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A Confused War

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A Confused War

A film by Rachel Waldholz and Mariel Waloff

Synopsis:

You want to talk about the significant drop in crime? Talk to these young people. They control the flow. So if they're the ones controlling the flow, let's make sure they know that we care about them. The city, the community, we care about you. And the way we show you that we care about you is we're willing to invest in you.

– Kevin Muccular, Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety

For decades, Richmond, California has had a reputation for intractable violence. In 2007, this city of 103,000 people had 47 homicides. It was one of the highest murder rates in the country. But by 2012, that number had dropped from 47 to 18, and the city seemed to be entering a period of fragile peace. This 26-minute documentary looks at the source of the city's violence and at two of the efforts to tame it: a police chief determined to forge a new model of policing, and a city agency dedicated to serving the young men at the center of the shooting.

Since the mid-2000s, homicides in Richmond have been driven by feuds between young men in North, Central and South Richmond. Shootings spark retaliations, which unleash further shootings. In 2006, the city hired a new police Chief, Chris Magnus, from Fargo, N.D., to transform the police department and repair relationships with the community. Magnus argues that community engagement is the key to preventing homicides. The film follows Richmond Police Officer Matt Stonebraker as he patrols Richmond's Central District, trying to put Magnus' policy into practice.

Around the same time that Magnus was hired, residents organized a "tent city" and camped out to demand more action. In 2007, the city created the Office of Neighborhood Safety, or ONS, to focus exclusively on gun violence. The office reaches out directly to those young men whom the police believe are involved in shootings, but cannot prosecute for lack of evidence. The ONS then offers these young men a deal: the police know who they are, so they can risk arrest, or join the ONS. The ONS provides mentoring and a stipend, and helps them to meet basic life goals, like getting a driver's license or GED, or accessing healthcare. In return, the ONS asks the young men to stop shooting – and to work with rivals from other neighborhoods. The filmmakers speak with ONS director Devone Boggan; mentors Sam Vaughn and Kevin Muccular; and three young men who have completed the fellowship, Dvondre Woodards, Rasheed Shepherd, and Eric Welch.

In March, 2013, 20-year-old Richmond resident Lincoln Plair was shot and killed, ending an eight-month ceasefire between the city's feuding neighborhoods and raising fears of further shootings. The murder has highlighted the importance – and fragility – of the city's quest to end gun violence.

Key words:

Richmond, California; City of Richmond; Office of Neighborhood Safety; Richmond Police Department; Chris Magnus; Devone Boggan; Rachel Waldholz; Mariel Waloff; crime; homicides; shooting; gun violence; violence; youth violence;

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Interviews

Robert Rogers
Reporter
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Devone Boggan
Director
Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety

Sam Vaughn
Neighborhood Change Agent
Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety

Kevin Muccular
Neighborhood Change Agent
Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety

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ONS Fellow
Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety

Rasheed Shepherd
ONS Fellow
Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety

Eric Welch
ONS Fellow
Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety

Chief Chris Magnus
Richmond Police Department

Capt. Mark Gagan
Richmond Police Department

Lt. Arnold Threats
Richmond Police Department

Officer Matt Stonebraker
Richmond Police Department

Officer Tony Diaz
Richmond Police Department

Adam Kruggel
Executive Director
CCISCO/Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization
Richmond Ceasefire

Tamisha Walker
Organizer
CCISCO/Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization
Richmond Ceasefire

Reverend Andre Shumake
Richmond Improvement Association

Bill Lindsay
City Manager
City of Richmond

Barry Krisberg
Director of Research and Policy
Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy
University of California, Berkeley School of Law

Jeffrey Fagan
Isidor and Seville Sulzbacher Professor of Law
Columbia Law School, Columbia University

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