

Sarah Leonard  
The Nation  
520 Eighth Avenue  
New York, NY 10018  
By email

February 14, 2018

Dear Ms. Leonard,

I'm writing in response to Max Rivlin-Nadler's recent article at *The Nation* ("[How Gang Policing is Criminalizing Whole Communities](#)," January 12, 2018). Let me start by expressing my admiration for *The Nation*. My parents were friends with Victor Navasky, and I've been an enthusiastic reader for many years (I was inordinately pleased some little while back when *The Nation* published a piece endorsing my work ("Beyond Stop-and-Frisk: Toward Policing That Works," Scott Stringer, April 23, 2012)). So it was deeply distressing to see that this article, which focuses on my work, is profoundly inaccurate, and beyond that unprofessional and sloppy in a way that is incommensurate with any reasonable journalistic and editorial standards. To wit (settle in, I'm afraid this is going to take a while):

**I. What the piece gets fundamentally wrong: "apples and monkey wrenches"**

Rivlin-Nadler's main argument is largely contained in this paragraph:

Kennedy's model involves [mapping out crime data](#), encouraging police to focus on violent parts of every city—almost always low-income communities of color. The theory went that, to help reduce gun violence in these mapped areas, police would reach out directly to groups of individuals considered "at risk" and offer them social services as an alternative to incarceration. These services were offered at a "call-in," often held in a police precinct, with cops and prosecutors warning individuals that they were being watched by police closely, and that if they were to commit a crime, they would be arrested. Surveillance, which was done mostly through on-the-street police observations (and, increasingly, social media) was central to the theory: To identify these violent groups, and to feed its reliance on mapping, the model overwhelmingly relied on a constant stream of data produced by an increased police presence.

It is a remarkable paragraph. Every single sentence in it is wrong.

Rivlin-Nadler goes on to say that the strategy focuses on gangs and employs flawed and indiscriminate gang databases, with a resulting "emphasis on large-scale gang indictments, which work to criminalize entire social networks, [and] risks incarcerating large numbers of

young people, despite Kennedy's claims that his method focuses on deterrence and mobilizing communities against violence." Each of these claims is also wrong.

Rivlin-Nadler's representation of "Ceasefire"—known in the literature as "focused deterrence" and at my organization, the National Network for Safe Communities ("NNSC"), as the Group Violence Intervention ("GVI")—how it works, and the impact it has are fundamentally and baroquely inaccurate. A quick summation of the article's inaccuracy came from Michael Sierra-Arevalo at Yale, who has worked on these strategies and [responded to a tweet from Rivlin-Nadler](#) promoting the article (the statement below is paraphrased, for clarity, based on Sierra-Arevalo's original tweets):

Lack of oversight and misuse of law enforcement data to wantonly criminalize and incarcerate is wrong, and a serious concern. But the claim that Ceasefire - more broadly termed focused deterrence - fails in MOST places is factually incorrect.

See review here: <https://t.co/OoAFUxrAG8>.

And here: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022427811419368>.

I have collected the scary network data you talk about. The networks that New Haven used were GROUP networks, i.e. what groups were involved in shootings between one another (see [@AVPapachristos](#) work on reciprocal gang shootings).

Such networks are used to guide implementation of the program--it allows you to decide WITH DATA which group is most violent. Not gut feelings. Not perceptions. What group is involved in the most shootings based on available shooting and homicide data, and with whom?

As for individuals IN a group, data is gathered via group audit with law enforcement agencies, and cross-checked with probation/parole, street outreach, and other agencies. If over 18 and on probation or parole, and in a violent group, they are then brought to a call-in.

In New Haven (pop. 130k), the total number of identified individuals was ~300: <0.25% of the city. And of those, 45 were "impact players": influential members or known shooters. This is the norm, not the exception. An exceedingly small percentage drives violence.

You falsely equate focused and vetted Ceasefire data collection with "gang databases" and "gang policing" in major metropolitan areas. New Haven, for example, doesn't even HAVE a gang unit. The "database" is an Excel sheet. You're equating apples and monkey wrenches.

I'm in 100% agreement regarding the danger of databases like CalGang and permanent criminalization via gang databases. I agree that criminalizing entire communities is bad. Gangs are RARELY hierarchical criminal organizations *a la* RICO. But these problems are not equal to Ceasefire/focused deterrence.

Is the strategy fool proof? No. Has it failed in some places? Yes. Do individual cities and police departments make decisions on how much they do and do not keep to best practices? Yes. Is "Ceasefire" equivalent to "gang policing" as described? No. It shouldn't be, and in many places it's not.

This, from a researcher who has worked on the ground in implementing the strategy in New Haven, is exactly right.

In more detail: GVI is a strategy aimed at reducing, especially, homicide and gun violence. One begins with the victims of such violence and works outwardly. It is a now well-established empirical fact that both victimization and offending is concentrated, on the ground, in a remarkably small number of very high-risk people who are overwhelmingly involved in street groups. Sometimes these street groups might be regarded as gangs, but much more often they are looser and less structured drug crews, neighborhood cliques, families, and the like. Such group members typically constitute less than 0.5 percent of a city's population but are consistently [linked to between 50 and 70 percent of homicides and a somewhat smaller but large proportion of nonfatal shootings](#).

Such groups, and the associated violence, are also invariably concentrated in historically and currently oppressed and neglected minority neighborhoods. GVI emphasizes, both theoretically and in practice, the fact—obvious to anyone who has been on the ground in such communities—that the vast majority of people in the most “dangerous” neighborhoods are not involved in violence, nor do they condone it. Among the vanishingly small number of people who are involved, most are scared and traumatized, not predatory. As Sierra-Arevalo says, fewer still are “impact players”—the actual instigators and perpetrators of violence. GVI is designed to keep those who bear the highest risk of shooting or being shot alive, safe, and out of prison.

Exactly *contra* to Rivlin-Nadler's account, GVI is not a gang strategy. “Gang” means something, both in law and in people's minds; both the legal and the common meaning are inaccurate and impede clear thinking and acting. GVI is built on the theoretical and practical commitment to reject conventional thinking and acting around notions of gangs and to replace it with the accurate and meaningful idea of “groups.” This could not be clearer both in the extensive scholarly literature and in anecdotal accounts of GVI, as well as in the extensive how-to literature. The [opening sentence about GVI](#) on the NNSC's website reads, “The Group Violence Intervention (GVI) is designed to reduce street group-involved homicide and gun violence.” Our GVI [implementation guide](#)—published by the United States Department of Justice—states:

All gangs are groups, but not all groups are gangs. An exclusive focus on gangs, which is often understood to include notions like organization and leadership, will exclude a significant number of groups that contribute heavily to serious violence, such as loose neighborhood drug crews. That National Network's experience shows that worrying about whether a particular city has gangs, or whether a particular group is a gang, is an unnecessary distraction. The simple fact is that many high-rate offenders associate in

groups and that these groups drive serious violence. Many (and often most) such groups will not fit the statutory definition of a gang. Nor will they meet even the common perception of what constitutes a gang. Such groups may or may not have a name, common symbols, signs, or tags, an identifiable hierarchy, or other shared identifiers.

The [webpage on GVI at the National Gang Center](#) states that “the Group Violence Intervention is designed to reduce street-group involved violence and homicide.” This distinction is now very well-understood within law enforcement, as reflected in a [story in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#): “Investigators are tracking 39 groups in the city, said Sgt. Jim Glick, who heads GVI. Police prefer the term ‘group’ because they feel it better reflects the loose organization and shifting allegiances they see here than the word ‘gang.’”

GVI restructures a city’s engagement with those few high-risk people and their groups. Law enforcement, social service providers, and community members organize themselves to act in a comprehensively new way. One central element of GVI is the “call-in,” in which the partnership speaks directly to group members, communicating the desire for them to be safe and successful, articulating community norms against violence, offering material support and services, and putting them on prior notice of new enforcement responses that will attach to certain acts of violence. The GVI call-in is largely not about those actually in the room, but more centrally about ensuring that the groups with whom they associate in the community hear, through them, those core themes. If the partnership keeps its promises – delivering help when it’s requested, following through with law enforcement when called for, and communicating those community norms – violence often drops dramatically. (Research shows that [these notifications work](#).)

Rivlin-Nadler writes that “surveillance...done mostly through on-the-street police observations (and, increasingly, social media) was central to the theory: To identify these violent groups, and to feed its reliance on mapping, the model overwhelmingly relied on a constant stream of data produced by an increased police presence.” This is not true (and the notion that any police department would deploy such an additional presence to... *watch*...conveys an utter lack of understanding of the most basic elements of how police and criminal justice agencies actually function). The people identified as potential recipients of the GVI message are not discovered through any kind of formal “surveillance” or “increased police presence,” as Rivlin-Nadler claims. They are known to law enforcement and the community through their flagrant public activity and through their and/or their groups’ ties to homicides and nonfatal shootings. That knowledge can be easily and quickly drawn out by convening experienced practitioners through qualitative exercises that have come to be known as “group audits” and “incident reviews.” In the same paragraph in which Rivlin-Nadler presents his fantasy about surveillance and police presence, he actually [links to a 1998 article](#) written by myself and coauthors that describes in detail how we first carried out these exercises over twenty years ago in Boston (the quotes reveal that we had not at the time learned our lesson about avoiding the concept and term “gang”). For the incident review:

We assessed the contribution of gangs to Boston's youth homicide problem by assembling a group comprised of Boston Police Department gang officers; probation officers; and streetworkers. This group met in three sessions of approximately four hours each. Those participating changed somewhat from session to session, with constant participation by four police officers, one streetworker, and two probation officers, and episodic participation by approximately half a dozen police officers, two streetworkers, and one probation officer. [The group reviewed 155 gun or knife homicides of victims aged 21 and under for the years 1990-1994.] For each victimization, the following questions were addressed in roughly the following order. Do you (the group) know what happened in this homicide? Was the victim a gang member? Was the perpetrator (or perpetrators) a gang member (or members)? What was the killing about, and was it gang-related?

And for the group audit:

This exercise took three sessions, totaling some ten hours. The first session included only police officers; the second two also included probation officers and streetworkers. The process was extremely straightforward. The practitioners were assembled around a 4'x 8' street map of Boston and asked to identify the territories of individual gangs. As each gang territory was identified, practitioners would draw the territory's boundaries on the map, and one of the authors would number it and record the name of the gang on a separate document. When the territory had been defined, the practitioners were asked to estimate the number of members belonging to the gang. Last, a circle enclosing the numerical gang identifier was drawn on a sheet of flip-chart paper, and the practitioners were asked to name any gangs with whom the instant gang had antagonisms or alliances. These "vectors" were drawn on the flip chart paper, with one color representing antagonisms and another alliances. Antagonisms that were at the time particularly active were so designated.

These exercises have become widespread in violence prevention and are an essential element of the GVI approach. Together, group audits and incident reviews are used to organize key information and keep it updated. Researchers usually keep the data in spreadsheets or similar tools that can be updated in real time as intelligence changes; the jurisdictions my office advises typically review and update their group lists at least every couple of months, if not more frequently. And to get back to the "gang" question, I've [written that](#) "systematically asking and answering such basic questions—which groups and which offenders are the most dangerous and committing the most crime—will be more accurate and more useful if the 'gang' question is ignored."

More recently, the GVI approach has begun to incorporate social network analysis (SNA) as a tool to identify group networks. These networks are also behavioral, not predictive, and are generally constructed from administrative police data on co-arrests and sometimes street stops. Such network analysis has been immensely useful in identifying strikingly higher-risk clusters and relationships within the overall, already high-risk population. For example, those connected by known links to gunshot victims are, for a time, at 900% higher risk than others

within the same network, and social network ties can provide guidance to understanding and preventing the retaliation and “cascade” violence that is endemic to community violence. Rivlin-Nadler is incorrect, however, in his characterization of “social-network analyses’ of suspects.” Inclusion in these network means nothing in and of itself; those in them are not in any way suspects; their presence in such networks does not indicate criminality or in any way criminalize them or their activity; and network analysis is in fact as useful for focusing prevention and intervention as supporting enforcement. He is also incorrect that SNA is something GVI “needs to function.” SNA is a recent addition to the portfolio and most GVI sites do not use it.

Rivlin-Nadler is similarly incorrect in his account that GVI relies upon gang databases. “The degree of involvement in criminal activities is not usually a factor of inclusion in these databases,’ Kollmann says, pointing out that inclusion in a database generally long outlasts criminal involvement, ‘because there’s no clear guidelines as to how someone gets put into the database.” Kollmann is wrong about the latter—federal regulations have explicit such criteria for any such databases used by federal agencies or employing federal funding, and most state and local gang databases are subject to state statutes and/or agency guidelines—but the article is correct in its suspicion of gang definitions and databases. That is precisely why GVI does not support their use. As I’ve [written in a peer-reviewed criminal justice journal](#), in response to an article calling for a set of particular national standards for gang databases, and drawing on a GVI intervention in Cincinnati:

Barrows and Huff (2009) suggest several plausible reasons why we should care about gang databases. Type 1 errors can lead to profiling, victimization, and collateral damage from schools, employers, and such. Type 2 errors can lead law enforcement to overlook gangs and gang members, raise officer-safety issues, lose the power of legislative gang enhancements, and such. These problems are genuine concerns. It is not clear, however, that we need to solve the gang definition problem and create coherent, far less nationally consistent, gang databases to solve them. Type 1 errors can be dealt with entirely by not having gang databases. No classification means no possibility of misclassification: Presto, problem solved. Addressing Type 2 errors requires information and vigilance but does not require a gang database. Dangerous groups and dangerous offenders can be tracked perfectly well by ordinary law-enforcement intelligence methods and systems; we do not need to worry about “gangs” to monitor them properly. One of the striking things about projects like Cincinnati’s CIRV is the extent to which they demonstrate how well law enforcement does understand what is going on. The initial identification and network analysis of Cincinnati’s violent groups was performed by Engel’s UC team, which used structured qualitative methods in cooperation with front-line CPD officers, in less than a day. Subsequent work identified individual group members, 71% of whom turned out already to be flagged in CPD data systems as officer-safety risks.

I believe it is the case that Baton Rouge’s BRAVE intervention did employ a gang database. However, despite Rivlin-Nadler’s claim, I have no formal relationship with that project (a matter



I will address below); Baton Rouge’s practice is not in accord with GVI practice; and it is simply not the case that GVI depends on or generally employs such databases.

Rivlin-Nadler is also incorrect in his account that GVI relies upon predictive policing algorithms. The GVI approach to focused investigation and law enforcement is simple. At each call-in, group members are told that law enforcement will henceforth respond to 1) the most violent group in the jurisdiction, and 2) the first group in the jurisdiction to kill someone after the call-in—what the strategy calls the “worst group/first group” promise. As a logical and practical matter, when that communication is credible, no group wants to be either the most violent group in the city or the first one to kill after a call-in, with the result that violence is very considerably dampened. All that is necessary to carry out the policy from a data perspective is routine tracking of homicides and shootings. GVI requires no monitoring of general criminal activity by group members, or any special attention to such general criminal activity. When the partnership decides to carry out a “worst group” or “first group” enforcement, routine investigative means are generally employed. No fancy data work of any kind is involved in any part of this process.

Rivlin-Nadler and his sources are deeply suspicious of predictive analytics, particularly when it leads to police action. They’re right to be. As [I’ve written](#):

It seems reasonable to take such concerns pretty seriously. In a moment when the nation’s attention is properly focused on mass incarceration; the overreach of the criminal justice system and the incredible harm caused not just by prison but arrests, fines, warrants, and the like; and the risk that even routine police contacts with the public can go horribly wrong, giving control over policing to the same kind of software that causes creepy ads to pop up on your laptop seems plausibly at least as creepy. *Moneyball* statistics are one thing when they give your home team an edge, quite another when they put your homeboy in prison. When baseball gets it wrong, you lose a game. When law enforcement gets it wrong, you lose your freedom and even your life...

Which may be why, in fact, Kansas City — and the Manhattan DA’s office, and a bunch of others being tarred with this brush — are not in fact doing anything of the kind. They are not forecasting who will do violence. They’re not using fancy computer algorithms, or sifting through “big data,” to forecast criminality. There is such a thing as “predictive policing,” with its own merits and demerits, but they’re not doing it. What they’re doing is...based not on prediction but on observation. [Groups drive the violence.] No computer algorithm is necessary to (or, so far, can) identify members of these groups, but their own behavior is perfectly good enough: they hang out together, commit crimes together, and are victimized together. I conducted the first “group audit” in Boston 20 years ago with front-line officers, a paper map, and a magic marker; the Manhattan DA began its work by calling around to NYPD precinct commanders and asking for lists of their most serious offenders. These days, computer software has of course moved in, but the focus is still on behavior, not prediction — looking, for example, at who has been arrested together, or stopped by police together — and computer results have to be filtered through front-line insight and common sense (link analysis may show that a gang shooter’s mother was in

his car when he was stopped by police, but that doesn't make her a gang member herself).

Think of it like traffic accidents. We could try to use fancy algorithms to predict high-risk drivers: but that young people learning to drive are accident-prone is just an observable fact. And just as most young drivers will never have a serious accident, most group members and other high-risk people will never kill anybody. Predicting that they will would be wrong; locking them up on the basis of that risk would be even more wrong.

Rivlin-Nadler writes that GVI leads to and depends on “large-scale gang indictments, which work to criminalize entire social networks.” I have my own views about RICO and similar conspiracy cases. It's unnecessary to go into them here, since GVI simply is not, except in very rare instances, a driver of such investigations and cases (an exception is New Orleans, where extraordinarily high levels of sustained violence by known groups and an associated nearly complete impunity for homicide led to a series of federal and local conspiracy cases, which I considered entirely justified). RICO-style gang indictments are extremely rare in the first place, and even rarer where GVI is concerned. The reason one old name for GVI is ["pulling levers"](#) is that it relies on the reality that most group members have long histories with the criminal justice system—arrests, convictions, jail and prison time, warrants, probation, parole, etc.—and are highly criminally active, and therefore face many perfectly ordinary points of exposure to legal sanction. This means that when a shooting or homicide occurs, law enforcement has many options with which to deliver perfectly ordinary sanctions to group members—through enhancing probation and parole conditions, serving an old warrant, undertaking drug enforcement, increasing prosecutorial attention to open cases, disrupting illegal money-making activities, civil code enforcement, and the like. Unlike ordinary enforcement thinking, the impact of GVI enforcement actions is driven by transparency, certainty, and the fact that changes in groups norms and actions are driven not by the prospect that any one member faces severe sanctions, but by the fact that all members know killing will bring *some* sanction to the group. This changes the group dynamic and makes lesser sanctions effective and desirable. Under GVI, law enforcement nearly always takes this route, and the fact is that most law enforcement practitioners prefer this to the resource-intensive activity of a conspiracy investigation and indictment.

Rivlin-Nadler's deep ignorance of actual criminal justice practice is again evident here. Federal law is more conducive to RICO and similar prosecutions than any state statutes, but most federal districts go years between such cases, and career prosecutors in many districts literally cannot remember one. Most district attorney's offices never bring any such cases. When they are brought, either federally or by state authorities, they generally take several years at best even to bring an indictment, which makes them utterly unsuited for any fast-moving approach such as GVI. In New York City, where both federal prosecutors and state prosecutors are more familiar with and favorable toward such cases than is the norm, several years of the city's GVI strategy have led to no such investigations or indictments.



This is one of the central goals of GVI: to reduce violence while also reducing heavy-handed enforcement. Rivlin-Nadler claims net-widening and an increase in criminal enforcement, but provides no actual evidence. In fact, recent formal research comports with years of field experience in showing exactly the opposite. A study [of Cincinnati](#) associates a years-long 41% decline in felony arrest rates with the implementation of GVI and a cultural shift amongst police to view arrest as a “scarce resource.” Oakland and New Haven, among many others, are seeing large reductions in arrests, along with large reductions in serious violence. In many cities, police leadership is explicit about seeing GVI as a way to retreat from disastrous stop-and-frisk and zero tolerance approaches while producing higher levels of public safety.

Finally, there is the most fundamental of Rivlin-Nadler’s misrepresentations: all of these points would be academic if he was correct that “in almost every iteration, Operation Ceasefire has failed to meaningfully reduce violence.” The record shows the opposite. The body of formal evaluations of focused deterrence interventions (including but not limited to GVI) is now robust enough to support what scholars call systematic reviews – in effect, an evaluation of the evaluations – with uniformly positive results. The [largest and most recent](#), by the international evidence-based public policy body the Campbell Collaboration, includes 24 studies, found that the quality of the evaluation research had “improved greatly over time,” thus lending “more confidence in study findings on the effects of focused deterrence programs,” and found that all 12 of the group-focused interventions produced positive results and the largest overall effect size studied (to Rivlin-Nadler’s claim that GVI typically lacks evaluation controls, most of these studies were quasi-experimental designs with statistical comparison areas or groups). Similarly, systematic reviews by [the United States Agency for International Development](#), [Weisburd et al](#), and the [National Academies of Sciences](#) support that the strategy is the most effective known to reduce community violence. The National Academy report is typical of the genre and found “consistent crime control impacts in reducing gang violence, street crime driven by disorderly drug markets, and repeat individual offending. The available evaluation literature suggests both short-term and long-term area wide impacts of focused deterrence programs on crime.”

It is also the case, as Rivlin-Nadler reports, that not all such interventions show sustained impact (usually, as is known in the community that does this work, because of identifiable implementation issues). But if the frame is opened to interventions not formally evaluated that seem to have failed, it should also be opened to ones not formally evaluated that seem to have succeeded, including—at the present moment alone—cities like Oakland (homicides down from 125 in 2012 to 72 in 2017, and shootings from 554 to 277); New Haven (nearly 80% decline in homicides from 2011 to 2017); Newburgh, NY (perennially one of the 10 most dangerous cities in the country, with shootings down 65% from 2016 to 2017); York, PA (shootings down by half from 2016 to 2017); and—to the sustainability point—High Point, North Carolina, which has been applying the framework since 1997 and has used it to address group violence, individual violent offenders, drug markets, robbery, and domestic violence.

To return to the original point that all of Rivlin-Nadler’s main points are incorrect:

- “Kennedy’s model involves [mapping out crime data](#), encouraging police to focus on violent parts of every city—almost always low-income communities of color.” It does not. The approach is *about* violence, begins with the violence, and works back from there.
- “The theory went that, to help reduce gun violence in these mapped areas, police would reach out directly to groups of individuals considered ‘at risk’ and offer them social services as an alternative to incarceration.” It did not and does not. Social services are offered, but not as an alternative to incarceration. Services are available to any group member (and often others) who wants them, services are not offered by the police, there is no consequence for not accepting services, and GVI makes no general threat of incarceration whatsoever.
- “These services were offered at a ‘call-in,’ often held in a police precinct, with cops and prosecutors warning individuals that they were being watched by police closely, and that if they were to commit a crime, they would be arrested.” Every clause here is incorrect. The call-in is not primarily about the group members present; there is no commitment to or actual effort toward subsequent surveillance; the enforcement commitment is to a select set of homicides and shootings, with no commitment to address crime as such; there is no commitment to arrest as such even within GVI group enforcement actions; and I am not aware that a call-in has ever been held in a police station (I take it that that was what Rivlin-Nadler intended to convey, since by definition every place in every jurisdiction is in a precinct, at least for jurisdictions that use that term to denote police areas).
- “Surveillance, which was done mostly through on-the-street police observations (and, increasingly, social media) was central to the theory: To identify these violent groups, and to feed its reliance on mapping, the model overwhelmingly relied on a constant stream of data produced by an increased police presence.” There is no such surveillance, and the information used to inform GVI is already present as a result of ordinary criminal justice and community processes or is produced without enhanced police presence.
- *The strategy focuses on gangs.* It does not, and in fact does everything possible to avoid any focus on gangs *qua* gangs.
- *It employs flawed and indiscriminant gang databases.* It does not, and in fact has advocated against any maintenance and utilization of gang databases.
- It puts an “emphasis on large-scale gang indictments, which work to criminalize entire social networks, [and] risks incarcerating large numbers of young people.” It does not, rarely employs such indictments, and has developed a range of approaches that seek to minimize both the use and the severity of enforcement.

## II. Additional inaccuracies

Rivlin-Nadler also makes the following mistakes:

- “Many cities gave Kennedy’s model a different name—in New York, a program goes by “Operation Crew Cut”... In each iteration, Kennedy advised the programs from his research center at John Jay College in New York.” Operation Crew Cut is an enforcement-only initiative of the NYPD begun under former commissioner Ray Kelly. It is not GVI and I have had nothing to do with it. (Amusingly, given Rivlin-Nadler’s argument that my portfolio leads law enforcement to see gangs where there is none, NYPD employs the term “crew” because it does not believe the groups in New York represent actual gangs.)
- “...with a best-selling book called *Don’t Shoot: One Man, A Street Fellowship, and the End of Violence in Inner-City America* published in 2011.” My book was anything but best-selling—would that it had been otherwise.
- “In almost every iteration, Operation Ceasefire has failed to meaningfully reduce violence.” The first link in this line in the article is to Stockton, CA and describes preparatory work for a GVI implementation that—at the time of publication—had not yet begun. The third is to an “Operation Focus” in Cleveland. As a fine example of the article’s general extreme sloppiness, the linked article in fact includes a quote *from me* explaining that Operation Focus is not GVI.
- “Like DAs before him, he turned to the Operation Ceasefire model, taking on Kennedy as a consultant...” My office provided an initial introduction to GVI to a group from Baton Rouge. Beyond that neither my office nor I have had any formal relationship with the city or any of its partners. I advise on violence prevention to anybody who is interested and for whom I can. “Consultant” connotes a sustained, formal, and generally financial relationship; I have not had that with Hillar Moore or anyone else associated with BRAVE.<sup>1</sup>
- Rivlin-Nadler says that with respect to Baton Rouge’s BRAVE intervention, “over the program’s course only 65 youths benefited from it through social services...” This is incorrect. That number reflects newly funded work through those Baton Rouge social service providers paid with BRAVE funds. BRAVE utilized a range of providers not specifically supported with new funding and reached what BRAVE organizers report as “hundreds” of individuals and families. In general, GVI interventions rely heavily on enhancing access for the high-risk population to existing social services, and giving them priority attention when they desire such services. In Baton Rouge, mental health and substance abuse services were covered by Medicaid, for example, and did not require new or dedicated funding.
- “Once someone has been identified as being at risk, the social-services side of Ceasefire should kick in, but that rarely happens,” Kollman observes. “What motivation would they [police and prosecutors] have to do anything besides what they’re trained to do, which is arrest and prosecute?” This, again, represents a misunderstanding of how GVI is implemented. Once the group-involved population is identified, call-ins are commenced. Social-service providers and

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<sup>1</sup> Updated 5/10/2018: Although this was true at the time of writing, the National Network for Safe Communities has since entered into a formal relationship with the city of Baton Rouge to implement our Group Violence Intervention and to perform a problem analysis as part of our Intimate Partner Violence Intervention.

community members then offer social services and other supports. Law enforcement figures are not involved in service delivery.

- “The assumption that a single program can take credit for a drop in homicides in a single year is something that criminologists often warn against.” Rivlin-Nadler appears to be confusing the common criminological prescription against inferring causes or trends in homicide on the basis of year-to-year variations - because of the natural “noise” in rates of violent crime—with what is appropriate in formal statistical evaluations. Formal evaluations isolate program impact with control and comparison groups and address such noise with statistical techniques for smoothing time series data and adjusting for seasonality, autocorrelation, and the like. In the formal literature program evaluations that show impact over relatively short periods are common.
- Rivlin-Nadler writes that “Moore claimed that he had told members of the group that they were being surveilled in April 2013, and that they could either participate in the BRAVE program, or be arrested.” This is not correct. BRAVE call-ins followed the same GVI messaging described above: that there was community opposition to violence, that certain violent acts would be met with a specific kind of enforcement response, and that services were available. BRAVE produced no new surveillance, such surveillance was not communicated to groups, and neither in BRAVE nor in any implementation of GVI is lack of “participation in the BRAVE program”—meaning, presumably, failure to accept services—criminalized. Such criminalization is not even possible.
- “Through the mapping and analyses of social networks that Operation Ceasefire needs to function, prosecutors at both the state and federal level have been able to give the appearance of vast criminal organizations operating openly in low-income communities.” There is no connection, in theory or in fact, between the information GVI implementation requires, or the spread of the GVI approach, and any increase in either the popularity or the implementation of gang and conspiracy prosecutions. While Rivlin-Nadler cites such prosecutions, and repeatedly implies that they are on the rise, he presents no actual evidence that this is so.
- “In New York City, for example, both former US Attorney Preet Bharara and current Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance have used gang databases to arrest hundreds of people in the city’s public housing project, usually as part of military-style overnight raids. Because those arrested face RICO charges, 33 people have been charged with crimes, including some committed by people who were already incarcerated.” New York City’s GVI initiative, called New York City Ceasefire, has been operating for some time in Brooklyn and the Bronx and has no connection to these investigations and prosecutions. (Beyond that, Rivlin-Nadler again displays a misunderstanding of criminal justice fundamentals. Nobody anywhere is ever arrested because of a gang database; such information may figure into investigative, enforcement, and prosecutorial actions, but it is incoherent to say that such databases are “used to arrest.” And it is routine in criminal justice for investigations to lead to indictments of people already in custody.)
- “...just as that alleged impact was no longer being felt in Baltimore, [Milwaukee](#), [St. Louis](#), [Kansas City](#), and other cities where Ceasefire had seen initial gains backslide.” The Milwaukee link goes to an article referring to an “Operation Ceasefire” in the city some 15 years previously. That was [an enforcement-only initiative focusing exclusively on gun prosecutions](#) and had nothing to do with GVI (the “Ceasefire” name can be applied by anybody to anything, which is why we mostly no longer use it). The St. Louis link goes to an article about violence in St. Louis; no intervention

of any kind is mentioned. I have no idea what this is about; St. Louis has never implemented GVI.

- “By instructing law enforcement to go directly to people’s homes, however, Kennedy’s most recent advice to the project might just reinforce its most troubling aspects.” I’m going to give this one to Rivlin-Nadler: if he got it into print, more power to him. But by what standard of editorial review does this sentence in fact make it into *The Nation*? Adding “might” to pretty much any proposition gives it credence, no matter how baseless or outrageous. It is, I guess, the Trump evidentiary standard. “Lots of people are saying...I don’t know...we’ll be looking at that.” I’m not encouraged that *The Nation* endorses this kind of discourse.
- “Attorney General Jeff Sessions relaunched [the DOJ’s Project Safe Neighborhoods](#), a George W. Bush-era enforcement operation that, building on Kennedy’s work in Boston, promoted federal prosecution of street-level gang activity.” Project Safe Neighborhoods had some connection to my Boston work and produced a small amount of similar work on the ground. For the most part, however, it drove federal gun prosecution—not prosecution of gang activity—that did not work, that stands in opposition to the logic and principles that inform GVI, and that [I am on the record as opposing](#).

### III. In conclusion

Everything central, and beyond that, nearly everything else I have presented above is readily available in the extensive scholarly literature, implementation materials, and public record about GVI. All of that, plus any less accessible material, context, knowledge, and thinking would have been readily provided by myself, the NNSC’s staff, and any of the many other scholars and practitioners who have been involved in this work, often for decades. So too would have been background information and detail about the approach, particular instantiations of the approach, the very real issues associated with GVI, and how the field has thought about and addressed those issues. Rivlin-Nadler does not appear to have engaged with any of the formal or otherwise available record about GVI and focused deterrence; if he did, he does not note or justify any of the many ways his presentation and analysis run counter to both the descriptive and evaluation literature on GVI. He did not contact me for this article, nor to my knowledge did he contact anyone else who actually understands GVI and the related issues. (I recognize only one of his sources.) The result is one of astonishing error and bad faith, in framing and in detail.

I am not aware of any version of journalistic professionalism, integrity, or fairness that allows for such conduct, particularly for something so overwhelmingly critical. My work has gotten a great deal of press attention over more than twenty years. This is, by a very large margin, the worst piece of such journalism ever produced. As a life-long, voracious consumer of journalism, it is the most inaccurate and irresponsible piece I can recall ever having read addressing anything I actually knew something about.

As for *The Nation*, the most elementary fact-checking would have uncovered these issues. Rivlin-Nadler wrote this article, but you published it.

This is obviously beyond the reach of any ordinary correction. I am interested in what you think could be done to correct the record and remedy the harm this article has done.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Kennedy".

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cc: Katrina vanden Heuvel