

WHAT STRATEGIES CAN LAW
ENFORCEMENT EMPLOY TO REDUCE
TAGGING-GRAFFITI CRIME
BY THE YEAR 2004?

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INTRODUCTION

Graffiti is defined as markings or drawings for purposes of artistic expression, political statements, acts of hatred aimed towards groups or individuals, territorial or "turf" designations, etc. ¹ Even though graffiti is an old phenomenon, the root causes behind the behavior have remained constant. Graffiti is produced by individuals to send messages, tell stories, or to obtain recognition for those producing the writings.

Graffiti has been around for decades and there is reason to believe it will continue to be around for decades to come. Graffiti crimes, however, used to be more confined to special locations or territories and were not a major issue to law enforcement or the community. But during the past few years a new form of graffiti crime has been occurring and has severely impacted communities and law enforcement. This form of graffiti crime is referred to as "tagging", and is the focus of this study.

This form of graffiti crime is normally produced by juveniles for the purpose of being recognized and obtaining fame for themselves or the group they have joined. ² They use spray paint, felt tip markers, shoe polish, glass etching tools, and any other implement they can get their hands on that will enable them to write their "tag" on any possible surface. ³ "Taggers" will go to great lengths to spread these writings as far and wide as possible and usually look for public property to deface that will ensure the most visible surface to the greatest number of people. These "tags" are not used for turf markings, political statements, etc., but as one tagging-graffiti vandal put it, "because I like the fame and the chase". ⁴ They rarely resemble any form of "art" and usually consist of cryptic letters or symbols that are meaningful to other "taggers", but are just ugly symbols defacing property to ordinary citizens.

Over the next decade these types of crimes may no longer be referred to as "tags", and they may not take the same form as they do today, but the author found there is sufficient evidence to suggest they will still be a significant community and law enforcement issue for the future. ⁵

The purpose of this futures article is to look into the future and to determine how law enforcement may best prepare to reduce this type of crime. Taking a "wait and see" attitude to see if it will fade away or become a greater problem is a very poor stance for law enforcement to take.

While scanning newspapers and magazine articles and other current data on the subject, the author located hundreds of articles describing current and future concerns about the tagging/graffiti crime issue. ⁶

The current data shows that the majority of those individuals involved in tagging-graffiti crimes, are juveniles ranging from twelve to eighteen years of age. ⁷ The Orange County juvenile probation dept. reports that juvenile vandalism arrests were fairly constant during the 80's with total arrests ranging between five to seven hundred per year. ⁸ From 1990 to 1993, however, they reported increasing numbers of arrests ranging from seven hundred in 1990 to over thirteen hundred in 1993. ⁹

The California Department of Finance, demographic research unit, projects the total California juvenile population to increase from approximately 2.8 million in 1993 to approximately 3.8 million in 2004. ¹⁰ Since juveniles are responsible for the vast majority of tagging-graffiti crimes, a significant increase in the total juvenile population is an important piece of data to consider in determining future concerns regarding this crime.

The literature scan and interviews also confirmed that "taggers" seek fame and recognition for their efforts. ¹¹ Studies showing the need for young people to be accepted and to obtain psychological fulfillment in areas of individualism and self-worth have been well documented and experienced. As society moves towards greater

accomplishments in technology and furthering the movement of a global information society during the next decade, the need for young people to fulfill these social and psychological needs will be challenged.

If the root causes of tagging-graffiti crimes come from these social and psychological needs,¹² and the total numbers of juveniles in California is projected to increase by approximately 25% over the next decade, then there is sufficient data to project an increasing concern over these type crimes and a need to develop strategies that law enforcement can employ to reduce tagging-graffiti crime for the future.

Technologically, the types of future tools that could be used by graffiti vandals to obtain their goals is only limited by the imagination. Tagging-graffiti vandals armed with lasers could write on almost any surface, or they could electronically use computers and T.V. screens as the "surface" to vandalize. The possibilities are endless. Conversely, the future tools that law enforcement may use against this kind of vandalism could be as wide in variety as the vandals tools.

Economically, the costs associated with tagging-graffiti are staggering. Orange County reports clean-up costs alone have increased from 1.5 million dollars in 1988 to over 4 million dollars in 1993.¹³ At the current pace, projected costs would be over 7 million dollars by 2004.

Environmentally, the paint and other chemical products being dumped onto any available surface is a concern now and will be in the future. The kinds of tools or implements used in the future could become even more of a problem.

Politically, the amount of community involvement in this area has been extremely high. Churches, service groups, schools, neighborhoods, etc. have all banded together to deal with this blight. Politicians and law enforcement leaders need to be prepared to answer the future needs of their clients.

Tagging-graffiti crimes in 2004 may not resemble the kinds we see today, but the need for law enforcement to develop plans and strategies to proactively approach the coming decade is necessary and important to the communities we serve.

FUTURES STUDY

The research began with the question, **What Strategies can Law Enforcement employ to reduce Tagging-Graffiti Crimes by the year 2004?**

The author took that question and by using a futures wheel and by meeting with a group of command college law enforcement administrators, the following sub-issue questions were developed;

What coalitions/relationships should law enforcement form to impact this issue?

What impact will future technologies have on the issue?

What resources will be needed to manage the issue?

Major Findings

The author conducted futures research by using the Nominal Group Technique. The nominal group consisted of ten professionals having expert knowledge of some component of the tagging-graffiti issue. They consisted of law enforcement administrators, school principals and a superintendent, juvenile justice administrators, a private businessman involved in graffiti cleanup and a crime analyst. The group identified thirty-seven trends and thirty-one events relevant to the issue question. The group then identified the top ten trends and events from those candidate lists.

The group then gave a numerical score relative to each trend to forecast its impact on the issue five and ten years from now. The group also gave a numerical score to the top ten events relative to the probability of the event occurring and its impact (positive or negative) on the issue.

The top ten trends selected by the group:

1. Status of traditional family structures.

2. Level of tagging gangs involvement in violence.
3. Prevention Education K-8.
4. Status of economic conditions.
5. Level of community involvement with government/schools.
6. Taggers finding new ways to achieve their goals.
7. Level of government resources.
8. Level of Orange County hard dollar costs associated with repair/removal of "tagged" property.
9. Level of Orange County juvenile vandalism/malicious mischief arrests.
10. Changes in California's projected 12-18 year old population.

The top ten events were:

1. State mandates prison time for graffiti offenders.
2. Street gangs declare war on taggers.
3. New law passed requiring community service from parent/child for first time graffiti offender.
4. Uniform school dress codes adopted.
5. Grant awards to local business to employ youth.
6. Media agrees to refrain from reporting tagging.
7. California bankrupt.
8. Criminalized 601 status offenses.
9. Scientists develop paint-proof surfaces.
10. U.S. becomes involved in large-scale war.

Cross-Impact Analysis

The author and a focus group of colleagues took the top trends and events and conducted a cross impact analysis of both events to trends and events to events.

The author used a cross-impact matrix to score and analyze the results. Those scores were then used to develop three future scenarios. The scenario that was

chosen is the one that describes the most desired future. This most desired future scenario is written in a way that tells the reader what trends and events occur to bring the desired end result. This then allows strategic plans to be developed that will produce the desired end result.

Most desired future scenario

In this "what if" scenario, the most desired future occurs. The events that were selected were based upon their probability and impact scores after cross-impact analysis was performed. Policies were implemented to manage the effects of the impacts. This scenario is presented as if it were an address being delivered by Chief John Wilson of a fictional North Orange County police department.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have come to speak to you today regarding our fight against tagging-graffiti and similar types of vandalism. Before I begin I would like to discuss some history regarding this problem which covers the past ten years. Prior to 1995 tagging crimes were spiraling out of control. Surprisingly, during 1995 street gangs declared war on tagger gangs (E-2). There were increased shootings, drive-by's, stabbings, and assaults of all kinds (T-2). Then it started to turn around. I think there were two major reasons. First, as "taggers" and street gangs started killing and injuring one another, it became more difficult to do their crimes and get away with it. They built in their own kind of accountability. Second, we developed policy that enhanced our gang prevention efforts. We had already organized gang units and utilized their intelligence systems to keep better track of those involved in both street and "tagging" gangs. Citizens like yourselves had had enough and started helping through volunteer "citizen watch" patrols.

By 1996 the courts gave school boards the right to adopt dress codes, and this improved problems on campus and helped single parents and those struggling to make ends meet and get their children school clothes without high cost (E-4).

During that same year, the police department met with the local school boards and shared in the cost of providing tagging-graffiti/gang prevention education to all children grades K-8. The police department helped provide personnel and material to teach these types of curriculum (T-3). Grant monies were also made available by the state to help employ youth in local businesses to keep them off the street (E-5).

In 1998 the legislature passed two bills that had significant impact on tagging crimes. Adult taggers were given mandatory prison time for damage over \$1,000.00 (E-1), and juveniles were required to perform community service with their parents for first time convictions (E-3). Also in 1998 the juvenile laws were changed to again allow youth who were runaways, truants, incorrigibles, curfew

violators, etc., to be arrested and to receive adequate counseling and incarceration if necessary (E-8).

The war with North Korea in 1999 also had an impact on the tagging issue (E-10). Some young people were able to find jobs in the defense industry, and many others joined the armed services.

By 1998, the state of California, after surviving the Clinton era, was barely afloat and it almost went bankrupt (E-7). The state made a dramatic turn-around through Pacific Rim investments, and things started to improve. But before this occurred, our city saw financial crises coming, and in 1995 began working towards economic independence from the state. The police department developed policies that cut back on services regarding crimes without suspects or leads, and concentrated on safety and order issues. Since our Proposition 13 "bail-out" monies were all taken back by 1996 (T-4), we no longer looked to the state for help. Our policy was to vitalize problem-oriented policing, and to bring in volunteers and community organizations to keep our city from going bankrupt (T-5). Even though the state increased sales tax to nine percent in 1999 to try and get back on its feet, our citizens still approved a special assessment bond that provided for more officers and other police personnel in the same year.

Some other factors came along that also helped in this effort. Four years ago, in 1999, scientists discovered a chemical coating agent that let anyone just wash graffiti off with a garden hose (E-9). But in that same year "taggers" then started using handheld lasers instead of paints to cut into the surfaces of public and private buildings (T-6). We encouraged the city council to prohibit possession of these lasers by anyone under twenty-one years old. The law helped control this type of vandalism, and the strategy proved to reduce this kind of crime in our city.

The years of gangs "owning the streets" started to fade. By 2002 we had reduced the amount of street gang and tagging gang members. The policies we enacted increased the accountability for these criminals and the consequences proved to be too high for most. Our "zero tolerance" policy has continued for the last eight years, and I expect to see it continue for the next eight. Prevention education is hard to measure regarding effectiveness, but I believe it has made and will continue to make a significant impact in the future.

We have not eliminated such crimes, nor do I expect to ever see that happen; but our strategies have in fact reduced tagging-graffiti crimes and arrests in the year 2004 as compared to the levels in 1994."

Policy Considerations

After considering the issue and sub-issues, the futures study, cross-impact analysis, and the selected future scenario, the author then developed some policy considerations that would apply to developing a strategic plan. The policies were selected based upon their likely successful implementation. The policies are applied

to a fictional North Orange County police department that neighbors the East Los Angeles County area. Policies that were considered are as follows:

1. Maintain and enhance prevention education through school programs. Build effective models and presentations to grades K-8 through a collaborative effort of parents, school teachers and the department.
2. Employ a "zero tolerance" standing against all "tagging-graffiti" vandalism. All such crimes will be prosecuted.
3. Detectives will no longer investigate crimes without suspects or leads, but will concentrate efforts on gangs, violent crimes, and those causing fear to the general public. (order and maintainance)
4. Problem-oriented policing will be part of efforts to attack these crimes. Volunteers and "citizen watch" patrols will be utilized.
5. Working with citizens to maintain public safety resources.
6. Support legislation controlling use of technological advancements for criminal purposes.
7. Work with all law enforcement intelligence networks, and put resources into gang and tagging prevention. Consequences for "tagging" will be substantial.
8. Long term crime prevention efforts through education will be directed at "tagging-graffiti" vandalism.

Strategic Plan

The policy considerations were used to develop a mission statement and to review the organization's environment as it relates to the issue and sub-issue questions.

A group of law enforcement colleques met with the author and used a modified delphi process technique to identify stakeholders and stakeholder assumptions. The group then identified a list of alternative strategies to consider in accomplishing the mission. The strategies that were considered were as follows:

1. Law enforcement agencies would equip local citizen volunteers with video cameras for "citizen watch" patrols.

2. Law enforcement to provide teachers in classrooms (grades K-8) teaching anti-graffiti, gang message.
3. Government to provide cash rewards /tax credit for "graffiti tips".
4. Promote and encourage legislatures to create mandatory sentences for graffiti offenders.
5. Law enforcement develops intelligence networks (with schools, other agencies) to identify and prosecute graffiti vandals.
6. Law enforcement develops graffiti "handwriting comparisons" for prosecution efforts.
7. Restraining orders on "594 registrants" restricting their associations and movements.
8. Law enforcement develops special enforcement units to suppress graffiti activity.
9. Certain places are authorized for artistic expression through graffiti.
10. Regionalized problem oriented team against graffiti.
11. Security /private police task force- bounty hunter.

Although the group felt a two-prong attack on the problem was the best approach to take, (enforcement and prevention education), the prevention education strategy received the highest score. It was viewed as the most proactive and most likely to produce the desired results in the long run. The justifications regarding the benefits of the strategy are as follows;

The long-term benefits of prevention through education supplement short-term benefits of enforcement.

Although enforcement will still be critical, effective education can move us towards a reduction in this behavior for the future.

All listed stakeholders would support and work towards helping law enforcement implement these programs.

Children who have poor family life badly need additional education, training and accountability for their actions. These programs could provide some minor form of substitution for lack of proper training at home.

Law enforcement officers in the classroom develop close ties with the children of the community and can impact their future behavior.

Shared funding with schools can help overcome budget constraints.

Developing relationships with parents through their children can create opportunities for parental counseling and training.

The root causes of tagging-graffiti behavior are complex, and can best be attacked at the grade-school level.

With increasing calls for service and decreasing resources, education provides the best investment for the future.

Transition management plan

A model plan was developed that could be used by any agency in developing a partnership with the schools and parents in implementing graffiti prevention education instruction in grades K-8. A representative of constituencies model was recommended as the best structure to organize in transitioning the selected strategy into implementation.

Conclusion

If the implementation of prevention education against tagging vandalism is successfully implemented, and is concurrently conducted with increased accountability through regional and local law enforcement efforts, it is probable that the desired future state will be achieved. It is recommended that additional studies be conducted and strategic and transition management plans be developed to provide for future enforcement enhancements of tagging-graffiti crimes to be used in conjunction with the prevention education plan. The findings relative to the sub-issue of what relationships must be formed include: schools; parents; businesses; district attorney; probation; and other public service agencies.

The findings relative to the sub-issue of how technology will cause or prevent tagging-graffiti in the future include:

- * Taggers will likely find tools to overcome obstacles such as locking up paint supplies, felt tip markers, glass etching tools, etc., by using future technology (i.e. laser tools, caustic chemicals, paint guns, etc.)

- * Technology will also be used to monitor, collect data, network intelligence information, and to develop surfaces that have coatings or chemical properties that resist defacement by tagging crimes.

The findings relative to the sub-issue of what resources will be needed by law enforcement include:

- *Personnel for classroom presentations and enforcement task forces.

- *Capitol items such as monitoring devices, computers, vehicles, etc.

- *Information networks.

- *Experts in intelligence gathering and identification of taggers.

- *Political leaders support and efforts to pass legislation.

- *Involved citizens for volunteer work in cleanup and enforcement.

The findings support strategies employed by law enforcement that focus on prevention education in the schools and coalitions of public agencies and citizens towards enforcement efforts. The findings support those strategies, and if employed by law enforcement, they will reduce the level of tagging-graffiti crimes by the year 2004.

Note; it is recommended that in addition to the selected prevention education strategy, that fully developed future enforcement strategies also be developed to deal with both the short and long term issues relevant to the crime of graffiti vandalism during the next decade.

ENDNOTES

1. Random House Webster's College Dictionary New York: Random House, 1992, page 579.
2. John M. Glionna, "L.A. Taggers up the ante, guns added", Los Angeles Times, May 1993.
3. Juan C. Arancibia, "Panel Takes Steps to Fix Anti-Graffiti Ordinance", The Press-Enterprise, Feb. 26, 1993.
4. Sergio Palos, "War of the Walls", The Los Angeles Times, July 14, 1993.
5. Wesley G. Skogan, Disorder and Decline, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990, page 49.
6. Charles Metivier, "Cost of Cleaning graffiti", The Orange County Register, Feb. 6, 1993.
7. Graph- "California Projected 12-18 year old population"- California Department of Finance, Demographics Unit.
8. Graph-"Orange County Juvenile Vandalism/Malicious Mischief arrests"- The Orange County Juvenile Probation Dept., 1994.
9. Graph- "Orange County Juvenile Vandalism/Malicious Mischief arrests".
10. California Department of Finance (demographics research unit) 1994.
11. National Graffiti Information Network, newsletter, Hurricane, Utah.
12. John M. Glionna.
13. Charles Metivier.

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