the night of August 30, 1970, twenty-five-year-old Patrolman Thomas J. Gibbons Jr. (the son of former Police Commissioner Gibbons), and his partner, 28-year-old John J. Nolen were shot after they stopped two black men in a stolen car in Southwest Philadelphia. After two days of

⁷⁴ “U.S. Gives City \$150,000 for Gang Control,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, July 22, 1970.

⁷⁵ “U.S. Gives City \$150,000 for Gang Control.”

⁷⁶ Joseph R. Daughen and Peter Binzen, *The Cop Who Would Be King: The Honorable Frank Rizzo*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 149.

anti-police violence from black men, Rizzo spoke to the media about both incidents. Following Rizzo's visit to Gibbons and Nolen at Misericordia Hospital, he told news reporters "this is no longer a civilized neighborhood."⁷⁸ Rizzo then erroneously announced that the Panthers were responsible for Sergeant Von Colln's murder instead of the Black Unity Council.

Rizzo was already unhappy with the Black Panthers because, since 1966, the BPP's goal for black youth was to take a Marxist, black nationalist view and educate them on how institutional racism, poverty, and police brutality damaged the black community.⁷⁹ The Panthers' pamphlet, *Ten-Point Program*, outlined the goals the organization had for the community, which included demanding the government provide full employment, decent housing, and education for black people. In the BPP's pamphlet, *Eight Points of Attention*, outlined moral principles for its members to follow as role models in the black community, such as "do not hit or swear at people," "do not take liberties with women," and "do not damage property of the oppressed masses." Additionally, the Panthers provided numerous missions programs to alleviate some of the socioeconomic burdens lower-class blacks faced each day.⁸⁰ These programs included a community ambulance service, free medical and legal clinics, a police patrol (where Panthers openly carried guns and followed police cars to preemptively prevent police brutality), community centers, and the Free Breakfast for School Children Program.⁸¹ Since the Panthers provided these free resources to impoverished blacks in the city, their political propaganda

⁷⁸ Ibid, 150.

⁷⁹ *The Black Panther Party*, New York: Merit Publishers, 1966.

⁸⁰ Erin Blakemore, "How the Black Panthers' Breakfast Program Both Inspired and Threatened the Government," (February 6, 2018), History.com, accessed May 3, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/free-school-breakfast-black-panther-party>.

⁸¹ The BPP's Free Breakfast for School Children Program began in January 1969 in Oakland, California. BPP members and volunteers consulted nutritionists on breakfast options and went to local grocery stores requesting donations to buy healthy food (specifically eggs, chocolate milk, meat, cereal, and fresh oranges) to feed tens of thousands of kids nationwide. The BPP's breakfast program later influenced the federal government to authorize free breakfast in public schools by 1975.

appealed to the black community because it identified institutional racism and the failure of social welfare programs as causes for the struggles of the urban black poor.

In the early morning hours of August 31st, Rizzo assisted in 100 police marksmen raiding two BPP offices in North and Northwest Philadelphia and the organization's main headquarters in West Philadelphia, even though a homicide detective already arrested the suspects involved in the shootings of Officer Harrington and Sergeant Von Colln.⁸² The officers soon publicly strip searched seven Panthers on a residential street, effectively humiliating them in front of onlookers and news media. The image of several bare-chested, barefoot, or completely nude Panthers lined up against a wall was captured by *Daily News* photographer, Elwood P. Smith, and later distributed around the world by United Press International. In press conferences, Rizzo responded to the incident unabashed:

This was an excellent job. They can hide weapons, grenades and so forth, in their clothing... We did nothing wrong... Their feelings were hurt. The big Black Panthers with their trousers down... We had information from infiltrators and informers and from the black community that they did have guns in there... Some black leaders spew out. Why did they not speak out before? I didn't hear them speak out when Von Colln was shot. As far as I'm concerned, they can go wash their necks.⁸³

Furthermore, this incident not only demonstrated how black activists and criminal suspects were negligently categorized as one threatening entity to police, but also how organizations promoting alternative methods to solving the societal problems of urban life would be discredited publicly by city officials who believed government spending on crime-fighting was more useful than social programs meant to uplift citizens.

When Rizzo became mayor on January 3, 1972, he immediately began a crackdown on gangs in the city. At the time, there were approximately 200 gangs in operation (with 96% of members

⁸² Daughen and Binzen, *The Cop Who Would Be King*, 147-155.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 150-155.

being black males) and citizens and politicians alike were concerned that gang violence was interfering with the everyday lives of Philadelphians.⁸⁴ In communities deemed gang territory, merchants had to close their businesses early, parents had to transport their children to and from school, and residents often feared turf wars between rival gangs. There were even news reports of innocent bystanders getting caught in the middle of gang crossfire, like 42-year-old Pearl Cooper who was shot in the chest and arm as she travelled home from the grocery store.⁸⁵ Ultimately, the goal of the crackdown was to enforce Pennsylvania's law on the prohibition of concealed deadly weapons while also invoking the city ordinance requiring citizens to register if they wanted to carry a weapon in a public place.

Beginning on January 30, 1972, the city ran a two-week moratorium on the prosecution of gang members who turned in their weapons at neighborhood firehouses with no questions asked. Although some gang members refused to turn in their weapons for fear they would be disarmed and vulnerable to rival gangs, the city recovered a total of 58 rifles and revolvers.⁸⁶ Following the moratorium, the city proposed mass arrests of gang members to expeditiously eliminate gang activity. In reference to the police policy of "stop and frisk" for weapons, City Managing Director Hillel S. Levinson was quoted as confirming the procedure as necessary action: "The city is looking very seriously at gang activities. It is not going to accept them any longer."⁸⁷ Rizzo himself was also quoted by the press for his "tough on crime" approach as mayor:

We know who they are. They're going to be stopped on the street by the police and we're going to talk to them. They had better hope they don't have weapons on them. We are going to move against gangs and

⁸⁴ Janson, "Gangs Face Drive in Philadelphia."

⁸⁵ Janson, "Gangs Face Drive in Philadelphia."

⁸⁶ Janson, "Gangs Face Drive in Philadelphia."

⁸⁷ Janson, "Gangs Face Drive in Philadelphia."

we are not going to take any stuff from them. If they want to fight hand-to-hand, we'll take them on. That's the challenge.⁸⁸

After the moratorium, the Confederation for the Conservation of Our City asked churches and synagogues to be open 24 hours a day on the weekend of February 12-13, 1972 as sanctuaries for gang members if mass arrests occurred. While the city proposed mass arrests, local organizations like the West Philadelphia organization, Umoja, Inc. arranged peace talks with about 500 gang members to avoid the crackdown.⁸⁹ According to journalists, organizations like this were in agreement with sociologists and gang members that the solution to gang activity was adequate job training programs and jobs for unemployed, unskilled, high school dropouts.

From 1973 to 1974, gang violence decreased but the presence of gangs in Philadelphia was still prevalent. By 1974, there were approximately 250 youth gangs in Philadelphia alone, with membership for each gang ranging from 18 to 200 individuals between the ages of ten to twenty-two years old. According to police, gang activity was strongly active within the black communities of North and West Philadelphia, leading city officials to concentrate more on curbing crime in those neighborhoods.⁹⁰ At Safe Streets the organization was in danger of being shut down after it received a six-month evaluation and the Philadelphia Regional Planning Council decided to discontinue disbursement of funds on December 31, 1974. Progress reports were regularly sent to the Governor's Justice Commission where they were transferred to Keith Miles at the Office of Evaluation, LEAA-NILECJ within the Department of Justice.⁹¹

In July 1974, an evaluation team from the historically-black college, Lincoln University visited Safe Streets' centers, conducted interviews with staff and juvenile attendees, reviewed the

⁸⁸ Janson, "Gangs Face Drive in Philadelphia."

⁸⁹ Janson, "Gangs Face Drive in Philadelphia."

⁹⁰ Youth in Conflict Cooperative Service Project, *Safe Streets, Inc. (Six Month Evaluation Report, July-December 1974)*, December 31, 1974.

⁹¹ *Safe Streets, Inc. (Six Month Evaluation Report, July-December 1974)*.

program's components, and requested records of operation to determine whether the organization was impactful in ending gang violence in the city.⁹² Once their evaluation was complete, the team determined that Safe Streets "tried to do too much for too many" and given its difficulties with efficient record-keeping, sufficient and highly-experienced staff, and proper coordination with the Youth Service Commission (YSC) that arranged training programs for juveniles, the non-profit should close its doors and allow the program to "go on where it can until the new plan is developed."⁹³

One of the main reasons for Safe Streets' "failures" was financial support. The organization had poor record-keeping because data on juveniles and program affairs were often handwritten and these documents were only accessible to evaluators when staff had the time and means to produce typewritten copies.⁹⁴ The staff who ran the centers were often former gang members who had neither a college education nor formal training in vocational skills or group therapy, therefore the organization had to hire or solicit volunteers who were trained in the fields necessary to meet the needs of juveniles. Additionally, staff at the centers were often paid low wages and pressured to work long hours so that juveniles could remain at the centers all day, instead of spending time on the streets where gang activity occurred.⁹⁵ Lastly, poor record-keeping and low morale among overworked staff members made program partnerships with the YSC an extra burden.⁹⁶ Although evaluators from Lincoln University believed the sports and recreation programs for youth were sound, they "lacked coordination and were weak in social service referral and follow up."⁹⁷ Nevertheless, while Safe Streets ideally wanted to end gang

⁹² *Safe Streets, Inc. (Six Month Evaluation Report, July-December 1974).*

⁹³ *Safe Streets, Inc. (Six Month Evaluation Report, July-December 1974).*

⁹⁴ *Safe Streets, Inc. (Six Month Evaluation Report, July-December 1974).*

⁹⁵ *Safe Streets, Inc. (Six Month Evaluation Report, July-December 1974).*

⁹⁶ *Safe Streets, Inc. (Six Month Evaluation Report, July-December 1974).*

⁹⁷ Robert W. Kotzbauer, "Safe Streets Gang Control Gets \$30,000," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, January 7, 1975.

violence with the resources it provided, the organization did not have enough manpower or finances to achieve its goals.

In November 1974, the Philadelphia Regional Planning Council disapproved Safe Streets' funding application because they received poor evaluations from Lincoln University and therefore saw no comprehensive planning to reduce gang activity from the organization's current efforts. Director of the Philadelphia Regional Council, Yvonne Haskins, later stated in a press release the disapproval was because "funding for ineffective programs was wrong" and before additional federal funds are spent, the city's Youth Services Commission must "devise an overall plan aimed at curbing gang violence."⁹⁸ Even though Safe Streets was scheduled to close that December, officials attempted to win more funding for the program by petitioning multiple politicians.⁹⁹

On January 6, 1975, the Governor's Justice Commission met in Harrisburg to consider funding Safe Streets and two other low-performing social programs, the Intensive Area Youth Workers and Youth Development, operated by the Philadelphia Public Welfare Department. At the conclusion of the meeting, Safe Streets, having already received \$942,165 in LEAA funds over the years, was granted two more months to operate with \$30,000 in federal subsidies. Initial responses to the news of unexpected funding was mixed. Executive Director of Safe Streets, Lewis Taylor Jr. responded with elation stating that the added funds would safeguard the organization's basketball, job counselling, vocational training, and educational programs for 400 youth because 27 staff workers would be retained. City Managing Director, Hillel Levinson responded with a cautious sense of relief in that the three programs were crucial to curbing gang activity on the community level because they were the only municipal entities outside of the

⁹⁸ "Safe Streets Gang Control Gets \$30,000."

⁹⁹ "Millions for Safe Streets, and Crime Still Climbs," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, March 10, 1974.

police department that directly tackled gang issues: “to discontinue them would severely restrict our ability to handle gangs other than by police action.”¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, the Intensive Area Youth Workers and Youth Development were denied additional funding, a fate Safe Streets hoped to avoid after its two-month extension ended.

Less than six months after Safe Streets won additional funding from the Governor’s Justice Commission, the organization was in jeopardy again when the city’s budget for social programs and the police department was under consideration by the Philadelphia Regional Planning Council. On the evening of June 19, 1975, the council met at Midtown Holiday Inn to review Safe Streets’ application for \$217,496 in federal funds.¹⁰¹ The council criticized the organization for continuously relying on LEAA grants and not searching for other financial supporters. The council then denied Safe Streets’ application with an 8-7 vote, leaving the final decision on funding to the Governor’s Justice Commission.¹⁰²

At the same meeting, the council reviewed the city’s application for \$1.04 million to install a computerized police radio dispatching system for the police department. As early as August 1974, the city noticed a 16% increase in police calls and argued that this rise in police requests left the department “overtaxed” and unable to respond quickly.”¹⁰³ Believing rising crime rates required advanced policing techniques to remedy the issue, city officials hired an independent consultant who recommended the police department use a computer system to keep logs of 911 calls, the precise locations of callers, and the availability of police cars to arrive at crime scenes or emergency situations. State criminal justice planner, Ted Shoemaker praised the approach, stating that if Philadelphia carried out this plan it would be the “first in the country” to do so,

¹⁰⁰ “Safe Streets Gang Control Gets \$30,000.”

¹⁰¹ “Gang-Control Loses Bid for U.S. Aid,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 20, 1975.

¹⁰² “Gang-Control Loses Bid for U.S. Aid.”

¹⁰³ “Gang-Control Loses Bid for U.S. Aid.”

especially since the city preferred a private consultant to set up the system rather than rely on computer firms to simply supply the necessary equipment.¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, the council approved the city's request to spend additional funds on policing.

Since June 1975, Safe Streets was constantly granted additional funding by the Governor's Justice Commission to stay open "temporarily," but the organization always existed with the threat of closure as it survived on an insufficient budget. Although city officials knew Safe Streets was a financial failure, they believed the organization had a quasi-effective approach to remedying gang activity, rising crime rates, and juvenile delinquency. In late August 1976, the Board of Managers of the Philadelphia Youth Study Center wanted to send "troubled and cast-off children" between the ages of nine and seventeen to temporary foster and group homes while they awaited their hearings in Juvenile Court for minor criminal offenses.¹⁰⁵ City officials, believing that jail was an inappropriate institution for low-risk youth to await trial, considered Safe Streets a potential facility to lodge at least six juveniles at each center overnight since its mission was to rehabilitate and steer children from violence and crime.¹⁰⁶ By December 1976, the organization was finally forced to shutter its doors when its grants from the city and federal governments were discontinued.

From 1970 to 1976, Philadelphia gradually spent more money funding the police, prisons and the courts than it did on juvenile commitment and the Youth Study Center.¹⁰⁷ In 1976, approximately 89% of Philadelphia's \$236 million budget for fighting crime went to the police department, prisons, and the courts. Programs committed to rehabilitating juvenile delinquents

¹⁰⁴ "Gang-Control Loses Bid for U.S. Aid."

¹⁰⁵ Robert W. Kotzbauer, "Cast-off Kids Will Go to Foster Homes, Not Lockup," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, August 31, 1976.

¹⁰⁶ "Cast-off Kids Will Go to Foster Homes, Not Lockup."

¹⁰⁷ "Billions for Safe Streets Yield Failure, Fear, Fury," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, September 11, 1977.

received only 3.7% of budgetary spending.¹⁰⁸ In the late 1970s, Philadelphia's economic issues gave government officials like Mayor Rizzo more leeway to argue that unpoliced (black) crime contributed to the city's financial difficulties. Few factories remained in Philadelphia as many companies moved their headquarters and production factories to the suburbs to reduce business expenses and increase profit margins. As factories left cities, so did jobs. In the summer of 1977, Philadelphia and South Jersey saw the disappearance of more than 11,900 jobs in construction, factories, services, and government, resulting in the region's unemployment rate teeter tottering between 7.1 and 8.8%.¹⁰⁹ Although 1,339,400 people were employed, and 447,300 new jobs were created in August 1977, the increase in residents quitting the job search made citizens and politicians alike cynical about the city's economic future. From 1972-1977, Philadelphia experienced depopulation when nearly 250,000 people moved out of the city.¹¹⁰ With Philadelphia losing not only business, property, and sales taxes from job flight and white flight, the city's tax base was struggling to finance the public services of water, sewage, street paving, street cleaning (including snow removal), street lighting, police, and fire services.¹¹¹ Moreover, conservative city officials like Rizzo thought it was more viable to curb crime with massive funding for the police, prisons, and courts to quickly undo the job flight and depopulation issues that plagued the Philadelphia.

Conclusion: The Legacy: North Philly Peace Park

If you go to 2201 W. Stewart Street, the former location of the North Philadelphia center of Safe Streets, you will find a vacant lot. Interestingly, in that vacant area is the North Philly Peace

¹⁰⁸ "Billions for Safe Streets Yield Failure, Fear, Fury."

¹⁰⁹ *Amateur Night at City Hall*.

¹¹⁰ *Amateur Night at City Hall*.

¹¹¹ Elizabeth M. Geffen, "Industrial Development and Social Crisis, 1841-1854" in *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982.

Park, an organization established in 2012 by community activist Tommy Joshua. As in the era of Safe Streets, the North Philly Peace Park is a safe space in the middle of gang territory. Children and adults can enter the large patch of land knowing that in Sharswood weapons, drugs, trash, and violence are prohibited. At the park, there is a community garden, wooden park benches, and brightly-painted car tires as decoration and recreation for children. The volunteers who work there tend to the garden, distribute free food to community residents in need, and sell trinkets and apparel to raise money for community projects like a vocational school for neighborhood children. Although, gang activity there has not dissipated and Safe Streets has been defunct for over forty years, the mission of the organization still lives on in the North Philly Peace Park as community residents and activists work to fulfill the goals that Specter and his board once proposed.

Appendix

Figure 1: Philadelphia’s Population by Race, 1900-1980

Demographics Table of white and black populations in Philadelphia.

Census Year	Total Population	White Population (Number and Percent)	African American/Black Population (Number and Percent)
1900	1,293,697	1,229,673 (95.1%)	62,613 (4.8%)
1910	1,549,008	1,463,371 (94.5%)	84,459 (5.5%)
1920	1,823,779	1,688,180 (92.6%)	134,229 (7.4%)
1930	1,950,961	1,728,806 (88.6%)	219,599 (11.3%)
1940	1,931,334	1,678,577 (86.9%)	250,880 (13.0%)
1950	2,071,605	1,692,637 (81.7%)	376,041 (18.2%)
1960	2,002,512	1,467,479 (73.3%)	529,240 (26.4%)
1970	1,948,609	1,278,717 (65.6%)	653,791 (33.6%)
1980	1,688,210	983,084 (58.2%)	638,878 (37.8%)

Figure 2: Chart of Active, Sporadic, and Dormant Gangs in Philadelphia as of May 13, 1968 (Printed in Phineas M. Anderson's *The Gang Unit*)

(Source: Gang Control Unit, Philadelphia Police Department)

Gang	Area	Foes	Members	Status
2-4 Counts	25th to 27th; Passyunk-Snyder	Hill; P.J.'s	25	Sporadic
P.J.'s	25th to 27th; Passyunk-Snyder (Claims same territory as 2-4 Counts)	2-4 Counts; 22nd & Greenwich	30	Active
5th Street	3rd to 7th Street; Federal to South	13th Street	45	Active
13th Street	9th to Broad Street; Christian-South	All gangs in South Phila.	60	Active
5th and Porter	4th to 6th Street; Moore to Porter	7th Street	25	Sporadic
7th Street	Mifflin to Wolf; 5th to 8th Street	5th and Porter	30	Active
15th and Clymer Street	Broad to 17th; Washington-South	13th Street	30	Active
19th and Dorrance Street	19th to 20th Street; Reed to Dickinson Street	None at this time	40	Sporadic
21st and Titan Street	19th to 22nd Street; Reed-Washington Avenue	13th Street	20	Active
22nd and Greenwich Street	22nd to 24th Street; Wharton-Watkins Street	Roads; P.J.'s	25	Active
22nd and South Street	17th to 23rd Street; Washington-South	13th Street	45	Active
20th and Carpenter Street	22nd to 25th Street; Washington-	None at this time	20	Sporadic

	Carpenter Street			
2-T-6	26th to 30th Street; Wharton to Moore	Taylor Street; P.J.'s	25	Sporadic
30th and Tasker Street	26th to 33rd Street; Morris to Reed Street	Any gang from outside their area	30	Sporadic
Roads	25th to 30th Street; Wharton to Grays Ferry Avenue	13th Street; Taylor Street	25	Active
Taylor Street	23rd to 25th Street; Tasker to Federal Street	Roads; 2-T-6	25	Sporadic
Wine	20th to 21st Street; Christian to Washington Avenue	22nd and South Street	20	Sporadic
20th Street	20th to 22nd Street; Gerritt to Watkins	Have several corners but will band together	70	Active
10th and Carpenter Street	10th to 9th Street; Washington to Christian Street	Any gang in South Phila.	10	Sporadic
12th and Poplar	8th to 12th Street; Green to Girard Avenue	Moroccans; 12th and Oxford	50	Active
T.G.O.'s	Broad to 13th Street; Fairmount to Parrish	12th and Poplar	20	Sporadic
16th and Wallace Street	Broad to 20th Street; Fairmount to Spring Garden Street	Moroccans	20	Active
Moroccans	Broad to 20th Street; Fairmount to Girard Avenue	12th and Poplar; 16th and Seybert	75	Active

16th and Dauphin	Broad to 18th Street; Lehigh to Susquehanna Avenue	21st and Norris	30	Active
21st and Norris	19th to 22nd Street; Susquehanna to Berks Street	16th and Dauphin; Valley	40	Active
28th and Montgomery	24th to 27th Street; Columbia to Montgomery	Valley; DeMarco's; 28th and Oxford; 30th and Norris	50	Active
2-9-D's	28th to 32nd Street; Norris to York	30th and Norris	30	Active
30th and Norris	30th to 33rd Street; Susquehanna to Montgomery	Valley; 32nd and Turner; 28th and Montgomery	30	Active
32nd and Turner	31st to 33rd Street; Columbia to Oxford	30th and Norris	25	Active
L.T.'s	29th to 33rd Street; Huntingdon to Lehigh	Village	45	Dormant
Village	24th to 27th; Dauphin to Cumberland	L.T.'s	60	Sporadic
Valley	Broad to 26th Street; Columbia to Diamond Street	15th and Oxford; 30th and Norris	250	Active
15th and Oxford	Broad to 18th Street; Columbia to Jefferson Street	16th and Montgomery; 21st and Montgomery; 19th and Montgomery	20	Active
DeMarco's	20th to 25th Street; Thompson to	21st and Montgomery;	45	Active

	Columbia Avenue	28th and Oxford		
19th and Harlan	18th to 20th Street; Jefferson to Columbia Avenue	Valley; 21st and Montgomery	30	Active
16th and Seybert	Broad to 18th Street; Girard to Jefferson Street	Moroccans; 12th and Poplar	40	Active
2-4-R'S	24th to 25th Street; Oxford to Jefferson	28th and Oxford	25	Sporadic
28th and Oxford	22nd to 32nd Street; Girard to Oxford Street	DeMarco's; 24th and Redner	20	Active
M.M.F.	8th to Broad Street; Lehigh to Clearfield	Zulu Nation	30	Active
Camac and Butler	10th to Broad Street; Erie to Hunting Park	None at this time	20	Sporadic
Uptown Norris	6th to 10th Street; Somerset to Allegheny	None at this time	50	Sporadic
8th and Diamond	6th to Broad Street; Berks to York Street	8th and Oxford; Zulu Nation	100	Active
8th and Oxford	5th to Broad Street; Jefferson to Berks	8th and Diamond; 12th and Poplar	60	Active
Zulu Nation	Front to 7th Street; Columbia to Lehigh	M.M.F.; 8th and Diamond	200	Active
Stars	2nd to 5th Street; Diamond to Huntingdon	None at this time	50	Dormant
Soul Diplomats	2nd to 5th Street;	None at this	25	Sporadic

	Diamond to Huntingdon	time		
Sommerville	Chew Avenue to 21st Street; Cheltenham to Ogontz Avenue	Dogtown; Haines Street	200	Active
Dogtown	Gorgas Lane to Walnut Lane; Chew to Germantown Avenue	Sommerville; Haines Street	75	Active
Pulaski Town	Queen Lane to Cheltenham Avenue; Pulaski to Wissahickon Avenue	Sommerville; Haines Street	30	Dormant
Haines Street	Germantown Avenue to Belfield Ave.; Walnut Lane to Cheltenham Avenue	Dogtown; Sommerville; Brickyard	60	Active
Brickyard	Penn to Logan Street; Germantown Avenue to Rubicam Street	Haines Street	40	Sporadic
Clang	68th Avenue to 65th Avenue; Ogontz to Broad Street	Sommerville	75	Active
15th and Venango	Broad to 17th Street; Erie to Tioga Street	M.M.F.; 21st and Westmoreland	35	Active
23rd and Atlantic	Hunting Park Avenue to Ontario; 21st to 23rd Street	21st and Westmoreland	30	Active
21st and Westmoreland	Broad to 22nd Street; Lehigh Avenue to Westmoreland	23rd and Atlantic; 15th and Venango	50	Active

39th and Aspen	39th to Union Street; Aspen to Brown	36th and Market; Empires; 41st and Brown; 43rd and Pennsgrove	35	Active
Theta Phi Omicrons	33rd to 34th Street; Haverford to Mantua Avenue	36th and Market	20	Active
36th and Market (This gang moved but still carries the old corner's name)	51st and Sansom	39th and Aspen 34th and Haverford	40	Active
Empires	35th to 36th Street; Haverford to Wallace	39th and Aspen	20	Active
41st and Brown	41st Street - Fairmount-Brown	39th and Aspen	20	Active
43rd and Pennsgrove	40th to 43rd; Westminster to Mantua Avenue	39th and Aspen; June and Parrish	15	Active
Coast	57th to 60th Street; Spruce to Market Street	Moons; Cedar Avenue	30	Active
Cedar Avenue	55th to 57th Street; Baltimore to Cedar	Coast; Creeks; 49th and Woodland	25	Active
49th and Woodland	48th to 50th Street; Upland to Chester Avenue	Cedar Avenue	30	Sporadic
60th and Webster	59th to 60th Street; Christian to Pine	Creeks; 49th and Woodland	20	Active
Moons	58th to 63rd Street; Market to Jefferson	Coast	50	Active
June and Parrish	June to 48th Street; Parrish to Brown	43rd and Pennsgrove	20	Dormant

Lansdowners	54th to 58th Street; Lancaster to Lansdowne	Moons	20	Sporadic
Creeks	61st to 63rd Street; Cobbs Creek Parkway to Christian	Cedar Avenue; Coast	20	Dormant

Figure 3: Chart of Additional Gangs in Philadelphia as of April 1970 (Printed in Phineas M. Anderson's *The Gang Unit*)

(Source: Youth Conservation Services, Philadelphia Welfare Department)

Gang	Area	Foes	Members	Status
31st and Reed	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
20th and Dickinson Streets	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
2-S-6	26th and South Streets	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
2-E-6	26th and Earp Streets	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
2-M-1	21st and Morris Streets	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Hill Gang	31st and Mifflin Streets	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Toppers	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Main Streeters	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Black Bridge	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Centaur	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Counties	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
CC Counts	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
31st and Montgomery	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Avenue				
28th and Oxford Streets	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
31st and Cumberland Streets	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Cambria Streeters	20th and Cambria Streets	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Cool World Valley	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
58-W's	58th and Willows	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Wallace Streeters	12th and Wallace Streets	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Twine Debs of Soul	Chelten and Ardleigh Streets	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Da Nang Delta	Chelten and Ardleigh Streets	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Black Volunteer Society	13th and Fitzwater Streets	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Last Siders	Roxborough	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
32nd and Haverford Avenue	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
58th and Whitby Avenue	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
58th and Chester Avenue	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Mill Creek Area	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
42nd and Mantua Avenue (Girls)	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

23rd and Diamond Streets	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
25th and Diamond Streets	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Upsetters - 24th and Master (Girls)	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Fishtown-Lutheran Center Minis (Girls)	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Fishtown-Lutheran Center Minis (Boys)	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Venice Islanders	Northwest Philadelphia	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Mayfair Area (Boys)	Northwest Philadelphia	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Mayfair Area (Girls)	Northwest Philadelphia	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
3-T-0	South Philadelphia	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
7th and Morris Streets	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
2nd and Harps Streets	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Hawthorne Area (Girls)	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Wilson Park (Girls)	--	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Figure 4: Philadelphia Spending to Fight Crime

(Source: *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, “Billions for Safe Streets Yield Failure, Fear, Fury,” September 11, 1977.)

Purpose	Fiscal 1970	Fiscal 1976
Police	\$80 million	\$152.5 million
Prisons	8.6 million	18.1 million
Defender Association	1.2 million	3.2 million
Sheriff	1.9 million	3.6 million
District Attorney	2.2 million	6.0 million
Clerk of Courts	1.4 million	2.5 million
Courts	15.5 million	39.8 million
Youth Study Center	1.6 million	3.0 million
Juvenile Commitment	3.0 million	5.7 million
Citizens Crime Prevention	--	1.6 million
Total	\$115.4 million	236 million

Figure 5: Pennsylvania Spending to Fight Crime

(Source: *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, “Millions for Safe Streets, and Crime Still Climbs,” March 10, 1974.)

Year	Law Enforcement	Corrections	Courts	Total
1969	\$968,000	\$349,000	\$85,000	\$1,427,000

1970	\$4,598,000	\$2,778,000	\$1,383,000	\$10,590,000
1971	\$6,757,000	\$9,176,000	\$2,286,000	\$22,276,000
1972	\$6,908,000	\$12,112,000	\$2,811,000	\$26,469,000
1973	\$9,512,000	\$13,052,000	\$3,724,000	\$30,715,000

Figure 6: Gang Related Homicides in Philadelphia, 1965-1976

(Source: *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, May 23, 1976.)

Year	Number of Homicides
1962	1
1965	13
1966	14
1967	12
1968	30
1969	45
1970	30
1971	43
1972	39
1973	43
1974	32

1975	15
1976	3