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Unity against crime

Complacency is the bugaboo of police work. When officers get too comfortable on their beats they lose the edge that alerts them to danger. When the leadership of an entire department becomes self-satisfied, public safety can erode.

Boston faces such a threat after nearly a decade of dramatic drops in criminal activity. But this week, the Boston Police, Mayor Thomas Menino, and their supporters in the neighborhoods most affected by crime made it clear that they will not be idle. After two days of strategy sessions, the city's leading law enforcement officials emerged Tuesday night to re-dedicate themselves to fighting urban crime, especially youth violence.

Overall crime statistics are still reassuring. But some recent events are foreboding. Last Friday's shooting of two young men in the South End was gang-related, according to police. Ministers say young people have been test-firing newly acquired weapons in sections of North Dorchester. Street workers fear that recently released felons are recruiting youngsters for the thug life. Criminal activity also rises in the Dudley Street and Columbia

Road sections of Roxbury and Dorchester, two neighborhoods benefiting from the recent creation of new businesses and sound, inexpensive housing.

The mayor's sessions served as a reunion of sorts for the police officers, ministers, probation officials, and prosecutors who authored the so-called "Boston Strategy" in the early 1990s. It targets unrepentant repeat offenders for long sentences while offering jobs to needy youths and ex-offenders who choose a legal path. Influential ministers made clear, as they had in the past, that they will not indulge young criminals who threaten the economic advances of Boston's minority neighborhoods.

"I don't care if you are poor, hungry, raggedy, naked, or out of doors," said Minister Don Muhammad of the Nation of Islam while stressing the need for Boston's young people to accept responsibility for a positive future.

Boston will experience shootings and setbacks. But the unified effort of law enforcement and clergy gives confidence that the city will not backslide into fitful violence.