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TURN OFF THE SPIGOT

As guns flood our communities, trying to change hearts and minds is a non-starter

By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. On January 31 a woman and her 19-year old son came to the Detroit apartment where Kade'jah Davis, 12, lived with her mother. Moments later Kade'jah, an honor student, was dead, [struck by a bullet](#) that tore through the front door. Police later arrested the youth for first-degree murder and his mother as an accessory. It seems that the pair and Kade'jah's mom had quarreled over a missing cell phone.

During the early morning hours of February 20 Delric Waymon Miller IV, age nine months, was asleep in bed when gang members [riddled his Detroit home](#) with thirty-seven rounds from an assault rifle (see above video). A bullet struck Delric in the arm and coursed through his body. He was pronounced dead at the hospital. Police believe that the intended victim was connected with the residence. At this writing the killers remain at large.

On February 26 a car with two adults and two small children [was set upon by a pair of Detroit hoodlums](#) who had committed two robberies and two carjackings during the previous day. For reasons that are unclear the bandits opened fire with an assault rifle, critically wounding a six-year old boy, who at last word is still hanging on. Both robbers were caught. Each was fifteen years old.

Determined to keep her troubled 14-year old son on the straight and narrow, a Detroit mother had forbidden him from running around with toughs. Neither was he to bring over his girlfriends. So on February 27, while his mother slept on the couch, [the angry youth took her fiancée's shotgun](#) and shot his mother dead. He then drove off in the family car. Police soon stopped the vehicle and arrested the youth. His uncle, the victim's brother, said he still loved the boy.

Things have indeed been getting worse in the once-proud "Motor City." There were 344 homicides in 2011, a twelve percent increase from 2010. Forty-nine murders have taken place so far this year, versus 39 during the same period in 2011. [Mayor Dave Bing is outraged.](#) "We cannot just cannot stand idly by and accept this. We have to be enraged at this point." At a hastily-called news conference [police and the Feds pledged](#) to expand a six-month old initiative to process gun-carrying felons through the Federal system, where resources are more plentiful and penalties more stringent. "I made it my

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personal resolution in 2012 to reduce homicides in the city of Detroit,” said the U.S. Attorney. “This is not a bunch of talking heads up here. We mean this,” said the local DEA chief. ATF offered \$5,000 for information leading to the arrest of those responsible for the nine-month old boy’s murder. Another \$5,000 was pitched in by Crimestoppers.

This is nothing new. Authorities in Detroit have repeatedly tightened the screws. Police chief Ralph Goodbee remarked that bringing down the hammer requires “a community willing to come up with information,” which by implication Detroit isn’t. “When you’ve got parents afraid of their kids,” said Mayor Bing, “you know you have not done a good job as a parent. You need to start disciplining those young people when they come out of the womb,” which by implication Detroit’s parents aren’t doing. Exactly how these deficiencies will be corrected wasn’t said.

Of course, it’s not just Detroit. So far this year [homicide has claimed seven lives](#) in the gang-ridden Los Angeles neighborhood of Wilmington. Others have been wounded but survived. Those killed include a 16-year old couple, gunned down February 26; a 41-year old man, shot dead January 28; a 21-year old man, gunned down January 22; and a 28-year old woman, stabbed to death January 2. No arrests have been made.

Authorities held a community meeting February 28. It was packed with frightened residents. Police expressed frustration at the lack of leads and implored those with information to come forward. Residents also staged a “take back the streets walk,” which will be expanded to a weekly event.

More shots rang out that evening, and another innocent Wilmingtonian fell wounded.

One would expect such troubles in Detroit and L.A. But Seattle? On February 27 [Seattle officials held a community meeting](#) to discuss a troubling rise in murders to nine this year, six more than at the same point in 2011. While victims are comparatively few – at 600,000 Seattle’s population is two-thirds that of Detroit and six times Wilmington’s – Mayor Mike McGinn nonetheless declared a “public safety emergency.” Deputy police chief Nick Metz promised increased attention to crime hotspots. “We are going to be constitutional in our policing, but we are going to be aggressive.” When pressed for a more comprehensive plan the mayor pointed to existing programs for troubled and underprivileged youths.

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Gun violence isn't just a problem in the big cities. On February 27, in the archetypical rural American community of [Chardon, Ohio](#), a 17-year old student [opened fire inside a high school cafeteria](#), killing three students and seriously wounding two (one remains paralyzed.) An intended victim who escaped with a grazed ear said that the shooter, who attended an alternative school for troubled teens, [had "gone Goth" after middle school](#).

Prosecutors have apparently concluded that the shooter is mentally ill. His weapon, a Ruger .22 caliber pistol, [had been legally purchased by an uncle](#) and was reportedly left in a family barn.

What's to be done? There seem to be no shortage of recommendations. Toughen up law enforcement. Severely punish criminals. Encourage citizens to cooperate with the authorities. Provide better social and mental health services. Get parents to do their jobs. Police have responded with a hodgepodge of strategies (for a review see "[Forty Years After Kansas City](#).") Some are directed at places, others at bad people, and others at bad people with guns. There's even a Federal agency, ATF, which is charged with interdicting the illegal flow of firearms.

Yet gun violence persists. That's to be expected. [According to ATF](#), more than five and one-half million firearms were manufactured in the U.S. in 2010. About the same number were produced in 2009. And while firearms sales seem stronger than ever, with [background checks hitting an all-time high](#) of 16.4 million in 2011, gun regulations grow weaker. Loopholes such as unrestricted gun transfers between private persons and at gun shows and no limits on purchase quantity assure massive gun flows even into states with restrictive regulations.

We've written extensively about these issues. (For example, see "[Where Do They Come From?](#)") Here we'll merely point out the obvious: that by virtue of their ubiquity, it's become impossible to keep guns from criminals and youth, let alone from otherwise good people who might misuse them. One could mount well-meaning campaigns from here to eternity, and in the end it will still be the same. Unless the never-ending flow of firearms is miraculously stemmed, or regulations are so tightened that gun possession and transfer are treated at least as seriously as driver licensing and vehicle registration, society doesn't stand a chance against gun violence.

Not one little bit.