

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

FORMATION OF GANGS  
IN THE TEXAS PRISON SYSTEM

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## PREFACE

Very little information was collected on the gangs in the Texas prison system prior to 1984. Even less information has been published, so little is known about these gangs outside the realm of the prison system. Previous authorities have touched upon the psychological and sociological aspects of prison gang behavior. Other authorities have written about the attitudes of the prison gang members. All have agreed that the gangs are an ever-growing problem. The life long commitment to the prison gang and to violent and precise retaliation against anyone who opposes their ideas, have made these prison gangs a concern of correctional authorities as well as law enforcement authorities throughout the country.

Over the past ten years prison gangs have developed from a few inmates banding together for protection to a well organized network of criminals that have controlled criminal activity inside system as well as outside the prison system.

It is a known fact that prison inmates are released from the prison system daily. Some of those prison inmates are gang members. The information collected in this study will acquaint law makers, law enforcement authorities and concerned citizens, with prison gang activity so they will be better equipped to handle the gang members once they re-enter our society.

This study is not intended to identify the gangs by name.

It is to identify the type of individuals involved in the prison gangs and the way they operate.

As long as there has been criminal activity in the United States of America, there have been individuals that have joined together in hopes of accomplishing a common criminal goal. In most cases that goal is control. These individuals hope that by joining together, it will make them stronger.

From the beginning of time, gangs were formed for three basic reasons:

1. PROTECTION
2. POWER
3. PROFIT

Joining together gave each person a sense of security thus protecting each one from outside influences. This banding together gave members of the gangs the power they needed to accomplish their goals. In most cases, especially in the criminal field, it is profit (goal) that makes it worth the struggle that a person may have to endure. Over the years, gangs have become more sophisticated. The more sophisticated a gang, the more dangerous it becomes.

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CHAPTER I  
GANG ACTIVITY IN AMERICA

Gangs have always been a part of criminal activity in America- from the early formations of criminals banding together to the latest, most sophisticated gangs. The sense of greater strength in numbers has passed through the era of outlaw train robbers to gangs owning and operating large businesses.

"Gangs were merely regarded as loose collections of criminals with limited involvement with each other and were seen as having importance in relation to acts committed by them rather than being important in themselves." <sup>1</sup>

"Groups have psychological lives of their own. They have stages of maturity and immaturity: they may be 'healthy' or 'unhealthy.' The more cohesive a group, the more productive it is likely to be, and the easier it is for its constituent members to reach unanimity of opinion."<sup>2</sup>

A healthy gang is dangerous to anyone that threatens them. An unhealthy gang is more dangerous to itself and its immediate surroundings. Gangs as we know them today began to be noticed in the late 1800's to early 1900's. These gangs were made up of criminals usually of the same race and

nationality. Cities such as New York, Chicago and the larger cities of California were where organized gangs could take care of business and then slither back into the streets that protected them. The "tools" that were used the most were fear, intimidation and violence. Gangs of today are still organized along those same guidelines and still have the same "rules of the jungle." "The long-term goal of organized crime is monopoly control with accompanying maximization of influence and minimizing the risk."<sup>3</sup>

#### Street Gangs

The family is where the youngster learns about being part of a group. He then goes to school and is taught how to get along with a group. The next step in this process is breaking the large group into a smaller group of friends and with those that he has some type of common bond. The common bond group or clique is where the youth first learns about how to get what he needs or wants through group activity. Once this activity becomes anti-social or criminal, then the youth has been introduced into criminal gang activity. "Most of the practices of the criminal gang are begun in fact or in principle among the boys. This is no break to make the place where the adolescent gang leaves off and the adult gang begins. This is an important fact in explaining the criminal community and the development of the other phases of the gang problem, most of which have their genesis in younger gangs."<sup>4</sup>

These individuals, as they grow older, tend to leave the area (turf) that they grew up in, but normally do not leave their criminal activity. Continued criminality with a background of gang activity tends to make this person a prime suspect in returning to his gang activity, but on a larger scale. Ruth Showle Cavan and Theodore N. Ferdin wrote,

"The gang boy is likely to build up attitudes and behavior that make him susceptible to adult criminal activities. The gang affords fertile ground for the growth of a delinquent contraculture. Boys identify themselves with the gang and do not respond to individual approaches from teachers or social workers. To leave the gang would often mean both social and emotional isolation for the boy, and would require self-confidence and self-sufficiency that most boys do not have."<sup>5</sup>

Robert Walker further concluded;

"Many youthful offenders have been conditioned by the feedback effects of their anti-social life cycle to respond negatively to usual social controls. Many have found that they win by delinquent acts oftener than they lose and are



punished. This is the hoodlum. He is a young member of a gang whose demoralizing influence easily promotes criminal behavior. However, if he remains with the gang and the process is not checked, the end product will inevitably be a seasoned gangster or professional criminal."<sup>6</sup>

The street gangs are a breeding ground for the much larger gang's activity as well as prison gang activity once he is convicted and sentenced to prison. Street gangs serve the purpose of protection as well as providing a family unit to numerous American teenagers. Most of the gangsters start at a young age. The vast majority of prison gang members in the Texas system were either associated with some type of street gang or have had a close friend or relative that was associated. "80% to 90% of the inmates in Illinois system have some affiliation with street gangs."<sup>7</sup>

The young gang member learns at a very young age about the rules that he is expected to follow. These rules are the guidelines or Constitution. Initiations by violence are a common practice. Being beaten by fellow members or having to commit some type of violent offense, such as shooting or stabbing someone is used to show if a person has the right stuff to be a member. Later in life, especially in prison gangs, this activity is to show, "where your heart is."

The activity that follows a member will form his attitude toward society. This type of attitude sets the youthful offender in motion for his adult future in anti-social behavior. This type of behavior is reinforced by the gang which gives him the support. Without this support the youth may not be so eager to continue his delinquent behavior. The growth of street gangs and their penetration into the world of drugs and drug trafficking, has made them one of the deadliest threats facing law enforcement today.

Street gangs are virtually the same in all parts of the United States of America. Their excitement comes from ridiculing others. Punishment, paybacks and taking care of business have led to thrill on one side; death, damage and destruction on the other. Homeboys, locals, vatos, bros and carnales live their lives to survive through crime sprees, drive-by shootings and bombings and drug dealing. Their gang's names and nick names may be different. The color of their clothes or the style of their tattoo (patch) may differ, but their devastation is the same.

#### **Prison Gangs In America**

Once a person is incarcerated in prison he has to adjust to that environment. George F. Cole stated that two adaptive styles were recognized: (1) an individual style-withdraws; and/or isolation, and (2) a collective style-participation in a convict social system which, through its solidarity,

regulation of activities, distribution of goods and prestige, and apparent opposition to the world of the administration, helps the individual withstand the "pains of imprisonment."<sup>8</sup> The Prison gangs have taken the collective style a few steps further. They want to control this style themselves through criminal activity within the system. Inmates that don't want to continue criminal activity in the system can choose from the two styles as long as they don't interfere with the gang's activities.

The most notable similarity between most prison gang members, whether they are from California, Illinois or Texas, are the personal characteristics. Each member has the macho demeanor; "speak for yourself" and the, "give me respect" attitude.

Prison gangs first were identified in Washington State in 1950. Shortly thereafter gangs began in the California prison system. It was the development of an Hispanic prison gang, Mexican Mafia, in California, that brought the most attention. There, prison gang members were beginning to organize and control other inmates in the system. In the late 1960's, Illinois identified their first prison gang. Other states in the southwest begin to show some activity within their prison systems. At this time there did not appear to be any relationship between the prison gangs in each state. Other states such as Kentucky, New Mexico, New York, Missouri and Pennsylvania were also having problems with prison gangs.

As time continued, the relationship between some of the states became clear. Through inmates being paroled and re-arrested, transferred or having close friends or relatives in other state prisons, the prison gangs began to spread out to other states. The one common characteristic was that the prison gangs were racially motivated. Therefore the prison gangs were set up according to race. There was some crossing, such as white inmates in hispanic prison gangs and vice versa.

By the 1970's prison gang violence began to show up. Homicides, aggravated assaults on inmates and prison guards, sexual assaults, riots, thefts, extortion, and prostitution were all beginning to rise. The main sources of this increase were the prison gangs.

In 1984 the United States Department of Justice, in Washington D. C., conducted a survey of gangs in state penitentiaries. The report reflected that, "... of the 49 jurisdictions that responded, 33 indicated that they had prison gangs in their institutions. Sixteen said they did not."<sup>9</sup> This study also showed that there was a growing population of prison gang members in the Federal prison system.

CHAPTER II  
FORMATION OF GANGS IN THE TEXAS SYSTEM

Prior to 1980 there was only one organized gang identified in the Texas Prison System. In 1983 there were less than 200 gang members identified in the Texas system. In 1984 there were six groups identified as prison gangs and the number of confirmed gang members had grown. By 1985 more than 800 gang members had been identified and steps were being taken to gather information and to keep a close watch on their growth. By 1987 the figure had grown to over 1200.

The formation of prison gangs in Texas was beginning to increase at a very rapid pace. The growth was attributed to the desire for self protection and the hunger for power. One of the precursors of the development was the Ruiz Vs Estelle case that will be discussed later in this chapter. This self protection developed into a protection of the gang's interests and their business of extortion, protection, prostitution, drug trafficking and murder. The abolishment of the building tender system, which will be covered in Ruiz Vs. Estelle case, created a problem of power and control among the inmates themselves. The inmates responded to these problems by joining gangs inside the prison.

*Don't let this title*

Protection may have been the catalyst of the development of the gangs. The gangs provide members the ability to survive in an hostile environment. This protection is basic to gangs along racial lines. Individuals would group together with inmates they knew, either while in the penitentiary or in the outside community, to have strength in numbers. The inmate felt that if he had numerous "brothers" to help him out, then he might not become a target of other rival gang members or be considered as a weaker inmate. This concept began to grow from just protection into power.

Extortion is the theft of personal property from weaker inmates. This property could be traded for drugs, used by the individual gang member or given to other gang members.

Prostitution is something that most people outside of the prison system would not realize occurs. Because there are no co-ed prison units, the inmates participate in homosexual activities. The gangs have individuals that take care of their sexual needs. These inmates commonly referred to as "punks" or "girls" are used, traded and sometimes given to specific members as favors. They are also used as "house boys" to keep the gang members cells clean.

Drug trafficking is the main money source of criminal activity by the prison gangs. Because of the intimidation and fear that a particular gang has on a unit, that gang will control the drug sales on that unit. Drug trafficking within the prison system is something that inmates have done for

years. Only in the past five to six years has the drug scene in the prison system developed into an artful manipulation of other inmates and guards as well. This section also will be covered in more depth in a later chapter.

And finally, murder, the artistic means of eliminating the competition within the system. Violence has always been a way of life within any correctional institution. But with the organization of the prison gangs in Texas, murder has become the primary tool for a gangs intimidation. Murder is used for several different reasons. As stated before, for elimination, or to make a statement to rival gangs and other inmates that they are capable of backing words with action. By committing this type of crime where witnesses can see it, the gang is telling the rest of the inmate population that they will "take care of business" no matter what. This statement is also for guards and prison officials. This makes a statement that inmates can understand and respect.

At the time of this report there are over 2400 gang members, and untold numbers of sympathizers and supporters of the gangs. These inmates are not members but assist in the criminal activity of the gangs, usually for a benefit.

#### **Other State's Influence**

The state that has had more influence in the organization of prison gangs in Texas, has been California. The creation of the gangs in California seems to be very much the same

trend in Texas both in the way they evolved and the course that the gangs took. This would be evident in the figures. About 5% of the inmates create about 80% of the violence. This 5% represents the population of prison gang members. In California from 1975 to 1985 there were 457 gang-related murders. 311 murders were on the streets and 146 were in the prison system. These figures show the violence that the gangs can generate. This same violence is being generated in Texas, on a smaller scale. However, as this report will show, Texas has been able to learn from mistakes California made, and take steps to handle this problem.

As previously discussed, prison gangs formed in California in the 1950's. One of these gangs was the Mexican Mafia. Other prison gangs such as the Aryan Brotherhood, started in 1965 and the Nuestra Familia, which started in 1967, began to grow and spread throughout the prison system. The era of gang activity within a prison system was born, and by the early 1970's had rooted itself in the largest state correctional system in the United States. Here prison gang members learned that organized gang activity worked inside the fences and walls almost as well as it did on the outside. In just a few short years the gang problems were in California to stay. These prison gangs continued to grow in number and in power. Even those inmates who chose to stay away from this type of gang activity, as well as prison officials, could see that the gangs had power within the system. The areas of



prison gang activity that have been previously discussed, (extortion, protection, prostitution, drug trafficking and murder), were tested time and time again. The result was success. Their reputations for violence, intimidation and business exceeds the fences and walls of the prison system.

In 1974 a group of Hispanic inmates from Texas, housed in the Folsom Unit in California, formed a small group and called themselves the Texas Syndicate. Their formation was in direct response to the prison gang activity there on that unit. These Hispanic inmates felt that it was time to stand up for themselves and take care of their interest in the prison. In just a few short years this prison gang had its own reputation within the system. From this formation grew the most organized prison gang within the Texas prison system.

These inmates, as well as other inmates, were released and made their way back to Texas. As they were arrested and convicted in the state courts of Texas, these inmates who were either a gang member or had been on units where the gangs exerted their power, entered the gates of the Texas system.

Those inmates that were prison gang members in other state penitentiaries began to organize in Texas. Those who knew what prison gangs were capable of doing, joined for the various reasons mentioned in the earlier chapter.

By the late 1970's some gang activity was being reported. This activity was mainly conflicts with those inmates that were referred to as "Building Tenders". The Building Tenders

or Row Tenders, had the responsibility of controlling other inmates on the blocks. With the introduction of the prison gangs and the power that they wanted, they were in direct conflict with the building tenders.

In the early 1980's the first prison gang-related murders were reported. This violent conduct was just the beginning of the violence the Texas prison system was to see in the next five years.

The prison gangs were set up along racial boundaries. Each race had its organized structure that was beginning to form. The gang's inclination for violence and control did not develop until the Federal Court ruled that the Building Tender system in Texas had to be abandoned. This decision created a time period in which the prison gang's control grew. The period between the time the Building Tenders were abolished and the staffing of correctional officers was conducted, gave the prison gangs enough time to get a foothold within the system and create the necessary intimidation and fear among the inmates needed for their control. This created a power struggle. The different Hispanic prison gangs were fighting each other for control. The white prison gangs were fighting the black prison gangs. All of the prison gangs were fighting the prison system. The prison gangs were on their way to becoming part of the Texas prison system. And with them, a level of violence that Texas had never experienced from their inmate population.

### **Ruiz Vs. Estelle**

The Federal Court case that impacted the Texas prison system more than any single act was the Federal lawsuit that was filed by David Ruiz. This lawsuit began in 1972. Because of conditions within the prison system, Ruiz filed this lawsuit against the State of Texas. The case was titled, Ruiz Vs. Estelle.<sup>10</sup>

The one most important point of the Ruiz case that enhanced the growth of the prison gangs was the abolishment of the Building Tender system. This system was previously utilized by the administration to make sure inmates followed the rules and regulations of the institution. According to Ruiz, " Building Tenders are used by the T. D. C. officials to gather intelligence concerning activities, expressions and attitudes of other inmates."<sup>11</sup> Other duties were also given to the building tenders, such as, making sure that other inmates went to work like they were supposed to. Keeping order in the cell blocks. "... enforce order and silence, operate the controls of the T. V. sets, and regulate the games that can be played."<sup>12</sup>

"The building tenders were the enforcement inside the blocks. What the building tenders said, went. These inmates were the toughest and meanest inmate on the block. Tenders kept order on their blocks, they turned their inmates out to work on time and they snitched to the building major about inmates who were plotting trouble or filing legal

complaints."<sup>13</sup>

But the inevitable happened. These inmates who were controlling the activity in the cell blocks for the building major, became egotistic and concerned only with what could be gained from control. Because of the influence this activity had on all inmates, this issue was one of several in the lawsuit filed by Ruiz. A U. S. Supreme Court decision in 1964 had given inmates the right to challenge state prison practices in Federal Court, and Ruiz took advantage of this decision and filed his complaint.

Federal District Judge William Wayne Justice heard the lawsuit that had originally begun in 1972 but did not reach the trial Court until 1978. The trial lasted for 159 days and when it had finished, Judge Justice handed down a 188 page decision that would change the Texas prison system forever, and abolish the Building Tenders in the system. "A federal judge had ordered sweeping reforms, dismantling the building-tender system and forcing the state to finally police its own. But the change was slow and sloppy; vicious prison gangs seized power in the vacuum. Inmates turned on inmates. Between January 1984 and September 1985, 52 prisoners were fatally shivved and mangled throughout the 27 unit system."<sup>14</sup>

Out with the Building Tenders and in with the prison gangs-had Texas just jumped from the pan into the fire?

Even though this question has been asked on several occasions, once a process goes bad, (the Building Tender

system), it needs to be replaced. One would hope that it would have been replaced with something more compassionate to human life than prison gang members.

### CHAPTER III

#### STRUCTURE OF TEXAS PRISON GANGS

This chapter will deal with the structure of the prison gangs in Texas; what the prison gang is looking for in an inmate, how an inmate gets recruited into a gang and the activity that is expected of him while he is a member.

For many years gangs have been a part of the prison system, but as discussed, did not increase substantially in strength until 1983. From that time until 1986 these gangs tripled in size, and from 1987 until the present, have doubled in size once again.

Membership is gained by association with current prison gang members or by acceptance of current prison gang values by the members. Prior affiliation with members from the streets, or "home boys", can strongly influence membership. Political, religious and certainly racial backgrounds are a must for membership.

For years the recruiting of inmates was an important part of the prison gangs. This activity was important because the intimidation factor was greater with size. These inmates were enticed with protection and the sense of belonging while they are incarcerated in prison. These inmates are used by the

prison gang to kill, run drugs, pass messages, pass weapons, etc. This activity shows the loyalty of the recruit to the gang. Once a recruit shows his loyalty, then he will become a member (brother). Once he becomes a brother, he becomes a brother for LIFE. If you don't abide by all of the rules or you decide that you want out, the gang will attempt to eliminate the member. If they can not get to him, they will attempt to get to one of his blood family members. Leaving the gang would be an act of betrayal and the consequences are harsh, death. The only way a member can gracefully leave the gang is through natural death or be murdered. This concept is sometimes hard to realize by a person who has never been a part of this type of activity. But it is real; it does exist.

This loyalty to the gang goes far beyond the penal institution. These members retain their membership even after release. Members will obtain drugs that will eventually be passed back into the prison system. These released members will pass gang messages and in some cases will commit murder or assaults on ex-inmates that betrayed the gang either while they were inside the prison system or while they were out. Their loyalty and alliance stays with them inside or outside the prison.

The basic organizational structure of each of these gangs is the same. The para-military structure has the higher ranking officers making the decisions, the lower ranking officers implementing the decisions and the members, or

"soldiers", enforcing the decisions. The strength of the gang is built on the numbers, loyalty, and the willingness to commit whatever crimes are necessary to perpetrate the power of the gang. Or, in other words, taking care of business.

#### Organizational Ladder

The organizational ladder of the gangs works the same as that in the business world. Those that work hard for the corporation and make them money, move up the ladder and get more benefits. Those that know the right individuals can also enhance their business success. Alas, those inmates that possess the inherent power to produce effects, or, those inmates that are friends, home boys, too can be rewarded. The first being a quality of virtue, the later being a vice. Either way, the gang wants those who can produce for the gang, not someone to have to drag along.

Most of the gangs in the Texas prison system use the para-military structure as their hierarchy. This system is utilized so those inmates with the most experience lead those with less experience. As a member becomes familiar with the gang and shows that he is loyal to the gang, he then may be in a position to move up.

Most of the prison gangs operate on the unit level. Prison gang leaders on the units have the responsibility to see that business is taken care of at all times. If the leader is not capable of doing this, he will be replaced, in



some cases, by death. As the member leaves his rank, another member - in most cases the next lowest rank - will enter that position. Once an inmate moves up in rank, he gets more of the profits. In some cases lower ranking officers have set up higher ranking officers for their positions. This does not happen as often as one would think. If the prison gang found out that the ranking officer was set up, the inmate or inmates would be dealt with severely, in most cases, death.

In some of the prison gangs in Texas a strong leader shares his power with a committee or council. This is where a group of inmates, usually five or six, will make the decisions for the whole gang. This concept appears to be diminishing at this time and the unit leadership now appears to be where the control is centered. The unit leadership is where one inmate is the leader on the unit and each unit makes the decisions. This inmate is referred to as a Chairman, Captain or General.

The leadership of the gangs in Texas has a tendency to change from time to time. When a leader has been identified, it is hard for him to communicate with other ranking members. This pressure tends to be alleviated by stepping down and letting some one else appear to be the ranking officer. In most cases, once a ranking officer steps down, he still maintains his control without the title. Other secession of leadership occurs when the other members vote for new leadership or when someone with a stronger appearance, with

the support of the gang, moves in.

### Criminal Activity

An interview with a current prison gang member revealed his attitude at the time that he became a gang member. "At the time that I joined it was for three reasons. (1) It gave me a macho image, (2) gave me respect and (3) the people that I was with felt the same way I did about prison. I could have my dope and no one could take it away from me."<sup>15</sup>

Once an individual has gone to prison, he is taken out of society, but he remains a criminal. Inside the prison system is not different. Inmates continue to commit criminal acts even though they are locked up behind the prison walls. This criminal activity is closely monitored by prison gangs. Through their intimidation, they will attempt to control whatever criminal activity that they may deem important to the gang. Their goal is to make money and obtain power.

POWER comes from image and image comes from fear  
and violence.

FEAR + VIOLENCE = INTIMIDATION

INTIMIDATION = CONTROL

The areas most important to the prison gangs are drugs, commissary supplies, weapons, prostitution and protection.

The drug business in the prison system is the most profitable to the prison gangs. This profit, according to a inmate in the system, is more profitable than on the streets,

because there is "no overhead". The supply is less than the demand, so the business is always there. It looks for him, he does not have to look for it. The prison gangs use their power to corner the market on a unit. They use inmates that have drug connections on the streets. These inmates may not be prison gang members, but they associate with the prison gang and use their drug connections to supply the gang with drugs. In turn, the gang may supply protection as well as money and other prison pleasures. They also utilize their brothers, prison gang members, on the streets to supply them with the much needed controlled substances. Because the drug trafficking is so profitable to the gangs, they spare no expense, including murder, to protect their business.

There are numerous ways of getting drugs in a prison unit. First, an inmate can utilize other inmates that have access to the outside of the prison. These inmates can pick up packages that have been left at a designated place. These inmates will then bring the drugs into the unit. This process can sometimes be dangerous because if the inmate is searched before he re-enters the unit, a guard can find the drugs or money.

A second way to get the drugs into a unit is to have correctional officers bring the drugs onto the unit. This is done by giving officers money for bringing the drugs in the unit. This process works better for the gang members because the officer is not searched prior to coming onto the unit.

Far too many times dirty bosses have entered the gates of a prison unit and violated the trust of the citizens of the State of Texas and delivered drugs to gang members and other inmates for the pleasure of the dollar bill. Far too many times have medical assistants, maintenance supervisors and food service personnel also violated that trust. Then they are treated as any other criminal, arrested, jailed and then prosecuted.

These are not the only ways that drugs are furnished to a gang member. Family members, friends, paroled prison gang members and others have furnished inmates with drugs.

The other types of criminal activity are not as profitable, but are controlled as much as possible by the gang members. Commissary supplies are black marketed or traded for drugs in some cases. Those gang members that do not have the money in their trust funds are supplied needed commissary goods by other gang members. The gang members take care of each other.

Weapons are very much in demand. These weapons may be fashioned in a machine shop, brought in from the outside (pocket knife) or crudely made inside the cell and sharpened on the concrete floor of the cell. Any material that is hard can be made into a weapon. Other weapons such as bombs, made from match head sulphur, small metal objects and flammable liquid, have been used to "take care of business". Disposable razor blades melted into tooth brush handles, tooth brushes

sharpened on one end, BIC pens among many other items have been used successfully to eliminate rival gang members or even members of their own gang that have snitched, refused to help other gang members or violated their promise to the prison gang.

Weapons have been traded for drugs, sold for money and given away as presents. The weapon is the gang's SWORD OF CONTROL.

Criminal activity is a never-ending thing whether the criminal is inside the prison system or outside. The criminal can come to prison and sharpen his wits as well as his weapons. If he is a gang member, he can push out his chest, beat it with his fists and be as bad as he wants to be, if it's for the gang.

Any time a person has twenty-four hours a day to do nothing but think criminal thoughts, he can beat the system, or make a darn good effort at it. Anything man makes, man can defeat.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PRISON GANG CONSTITUTION

The Constitution of a prison gang is in essence its set of rules. These guidelines were developed to give the prison gangs "direction". The gang comes first, even before family. Carl A. Dawson and Warner E. Gettys explained this concept in their study in 1948.

"Group life is possible only when the individual members suppress many of their personal interest and desires for the sake of the survival of the group as a whole.--- When a feeling of unity develops, individuals feel that the group should be put ahead of themselves at all times and that, in a group crisis, they would be willing to lay aside their personal wishes, ideas, and even their lives for the sake of group survival."<sup>16</sup>

This idea is what is captured in the prison gang's constitution.

First, each member is told what is expected, how he is to respect each and every member, and assist and protect them.

It is explained that once a person becomes a member, "BROTHER", he is a member for LIFE. The only termination of membership is DEATH. This rule may be the most important of all because it will test the loyalty of each member from the very beginning. Each member is to conduct himself with respect and any disrespect will be dealt with by the prison gang.

The Constitution explains that he never lets another gang member down. He must always look after and take care of his "brother". The member's family, the gang, comes first and your blood family, or biological family, comes second.

The earlier prison gang members were required to wear a tattoo or "patch" on some part of their body. This tattoo was a sign to other members that one was a brother. The tattoo also informed other inmates that one did not stand alone, but was a part of a prison family. It was a sign to other inmates and other prison gangs that if anyone hurts or disrespects the inmate, they would have to answer to the whole gang.

The tattoo also served a purpose for the prison officials. It told the officials which inmates were part of a prison gang. By identifying these prison gang members, the officials could keep a closer watch on them and monitor their activity. This process subsequently made it possible for the officials to "lock down" the prison gang members. Locking gang members down and placing them in segregation, keeps the prison gang members away from other inmates. This procedure

kept the gang members from freely attacking rival gangs and kept the gangs from freely recruiting other inmates in the main population of the prison.

Secrecy is a vital part of the prison gangs' operations. Without it, everyone would know what the prison gang is doing. An inmate who talks to the officials is labeled as a "snitch". A snitch is marked and other inmates stay away from him. In the prison gang, that inmate is also marked, but the other members want to kill him. The code of silence is extremely important to the prison gang, and they want the members to know just how important it is.

Respect for other members and sharing your personal property is important. Respect may be the only thing that an inmate has left. If an inmate disrespects a gang member, it is disrespect for the prison gang. You must honor your brother. If another member does not have the things he needs, such as coffee, cigarettes, and other property, then another member is expected to share. Taking care of your family means they will take care of you.

As can be seen from the rules, the prison gang fills the void of an inmate without any family in the free world. This is one of the selling points for joining a prison gang.

The next part of the Constitution explains how new inmates, "PROSPECTS", are SPONSORED by members. It gives the members the guidelines to recruit new inmates. It also makes that member responsible for any problems that the prospect may



cause. After the prospect has been "checked out" by the other prison gang members, then he may be approved as a member or rejected.

The Constitution constantly reminds the members how important it is that all activities conducted by the prison gang remain secret. This is to keep the officials and other prison gangs from knowing their business. It is also repeatedly explained that violations of these rules will be dealt with "accordingly".

These basic rules are adopted by most of the prison gangs. Additions to these rules are made according to the individual gangs and circumstances as they arise.

#### Entry Into The Prison Gang

Entry in the prison gangs are set up relatively the same no matter which gang an inmate joins. Each is looking for people that will look out for the best interest of the prison gang. Inmates that will enforce all rules, no matter what the consequences. Upon entry each member will conform to the norms of the prison gang. Some conform faster than others. This type of behavior is no different than the concept of any organization. The fact that it is criminal by nature, makes it more binding on the inmate because of the consequences for failure to comply to the norm. "Groups develop norms or standards of behavior and belief as a way of encouraging solidarity or as a test of membership. The norms developed in

this way have such a powerful effect on the thinking of group members that perception frequently may be distorted if reality conflicts with the group."<sup>17</sup> Violence, discussed in the next chapter, is one of the norms expected by a prison gang. The ability or willingness to carry out acts of violence are tests that are frequently used. Not all prison gangs require a prospect to kill to get into the gang. But, a prospect that did kill an inmate for the gang, would be held in high regard and would surely "show where his heart was." This type of "heart check" doesn't just apply to the entry prospect. This test is also used to check the loyalty of those that have been with the prison gang for some time.

#### Release From Prison

Release from the prison system is obviously very important to a prison gang member. Now he is in a position to help his prison gang from the outside. The constitution requires the released member to abide by several rules laid out for him once he is released.

Among the rules are: make contacts in the streets with other prison gang members, attempt to set up recruiting in the streets to strengthen the gang outside of the prison, and make sure that the released member's brothers in the prison know where he is so they can make contact with him. And, additionally, the most important rule of all, for those members still in the prison, is to set up drug contacts so the

released member can get drugs back to his brother inside the prison.

The one demand that goes unstated, is to revenge any disrespect by outside rival gang members. This command is one of the most important commands that law enforcement and the community need to understand. Even though a person is out of prison, his allegiance is still with the prison gang that he belonged to while he was incarcerated. A loyal gang member will remember his brothers inside and will attempt, to the best of his ability, to take care of them and the organization. This is the norm that the released member learned while he was still inside the prison. The proficiency at violence that some members obtain while they are incarcerated, makes them proficient at acts of violence in our communities. This one attribute alone should stir the interest of the law enforcement authorities. This characteristic is a reality and taking care of rival prison gang members and even the prison gang's own members that have disrespected the gang, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Recruiting new members in the free world, is an important step in controlling the drug market and other criminal ventures in the released members area. By recruiting young teenagers and young adults that do not have a criminal record, the gang activity has a better chance to prosper and go unnoticed. It also secures a continuation or future for the organization and orient the youngster to criminal gang

activity. Should this youngster ever go to prison, he is already an experienced gangster.

The importance of the drug trade to the released prison gang member is continuously expressed to all prison gang members before release. This is the gang's assurance that there will be a constant supply of drugs into the prison. Once the supply breaks down, the drug business drops off and problems arise for the prison gang inside the prison. If the prison gang cannot produce, the demand will find some other place to provide it's supply. The gang will then not only lose money; it may very well lose it's credibility among other inmates, especially those who rely on the prison gang to supply their drug habits. This could also cause the prison gang to lose its power, thus, causing it to lose its control. This is the reason that it is very important for the prison gang to see that released gang members who do not abide by the constitution in the free world, get killed. This intimidation factor supports their business in the prison as well as on the streets.

CHAPTER V  
PRISON GANG VIOLENCE

As earlier discussed, about 5% of the population of the Texas Prison system in 1987 were confirmed prison gang members. That figure has increased by about 1% by January, 1991. This relatively low number produced approximately 80% of the violence in the Texas system in 1987. Today this figure is down to just less than 70%.

Source?

The violence that the prison gangs generate reaches far beyond the walls, or fences, of the Texas Prison system. What may begin as a discussion over a cup of coffee in the chow hall, or a cigarette handed from one cell to another in administrative segregation, could result in the homicide of a prison gang member some 700 miles away. This data only confirms the still paralleling association with the gang violence in California. These figures are dramatically close. James Davis wrote in 1982, " I believe that 40% of California's violent crime is attributed to crime committed by social aggregates. . . . street gangs and prison gangs."<sup>18</sup>

This sometimes unbelievable violence is a definite trade mark of the prison gangs. This violence can be broken down into two areas of violence, (1) violence inside the prison

system, and (2) outside of the prison system.

#### Inside The Prison System

Of chief importance is the violence that occurs inside the system itself. As previously discussed, this is a way of life for the gangs. The gangs use violence to maintain control through intimidation and fear. It is also used as a tool to test their members loyalty as well as to eliminate enemies. The effects that a prison gang can generate through violence may well determine how successful it will be on that prison unit.

Even though the prison gangs did not appear to be a problem prior to the mid 1980s, there were several homicides that were committed in the prison system that were credited to prison gang activity. From 1979 to 1986 there were 98 homicides in the Texas Department of Corrections. Of that number, 61 were associated with prison gang activity, (approximately 62% of the Homicides committed in the Texas Department of Corrections were gang related). This period of time is when the prison gangs were forming and beginning to grow. Very little information was know on the prison gangs and preparation to confront the problems had just gotten off the ground. For this reason, the code of silence of the gangs was instrumental in conducting their business.

Violence was fast becoming a way of prison life in Texas. The old fashioned way of using one's fist to settle a problem

Source?

had been replaced by a more permanent way, death. This violence was the way a prison gang was going to establish itself as the "controlling party". As one current prison gang member recalls during a voluntary interview, "this ain't no resort, it's a prison. You do your thing and let me do mine. The only thing that the person next door understands is violence. If you have killed one time, people will listen to you the next time."<sup>19</sup> This attitude reflects the general attitude of prison gang members.

Homicides are not the only form of violence commonly used by the prison gangs. Assaults are far more the rule. It is not always known if the assault on another inmate was planned to be an assault, or if it was an attempt to kill the individual. In some cases it is clear that the prison gang member attempted to kill the other inmate and just did not do it. Also, in some cases, it is clear that the assault was only an attempt to hurt the other inmate, not kill him. This approach to violence is a clear warning to the other inmate to refrain from their past activity.

Weapons are a very important tool in the prison gang's attempt to control. Different types of weapons may be used to carry out the prison gang members objectives. Sharpened pieces of metal, all shapes and sizes are used as weapons. Weapons are manufactured different ways. Some are made in machine shops within the prison. These weapons are usually made of sturdy material and have more finely honed edges to

the blade. Some of the more crudely made weapons are usually smaller pieces of metal that are adapted and sharpened in the inmate's cell. The metal can be scraped against the concrete floor to develop the sharp edges. Other types of material are also used. Pieces of plexi-glass are useful weapons. In some cases, they are more practical than metal. Plastic materials can not be detected by metal detectors. Metal detectors are used in many areas of the prison. If an inmate needs to transport his weapon to an area that is protected by a metal detector, then the plastic material can easily go undetected.

Writing pens and pencils, broken materials from items that are allowed in the cell, as well as hundreds of other objects can be fashioned to obtain the result the prison gang member is after.

Combustible materials such as match head sulfur, paint thinner, paint and solvents are used to make explosive devices. These materials compressed in a can and ignited with electricity, can cause an explosion that can kill or destroy parts of the human body. Used effectively, these crudely made bombs can accomplish the same result as any other type of weapon.

These criminals can be very ingenious when it comes to ways of death and destruction. With the development of their weapons, the prison gang members are ready to take care of business. Indeed, opportunity is the only thing holding back another homicide or aggravated assault in the prison system.



### Outside The Prison System

Approximately 900 confirmed members have been discharged, paroled or on mandatory supervision in the free world since December 1986. It is estimated that approximately 60% to 70% of these released prison gang members have been or are still heavily involved in criminal gang activity in the free world. The other 30% to 40% are targets of the prison gangs. Those members that are loyal to the gang are recruiting people in the free world. The number of gang members that have not been in the Texas prison system or do not have a criminal record is unknown.

*Source?*

As discussed in chapter IV, violence in the free world is a must, if control is to be preserved within the prison system. If the prison gang can order a hit on someone in the free world, then they can hold it over anyone they want to in the prison. This far-reaching ability is realized very early in an inmates incarceration. If a member discusses his blood family in the free world, the prison gang has information that can be used to find them. This information is also used to secure the code of silence.

By realizing the ways and methods used to gain weapons inside the prison, imagine how much easier it is to get weapons, conceal them and take them to where ever they are needed. In the streets, the gang member has greater access to all types of weapons. They no longer have to depend on a piece of crudely developed metal to take care of business.

Now they shot someone with a high powered firearm and a greater distance. Death from a distance takes less courage than looking someone in the face or feeling their breath when you take their life. If it is easier, then it will happen more frequently and with less thought.

The exact number of prison gang-related murders and assaults in the free world is not known. The reason is that most law enforcement agencies and prosecuting attorneys have not been aware of this type of activity until recently. In some cases, the prosecutors felt that it was easier to convict a person just for the homicide. By trying to show that it was gang related, it may cause problems with a jury because the jury themselves were uneducated to gang activity. The prosecutors felt that it would take away from their prosecution to try to educate the jury in a few short hours.

Law enforcement officers had very little information about the activity that was happening inside the prison system. By not having any knowledge of the prison gang activity inside the prison, they could not be expected to have any idea of prison gang activity outside the prison. Therefore, most of the prison gang activity conducted outside the prison system was reported, filed and prosecuted as typical criminal activity instead of prison gang (criminal) activity.

From 1982 through 1986 there were at least eight homicides that were directly related to prison gangs in Texas.

Source?

Several more homicides were suspected, but never confirmed. The cases were investigated by the local law enforcement agency and information was gathered explaining the relationship between the victim and the offender. Very little information was dispersed about the homicides. The area of a "gang homicide" had not been tested. Subsequently, these homicides were prosecuted as regular homicides, not gang related homicides. What this was doing was concealing the fact that people were being killed because of prison gang activity. During this time the prison homicides climbed to the highest figure the prison system had ever seen.

It was not until early 1986 that law enforcement agencies began to take notice of the crimes that were being committed by released prison gang members. These agencies began to realize that the violence the prison system had been seeing for the past two to three years was a warning of things to come very soon to their communities. By this time, the prison gangs had already "set up shop" in the streets. The recruiting of new members, some who have no criminal record at all, had entrenched the gang concept in our community.

This report has not mentioned the female inmates and their gang affiliation. At this time female inmates play a small role in prison gang activity in the Texas prison system. The growth of prison gangs within the system has been extremely small, but there is a potential for rapid growth. Other states are beginning to see problems with the females

gang members. Most of them that were a part of a gang in the streets will reorganize once in the penitentiary. This will continue to add to the ever-growing problem that already exists. Dorthy Elmore, Portland Police Bureau's gang unit said, "Female offshoot of the Bloods and Crips, known as Bloodettes and Cripettes are on the rise. Expect a large increase in the number of female gang members in the correctional system." <sup>20</sup> This observation is confirmed by a special report by the U. S. Department of Justice, Women in Prison. The report stated,

"The number of women under the jurisdiction of State and Federal prison authorities at year end 1989 reached a record 40,556. Although the female inmate population had grown by more than 27,000 since 1980, an increase of over 200%, females still comprise a relatively small segment of the prison population - 5.7% at year end 1989. An estimated 41% of the female inmates in 1986 were in prison for a violent offense, compared to 49% in 1979. Nearly half of the women in prison for violent crime in 1986 were serving time for a homicide." <sup>21</sup>

With the growth of females in prison and the high percentage of them incarcerated for violence, it is just a matter of time

before the gangs expand to the women.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION AND PROGNOSIS

The State of Texas has a long way to go before it has any control on prison gang activity outside the prison walls. The prison system has a head start because the controlled environment makes it easier to monitor gang activity. By placing the prison gang members in administrative segregation, locked in their cells for 22 hours a day, coming out only for recreation, showers, visits, legal matters and medical treatments, the prison officials have been able to keep the known prison gang members away from the rest of the population of the prison. This reduces their ability to recruit.

Another important preventative measure is the prosecution of the prison gangs by the Special Prison Prosecution Unit. This unit organized in October 1984, was designed to prosecute violent crimes that occur inside the prison system. This unit has received over 2300 felony crimes since their inception. 1681 of these cases are crimes of violence. Of the 1681 violent offenses, 1142 are prison gang related (67%). This figure is slightly lower than the totals in the mid 1980s. The joint effort of the prison system, locking the prison gang members in administrative segregation, and the prosecution of

*Source?*

prison gang related offenses has reduced this figure by about 12% in a period of four years.

Two important acts of legislation in recent years has also contributed to the decrease of prison violence. Senate Bill #183 of 1987 made it a felony offense to possess or conceal a deadly weapon in a penal institution. Senate Bill #186 of 1987 stated that inmates convicted of an offense while incarcerated in the prison system, shall serve that sentence consecutively to the sentence that they are already serving.

All of the above acts, plus others, have led to positive actions toward solving the gang violence problem in the prison system. Steps along these lines should be created to combat the problem on the streets.

First, and one of the most beneficial steps would be education. Educate the youngsters to the adverse effects of criminal gang activity. Getting law enforcement into the schools to lecture on gang violence, would be a giant step toward curtailing the youth gang problem. Educate juvenile authorities of the youth gang problem, so they can identify and correct them early in the delinquent behavior.

Educate the community to the problems in their area. If gang activity is not a problem, then keep the community aware of surrounding areas with gang activity. These precautions may result in someone recognizing delinquent or adult gang activity before it can get unruly. By educating and listening to the community, law enforcement has many more eyes and ears

on the streets.

Intra-departmental communication is of vital importance. The sharing and passing of information on gang activity may keep the gangs from moving from point to point without law enforcement knowing. As the gang territory expands, those enforcement agencies will be aware of current criminal activity and will be prepared for them. The networking of criminal gang intelligence information is vital to the State. By having a central clearing house of information, and law enforcement knowing where this information is, gang activity throughout the state can be monitored.

There are other factors that can be utilized to curtail gang activity, such as, stronger and mandatory sentences for gang related offenses. Make sanctions against the individual for being a gang member. Keep gang members isolated and locked down. Prosecute the members and use their gang affiliation against them. Make it non-profitable to be a gang member.

A state witness protection program should be set up for individuals that give information and testify against persons that commit violent crimes. Give the person a chance to give up information about the gangs, but don't punish him for helping the system. See that the individual is assisted in his attempt to straighten himself out. Most local jurisdictions do not have the funds to assist people that give up information and need protection. Those individuals that



are willing to put their life on the line and testify against gangs, should be helped.

In 1985 the United States Department of Justice report, Prison Gangs: Their Extent, Nature, and Impact on Prison, written by G.M. and C. G. Camp, wrote that most states with a gang problem felt that prosecution of gang offenses was necessary to deal with the gangs. As of January, 1990, only one state has a prosecuting unit designed to prosecute gang violence within the prison system. In 1984, Texas appointed the Special Prison Prosecution Unit. There are special units set up in several larger cities in Texas, but they do not have the support that is needed to control the gang problems in their community. Camp also wrote that through the research that was done in his report, he concluded that gang violence will grow.

Identifying, monitoring, arresting and prosecuting criminals for gang activity are the only ways to slow down the growing gang problem in Texas. The only way that this can be successfully accomplished is by educating the law enforcement agencies, prosecuting agencies, law makers and the general public, and a cooperation from these agencies to pass on information and assistance.

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