



# **Operation Cloak and Dagger**

**For**  
**2005 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem**  
**Oriented Policing**

**Boston Police Department**  
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## **1. Summary**

In 2004, the City of Boston experienced the highest number of homicides that it had witnessed in ten years. By September 2004 the number of homicides had increased by 61% compared to the same time period in 2003. During that same year, a small area of the Dorchester section of Boston that geographically encapsulates 1 square mile, accounting for only 2% of the entire land area of the City of Boston, generated nearly 40% of the City's total number of gun-related homicides. Citywide, in 2004 non-fatal shootings were also the highest that they had been in a decade. Similarly, non-fatal shootings were disproportionately high in this small section of the city, accounting for nearly 20% of Boston's total shooting incidents.

The Boston Police Department (BPD), like many departments nationally, had lost significant numbers of personnel by that time. In the five years prior, the Department had been reduced in numbers of sworn officers by 300, or 13%, due to budget constraints. In order to respond to the spike in gun related crime, each of the Department's eleven districts was tasked with developing an effective strategy in order to produce tangible results.

District 3, the police district covering the Mattapan/Dorchester section of Boston, experienced the highest rates of gun-related violence of all areas of the City (Attachment 1). Most deeply affected within this District was the small area known as the Morton Street-Talbot Avenue Corridor. In the midst of this uptick in the city's rash of shootings, a new commander, Captain Timothy J. Murray, was appointed to District 3. Captain Murray was tasked with developing an approach to the surge of gun violence. Recognizing their shortage of manpower, he and his officers relied upon innovative and as-yet untried

methods to combat this issue. The measures taken collectively formed a multi-faceted, comprehensive operation designed to combat the gun violence and existing street crime that was permeating the Morton Street-Talbot Avenue Corridor.

The result was a 63% decrease in shooting incidents in the nine months following the inception of Operation Cloak and Dagger. Shooting homicides were reduced by 87%. Street crimes (i.e. robberies, stolen cars, and car breaks) also saw double-digit decreases. The positive effects of this Operation have carried over into 2005. District 3 now leads the City in lowered numbers of both fatal and non-fatal shootings, in total arrests, warrant arrests, and plain-clothes arrests.

## **2. Description**

### SCANNING

Gun related homicide is not a new problem for the District 3 jurisdiction. However, gun related homicides increased drastically in the first eight months of 2004. This has had a devastating impact on the local community and has been of major concern to the BPD. The Boston Police Department has been nationally recognized for targeting ‘hot spots,’ or high-crime areas, for problem solving and focused crime prevention and intervention initiatives. Crime hot spots are determined based upon data collections in which clusters of particular activities arise within certain geographical areas of the city. In this instance, a cluster appearing within one square mile of Dorchester accounted for 41 incidents of shootings (not including service calls for Shots Fired). These 41 incidents accounted for *22% of all shootings in the entire City of Boston* during the same time period.

Boston’s local media dubbed this area “Corridor of Death” and “Murder Mile.” Residents at community meetings vocalized their desire for heightened police safety initiatives. Officers themselves noticed a disturbing trend in increased numbers of young men, often with no prior criminal history, found in possession of firearms. Both groups of stakeholders preliminarily identified dual objectives:

1. Reduce the number of shooting cases and remove the offenders from the streets.
2. Discourage young people in this neighborhood from resorting to this level of violence.

The combined numbers of fatal and non-fatal shootings in this district were consequently reviewed not only on an intelligence- and investigative-driven basis, but also in a systemic, problem-solving approach.

To compound the overarching problem of this area's rising death tolls and shootings, like other districts, District 3 suffered a shortage of manpower. The problem, therefore, was two-fold: How could the District do more with less?

### ANALYSIS

Upon initial review, the new District Commander deemed that such a highly disproportionate number of shootings in the Morton Street-Talbot Avenue Corridor should be both attributable to a cause, and responsive to a new policing strategy. First, he concluded the need to fully understand the problem, including its root cause(s). Second, he sought out multiple sources of information to determine the pervasiveness of gun crime and the overall criminal environment in the Corridor. Lastly, relying on data and qualitative analysis to focus efforts and limited resources, he identified measures to address the issues of greatest concern.

What was needed to gain a full understanding of how vast and pervasive this problem truly was. Until this point, much anecdotal evidence, but little statistical analysis, highlighted the rash of gun violence and correlated problems in the Corridor alone. Police officers working in District 3, for example, noticed the emergence of greater numbers of gangs in the area, including those large and organized as well as those small and loosely defined. In 2004, the youth population of Mattapan/Dorchester

appeared to be on the rise. In fact, the 2000 Census recorded a double-digit increase in the under-17 year-old population on the District. Additionally, officers noted the nature of gang “beefs” among these youth oftentimes escalated more rapidly, and more lethally, than in prior years. What would begin as a personal difference between two individuals – over seemingly minor differences as much as over large-scale drug feuds or retaliatory vendettas – emerged into a full-blown gang war. This phenomenon, officers theorized, must be attributable to an attitude promulgating the utility of gun violence.

From this preliminary determination, District 3 took the next step, which was to review data collected by the BPD regarding firearm violence and street crimes, and devise a test to measure youth’s attitudes towards firearms.

Data: The BPD assembled statistical information that revealed the following:

- From January 1, 2004, through September 4, 2004, there were fifteen (15) Homicides committed within the Morton – Talbot Corridor by means of a handgun. In addition, there were a total of twenty-seven (27) Non-Fatal Shootings. (Attachment 2)
- Far and away, the Firearm Homicides and Non-Fatal Shootings, which took place within the Morton – Talbot Corridor, accounted for the majority of such cases on District 3. The 15 Gun Related Homicides accounted for 75% of all such cases on District 3, within that time frame, and the 27 Non-Fatal Shootings accounted for 61% of all shooting cases on District 3.
- Furthermore, *the 15 Firearm Homicides, which took place within the Morton Talbot Corridor, accounted for 39% of all the Firearm Homicides in the entire*

*City of Boston*, during that same time period. In addition, the 27 Non-Fatal Shootings accounted for 18% of all the Non-Fatal Shootings in the City of Boston, during that same time frame.

Non-Traditional Indicators:

In order to obtain the full scope and toll of gun violence in this area, additional indicators of *all* street crimes and violence needed to be looked at. The notion that increased street crimes, such as drug activity, robberies, and car theft, also contributes to, or lends itself to, an increase in firearm-related crime is supported through the “broken windows” philosophy<sup>1</sup>, which recognizes the connection between disorder, fear, crime and urban decay. Thus, a third objective of this initiative emerged: combating street crime. Data was collected for several other crimes and reviewed. The analysis narrowed down particular crime types or conditions that are often indicators of violent crime and create additional crime fears in the community:

➤ Street Crimes and Motor Vehicle Thefts

In each of the two years leading up to Operation Cloak and Dagger, there were on average 100 robberies and over 200 car-breaks in the Morton Street-Talbot Avenue Corridor. Knowing from investigations involving shooting incidents and other street crimes that stolen vehicles are often used in some capacity, District 3 gathered statistics on car thefts. It was evident from this research that certain makes and models of cars had a higher probability to be stolen than others. This finding further reinforced the District

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<sup>1</sup> “Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in our Communities,” Kelling and Coles, 1996.

Commander's belief that "crime travels on wheels" – the commonsensical notion that many street crimes and violent crimes are aided through the use of stolen vehicles, either as a method to flee a scene, transport guns, or do a drive-by shooting. As noted in the Kansas City Gun Experiment, traffic stops are often the most effective method in locating illegal guns.<sup>2</sup>

➤ Warrants and Drug Dealing

In the past, a high percentage of those arrested for violent street crimes also had outstanding warrants for their arrests on other offenses. Thus, warrant apprehension was paramount. District 3 intelligence shed light on the fact that much of the gun violence occurring in the Morton-Talbot Corridor could be attributed to those who are already wanted for outstanding warrants and/or those involved in street crimes and drug activity.

➤ After Hours Parties

District 3 also saw a trend in shootings in terms of the times of their occurrence and the venues in which they took place. In 2004, there were 47 shootings and 67 stabbings between the hours of 2:00 and 5:59 AM. This data supported officers' observance of the "spill over violence" tendency following late night parties, where vast numbers of intoxicated individuals find themselves in potentially explosive situations.

Several variables contributed to the pervasive effect from these parties, including

1. Numbers of officers on duty are at their lowest after midnight
2. This period of time is the same in which calls are made for domestic violence incidents, which receive higher priority than service calls for loud parties; that

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<sup>2</sup> "Promising Strategies to Reduce Gun Violence," OJJDP Report, NCJ173950.

3. Organizers of the parties rarely suffered legal consequences for its occurrence; and
4. Organizers derived an enormous financial profit from these parties, in which attendees not only pay an admission fee but also pay for alcohol.

Survey:

In addition to information presented through statistical analysis, it was apparent that the causal relationship between youth attitudes and perceptions, and violence committed with firearms needed to be further studied. This led to the development of youth survey, administered ad hoc to young people by officers *in the field*. Officers stopped youth in locations ranging from the District 3 booking desk to outside of crime scenes in order to request their participation in this survey. Over 100 Mattapan youth were asked the following question:

***Why is there such a demand, or desire, for guns by young people in this community?***

The responses were ranked in order of frequency, with 1 being the highest:

1. Power
2. Protection
3. “Because a beef is never squashed”
4. “It is better to be caught by the cops with a gun than by your street enemies without a gun.”
5. Because “doing time” is not a big deal

In addition to this survey question, officers posed another scenario describing a homicide (Attachment 3) to both these youth in the field, and to adults attending community meetings. It showed a marked difference in perceptions of violence. What adults in the community viewed as “senseless” and “mindless” youth viewed as “common sense” and necessary.

The next step following examination of the collected data and survey information from youth was to appraise the short-staffed police station's capabilities. Traditionally, when faced with a shortage of personnel, the BPD had cut its plain clothes patrols in order to compensate for the otherwise small number of uniformed officers. Uniformed patrols would be put on the streets in as great a number as possible to maintain maximum visibility. Community perception had much to do with this method of response. At community meetings and in various public forums, police officials are frequently asked to make their presence known in the neighborhoods, through highly visible patrols in marked cruisers and walking beats, in order to dissuade criminal activity.

As was most often the case, the BPD would follow this logic and increase targeted patrols of these hot spot areas, keeping their visibility – and presumably their deterrent effect – high. On the contrary, District 3 officers found that uniform and cruiser visibility was simply moving or delaying their neighborhood's crime problems from one time or location to another. Officers were frustrated by the knowledge that criminal activity often occurred immediately after they passed by. As was also borne out in the Kansas City Experiment, increased uniform patrol usually does little to decrease incidents of street crime.

In addition, it was believed that by targeting areas of known "impact player" activity, the problem was not addressed, but rather delayed until such time the police were no longer in sight. In a different time and economic situation, where the department could afford to keep patrols at these specific locations for long periods, this method may have proven more successful. In the current economic situation, however, that was simply impossible.

With the Department-generated data for shootings and collateral crimes, and the results from the youth surveys, in addition to taking stock of the District's current operational response tactics, District 3 was now presented a comprehensive framework with which to view their problem and develop responses.

## RESPONSE

A strategy was developed with the goal of sizeable reductions in shootings and homicides as primary consideration, with a secondary goal of reducing all levels of street crime. The key objectives in this endeavor included the creation of a proactive patrolling plan, promoting change in the community's view of police response, and production of high arrest rates and seizures of guns from the streets of District 3. **Operation Cloak and Dagger**, implemented in September 2004 and continuing presently, was designed to utilize large-scale covert policing methods formerly exclusive to undercover units and to attack the problem from a variety of creative and complementary angles.

- Police response capabilities

District 3 found that they had to fight the urge to follow the preexisting mindset regarding limited personnel - reducing plain-clothes patrols in favor of uniformed officers. Where officers could not increase in numbers, they needed to perform policing functions creatively. Risking criticism by the community for showing less of a visible presence, officers were taken from regular uniformed patrols and put in plain clothes. To our knowledge, this approach had not been taken previously in the Boston Police

Department. Where there were no plain-clothes units on some nights prior to Operation Cloak and Dagger, following its inception the majority of two-man cars were sent out each night in plain clothes. In addition, these officers were no longer driving in marked cruisers. Instead, they operated various undercover cars and “non-descript” vehicles such as taxis, utility vans, and sports cars, many borrowed from statewide law enforcement agencies and from local privately owned companies.

The change from traditional uniformed patrols to plain-clothes units resulted in such success that the District implemented a plain-clothes assignment to each of its three shifts. During the morning hours, plain-clothes officers were used to gain entry into homes in order to execute warrant service. Warrants are generally served at a suspect’s residence. Typically, a uniformed officer was far more likely to be ignored at the front door than greeted. During the afternoon and early evening hours, hot spots that were common meeting points for youth to congregate as well as known high-crime areas were patrolled and surveilled by plain-clothes units, where oftentimes officers were able to make observations of suspicious or illegal activity at a close distance and move quickly to apprehend. During late night hours, plain-clothes assignments included proactive surveillance of barrooms, food establishments, liquor stores, and after-hours parties.

- Youth perceptions

The youth survey conducted in Mattapan and Dorchester was very telling to District personnel. If the sight of uniformed officers could not dissuade young people from carrying and using weapons, officers reasoned that they needed to employ a new tactic. The survey presented officers with the challenge to find another way to put the

fear of being caught by police back into these young people, and the criminal “impact players,” if the sight of uniforms alone did not.

Indeed, perhaps the *sight* of police was exactly the problem. Police officers dressed in uniform and arriving in a marked cruiser were in effect announcing themselves not only to the law abiding community members who appreciated their presence, but also to the individuals or groups of young people who congregated in the Morton Street-Talbot Avenue Corridor’s hot spot areas that were potentially carrying firearms and/or committing other street crimes. Young people holding guns now became easily identifiable to plain-clothes officers, who could conduct surveillance on and approach the groups of youths undetected.

- Initiatives

“Operation Party Time” was conceived in response to the degree of shootings and other violent acts taking place during the hours of 2:00 and 5:59 AM and continues today. The parties, as stated earlier, provided a great deal of financial incentive to the organizers with little accountability. Operation Party Time removed that incentive. Plain-clothes officers were used to gain entrance to these parties, and – with marked dollar bills – pay admission costs as well as purchase liquor. Officers were now able to move in to make arrests, charging the organizers with Unlawful Sale of Alcohol. They would also seize the admission money, seize the liquor sales money, seize the alcohol, and when feasible seize the DJ equipment used at the party. Additionally, partygoers were checked for warrants.

With the knowledge that certain types of motor vehicles are more likely to be stolen and possibly used in the commission of street crimes and violent offenses, District 3 began “Target Tango.” This approach was novel in that the BPD’s Office of Research and Evaluation used data gathered on the makes and models of cars most frequently stolen both on District 3 and citywide to cross check with records from the Registry of Motor Vehicles. From this list, owners of those particular makes and models of cars living in the District 3 jurisdiction were identified. District personnel then conducted a direct mailing to those vehicle owners and advised them of the likelihood their car could be stolen and suggested they contact the police station. Through corporate sponsorship with local banks, District 3 had secured anti car theft devices which they were able to offer residents at discounted rates, most for as little as 25% of the market price.

“Operation Pick Off” was designed to address the high number of outstanding warrants. By increasing District 3’s Warrant Arrests and by making the operation very pro-active the District was able to reduce its street crime and overall crime such as robberies, car thefts, assaults, and other Part 1 crimes. The same premise was assigned to increasing the District’s drug arrests. Where the prior tendency was to focus efforts on apprehending the drug dealer, netting large seizures of drugs and money, the District 3 Commander took an “all crimes” approach to seek arrests of both dealer and user, as drug users had oftentimes proven responsible for a significant amount of area street crime.

### ASSESSMENT

Once the data was collected for comparison, the success of Operation Cloak and Dagger was evident. Arrests skyrocketed and crime plummeted. The process leading to

this operation was *innovative, logical and sequential*. Not only has the success of Operation Cloak and Dagger been evidenced by tangible and astounding drops in gun crimes and increases in arrests, but also by the virtual turn-around in the district's patrol operations and the neighborhood perception of police response.

### Homicide

First and foremost, during the eight months preceding Operation Cloak and Dagger (January to September 4) there were 15 homicides with firearms in the Morton Street-Talbot Avenue Corridor. In the ten months following the Operation there have been two (2). These figures are in keeping with the overall District 3 trend, but in sharp contrast to the rest of the City. (Attachment 4) Citywide homicide rates for the first half of 2005 rose by 7% from those in the first half of 2004.

### Shootings

Rates of all shootings dropped by 63% in the Morton Street-Talbot Avenue Corridor. (Attachment 5) Specifically, there were 26 non-fatal shootings in the Corridor during the eight months preceding Operation Cloak and Dagger; since that time there have only been 13. (Attachment 6) District 3 also saw a 21% increase in firearm seizures as compared to the same period of the Operation in the prior year. (Attachment 7)

### Street Crime

Drug arrests in the District increased from 142 in 2003 to 319 in 2005, or 45%. Over the course of the first five months of 2005, warrant arrests increased 97% over the

previous year. (Attachment 8) During Operation Cloak and Dagger there were 54 robberies in the Morton Street-Talbot Avenue Corridor, a 32% drop from the two previous years (over the same time frame) where that area averaged 80 robberies. One of the largest drops of any shift was the midnight shift, where robberies were cut in half (-50%). In addition, Robberies by Means of a Firearm decreased from 25 (in each of the two previous years during the same time frame) to 15.

There were 209 car break-ins District-wide during the Operation, representing a 43% reduction from the two previous years (over the same time frame) where the District averaged 367 car breaks. In the Morton-Talbot Corridor alone car breaks were cut in half (-50%) during Operation Cloak and Dagger.

#### After Hours Parties

Following the *first week* of Operation Party Time four (4) parties were shut down, resulting in 5 arrests, seizure of 4 loads of DJ equipment valued at thousands of dollars, and the confiscation of a .357 Magnum and a MAC-11 semi-automatic firearm. A fifth party was shut down that week before it was able to begin. Support for this initiative also came from a local City Councilor, who filed legislation making it a violation of city ordinance to host such parties.

#### Stolen cars and traffic enforcement

Target Tango produced the highest number of traffic violation citations within the City of Boston. From January to April 2005 there has been a total of 5,661 citations for

such violations, a 66% increase from the same time period in 2004. These citations represented nearly 1,000 more than the next closest district's rate during the 2005 period.

During Operation Cloak and Dagger there were 341 stolen cars District-wide, representing a large drop from the two previous years (over the same time frame) where the District averaged 460 stolen cars.

### Public Perception

Though initially concerned that residents of the District 3 neighborhoods, particularly those living in the Morton Street-Talbot Avenue Corridor, would react harshly to the lack of visible police presence, the results seem to have led to their trust and approval. Whereas earlier the residents expressed frustration that police never seemed to be around when they were needed, since the inception of Operation Cloak and Dagger they began to see results. Residents have witnessed scores of arrests by plain-clothes officers outside their homes, and have also seen the Operation's success highlighted at community meetings and public forums. Finally, the local media had something positive to report. (Attachment 9)

The seemingly simple change in clothing and vehicle produced significant results in reactions to police by area youth and impact players. Those questioned told officers many times during Operation Cloak and Dagger that plain-clothes officers had made them feeling "paranoid." Plain-clothes officers, it appeared, had finally put the fear of being caught by the police back into their minds.

Residents in the community generally associated undercover officers with specialized BPD units particularly known for their aggressive efforts. Plain-clothes

officers in the District were now similarly viewed as aggressive and pro-active. So, too, were they recognized as having turned the tables on criminally involved and/or high-risk youth (who later admitted that the obvious nature of uniformed officers made them less of a threat, as they were easier to spot and therefore avoid).

Also noteworthy was the belief expressed by many of these youth that the number of district personnel had actually grown. They were unable to account for so many police officers appearing out of uniforms. No longer able to see or hear a police officer approaching, or in their midst, youth began questioning where, when, and *if* they should conduct criminal activity.

Youth's and impact players' attitudes were measured in part by direct feedback. These young men vocalized their frustration with the new ability of police to "sneak up" on them. They described feeling anxious, and wondered how many more police could be patrolling in a given area at a given time. Moreover, these plain-clothes assignments had a deterrent effect. Once word spread that these officers could be located virtually anywhere, or operating any type of vehicle, the population of youth and impact players grew more wary of conducting illegal activity. The success, therefore, was not solely in the numbers of arrests that were made possible by the units, but by word of it's success spreading among the target population.

### Police Perception

The shift from reliance on uniforms and marked cruisers to more covert appearance was enormously successful in District 3. Total arrests by the plain-clothes

patrols in District 3 were nearly triple those of the next highest district during Operation Cloak and Dagger. (Attachment 10)

The change in operations was a novel approach: patrolmen who had been working for the Boston Police Department for as little as six months were eligible to participate in this initiative. Many officers assigned to plain-clothes units noted that they learned more about policing in a short time in this manner than they had over long periods of time performing traditional uniformed policing. Plain-clothes assignments had previously been reserved for veteran officers, but now were open to any officer that wished to perform this work and could handle its aggressive demands. Another positive outcome from this initiative was that officers who used to believe assignments to the plain-clothes units were based on favoritism or seniority now knew the assignment to be merit-based.

### **3. Agency and Officer Information**

1. The problem solving initiative, known as “Operation Cloak and Dagger”, was conceived, formulated, and implemented on the District or Station House level. The City of Boston is subdivided into 11 District Police Stations. Each District is commanded by a Boston Police Captain, whose Civil Service rank is Captain and whose official title is District Commander.

“Operation Cloak and Dagger” was a District 3 initiative that was conceived by Captain Tim Murray, who is the District 3 Commander, in conjunction with the District 3 Supervisory Staff. It has been reviewed Department-wide, and lessons taken from it administered in other districts.

2. In terms of training and/or familiarity with the concept of Problem Oriented Policing, over the course of his career, Captain Murray, and the Sergeants and Lieutenants at District 3, have all had to take Civil Service Promotional Exams in order to achieve the ranks of Sergeant, Lieutenant, and Captain.

The course study books, from which the promotional exams were based, contained lengthy sections on Problem Oriented Policing and the S.A.R.A. Model. As such, the Captain and his Supervisory Staff have all studied these concepts and have passed promotional exams and been promoted based on these study materials.

3. Officers who performed exceptionally well were given more opportunities to work in plainclothes assignments. This merit based assignment system, which was – and still is being employed -- during Operation Cloak and Dagger is being done so regardless of job seniority. In fact, many of the standout Officers, who are now working permanently in plainclothes, have only been on the job less than 1 or 2 years.

Other incentives included merit based “C” Days or Commendation Days, where the Captain would grant an additional Day Off for stellar or heroic work, (*e.g. a valorous gun arrest, or an exceptional street investigation which resulted in impressive arrests or seizures, etc.*). As incentive for their efforts, the District Commander established a “gun wall” inside the station house that displays photos taken of the guns recovered during plain-clothes assignments. These photos serve as a constant reminder to the officers in the District that their hard and courageous work is praiseworthy and recognized.

4. Officers were encouraged to find workable solutions to respond to the gun and street crime problem. The encouragement from the Commander and Supervisory staff to utilize unconventional methods to approach and apprehend suspects left much problem solving to the plain-clothes officers on case-by-case-bases. These situations

prompted many officers to describe their greater degrees of on-the-street education over lessons learned in uniformed patrols.

5. There were no problems identified with the problem oriented policing model.
6. Additional resources committed to the initiative included a state appropriation for additional overtime funding over two years for police officers at District 3.

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