VIEWS FROM THE FIELD:

Flashgangs and Flashgangbanging:

How can local police prepare?

By

Carter F. Smith, Ph.D., Jeffrey P. Rush, D.P.A.,
Daniel Robinson and Megan Karmiller

Abstract
        Flash mobs, participants in an event in which a group of people are organized via some form of telecommunications, assemble suddenly in a public place, perform an unusual and sometimes seemingly pointless act for a brief time, and then disperse. A recent phenomenon synthesizes the activity of flash mobs and street gangs. Communities everywhere have experienced the negative effects of street gangs, and their proliferation has led to an increase in destructive crimes in the United States. A flash gang is a group that uses a social media connection to invite participants to a time and location where they commit a crime and then they split up. Local law enforcement needs to examine response policies to prepare for this new and dangerous phenomenon. Recent protests in the Middle East and North Africa were coordinated using similar strategies, spotlighting the power of using social media technology to oppose government action. The spontaneity and secrecy of the flash mob combined with the targeted crime and/or violence of the street gang produces a mix that is hard to combat even with inside intelligence. The instant access and extended reach of mobile phones and social media sites like Twitter and Facebook bring a twist that makes the spontaneous volatility even more difficult to prevent.

Introduction

        In the spring of 2003, strange activity was seen in streets, shopping centers, and other public access parts of New York City. A crowd with no clear social or political agenda gathered in seemingly random and spontaneous fashion to perform specific actions and then disperse. They had no apparent leader, had no recognizable agenda, and refused to bask in the notoriety their participation in these events brought (Walker, 2011). The event was provoked by an email from an anonymous account that inspired the recipients to be part of a mob of people for 10 minutes or less and forward the request to their friends (Walker, 2011).

        Flash mob-like activities have found a home in the political uprisings of the early 21st Century. Many recent anti-government protests were facilitated by social media. Social media and mobile phone technology have played a key role in coordi-

nating documenting opposition, resistance, and defiance across the Middle East and North Africa. In 2010, communities began experiencing a new phenomenon – flash mobs with crime and violence. Flash-mob-like activity with gang-like criminal activity has been reported in such diverse locations as Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Washington D.C. Almost all of the gangs in America would be able to organize a flash gangbanging operation.

Flash Mobs

A flash mob is a group of people, usually unknown to each other, who assemble suddenly in a public place, perform some unusual or notable activity according to predetermined instructions, and then quickly disperse (Duran, 2006). The phenomenon was apparently started by Bill Wasik, who used the activity to create art, harness the urge people have to join a group, and demonstrate a drive toward deindividualization (Wasik, 2006, p. 58). Wasik's flash mobs got their name from Niven's (1973) short story *Flash Crowd*. In Niven's story, teleportation allows for the emergence of mobile mobs and even riots. People quickly traveled upon hearing of an interesting occurrence (like a fight or protest). Noting a related use of technology and a desire to join a group, Savage (2003) gave the *flash mob* its name when describing their activities.

Flash mob instructions are usually distributed via digital communication networks, such as Internet postings, e-mail, or mobile phones (Duran, 2006). Flash mobs are an intriguing social phenomena. The organizer of the event(s) is not viewed as the leader, though attendees or participants look to that person for guidance (Walker, 2011). Organizers instantly create social group out of strangers, and the participants are both group members and deviants at the same time (Duran, 2006). At a set time, participants arrive, perform the agreed upon or directed action, and then leave, often right before the police arrive (Walker, 2011). Among the more noteworthy activities of flash mobs: 100 people danced to Michael Jackson's "Thriller" in Times Square; 1,500 people took part in a pillow fight in San Francisco; and 2,000 hardy souls slung snowballs in Washington, D.C. (Dade, 2011).

Flash mobs are hardly new, at least if you are using technology time (Smith, 2011). The synthesis or morphing of flash mobs and gangs; however, has produced a hybrid that few appear prepared to respond to, and for good reason. The spontaneity and secrecy of the flash mob combined with the no-holds-barred targeted crime and/or violence of the street gang produces a mix that would be hard to combat even with inside intelligence (Smith, 2011). The instant access and extended reach of social media sites like Twitter and Facebook bring a twist that makes the spontaneous volatility even more difficult to prevent.

Though the stated intention of flash mobs usually has indicated otherwise, there are many results that indicate a variety of intentions. Flash mobs appear to shock the audience while highlighting bizarre behavior (Walker, 2011). Flash mobs create a situation that appears anarchic, with unpredictable consequences for both participants and their audience (Walker, 2011). The only reference made to any political intention by flash mob creators was a desire to liberate public space (Walker, 2011). Flash mobs don't appear to be intent on committing crime, though they do intend to elude identification by either authority figures or members of the media.

Flash Gangs

Street gangs have been around since as far back as Chaucer in 1390 and Shakespeare in 1602, though little was known of the members of those groups (Klein, 1995). There were roughly one million gang members in the United States at the end of 2008 (NGIC, 2009). Many scholarly works spend a good amount of time addressing the absence of a uniform definition for gangs and gang activity (Ball & Curry, 1995; Klein, 1995; NGIC, 2009). With flash gangbanging, this is uniquely critical, as a key component of the definition may be otherwise absent. George Knox, with the National Gang Crime Research Center, coined the term *flash gang* in a letter dated June 15, 2011. *Flash Gang: a social media connection such as Twitter is used to invite participants to a time and location, they do something like robbery or assault, and they split up* (Knox, G. personal communication, June 15, 2011). He later noted that some gangs have focused on smash and grabs ......create a diversion, then smash window of an expensive jewelry or fur/leather store, and take what they can grab in seconds, and in seconds they are gone. Knox noted that if the youth phenomenon of *flash banging* ever goes *old school* (the target being high-end shopping, smash and grab style), then we will see a crime challenge (personal communication, June 15, 2011).

We are not trying to propose that gang bangers have necessarily transformed the flash mob to a new evolution with flash gangbanging. We are suggesting that gangbangers have used the notification techniques of flash mob organizers to issue a call to arms to their members and associates. The transformation, if it catches on, would be of gang banging, not flash mobbing. Some law enforcement professionals have referred to this activity as *flash robs* (Zimmerman & Bustillo, 2011), which alludes to the criminal activity, but appears to ignore the group dynamic and prior coordination amounting to, it appears, a conspiracy.

As a result of this "new" approaching to gang banging, will flash mobs as we've known them go away so as to not be associated with flash gangbanging? Time will tell, but it seems likely that as people have stopped wearing certain sports clothing regardless of their team affiliation, so too will the traditional flash mobs go away. Whether that's a good or bad thing we leave to others. That flash gangbanging is a bad thing, a "crime challenge" as Knox noted (personal communication, June 15, 2011) is without question.

Rush Limbaugh (2007) said that one's understanding of history begins upon their birth (Brainyquote, 2011). Certainly there is some truth to that, especially if one is not taught that which came before their birth. Sir Winston Churchill commented that "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it" (Bowers, 2011, para. 1). To some extent this is what's happening with flash gangs and gangbanging.

At least as far back as the 1990s, one of the authors had the privilege of working private security for concerts and special events at a local Birmingham, AL amphitheater. The amphitheater had a place known as "The Lawn." It was exactly that, a lawn; a lawn that could hold hundreds, indeed for some concerts, thousands of patrons. Almost without fail on any concert night, almost regardless of the artist(s)

performing, there would high school youths who bought tickets for "The Lawn" for the expressed of fighting. Fighting other youths from other (rival) high schools. Clearly there was pre-planning on the part of the youths, because, again, they came for the expressed purpose of engaging in violence (fighting) with their rivals. And of course the girls came as well, mostly to watch but sometimes they too would engage in the fighting. We knew this was the purpose because as they entered the gates, they would take their shirts off and began to roam, usually waiting for darkness (but not always) and to spot their rivals. The weekend concerts (i.e. all weekend, Friday through Sunday) with Hank Williams, Jr. and Lynrd Skynrd were especially busy nights where we usually ended up fighting from gates open to the end of the concert.

What's the point? Flash gang activity existed in the nineties. Is there a difference? The notifications were made by phone or in person as opposed to Facebook, Twitter, texting or e-mail. And the levels of violence weren't quite as bad as has been reported with the flash gangs addressed in this study.

It could also be argued that in many cases there was a difference in the participants, as most of the participants in the activity at the amphitheater were white youths, and in most cases middle class white youth. Regardless of class or race, the end result was the same: people hurt, people sent to the hospital and to jail. Again, not a new tactic, simply new technology.

This change in tactics is, however hugely important as the process speeds up significantly. Meaning here that in a matter of moments several hundred individuals can be somewhere causing problems. In late July 2011 outside Grauman's Chinese Theatre, 2000+ people showed up relatively quickly in response to a tweet by DJ Kaskade's inviting people to an impromptu block party (O'Brien, 2011). That tied up traffic in downtown Los Angeles and the freeways.

The crowd, as might be imagined, wasn't peaceful. It was reported that the crowd began fighting, taking on the cops and setting fire to a police car (Nordyke & Goldberg, 2011). The Los Angeles Police Department called out their SWAT team which kept the situation from "turning into an all-out riot" (O'Brien, 2011, para 8).

Nordyke and Goldberg report that DJ "Kaskade later took to Twitter to ask the crowd to calm down: 'Everyone needs to go home now! I don't want this to reflect badly on EDM or what we are about. Be respectful and chill out!!!'" (2011, para 9). It's important to note here how it was DJ Kaskade attempted to control the crowd: Twitter.

A similar thing occurred two weeks later, also in Los Angeles when rapper The Game gave out the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office phone number as his own. Tweeting to his "followers" that if they wanted an internship they should call the number. The sheriff's office reported that the phone lines were jammed for more than two hours (Morganstern, 2011). Sheriff's Captain Parker sent his own tweet to The Game asking him to stop, that he was compromising public safety. The Game's response: "Yall can track a tweet down but cant solve murders ! Dat was an accident but maybe now yall can actually do yall job !!!! #iSpeak4ThePeople" (sic) (Morganstern, 2011, para. 8).

Almost two decades ago Ball and Curry defined gangs as a "spontaneous, semisecret, interstitial, integrated but mutable social system whose members share common interests and that functions with relatively little regard for legality" (1995, p. 9). But they were never as spontaneous in appearance as modern day flash gangs. They also represented a slightly different type of group. These criteria have been generally accepted for identifying groups as gangs (Decker and Curry, 2003; Klein, 1995; Spergel, 1995):

- · The group has three or more members.

- · Members share a group identity and often other symbols.

- · Members view themselves as a gang, and they are recognized by others as a gang.

- · The group has permanence and organization.

- · The group is involved in criminal activity.

Analysts at the NGIC noted the lack of a uniform definition was one of the greatest impediments to the collection of accurate gang-related data. The NGIC analysts suggested definition offered by the National Alliance of Gang Investigators' Associations (NAGIA) be used:

A gang is a group or association of three or more persons with a common identifying sign, symbol, or name who individually or collectively engage in criminal activity that creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

We propose that the possession of an account with whatever form of social media used to communicate actions be used to replace the need for a common identifying sign, symbol, or name in order to properly classify flash gangs as gangs.

To use social media (whether Facebook, texting, Twitter, etc.) requires an account. It also requires an active movement on the part of the individual. That is, in most cases a social media account doesn't just happen. Someone makes the concerted effort to create the account, identify themselves (in some fashion, by name or alias) buy the phone, etc. Again, not something that just happens and the individual knows nothing about.

After that, the individual must then take the action to engage the account that is s/he sends out the Tweet, the text, posts on Facebook, sends an e-mail, etc. Additionally, the individual makes the announcement as The Game, DJ Kaskade and all the other "organizers" of the flash gang activity both here and around the world have done. Thus the individual is an active participant from the very beginning. They create an account, access the account and then make the pronouncement, call the troops as it were. In doing so they are directing an association of three or more persons to collectively engage in criminal activity that creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation which of course meets the requirement of the NAGIA's definition.

The earliest we have been able to find gang-like activity with flash mob-like technology-assisted surprise was in March 2004 when 3 dozen people were arrested

for a street fight arranged via an Internet chat room. Two Dallas gangs, after trading insults in a chat room, traded their keyboards for fists and baseball bats and arranged a time to meet and duke it out in real life. But that action didn't start a trend like the one seen in recent months. In March, 2007, in Chattanooga, TN, a large crowd was summoned to the Riverpark using mobile phones, and at least one person at the park had gang photos on his phone. A message went out: "Cookout today at Riverpark at 6:30. Everybody come out and chill. Send dis ta everbody you know. We tryin get da whole Chatt. out" (Chattanoogan.com, 2007). Sheriff deputies and Chattanooga Police officers had to be called when numerous fights broke out as the large crowd gathered after the text messages went out. The same thing had happened the previous Wednesday night (Chattanoogan.com, 2007). Up to 20 people were involved.

Flash Gangbanging

The seemingly random acts of the groups highlighted here should be concerning to law enforcement across the country. Flash-mob violence has recently been reported in many cities across the United States. The following comprise a representative sampling of flash mob-like activity that appears to qualify as flash gangbanging. Though it is doubtful that coordination between cities and groups occurred, there are a few similarities in the activities.

- In early June in Chicago, groups of youth were using text messaging and social media to gather at specified locations on the city's South Side, where robbers attacked people with pepper spray (Spielman, 2011).

- In April in Los Angeles, a man was shot during a flash mob organized on Twitter at a Venice Beach basketball court. A witness reported to police that "Venice beach bball ct going up tomorrow." There was mention of gang affiliations (Dade, 2011).

- One Philadelphia store owner observed that all of a sudden the street was really crowded. Members of the crowd began to jump up and down, and then utter chaos broke out. Some started beating each other up, while others began banging on the shop windows. "They were trying to climb in the windows on top of the people who were dining, so we pushed them out, we closed the doors and we locked the front doors" (Phillips, 2010, para. 7). Some say the crowd of youths was in the hundreds, while others say thousands (Phillips, 2010).

- In April 2011 in Washington, D.C., nearly 20 youths gathered outside the G-Star Raw clothing store in Dupont Circle and filed in together. They walked directly to the designer jeans and high-end shirts, initially behaving like usual, if rushed, customers. They then quickly left the store, before police arrived, stealing an estimated $20,000 in merchandise (Pettus, 2011).
- Nashville, TN, Decatur, AL, Milwaukee, WI, Oakland, CA, Vancouver, Canada, the District of Columbia, Denver, CO, Kansas City, MO; from north to south, west to east cities across America have experienced this phenomenon in almost the exact ways. And when the cops arrived, the banging didn't stop, indeed the flash gangsters took on the cops in most cases eventually losing but not before seri-

ously injuring many cops across the country.

As they evolve

Rheingold's (2002) theory about the power of mobile phones to mobilize users into 'smart' or 'flash mobs' has received a significant amount of attention. Rheingold (2002) used the 2001 presidential election in the Philippines – when protests organized by mobile phone users facilitated the overthrow of President Joseph Estrada – to illustrate how new technology enables people to act before government representatives know how or that they are communicating. Law enforcement would do well to remember that when dealing with flash gangbanging.

As previously noted, gangbangers use the technology that many of us use but flash mobs have used for gathering a large number of people, to notify their members and associates of a planned mass meeting during which a crime and many accessories to commit the crime will occur. The activity of the participants appears to cause onlookers to watch in awe without considering alternative responses. These flash mob activities, if done well in the planning stages, appear to onlookers as a spontaneous activity but they are really planned spontaneity. The transformation of gang banging to flash gangbanging, will cause law enforcement to prepare for such activity in a way that differs from other gang activity.

A recent parallel activity would be by those catalyzing the governments in the Middle East. Cottle observed that mass protests and political uprisings do not erupt from nowhere no matter how spontaneous or seemingly unplanned they are (2011). Flash mob activities have found a home in the political uprisings of the early 21st Century (Cottle, 2011). Many of the recent protests, first in Tunisia, then in Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Libya, Syria, Iran, Lebanon and, more tentatively, Saudi Arabia, were facilitated and even catalyzed by social media. Social media, including YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, as well as mobile phone texting, images, and live video streams have all played a key role in coordinating and documenting opposition, resistance, and defiance across the Middle East and North Africa (Cottle, 2011).

Also related to flash gangbanging may be the riots recently seen in England. Though referred to by some as looting, which carries the connotation of spontaneous theft based on the right combination of a lack of security combined with the desire to do something inherently anti-social, these activities could qualify as flash gangbanging if there was an organized group that coordinated at least part of the catalyzing activity. Some of the crimes seemed to be the result of split-second decisions made by normally orderly people seduced by the disorder around them (Somaiya, 2011). More than 1,200 people have been arrested, with 725 charged in courts that run 24 hours in some areas. Many have prior convictions, and some were armed or carrying quantities of drugs when arrested (Somaiya, 2011).

England's Prime Minister David Cameron, placed blame for much of the rioting and violence on the growth of gangs in England (Pogatchnik, 2011). Not unlike many places in the United States, England tended to avoid the "G" term, preferring to refer to their gangs as delinquent youth groups (Pogatchnik, 2011). During Englands flash gangbanging many a gang member used social media to call

out their troops, and specialized burglars to breech various stores and other locations (Pogatchnik, 2011).

Pogatchnik (2011) reported that many of these "delinquent youth groups" have engaged in crime and rioting since the early 1980s. To his credit, Prime Minister Cameron recruited former Boston, NYPD and LAPD police chief William Bratton to come to England as a consultant. As one might imagine the coppers in England are not happy with an outsider being brought in, and it's been reported in some places that Cameron has cancelled further talks with Bratton.

As Harvard Professor David Kennedy noted, "It is now absolutely demonstrable that there is a better way to do this. There is a 15-year history in the United States in city after city after city. We don't think that London can fix its gang problem. We know it can fix it, (Pogatchnik, 2011, para. 35). Whether PM Cameron continues his discussions with these outsiders remains to be seen. That Cameron and other English politicos believe England's rioters are in large part gangsters doesn't seem to be in question.

What do we know?

A content analysis was done of flash mob and flash gang reporting by news media on the Internet between June-September 2011. The results can be seen in appendix A. The reported events included flash mob-like activity including criminal activity from October 2011 through September 2011. The vast majority of incidents appeared (from the reporting) to be instrumental. That is, they were designed to gain some benefit to those involved. That would clearly be consistent with the behavior of gangs.

A total of 13 events were identified, all occurring in the United States. Five occurred in the East (DC, PA, MD), six occurred in the Midwest (MN, IL, MO), one in the South (TN), and one in the West (NV). In all but one incident, where the description was only of "men," the participants were referred to or described as teenagers. When the race of the participants was mentioned or observable (9 events), it was more often than not black or African-American. The number of participants ranged from about five to 50.

Most of the activity (7 of the 13 events) occurred between June-September 2011. The reporting by news media on the Internet diminished around mid-September 2011. It should be noted however that in terms of news, and the reporting thereof, many things have occurred across the world that might very well have knocked flash gangs out of the news limelight.

Is this; was this, just a summer phenomenon? If so, will it be repeated next summer? At this point we don't know, however we believe this will be a continuing problem and for which law enforcement needs to plan and prepare for.

Where does that leave us?

In 2005, Ford Motor Company sought to co-opt the notoriety of the flash mob to appeal to different customers (Wasik, 2003). Ford announced a series of

Fusion Flash Concerts via e-mails that typically arrived six days prior to the event, instead of at the last minute as happens with a regular flash mob (Walker, 2011). The events were sparsely attended and lasted much longer than the normal ten minutes for a traditional flash mob. Ford's co-optation of the flash mob apparently managed to help make flash mobs passé in the eyes of the general public, thereby removing the cool factor (Walker, 2011).

Social media and mainstream media often appear to have acted in concert, with social media alerting international news media to growing opposition and dissent events and providing raw images of these for wider dissemination. Mainstream newspapers and online news broadcasters also incorporate direct links to posts in social media, acting as a portal to updated communication from the protests themselves (Cottle, 2011).

It is possible that traditional media may provide the tipping point for this activity. Kim and Maugorgne (2003) suggest that a tipping point "hinges on the insight that in any organization, once the beliefs and energies of a critical mass of people are engaged, conversion to a new idea will spread like an epidemic, bringing about fundamental change very quickly" (p. 4). Orr (203) suggested that a tipping point is about a trend catching fire and spreading rapidly (exponentially in his words) throughout the culture. Some of this is clearly what's happening with flash gangs. The question is whether this will continue to occur (i.e., a new tactic for gangs) or whether this is simply a flash in the pan.

We suggest this is a strategic tipping point, i.e., that this will become a strategy (among many strategies) for use by gangs in specific situations to accomplish specific goals and objectives. Kim and Maugorgne (2003, p.6) offered a four step process, depicted as hurdles to organizational strategy execution in tipping point leadership. The first *Cognitive* hurdle pus managers face-to-face with problems and causes them to find new ways to communicate. The second *Resource* hurdle places the focus on hot spots and pushes leaders to share with other organizations. The third *Motivational* hurdle focuses more on the activities of the organization and frames the challenges to match the various levels of the organization. Finally, the fourth *Political* hurdle encourages identification and silencing of internal opponents and isolation of external opponents.

We suggest that the first three hurdles have already been jumped (as we have seen with flash gangs) and the fourth is irrelevant to most gangs, though some (e.g., Gangster Disciples) are attempting to overcome this hurdle as well. Flash gangs work. There's no reason to think the activity will end. As Ratcliffe noted (in Wolfgang, 2011), "Flash mobs 'take advantage of opportunities. Those opportunities are that the victims are outnumbered by the group and that there is an absence of law enforcement'."

Assuming flash gangbanging continues to occur and evolve, it is likely that rappers and music video producers will incorporate the activity into their productions. At the time this article was being written, rapper The Game edged closer to such activity (L.A. NOW, 2011). As noted above a message posted on The Game's Twitter account recently encouraged his 580,000 followers to call if they wanted an internship. The Tweet gave no indication that the phone number posted was to the

Compton police station's help line. The sheriff suspects many more of such posts will follow. Unfortunately, such activity is more likely to catalyze a reproduction of flash gangbanging than it is to diffuse the inspiration to participate.

The sheriff's office has decided not to press charges against The Game, welcoming the apology he made to the department. The sheriff's spokesman noted, "His willingness to help share with the media and the community that the safety of the public is what is most important is a great message," (Associated Press, 2011). It appeared the sheriff's office may be taking the path of least resistance here, by acknowledging The Game's actions but giving him a pass given his "apology" of sorts. This might have been the best course of action for them at this time.

How can local police prepare?

Recent Arab uprisings have produced numerous instances of regimes trying to censor and contain information by limiting Internet access, monitoring telecommunications, and disrupting journalists through intimidation (Cottle, 2011). Some government leaders have sought to rally pro-government supporters by ordering mobile service providers to send text messages; a tactic that has also been used to dupe protesters into arriving at particular locations, dispersing them and/or positioning them to be picked up by the security forces (Cottle, 2011).

The media can perform a necessary and influential role in alerting the public to repressive and prosecutable acts of inhumanity and can serve as a public forum for deliberating moral dilemmas and difficulties involved in humanitarian intervention (Cottle, 2011). Ideally, the media could also perform a role in informing citizens and governments how to intervene to protect human lives when sovereign states fail to do so, or when they deliberately target their own citizens (Cottle, 2011).

Scoville (personal communication, August 25, 2011) recently asked the question of members on the online POLICE-L listserv how cops are responding to crimes being facilitated through social networks. Responders noted it was a timely and interesting question, and one partially answered by this study.

In response to what was perceived to be a possible protest about to happen the San Francisco BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) jammed cell phone service. They anticipated a protest, shut down cell phone service and there was no protest (Kravets, 2011). Good enforcement, good prevention or a violation? Four days later, instead of shutting down phone service, they chose to close four stations. Both of these attempts were trying to quell possible protests before they occurred. Believing, no doubt, that there would be trouble were the flash mobs to happen.

The legal issues here "could go one way in a district court and another in a circuit court, but the US Supreme Court is the only one that can really clarify them definitively" (Wood, 2011, para. 5). The City of Philadelphia has instituted a curfew which they say has worked in the early goings. Kansas City, Missouri is considering the same. Other cities have considered making it a crime to engage a flash mob by social media. NYPD has established a social media unit.

That cops are behind the curve here is without question. They're suffering from a lack of imagination, a lack of understanding what's ahead. This, says Varano (2011) is ". . . an emerging form of crime" (Jervis, 2011, para. 5).

On the other hand, Ratcliffe says "this is an old crime being organized with new tools. There's nothing new about groups of people assaulting people and robbing, but what's new is the technology" (Wolfgang, 2011).

Law enforcement would do well to involve other public and private agencies in their planning for this phenomenon. Last year, the Pennsylvania Bar Association showed some vision when they designed a mock trial scenario about a group that was "not a gang in the traditional sense, but was a collection of students who were organized by social networking technology . . ." (Grode, Meyer, & Kaufman, 2010).

In response to a recent inquiry to gang investigators, the authors were told, the "it's pretty easy for law enforcement to stop though and even easier to catch the perps so once that happens it will be recognized as a poor strategy by those who would be tempted" (Mason, J., personal communication, July 15, 2011).

Flash mobs depend on the shock of the spontaneity of the event combined with the sheer number of participants to limit observations regarding the participants. If gang members use those same strategies, witnesses would likely have difficulty distinguishing the participants or accurately recalling their activities.

Audiences of the flash mobs may begin to enjoy the activity assuming no violence is being done. That may lead them to themselves depart immediately after the event or even refuse to cooperate with police. Gang members who engage in similar activities may enjoy this refusal to cooperate from their audiences if their criminal activities don't cross a certain boundary or level.

Some might think it would be difficult to identify so many participants, especially if they are similarly dressed or if no video surveillance footage is available. Flash mobs in their original designed used anonymous (to the recipients) emails to distribute their message. If gang members were to use the same strategy, some members of law enforcement might think the perpetrators' actions were untraceable. In reality, the method of communication may actually facilitate their identification. Without delving too much into the nuances of the technology, readers can be assured that all social media accounts and the devices used to communicate on them have unique identifiers. Assuming the crimes committed by flash gangbangers would warrant the investigative expenses, law enforcement can coordinate with the service companies represented to further identify the perpetrators.

Potential police responses include aggregating private video to be used for prosecution and using local ordinances to criminalize activity. How should police respond, though, when no crime was committed? Perhaps they can use a covert participant, monitoring keywords and hash tags used to announce the events, showing up to surveil and monitor activity.

The response thus far by law enforcement seems to be the monitoring of social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). This may be the best and only way to know what's going on in these instances. Of course the questions remains whether this will ultimately be constitutional and what do, how does law enforcement respond with this information that they have. Does this call for a dedicated team like a digital SWAT Team? Is the problem that police are not trained to respond to groups? Police are generally equipped to respond to individual for interaction, arrest, and prosecution, but throughout the criminal justice system there has been little training regarding organizational behavior.

O'Brien (2011) asked the question: Violent Flash Mobs: Passing Fad or Here to Stay? We believe they are here to stay. Whether law enforcement is ready for them is an entirely different and no less important a question.

References

Associated Press (2011, August 18). *Sheriff: Investigation Into Rapper's Tweet Closed.* Author. Retrieved from http://www.foxnews.com/us/2011/08/18/sheriff-investigation-into-rappers-tweet-closed/#ixzz1VQ8KKISW

Ball, R. A., & Curry, G. D. (1995). The logic of definition in criminology: Purposes and methods for defining "gangs". *Criminology*, 33(2), 225-245. doi:10.1111/j.1745-9125.1995.tb01177.x

Bowers, Brenda (2011) *And So I Go.* (blog). Retrieved from http://brendabowers.wordpress.com/2008/05/10/those-whofail-to-learn-from-history-are-doomed-to-repeat-it-sir-winston-churchill/

Brainyquote. (2011). *Rush Limbaugh quotes.* Retrieved from http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/r/rush_limbaugh.html

Cannon, Chris (2011). Franklin Police Search for Smash and Grab Thieves. Newschannel5 [online]. Retrieved from http://www.newschannel5.com/story/15538352/franklin-police-search-for-snatch-and-grab-thieves

CBS Chicago. (2011, March 2). Mag Mile Shops. *CBS Chicago [online].* Retrieved from http://chicago.cbslocal.com/2011/03/02/mag-mile-shops-on-alert-after-flash-mob-thefts/

Chattanoogan.com. (2007, March 28). Gang information on report not mentioned in county press release. *The Chattanoogan* (online edition). Retrieved from http://chattanoogan.com/articles/article_104448.asp

Cottle, S. (2011). Media and the Arab uprisings of 2011: Research notes. *Journalism, 12*(5)647-659 doi: 10.1177/1464884911410017

Dade, C. (2011, May 26). Flash Mobs Aren't Just For Fun Anymore. *National Public Radio.* Retrieved from http://www.npr.org/2011/05/26/136578945/flash-mobs-arent-just-for-fun-anymore

Decker, S. H. and Curry, G. D. 2003. Suppression without prevention, prevention without suppression. In S. H. Decker (ed.), *Policing Gangs and Youth Violence* (pp. 191–213). Belmont, California: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning.

Duran, A. (2006). Flash mobs: Social influence in the 21st century. *Social Influence, 1*(4),301–315.

Fox29. (2011, August 18). Raw Video. *Fox29.*Retrieved from http://www.myfoxphilly.com/dpp/news/local_news/raw-video%3A-teen-girls-attack-worker-inphilly-081711

Grode, J., Meyer, J., and Kaufman, P. (2010). *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania v. Maddox Hale.* Pennsylvania Case Writing Committee - 2010 National High School Mock Trial Championship. Pennsylvania Bar Association. Retrieved from http://www.2010nationalmocktrial.com/docs/2010NationalCaseCommwvHale.pdf

Jervis, R. (18 August 2011). 'Flash mobs' pose challenge to police tactics. *USA Today*.

Kim, W.C. and Maugorgne, R. (2003). Tipping Point Leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, pp. 1-11.

Klein, M. W. (1995). *The American street gang: Its nature, prevalence, and control.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

KMOX Radio. (2011). Teens Target Cyclists In 'Knockout' Game. *KMOX Radio [online].* Retrieved from http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2011/08/29/alert-for-swarm-and-slug-mobs/

Kravets, D. (2011, August 15). San Francisco Subway Shuts Cell Service to Foil Protest; Legal Debate Ignites. *Wired Magazine.* Retrieved from http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2011/08/subway-internet-shuttering/

Limbaugh, Rush (2007). *The Limbaugh Lexicon: 'Mega Dittos.'* Retrieved from http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2007/07/26/the_limbaugh_lexicon_dittos

L.A. NOW (2011, August 15) *Sheriff: The Game's Twitter 'flash-mob' a caution for celebs*. Retrieved from http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2011/08/sheriff-the-games-phone-flash-mob-a-caution-for-celebrities-on-twitter.html

Morganstern, M. (2011, August 13). US Rapper's Tweet Incites Telephone Flash Mob,   Overloads LA Sheriff's Station With Calls. *The Blaze.* Retrieved from http://www.theblaze.com/stories/rappers-tweet-incites-telephone-flash-m...

MyFoxPhilly (2011) Caught On Tape: Philadelphia Teen Mob Attack. *MyFoxPhilly*

[online]. Retrieved from http://www.myfoxphilly.com/dpp/ news/local_news/caught-on-tape%3A-philadelphia-teen-mob-attack-080811

National Gang Intelligence Center [NGIC]. (2009). *National gang threat assessment - 2009*. Washington, DC: National Gang Intelligence Center.

Niven, L. (1973). Flash Crowd. *Three trips in time and space*. Ed. Robert Silverberg. New York: Hawthorne Books.

Nordyke, K. and Goldberg, L. (2011, July 27). Riot Breaks Out at 'Electric Daisy' Film Premiere in Hollywood. The Hollywood Reporter. Retrieved from http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/electric-daisy-premiere-canceled-riot- 216264

O'Brien, R.O. (2011). Violent Flash Mobs: Passing Fad or Here to Stay? *Police Magazine*. 19 August 2011.

Orr, G. (2003). *A Review of Diffusion of Innovations*. Retrieved from http:// www.cs.nyu.edu/courses/fall10/V22.0480-002/Rogers1985.pdf

Pettus, M. (2011, April 29). DC Police Search For Men From Flash Mob Robbery. Retrieved from *WUSA – 9NewsNow*. http://wusa9.com/news/article/ 148817/ 77/DC-Police-Search-For-Men-From-Flash-Mob-Robbery

Phillips, S. (2010, April 3). When Flash Mobs Attack, It's Plain Anti-Social. *National Public radio [online]*. Retrieved from http://www.npr.org/templates/ story/story.php?storyId=125503587

Pogatchnik, S. (2011, August 18). From bling to lingo, US inspires UK gangs. *MSNBC [online]*. Retrieved from http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/44136757/ns/ world_news-europe/t/bling-lingo-us-inspires-uk-gangs/

Rheingold, H. (2002) *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution: Transforming Cultures and Communities in the Age of Instant Access*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus

Savage, S. (2003). Upcoming flash mobs. *Cheesebikini?* Retrieved from http://www.cheesebikini.com/index.php?s=upcoming+flash+mobs+2003

Scott, K. (2011). "2 teens, 11 year old plead guilty in flash mob attack. ABC Local [online]. Retrieved from http://abclocal.go.com/wpvi/story?section= news/ local&id=8314533

Smith, C. F. (2011) Flash Mobs and Street Gangs morphing into . . .? *The Gangfighters Network Blog*. Retrieved from http://gangfighters.blogspot.com/2011/06/ flash-mobs-and-street-gangs-morphing.html

Sobol, R. (2011). Four robbed, attacked by mob of young men in Streeterville. *Chicago Sun Times [online]*. Retrieved online from http://www.suntimes.com/news/

metro/   5788512-417/four-robbed-attacked-by-mob-of-young-men-in-streeterville.html

Somaiya, R. (2011, August 14), After Riots, British Ask 'Why,' but Find No Clear Answers. *The New York Times [online].* Retrieved from http://mobile.nytimes.com/article?a=828301&single=1&f=19

Spergel, I. A. 1995. *The Youth Gang Problem.* New York, New York: Oxford University Press

Spielman, F. (2011, June 8). Garry McCarthy: Officers seek to break up flash mobs before they form. *Chicago Sun Times [online].* Retrieved from http://www.suntimes.com/5842015-417/garry-mccarthy-officers-seek-to-break-up-flash-mobs-before-they-form.html

Tovrov, D. (2011). Flash Mobs: 5 Things to Know. Retrieved from http://www.ibtimes.   com/articles/199419/20110817/flash-mob-violence-us-philadelphia.htm

Vaughn, A. (2011). Teenage Flashmobs on the Rise. *Foxnews.com.* Retrieved from http://www.foxnews.com/us/2011/06/18/top-five-most-brazen-flash-mob-robberies/

Walker R. (2011). *Eight is not enough: A historical, cultural, and philosophical analysis of the flash mob.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Louisiana State University.

Wasik, B. (2006, March). My Crowd: Or, Phase 5: A Report from the Inventor of the Flash Mob. *Harper's Magazine,* 56-66.

Wolfgang, B. (17 August 2011). Police to use social media to thwart flash mobs. *The Washington Times*.

Zimmerman, A. and Bustillo, M. (2011, Oct 21) 'Flash Robs' Vex Retailers. The Wall Street Journal [online edition]. Retrieved from http://online.wsj.com/article/ SB10001424052970203752604576643422390552158.html

About the Authors

Dr. Carter F. Smith has been involved in military and federal law enforcement for over twenty-two years, and was the team chief for the Army's first gang and hate crime investigations team. He has provided training on gangs to the Florida, Georgia, Northwest, Oklahoma, and Tennessee Gang Investigators Associations, the Regional Organized Crime Information Center, the National Gang Crime Research Center, the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS), the National Crime Prevention Council, the Southern Criminal Justice Association (SCJA), the Department of Justice, and the U.S. Army. He was a founding (Executive) board member of the Tennessee Gang Investigators Association and is a member of the Speaker's Bureau for the National Alliance of Gang Investigator Associations. He is a member of the CID Special Agents' Association, the ACJS, SCJA, and the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), a recipient of the CID Command Enlisted Special Agent of the Year award, and a recipient of the Frederic Milton Thrasher Award of the National Gang Crime Research Center. Dr. Smith received a law degree from Southern Illinois University – Carbondale, and a Doctorate of Philosophy from Northcentral University in Prescott Valley, Arizona.

Dr. Jeffrey P. Rush is in his 22nd year of college teaching. His areas of expertise include terrorism/homeland security, gangs, law enforcement, leadership and juvenile justice. A published author in all these areas and an active duty street cop for approximately ten years, Dr. Rush has been a reserve deputy sheriff since 1988 working in courtroom security for approximately ten years and currently assigned as a patrol deputy. He was a juvenile probation officer for five years and for the past 20 years has worked in private security (including retail, concerts, special events and executive protection). A past president of the Southern Criminal Justice Association, Dr. Rush is also an author and trainer and co-editor of *The Police Forum*. Dr. Rush received his doctorate in Public Administration from the 2009 college football national champions the University of Alabama), his Master of Science in Criminal Justice, Master of Arts in Educational Leadership and Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice all were received from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Daniel Robinson and Megan Karmiller are Criminal Justice students in the Criminal Justice/Homeland Security program in the Department of Public Management and Criminal Justice at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN.

Appendix A: Chart depicting flash gang activity in the United States (February 2011 – September 2011)

Appendix A: Chart depicting flash gang activity in the United States (February 2011 – September 2011)