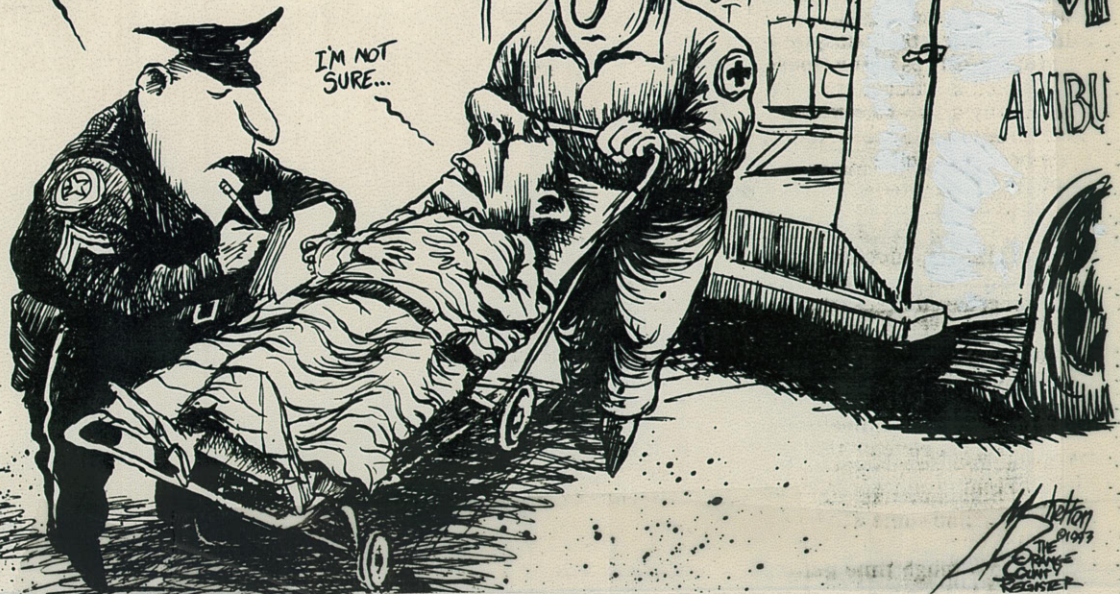


# Commentary

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, SUNDAY, DEC. 12, 1993

...OK, YOU WERE ASSAULTED BY A 9mm SEMI-AUTOMATIC HANDGUN, DARK BLUE WITH A SCRATCH JUST BEHIND THE FRONT SIGHTS... DID THE WEAPON HAVE A HUMAN ACCOMPLICE?...

I'M NOT SURE...



THE ORANGE GROVE

## JUVENILE JUSTICE

**TEEN VIOLENCE:** The court system must stop treating young thugs like children.

**P**hilip Lott, a 16-year-old sophomore from El Toro High School, was walking home from school when he was gunned down in front of his high school.

Last week, his high-school classmates, William Taboy and Chungming Lee, the shooter, were tried and convicted as adults for the attempted murder of Philip Lott.

Philip was shot four times at close range by a 9mm pistol during the drive-by shooting. When Philip was first struck in the back, he attempted to dodge the bullets but was struck three additional times. He has endured several surgeries and his dream of becoming a Marine pilot, like his father, may never be realized.

The genesis of the drive-by shooting was William Taboy's promise to get even with Philip after a heated argument a week earlier. With the promise of 10 stolen cassette players, Taboy engaged three teen-aged boys from Hacienda Heights to murder Philip.

A minor, Jason, was the individual responsible for connecting the gang to Taboy. Because he was 15 years old, California law does not permit Jason to be tried as an adult. Though he was guilty of arranging the drive-by shooting, he will spend only five years in the juvenile court system. This is an outrage that needs to be corrected.

Juvenile violence is increasing geometrically. From the cold-blooded killings of the tourists in Florida to the senseless murder of Michael Jordan's father, plus the unrelenting drive-by warfare in many of our urban areas in California, juvenile crime has taken an aggressive twist.

Juvenile-justice law has not been changed in California in over 32 years. Our system was set up to handle the likes of James Dean: the rebel without a cause. Dean's worst crime was either stealing cars or getting involved in a knife fight. Today, our world is different. Young teen-aged gangs are armed to the teeth with sophisticated automatic weaponry.

With the growth of illegitimacy, sociologist Charles Murray documents a

### SHAWN STEEL

aged boys criminally prone and devoid of values. We have a new breed of sociopaths who are inflicting terror on other teen-agers. In reaction there is a growing demand that something must be done to correct this plague.

Emerging from the crisis is Karen Lott, Philip's mother. She formed a group called the Action Coalition Against Teen Terrorism (ACTT). Its symbol is the green ribbon. Karen Lott, a Hopi Indian, is crusading with schools in Orange County to adopt the green-ribbon campaign. The green-ribbon campaign not only encourages teen-agers to avoid peer pressure for teen violence but also to reform the criminal justice system.

The most obvious problem is the special protection enjoyed by juvenile terrorists.

It is clear that most juveniles who commit the most heinous crimes know full well that they are likely to suffer minimal penalties if caught. Statistically, we know most felons seldom get caught in the commission of their crimes. When they do get caught, juvenile offenders are particularly aware that the penalties are modest. There is evidence suggesting that older gang members specifically direct younger gang members to commit the most violent crimes because of the understand-

ing that the law will go easy on the younger members.

Because we have created a system that does not punish youthful offenders, we will continue to get a corresponding disproportional amount of violence from younger juveniles.

Karen Lott and the ACTT organization endorses Attorney General Dan Lungren's reforms in the criminal-justice juvenile system: specifically, to lower the age at which a juvenile may be tried as an adult.

Assemblymen Charles Quackenbush and Pat Nolan each are offering bills to remedy this long overdue reform.

Quackenbush specifically recommends that a 14-year-old who commits a murder or attempted murder be tried as an adult and held in a state penitentiary for the remainder of his or her life if convicted.

Unfortunately, this reform is not enough. There is an army of apologists within the criminal juvenile justice system who seek to "rehabilitate" the young amoral thugs. Judges are given too much discretion and often mete out lenient sentences for vicious criminals. Longer sentences are needed. As things stand now, not only is the integrity of the justice system suffering but the public's safety is endangered.

Mr. Steel is an attorney with offices in Westminster. He filed a multi-million dollar lawsuit against the perpetrators and the Saddleback Unified School District for Philip Lott.

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