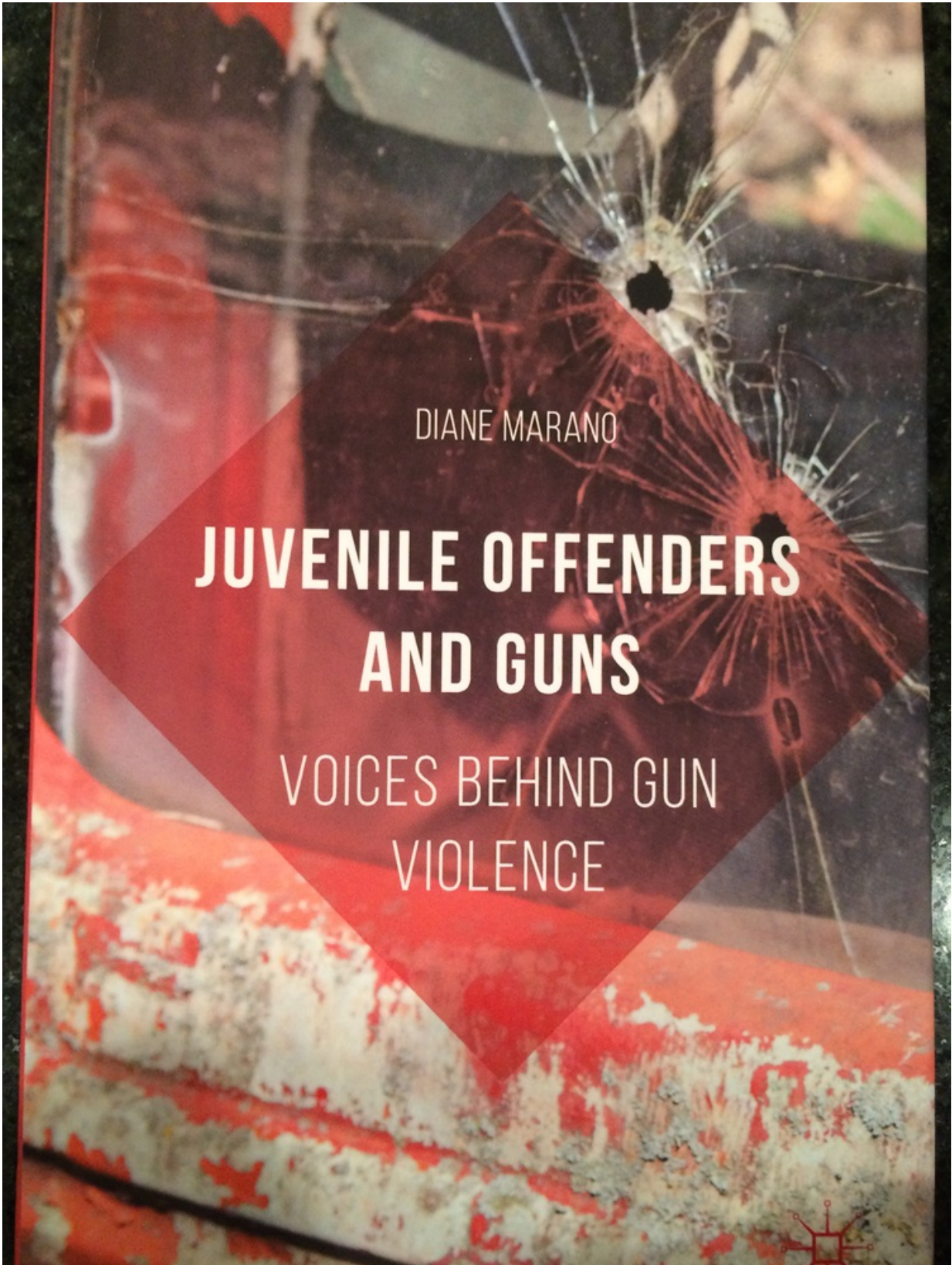


Scholar explores juvenile gun violence in new book

November 13 2015, by Tom Mclaughlin



As a Camden County assistant prosecutor for 25 years, Diane Marano witnessed the devastating effects of gun violence on the city's youth. She spent the last 21 of those years as section chief of the juvenile unit, where she gained a piercing understanding of the faces and names – and lives – behind the cold statistics.

The 1978 graduate of the Rutgers School of Law-Camden later explored the critical issues surrounding juvenile gun violence as a Ph.D. student in the childhood studies program at Rutgers University-Camden, graduating in 2014.

Marano's dissertation is now the basis for her new book, *Juvenile Offenders and Guns: Voices Behind Gun Violence*, published by Palgrave Macmillan this fall.

"The book explores the pathways into juvenile gun acquisition, the various types of gun use, and [youth](#) involvement in illicit activities," explains the Medford resident.

Through the Juvenile Justice Commission Marano interviewed more than 20 male juvenile gun offenders, learning how they were first exposed to [guns](#), how and why they acquired and used firearms, and how guns made them feel.

"I wanted to find out why gun acquisition and use was so attractive to these young men, especially with a proven history of negative outcomes, including death, injury and incarceration," says Marano. "It was a luxury for me to ask these questions that had been building up for over 25 years."

Among her findings, Marano learned that most youth she spoke to were not exposed to guns in the home. Often their parents did not approve of guns, and only one juvenile recalled receiving a firearm as a gift from a parent.

Many youth recounted being exposed to firearms as the result of chance encounters. In many instances the juveniles had found guns, which held a wide range of meanings to them – including fear, fascination, or indifference – depending on the context of their overall values. For instance, one youth recalled seeing a gun when he was 12. However, as a successful student and athlete, he wasn't very interested. He then found another gun several years later, this time while he was involved in a gang and selling drugs.

"The gun was essentially the same, but his life was different, so the gun held a very different meaning for him," explains Marano, a member of the childhood studies program's first cohort.

With her extensive background in criminal justice, Marano says that she expected to find that youth who lived in dangerous neighborhoods needed a gun to feel safe. This proved not to be the case. Many youth did not even view their surroundings as dangerous, seeing it simply as "home," even when drugs and violence were common. The youth instead made a clear distinction between being in and out of "the street lifestyle," which corresponded directly to their need for a gun.

Marano acknowledges that often the juveniles shared stories that resonated with her past experiences in the court room. She recalled one such incident that took place as she sat at counsel table with a juvenile. When the sheriff came to escort him to jail, the young man turned and peeled off several dollars from a roll and handed them to his mother seated in the first row.

"That was a clear indication to me who was supporting this family," she says. "I now have a greater understanding of the dynamics at play in situations like that."

It is precisely this level of insight and understanding that Marano sought upon pursuing her Ph.D. in childhood studies at Rutgers-Camden. As she neared retirement in 2007, she attended a kickoff event for the program, and was immediately impressed with its intensive, interdisciplinary nature.

"It really fit my range of interests in criminology and history," says Marano, who credits this integrative approach for not only building on her prior experience, but guiding her exploration of juvenile issues within larger historical, socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

Marano now hopes that, by introducing her research to scholars as well as practitioners, her book may help to improve juvenile gun prevention and other intervention efforts.

"Reducing juvenile [gun violence](#) would benefit both the public at large and young people themselves," she says.

More information: Juvenile Offenders and Guns: Voices Behind Gun Violence. [www.palgrave.com/page/detail/J ... uns/?K=9781137520135](http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/J...uns/?K=9781137520135)

Provided by Rutgers University

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