

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

AN HISTORICAL REVIEW OF GANGS AND GANG  
VIOLENCE IN EL PASO, TEXAS

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## **GANGS: A NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL PROBLEM**

Chief John Scagno of the El Paso Police Department stated that, "Gangs are one of the single most critical law enforcement issues facing El Paso" (Scagno 1992). Most other officials in El Paso agree with this assessment. Gang related violence is increasing dramatically in El Paso, which appears to be a trend statewide as well as nationwide. To fully understand the local problem, consideration needs to be given to the overall situation.

"The way I see it", says Captain J.R. Grijalva, "there's really not one solution to the gang problem. We have to attack it on many fronts. One of them is aggressive enforcement. Another one is, of course, in some of the programs we already have in place" (Grijalva 1992).

"I don't think the police department has the answer to the problem," said Captain George DeAngelis. "I think it's going to be a total community effort. Enforcement is not the lone solution, but it is our end of our bargain" (DeAngelis 1993).

"As far as long and short term solutions are concerned, as far as the police department is concerned, we have to work on both," said Deputy Chief Greg Drollinger, the short term solution is the enforcement, where somebody goes out to break the law or is about to break the law, we need to do something about it right now and that is obviously short term. The total answer to gang-problem is a long term solution. And that is education" (Drollinger 1992).

Jimmy Gurule, Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs in the U.S. Department of Justice, reported in the June, 1991 issue of the National Institute of

Justice Report, that "gang violence is a growing problem across the nation. It cuts across ethnic and cultural lines, involves youth, and increasingly adults, and is spreading at an alarming rate" (Gurule 1991).

Terence P. Thornberry, Professor in the School of Criminal Justice at the State University of New York at Albany, reported in October, 1991, at the National Conference on Youth Gangs and Violent Juvenile Crime, that recent research indicates that between 83% and 87% of all street crimes involving juveniles are committed by gang members compared to 9% to 15% which are committed by non-gang members. While nothing indicates that gangs are organized for the purpose of drug dealing, members of gangs are ten times more likely to sell drugs than non-gang members.

Gangs are generally unstable units whose membership is highly fluid and transient. Thornberry's 1991 studies suggest that only 3% of members maintain gang affiliation for more than three years, but these 3% are responsible for 64% of all street crimes, 38% of which involve drug sales. His conclusion is that gang affiliation has a definite correlation to higher rates of crime.

Texas Attorney General Dan Morales stated in his report Gangs in Texas Cities, published in June, 1991, "There is very little doubt that youth gangs are now a part of the urban landscape in Texas. Almost one-third of Texas Youth Commission (TYC) referrals are members of named gangs, and another third belong to a circle of friends who at least sometime think of themselves as a gang" (Morales 1991).

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reports that no national data on gangs or gang activity are collected. Only gross estimates, based on law

enforcement perceptions are available in most cities. The definition of the term "gang" and what constitutes gang related crimes, varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction as well as in research literature (Salazar 1990). This is a problem in the development of laws and subsequent policies and strategies for dealing with the gang problem.

The participation by juveniles in gang activities, many of them violent, is a critical issue confronting society today. Recent and frequent news reports of gangs violence are not simply media hype. Juvenile involvement in gang activities is not new, but it has a new and alarming ramifications due largely to competition for the lucrative illegal drug trade. This competition has led to increased recruitment of juveniles as young as seven years of age, indiscriminate killings, and the spread of gangs into suburban areas and small and mid-size cities across the country. Gang violence is real, and so are its victims.

The most disturbing aspect of the gang is the number of young children involved in a wide range of street activity. Older gang members recruit juveniles to sell narcotics because the adult gang members are thereby insulated from arrest. The juveniles actually commit the crimes because there are few sanctions available in juvenile justice.

The easy accessibility of illegal weapons is another major factor contributing to the increase of violent crime. According to Ron Stephens, executive director of the National School Safety Center, superintendents from 15 major urban school districts recently rated weapons on school grounds as their number one concern followed by gangs and drugs. Students bring weapons to school because they fear gang-related violence and because they are tools of the gang-related drug trade.

## **GANGS IN EL PASO, TEXAS**

A scientific assessment of the gang problem in El Paso could not be made. In fact, no such data exists today in most areas of the nation. Assessment of the gang problem in El Paso is being based on information about gangs, their members, and their activities from the El Paso Police Department, the criminal justice system, current and former gang members, and the public at large.

Juvenile violence is increasing at alarming rates in El Paso. Manny Torres, Director of Court Services El Paso County Juvenile Probation Department, reported that 15 youths have been certified as adults for violent crimes for the year of 1992, compared with a total of 12 certifications in 1991. Torres notes a definite increase in the number of violent acts being committed by juveniles ages 10 to 16. These violent crimes include sexual abuse, robbery, aggravated assault, attempted murder and murder (Torres 1993).

A comparison of the numbers of cases and types of violent offenses involving juveniles filed by the El Paso Police Department for the years of 1991 and 1992 follows:

Table 1  
Juvenile Crime: El Paso, Texas

OFFENSE	1992	1991
Homicide	41	24
Sexual Assault	30	52
Robbery	109	143
Assaults	2,486	2,583

## **THE LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSPECTIVE**

In El Paso, youth gang activity is unorganized with limited goals or purpose. Gang activity is a minimal threat to police; gangs pose a greater threat to schools and citizens.

El Paso has as many as 2,281 active gang members, a number which does not include associates, estimated at more than 4,000. Activities associated with gangs included a high level of the use and sale of drugs, auto thefts, burglaries, shoplifting, criminal mischief, assault, robbery, murder, drive-by (retaliation) shootings, and intimidation.

## **THE SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE**

Gangs are prevalent on many secondary school campuses in El Paso, mostly identifiable by their clothing. Most administrators feel that youth join gangs in the upper elementary grades or in middle school. The majority of the schools report having gang members attending school and creating significant problems on campus. Administrators recognize the need for education and training of school personnel and parents about gangs as well as the need for written guidelines, policies, and procedures to follow in responding to a gang situation.

## **THE PROBLEM DEFINED**

El Paso is one of the poorest cities in the United States. Of the 50 largest U.S. cities, El Paso ranks 24th in size and 49th in per capita income. Of the 281 U.S. "metropolitan areas" recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau in the 1990 census, El Paso ranked 276th in per capita income.



The people who live in certain areas of El Paso, especially public housing, are the poorest of the poor, trailing well behind the rest of El Paso in average income.

Many poor people try to keep themselves and their families happy and healthy. But for so many others, poverty brings frustration, desperation and burnout. It's difficult to reach children in this environment and help them learn. Many of those receiving public assistance are women raising children alone who want to work but can't because they have no marketable skills and are lacking the basic education they would need to get any sort of job training.

Parental involvement is the single biggest thing that can keep young people out of trouble. Because many families are led by a single parent, or by two parents who work long hours and cannot keep a close eye on their children, providing this involvement can be difficult. Parents who are themselves unemployed will have a hard time finding their children jobs away from gangs.

Of the 2,281 known gang members identified in El Paso, over 80% are Hispanic. In 1991, 1,101 gang related crimes were investigated. In 1992, the El Paso Police Department Gang Unit investigated 1,274 gang related crimes ranging from petty offenses to murder. Of these offenses, 500 involved weapons, 150 involved drugs, and 182 were drive-by shootings.

The number of drive-by shootings is increasing significantly, especially among street gangs. Schools in El Paso reported that gang members are harassing and intimidating elementary school students to the point that they are fearful of going to school. Another trend is an increase in female participation in gangs.

Street gang activity is at its greatest after school and on weekend nights. The police department is called to many schools for gang-related activities and is called to many campuses almost daily during the school year.

## **THE PHENOMENON OF GANGS**

Youth gangs and gang incidents are defined differently across and within cities and jurisdictions by criminal justice, community based organizations, and schools. The lack of a common definition clearly prohibits an accurate assessment of gangs and related activities nationwide and statewide. The following are examples of the variety of definitions which exist.

### **EL PASO POLICE DEPARTMENT**

For prosecutorial purposes, gangs may be regarded as a species of organized criminal activity, or as a criminal street gang. The El Paso Police Department defines a gang as: "Any group of three or more persons characterized by a common sign, symbol or name, that engages in continuous or regularly criminal activity with special interest in violence and graffiti for benefit or identification of the group, and is recognized as a gang by both its members and by others."

### **TEXAS ATTORNEY GENERAL'S 1991 REPORT**

Current legislation defines a gang as a group of two, three or more persons who have a common name, identifying sign, identifying symbols, or leadership; and who engage in a pattern of criminal gang activities. Criminal gang activity is then defined in terms of specific offenses, with the proviso that at least two such offenses are committed within a three year period. The offenses include murder, capital murder, involuntary manslaughter, aggravated assault, arson, criminal mischief, robbery, aggravated robbery, tampering with a witness, and retaliation; and various offenses under the Health and Safety Code, having to do with manufacturing, delivering, or possession of controlled

substances (Morales 1991).

#### **MIAMI POLICE DEPARTMENT**

A gang is a group of persons joined together to commit acts of violence or any other anti-social behavior (Miami Police Department).

#### **CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT**

Chicago uses four criteria to define a gang:

1. It is an organized group with a recognized leader and usually less powerful under command.
2. It is a unified group which remains together during peaceful times as well as during conflict (in contrast to a mob which may unite in a riot, but whose members go their separate ways when the riot is over).
3. The group show unity in obvious ways, earrings, gang colors, sweaters, etc.
4. The group's activities are either criminal or somehow threatening to a larger society (Chicago Police Department).

#### **LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT**

A gang is a group of juveniles and/or adults in a geographic area whose activities include the unlawful use of force, violence, or threats of force and violence to further the group's purpose (Los Angeles Police Department).

According to Walter B. Miller (1990), with the Center of Criminal Justice of the Harvard Law School, " A youth gang is a self-formed association of peers, bound together by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership, well-developed lines of authority, and other organizational features, who act in concert to achieve a specific

purpose or purposes which generally include the conduct of illegal activity and control over a particular territory, facility, or type of enterprise."

## **LOS ANGELES COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT**

A gang is any group gathered together on a continuing basis to commit anti-social behavior. In general these groups will identify under a single name or symbol and claim areas or neighborhoods as their own (Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department).

## **REASONS YOUTH JOIN GANGS**

Involvement in a gang is only a manifestation of many social ills plaguing our youth today. Research and interviews with gang members and service providers have developed the following lists of reasons for gang affiliation:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Need to belong                                | 11. Peer pressure                                |
| 2. Low self-esteem                               | 12. Security/protection                          |
| 3. Protection                                    | 13. Identity                                     |
| 4. Recognition                                   | 14. Not enough attention at home                 |
| 5. Avoidance of rejection                        | 15. Lack of religion                             |
| 6. Intimidation                                  | 16. Low economic condition                       |
| 7. Fear  | 17. Lack of parental interest                    |
| 8. Too much unstructured,<br>non-supervised time | 18. Insecurity                                   |
| 9. Family tradition                              | 19. Lack of education                            |
| 10. Lack of social activity                      | 20. Unhappy youth trapped in bad<br>environments |

Dr. Lucy Romeo, an El Paso psychologist, states that, "Typical gang members have low self-esteem, are rebellious, impulsive, easily led and have problems in school. They also commonly have family problems, sexual and physical abuse, broken homes, drugs and alcohol abuse." Dr. Romeo adds, "Gang members, are very vulnerable children and if there aren't changes made in their families and their lifestyle, or if they don't [continue to] receive help, there will be a tendency to continue gang activity. Gang members possessing a negative self-concept seems to interfere with job satisfaction, motivation, performance and even with finding a good position" (Romeo 1993).

#### **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GANG AFFILIATION**

Low parental involvement is the major reason cited for most social problems in youth. Research reports validate the belief that parents and "parenting" play key roles in determining whether a juvenile joins a gang.

Factors placing youths at risk include:

- \* the demise of the traditional family unit
- \* parents lack parenting skills
- \* all adults work and leave children unsupervised
- \* home environments are stressful due to economic demands
- \* high divorce rate
- \* high numbers of single-parent households
- \* high numbers of child abuse cases
- \* alcohol and drug abuse
- \* low literacy levels

- \* high levels of poverty
- \* high drop out rate
- \* high unemployment rate

### **COSTS TO SOCIETY**

Texas Attorney General Dan Morales made the following statement in August 1991, "We are in effect not willing to spend money now on prevention programs, but we tell the kids that we are reserving a room for them in ten years at a cost of \$50,000" (Morales 1991). Prevention is cheaper and much more cost effective than building and maintaining prisons. The Committee on Economic Development of the State of Texas reports that for every \$1.00 spent today to prevent failure, \$4.75 is saved in the cost of remedial education, welfare, and crime further down the road. According to the Dallas Morning News, trauma units in hospitals across the nation are being swamped by gunshot victims with multiple wounds often from drug or gang-related violence. Their hospital stay will probably be 50% longer than average and cost the hospital \$10,000 more per patient.

As violence, much of it associated with gangs and drugs, has increased in the inner city, more victims, many of whom have no insurance, are delivered daily to emergency rooms, the cost of health care rises. Cities are losing their trauma units due to high costs of treatment, law suits, and loss of medical staff.

## **HISTORICAL PERIODS OF GANG DEVELOPMENT**

Analyzing gang activity from an historical perspective highlights certain social, economic, political, psychological, and geographical factors that characterize the development of gangs. Gangs usually develop among ethnic and racial groups which are often victims of discrimination manifested by housing, education, politics, health, and employment deficiencies.

Gang activity in the United States has had five distinct historical periods: Pre-Civil War Era, Post-Civil War Era, Industrial Revolution Era, Post World War I/Prohibition Era, and the Modern Post World War II Era (Horowitz 1990).

Youth gangs were first identified in the United States in the eighteenth century. They existed mainly in large urban areas and were made up of predominantly white, recent immigrants. During the Pre-Civil War Era, the Irish were the first great wave of immigrants to the United States, but America proved not to be a land of opportunity but, instead, a land of hunger and discrimination. Many of the unemployed adolescents and young men formed street gangs as a means of survival.

The Post Civil War Era saw the emergence of gangs from other nationalities. The Ku Klux Klan was organized by six young men who were unemployed veterans. Southern whites joined the Klan because, under Reconstruction, the majority of whites who supported the Confederacy were denied the right to vote and lost much of their land, identity, and status. They terrorized blacks and other ethnic groups. Meanwhile, German gangs that were forming in the North robbed and beat strangers as well as their neighbors.



The Industrial Revolution expanded the labor force and drew even more immigrants to the United States where landlords and factories exploited them and put their children to work. By 1873, more than 100,000 children were working in U.S. factories. Children as young as five years old were employed until the Child Labor Reform Movement raised the average work age to 16 years. Suddenly tens of thousands of unemployed, unsupervised children ages 5 to 15 were roaming the urban streets. This era is considered the true beginning of juvenile gangs in the U.S. Like their adult counterparts, youth gangs had fights and committed crimes. In 1889, of the 82,200 people arrested in New York, 10,500 were under the age of 12 (Horowitz 1990).

By the early 1900's thousands of street gangs existed; gangs did not change much for the next fifty years except for an increase in guns and the use of drugs. By 1912, Irish gangs began to decline in size because they had gained legitimate economic and political power. Italians and Jews began to take over the gangs with Chinese Tongs forming their own gangs in the Chinatowns. They engaged in violent acts for hire.

Gang activity diminished greatly between 1914 and 1918. Reforms of 1916 brought overthrow of local governments resulting in the imprisonment of over 200 of the most important gang leaders. Immigration was all but cut off.

The Mafia rose to power during the Era of Prohibition in 1919; the era is called the golden era of gangs. Bootlegging became a multi-million dollar business. After the repeal of Prohibition, the Mafia shifted its focus to prostitution, gambling, and drugs.

During the 1920's, immigration from Europe and Asia was cut off only to be replaced by the heavy migration of blacks and Puerto Ricans to the urban north seeking

labor positions during World War II. This continued until after the war ended in 1945 when white soldiers returned to reclaim their old jobs leaving many minorities jobless. The result was a rise in the number of black and Puerto Rican gangs marking the beginning of the modern post war era of gang development. The civil rights movement in the mid 1960's brought rapid social and political change. Super gangs emerged in several cities. The War on Poverty was stalemated and, on some fronts, totally lost.

While all this was happening, poverty became a primarily urban problem and structural changes in the economy resulted in the emergence of a new ghetto underclass. Drugs and firearms proliferated in urban areas and the War on Crime and the war in Vietnam drew attention away from efforts to work with ghetto youth.

Gangs have diffused into some cities as a result of the increased mobility of society. Although, historically, gangs have organized around neighborhoods, today's gangs are not as attached to particular boundaries. Court-ordered school desegregation had the effect of removing the neighborhood base of gangs.

Today's gang problem has been compared to the golden age of the Mafia with drug trafficking replacing bootlegging. Gang's memberships tend to cross ethnic lines and have more female involvement (Horowitz 1990).

## **RESEARCH**

Research and historical documentation of the evolution of gangs is sparse. A few papers written in the 1920's dealt mainly with Chicago street gangs. Publication of Albert K. Cohen's Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang in 1955, began a period of intense interest in theories and reasons for juvenile delinquency and in delinquent

gangs especially.

Most research in the 1960's was conducted by public and private delinquency agencies, often with police cooperation. It included mostly field research and observation relying primary on data from police, other law enforcement contacts, and informants.

While a few gang studies were published in the 1970's, by the middle of that decade a shift had occurred in research on the topic. Accompanying this shift was a preoccupation with delinquency control, rather than its prevention and with suppression of gang activity, rather than its monitoring and an emphasis on "working with" gangs in the interest of delinquency prevention as many police departments had done in the early to mid 1960's.

Changes were occurring at the same time; federal delinquency policy was increasingly influenced by insights gained from reports of the President's Commission of Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice and its Task Force on Juvenile Delinquency (1967). These reports stressed the importance of community efforts to prevent delinquency. Gangs continued to exist through the 1970's with minimal attention from officials and the media. By the late 1970's, police and city officials became increasingly concerned about gang activity and responded by building police gang units and gathering statistics. The passage of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 added even more funds to the millions of federal dollars being spent in support of projects designed to provide opportunities for youth in communities targeted as at risk for involvement in delinquency.

By the early 1980's, gang problems had once again emerged into the public consciousness. Police departments in major cities continued to develop their gang intelligence programs. A few gangs were reported to be expanding into smaller cities spurred, in part, by the attraction of local drug markets.

In 1987, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention established a research and development program to address the gang problem in policy and programmatic terms through a cooperative agreement with the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. As a result, the National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Program is conducting a four-stage process of assessment, model program development, technical assistance, and dissemination. Studies of youth gang programs have been conducted in 45 cities, and manuals have been produced (Huff 1990).

C. Ronald Huff, Director of the Criminal Justice Research Center and Professor of Public Policy and Management at Ohio State University, describes the state of gang research in the 1990's in the following way: "In my own judgment, we have not yet arrived at a point where we can embrace a general theory of gangs or recommended by consensus the policies that ought to be pursued to prevent and control gangs." He stresses the need for more research on gangs, especially in the context of their social and economic environment addressing the question of why some youth in the same environment do not affiliate with gangs while others do. Huff also believes that gangs need to be viewed as a manifestation of other problems in our social economic structure and in certain ecological areas of our cities (Huff 1990).

Ronald Chance, Project Director of the National Gang Suppression and Intervention Program, reports that the rate of violent offenses for gang members is three times as high as for non-gang members. Gangs membership also appears to prolong the extent and seriousness of criminal careers (Chance 1990).

Because of the lack of research on and consensus about what a gang or gang incident is, the national scope and seriousness of the problem is not clearly or reliably known. Gangs are known to exist in all fifty states, and there is reasonably good evidence to verify an increase in gang-related violent crime. Several factors are attributed to the growth of gangs and their related crimes such as drug use and drug trafficking, poverty, dysfunctional families, poor education, and the lack of job opportunities.

### **SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Gangs present a series of paradoxes. Gangs minister poorly to such adolescent needs as preparation for marriage, jobs, and getting along with others. Boys who join for protection are often exposed to dangers that non-gang boys can more easily avoid. Girls may join because they are attracted to male members who then exploit them sexually often resulting in teenage pregnancy and more female head of households. Gang members are more likely to become involved in crime and to be victims of crime than are non-gang members.

Economic changes have created a permanent underclass. These unskilled, under-educated youth may become attracted to the illegal economy of crime and drugs, while others have become so demoralized that they are ready candidates for alcohol and drug addiction. Crimes associated with the underclass victimize all races and ethnic groups.

Gangs are a social problem, not an ethnic problem.

Joblessness and the lack of stable jobs with prospects for advancement have resulted in a shortage of desirable male marriage partners for young women. Sexual exploitation is found in every society, but its consequences are more evident when social and economic resources are lacking and sexual conquest is one of the few available avenues for status achievement.

## **TYPES OF GANGS**

### **STREET GANGS**

Opinions about the origin, development, and structure of street gangs are as vast and varied as the terminology used to describe them. Traditional street gangs usually develop around a particular geographic location and are usually ethnically oriented. Because development is slow, it may go unnoticed until the behavior of the gang become violent. Transition from social club to criminal gang can be due to the pressures of adolescent development, poverty, discrimination, ethnicity, and materialistic values.

According to Dr. William Sanders, a professor at University of Texas at El Paso, "gangs in general across the Nation are basically unorganized. Violence by gangs, no matter how infrequent, is at the core of their definition. So rather than arguing that "gangs cause violence," I think it is prudent to consider the thesis that "violence causes gangs" (Sanders 1993).

The first consideration in examining violence as a defining criterion of gangs is the severity, in quality and quantity, of the violence. "To simplify, and accurately portray the level of violence needed to define a gang, I will propose that for a group to be a gang, it must use deadly force" (Sanders 1993). If a group is willing to use enough violence to kill others, whether in defense of self or in aggression, then it is enough to be considered a gang.

A second element of gang violence is the use of group violence in the name of the gang. "A group of kids might get together and use a gun to commit a robbery. In fact, they may actually kill someone in the process. However, unless the group identifies with

a gang, and understands that the violence is for or with the gang, we are not talking about violence as a defining element in the gang" (Sanders 1993).

When gang members feel an obligation to engage in attack or defense with the use of deadly force because of affiliation with a gang, we can define that violence as gang violence. Another function of violence in defining gangs is the effect of violence on gang cohesion or solidarity. "Gangs that have little sources of internal cohesiveness, rely on external threat such as rival gangs and the police to maintain gang cohesion" (Sanders 1993).

Deadly violence visited on gangs is a clear source of external pressure. However, violence by a gang against another gang or non-gang also generates external pressures. When a gang attacks a gang, it can expect retaliation in the form of violence. Likewise, any kind of gang violence is going to bring the attention of the police. Whether the gang sees the response to their violence as appropriate, it generates the external pressure that increases solidarity.

"There is a necessary caveat to the idea that external pressure increases internal solidarity. If enough pressure in the form of arrests and deaths hit a gang, it can destroy the gang, or at least cool it off to the point that it is no longer the target of other gangs or the police" (Sanders 1993).

"For a gang to be territorial, it virtually has to be violent" (Sanders 1993). A gang cannot lay any legitimate claim to public areas otherwise. However, by being willing to use violence against rival gangs that come into their area, they can maintain a claim. "So in talking about gang territoriality as a defining characteristic of gangs, it is



necessary to define territoriality as the willingness to use violence to maintain territorial integrity" (Sanders 1993).

A seemingly contradictory element must be introduced into gang violence. While it is important to understand that to be a gang, a group must demonstrate the willingness to use deadly force, it is not important that such force be used all the time or by all the members.

The frequency and intensity of violence may also vary considerably. Some gangs may not have displayed violence for years, but their reputation as a gang can be made on a single incident where the willingness to use deadly force is demonstrated.

### **THEORIES ABOUT THE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT**

According to the concept paper "Gang Intervention, Diversion, and Prevention Strategies," prepared for the Youth Diversion Project of Milwaukee by the Human Development Systems, there seem to be three stages of development associated with the evolution and transformation of peer groups into gangs: envious comparison, ethnocentrism, and illegal market-place identity. Although the first two are universal to adolescence, the third is a direct result of poverty and discrimination.

Envious comparison (ages 8-15) is the stage when most youth begin to separate from their families in an attempt to develop an independent sense of identity. Middle-class youth use the status and material possessions of their parents to create a standard for themselves in society. Youth who do not have even the basic necessities often turn to crime to attain status. Ethnocentrism (ages 14-17) is the stage usually around puberty when youth gravitate to the group for identity.

The illegal market place identity (ages 17-early 20s) is a stage usually reached only by low-income youth groups because middle-income youths have more alternatives. During this state of gang development, the gang is trying to build a stable economy to support individual gang members and gang activities. At this stage, the group becomes a stable inter-generational group which can assume a variety of structures (Thomas 1991).

## **THEORIES ON THE STRUCTURES OF STREET GANGS**

The concept paper lists four structures of street gangs.

### **I. VERTICAL GANG STRUCTURE**

A gang with vertical structure is made up of youth of about the same age living in the same immediate neighborhood. This type can have a long history with its motto, name, morale, and fighting tradition being handed down from one generation to the next. There are three age levels in the Vertical gang:

- (1) "Pee Wees", "Midgets", or "Tots", ages 7 to 13. Their main function is to socialize and to act as runners, messengers, and lookouts.
- (2) "Juniors", ages 13 to 17, teach the Pee Wees the gang signs, oath, and mottos and serve as the workers and the military for the gang because, if caught, they are treated as juveniles in the criminal justice system. They sell the drugs and commit street crimes. "Gang banging" is often a rite of passage for young gang members.
- (3) "Seniors", ages 17 to 20 and over, are the leaders and organizers of the gang and function as the liaisons between the gang and other affiliated

gangs. Seniors make the drug deals, make arrangements to sell stolen property, and direct gang wars. The socialization, discipline, and reward of the younger gang members is also handled by the seniors. They function like heads of a family by providing basic needs of food and clothing to the younger members. Seniors use the desire to belong, the fear of being unprotected, money, and drugs to forge gang loyalty and obedience.

The membership of vertical gangs is not fixed and is never as large as it seems because many members are marginally connected. Marginal members wear the colors and claim allegiance to the gang out of necessity but do not get involved in criminal activity except for fighting. Youth who live in the territory of the gang must declare affiliation in order to move freely and safely within the territory.

Vertical gangs usually have three types of members. Hard core members give full allegiance to the gang treating it like a family for whom they would die. The gang is their primary means of belonging and making a living. Usually the core has no more than 10 to 15 members. Floaters are usually close friends of individual members of the core and can be counted on to participate in gang wars; floaters may number no more than 40. Peripherals basically belong to the gang out of necessity, so their commitment is not strong. The number of peripherals often give the illusion that the gang is much larger than it really is.

## II. HORIZONTAL GANG STRUCTURE

Horizontal gangs are a loosely knit union of autonomous groups which are allied for specific purposes. They are usually developed from members of a Vertical or Self-

Contained Gang who have moved to another neighborhood and organize an affiliated gang. These groups usually lack experience and powerful leadership. Although there are usually 10 to 15 core members, with at most 20 floater members, it is through this structure that gangs can boast hundreds of members.

### III. SELF-CONTAINED STRUCTURE

The Self-Contained gang is a small, tightly knit group of members from a horizontal or vertical structure who could not get along with their age group in the other structure. Some self-contained gangs are sociopathic youth who are involved primarily in violent crime. Although this type is rare, they are very dangerous.

### IV. DISINTEGRATIVE STRUCTURE

The disintegrative gang is the last stage in the evolutionary decline of the other three types and occurs due to the advancing age of gang membership; the decrease in membership due to imprisonment, death, or changing values; and the loss of viable leadership. This type of gang is usually composed of older teens who meet occasionally for social reasons and out of habit. Even though they still view themselves as a gang, they are usually not involved in crime and are not threatening the community.

Depending on the particular area and type of gang, structures vary significantly and are rarely very sophisticated. Street gang members are mostly male with females functioning in an auxiliary role, although a few independent female gangs exist. Street gangs cover almost all racial and ethnic segments of society although the great majority of gang members are those from the lower socioeconomic groups. Characteristics of specific ethnic groups' gangs tend to vary with the geographic region. Gangs in older

urban areas of the country seem to have the most similarities among differing ethnic groups, with the greatest differences existing on the west coast (Thomas 1991).

## **HISPANIC GANGS**

Hispanic barrio (neighborhood) gangs are among the oldest in the United States and also in El Paso. They are usually organized around neighborhoods, streets, or certain areas and take their names from the geographic area or some characteristic of the area they claim. They tend to express their gang affiliation more artistically than other gangs via dress, graffiti, tattoos, and vehicles.

Participants in Hispanic street gangs are youth who have relied largely on street peers for socialization. Youth with problem families, lack of adult supervision and guidance, and a fear for personal safety are most vulnerable to gang involvement. Youth join gangs seeking a sense of belonging. Gang membership affords a clearly defined set of peers with whom friendship and family-like relationships can be enjoyed. Another reason for gang affiliation can be family tradition. Joining the gangs is a natural expectation in a family where fathers, uncles, and brothers have participated in the gang.

Adolescence brings additional stresses which produce many school drop-outs. Lack of training and limited job opportunities find these youth on the street with gang peers. They may strive to demonstrate gang loyalty or machismo (manliness) through drinking, drugs, exhibiting sexual prowess, fighting ability, and a quick readiness to fight. The availability of guns and the wide use of mind-altering drugs lead to serious criminal consequences. Physical pummeling (jump in's) is part of the initiation to most barrio gangs. The initiation serves to test a prospective member's toughness and desire for

membership and to enhance loyalty to the group. Initiation rites range from "being jumped" (being beaten) to stealing cars or committing a burglary. In addition, if members want to leave a gang, they have to go through an exit rite which requires performing a criminal act, often violence.

The average age of an Hispanic youth gang member is 14 to 21, but children as young as seven have joined. The most violent age seems to be 13 to 16. The average life expectancy of an Hispanic gang member is 25. About age 21 or 22 members tend to leave the gang, but may remain criminally active (Vigil 1990).

To enhance the gang identity, standardized clothing styles, nicknames (street names), tattoo and graffiti techniques, speech practices, and even distinctive patterns for face and hand gestures, body posture, and walking are used. This is called the "cholo front". Most gang members freely drop their cholo front in situations where it impedes their attaining a particular goal.

The motivations for joining gangs determine the level of the members' involvement in the gang. Some are totally committed to the gang while others use the gang for socialization but have interests elsewhere. Some members may enjoy the parties and try to avoid the more violent activities, but sometimes a leisurely cruising episode can quickly turn into violence.

Graffiti is significant among street gangs because it delineates a gang's territory (marks the turf) and indicates territories in dispute. It proclaims who the top ranking gang members are, serves as a directory of gang membership, communicates challenges, and advertises types of activity the gang or gang member is involved in. Hispanic gang

graffiti is highly stylized and, usually, is not placed on larger areas like walls until the scribe has acquired a fair degree of skill in such writing. It tends to be in Old English lettering, explosive block style, or the sharp angled California Hispanic street gang style that developed in Los Angeles.

Gang members mark out their gang logos or members' names on anything that will hold paint, felt tip pens, chalk, or pencil. The gang logo or moniker painted on a wall is called a "placaso" which derives from the Spanish word placa which means badge, insignia, plaque, or plate. It is the gang member's insignia.

Placing graffiti in the area of a rival gang is considered an insult and a challenge to which the rival gang invariably feels compelled to respond. The response can be anything from simply crossing out the rival graffiti to a drive-by shooting or other violence. It is not uncommon for death to result from graffiti confrontations. The first response is inevitably the "X-ing out" of the rival graffiti along with some additional negative display in bold letters. Most cross outs are found around the fringes of a gang's territory instead of in the geographic center. Hispanic gang members commonly list their "homeboys" on the walls in the area or the area of rivals or the area of a crime they have recently committed. The order of the names often has rank significance.

The major industrialization and urbanization of the twentieth century requiring thousands of laborers has produced a continual Mexican immigration in this century. In turn, this boom has contributed to the development and growth of street gangs. The continuity of these barrio gangs stems from the same conditions that initially caused the development of gangs: poverty, substandard housing, poor-paying jobs, low levels of

education, estrangement from families, and widespread discrimination. In addition minority neighborhoods usually have few parks and playgrounds, no safe, supervised places for youth to gather. Schools often do not provide staff capable of understanding and dealing with language and cultural differences.

The Depression and World War II also brought many Mexican immigrants. Attempts at deportation of Mexicans to Mexico combined with racist practices in schools and in public facilities made the people feel unwelcome. This resulted in challenging and anti-social behavior, especially on the part of second generation youth who considered themselves American but were being rejected by the majority society.

The Zoot Suit riots in 1943 increased the anti-Mexican sentiment and are considered the turning point in the development of a serious gang problem. The riots culminated when servicemen and Anglo citizens hunted down and beat up Mexican youth dressed in "zoot suit." Attention from police and the media intensified gang participation (Vigil 1990).

World War II removed many Mexican male role models from the barrios leaving only those rejected from service or those with criminal records to serve as role models for the younger boys. These factors helped create a welcoming attitude toward the legal and illegal immigrant laborer. Improvement in the work and earning powers of many immigrant families resulted in social mobility allowing many to move from the poverty conditions of the barrio. Returning soldiers took advantage of government programs to improve their housing options. These factors removed even more positive male role models from the barrios.



The introduction of drug use and dealing in the late 1940's and early 1950's was a major factor in changing the gang into a more formalized unit. The Chicano civil rights movement altered the form, activities, and direction of gang activities. Gang members have said that gang-banging (fighting) is like "showing you are an American (Vigil 1990)."

This change describes cultural change in terms of "choloization." "Cholo" is defined as a people caught between two cultures. Such is the case in the Hispanic culture. First generation immigrants attempted to maintain their native language, traditions, and lifestyles while second generation youth realized a need to be more closely identified with American youth. The result was a lack of acceptance by both cultures.

## **LOCAL POLICY STRATEGIES**

### **PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT**

1. All personnel should receive sensitivity training and regular updating about ethnic diversity and cultural differences.
2. TCLEOSE should mandate cultural awareness training for all law enforcement officers.
3. Police Departments should create community relations divisions.
4. The DARE program should be expanded in every elementary school and in secondary schools in high risk areas.
5. Officers should make frequent routine drop-in visits to schools and agencies in an effort to change negative attitudes of youth toward police.
6. Agencies should utilize a community-based policing philosophy.
7. Police storefronts should be opened in every community, especially in high risk neighborhoods, in an effort to decentralize services and make police more visible and accessible.
8. Enforcement agencies should form partnerships with community-based resources to enhance services through police storefronts.

### **INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT**

1. Police officers need to educate block captains through Crime Watch about gang activities.
2. Police need to determine ways to cut off avenues of gang recruitment and train citizens to help.

3. Police storefronts need to have information for citizens about combating gang crime and youth violence.
4. Schools should be alerted by police agencies at the earliest possible time about the potential of gang violence on school campuses.
5. All facets of the criminal justice system (police officers, probation officers, attorneys, etc.) should develop and participate in mentoring programs for youth at risk.

#### **ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT**

1. When necessary, enforcement agencies should take a hard line approach to communicate to youth and the community that violence and/or possession of weapons will NOT be tolerated by:
  - a. Using metal detectors in schools.
  - b. Bringing dogs into schools to search for drugs.
  - c. Enforcing stiff penalties for violators.
  - d. Advocating more stringent prosecution and sentencing of gang members who commit crimes.
2. The criminal justice system should maintain a tracking system of gang members as they go in and out of prison.
3. A special prosecutor should be designated to handle gang related crime.
4. Law enforcement agencies should increase their ability to track gang members and gang-related crimes.
5. Agencies should press for passage of legislation that increases the consequences of gang-related behavior.

6. Penalties for gang members should include community service to remove graffiti.
7. Agencies should participate in the development of creative programming/sentencing alternatives for incarcerated youth.

## **PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS**

Educators must realize that children today lack consistent ethical instruction by parents, schools, churches, and community. Schools must recognize and accept their role in teaching social as well as academic skills to their students.

### **I. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

Schools must recognize and respect cultural differences among students and their families by:

- a. Providing training for all staff which includes information about cultural differences and ethnic diversity present in the school (i.e., family structure, traditions, value systems, expectations, etc.).
- b. Creating and supporting positive organizations for youth which promote ethnic pride.
- c. Involving students in the recognition of special events of certain ethnic groups.
- d. Inviting successful alumni of neighborhood schools to participate in special programs or events as school at school as positive role models.
- e. Conducting all parent meetings in all languages spoken by the parents of students attending the school.
- f. Publishing all written communiques from school to parents in the primary language spoken by the parents.

- g. Providing special orientation meetings during the school year for each ethnic group to determine specific needs of families and to communicate to them how to work with the system.

## II. IN-SERVICE TRAINING

1. Schools must incorporate gang awareness and violence prevention into in-service training for teachers and all school personnel working directly with students, utilizing resources available through a Police Agency Gang Unit. Topics that should be included are:
  - a. How to identify a gang member:
    - \* Graffiti and its implications
    - \* Hand signals and other modes of gang communication
    - \* Gang clothing, colors, language
  - b. How to react to gang activity/violence within the school.
  - c. Resources available for referral of gang members.
  - d. Literature and curriculum resources for staff development about gangs and gang-related activity.
  - e. Developing a list of curriculum resources that will provide students with appropriate information and skills to resist peer pressure to become affiliated with gangs.
  - f. Providing a list of community-based resources available for students and their families.

### III. CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMMING

1. Schools need to develop and implement a life skills curriculum for all grades aimed at building positive self esteem, good decision-making skills as well as providing information related to life skills and human growth and development.
2. Schools should research, develop, and present curriculum that will provide students with appropriate information and skills for resisting peer pressure to become affiliated with gangs.
3. Schools must incorporate gang prevention into curriculum with focus on grades 4-6, the ages when youth are most at risk of gang affiliation by:
  - a. Utilizing curriculum resources provided by a Police Agency Gang Unit.
  - b. Utilizing existing programs such as DARE and advocating for program expansion when necessary.
  - c. Developing new programs as necessary.
4. Schools need to provide a wide variety of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities and choices, reflecting the needs and interests of the entire student body and encouraging participation and recognition by all youth.
5. Schools should foster positive self-worth and a sense of responsibility in the student for the school and to the community by requiring participation in service projects.
6. Schools need to take the lead in developing community partnerships to enhance, complement, and expand social education opportunities within the school as a cost effective means of providing services to meet the needs of youth within the

school by:

- a. Providing more structured after school care and tutoring programs in high risk areas, taking full advantage of all local community resources.
- b. Extending the school day for elementary and secondary school students by keeping the buildings open after school hours and inviting community-based services into the buildings to provide programming.

#### IV. MEDIA

Schools should work with the media to research, develop and implement media messages about gangs and alcohol and substance use and abuse to students and parents through:

1. Television PSA's and programming
2. Radio PSA's and programming
3. Billboards, posters, flyers, and newspapers
4. Speakers
5. Assemblies
6. Parent meetings

#### V. ORGANIZED PARENT GROUPS

Organized parent groups must take the lead in educating parents and the immediate school community about gangs and related problems by:

1. Creating awareness of the gang problem through parent meetings, newsletters, special seminars, etc.

2. Enhancing family awareness of gang involvement by educating parents about warning signs of gang affiliation and the related dangers.
3. Educating parents about discouraging gang participation utilizing resources available through a Police Agency's Gang Unit.
4. Targeting parents of gang members and providing information to educate them about helping children to disassociate from gangs.
5. Find creative ways to involve all parents, being sensitive to language and cultural barriers.

## **VI. COUNSELING**

1. Schools must expand the scope of the counseling program to include adequate counseling on social issues affecting youth by:
  - a. Increasing the number of counselors in all schools especially middle schools and high schools.
  - b. Expanding the counseling program to include all elementary schools.
  - c. Identifying youth at risk and developing a case management plan for the youth and the family.
  - d. Finding creative ways to involve parents, being sensitive to the particular cultural needs of parents.
  - e. Holding regular meetings of counselors within a high school's geographic area including all the elementary and middle feeder school counselors to:
    - \* Share information about students as they promote or move
    - \* Share strategies concerning student and/or family case management



2. Counselors must research and make available to students information about college scholarships and grants.

## **VII. MENTORS**

Schools need to identify and initiate effective, year-round, long-term positive role models for youth utilizing all resources available in specific neighborhoods by:

1. Utilizing Adopt-a-School sponsors in a mentoring program for at risk students, remaining sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences.
2. Adopting policies to remove barriers, constraints, and limitations of mentoring programs.
3. Recruiting successful adults who have moved from at risk neighborhoods to return as mentors for students.
4. Utilizing older students as positive peer models for younger students.
5. Recruiting local businessmen and police officers who have moved from neighborhoods to serve as mentor/positive role models for the at risk youth remaining in the neighborhood.
6. Utilizing senior citizens in the neighborhood to act as mentors for youth.

## **INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS**

1. Schools should develop policies and procedures for sharing information among school, police, and other criminal justice agencies, on specific youth involved in gang-related activities in the school.
2. Schools should lead in developing community partnerships to recognize and address youth issues, interests, and needs by:

- a. Recognizing publicly the positive achievements of youth.
  - b. Recognizing publicly individual youth who make positive contributions to the community.
  - c. Creating intervention teams by collaborating with businesses, youth serving agencies, churches, police, and organizations to connect youth with mentors, jobs, or other specific services they need.
  - d. Creating jobs and apprenticeships for youth at risk.
3. Schools should advocate for policy change when needed to allow flexibility in meeting the individual needs of students both socially and academically. To be considered are:
  - a. Year round school.
  - b. Extended school day.
  - c. Alternative school placement for youth wishing to disassociate from gangs.
  - d. Additional alternative schools within each school district for incorrigible, students.
4. Curriculum and service resources available through a Police Agency's Gang Unit should be used to train teachers and administrators to work with gang members and the related problems.
5. Volunteers, local businessmen, successful school alumni, churches, and all other available resources should be used to serve year-round as mentors to gang members or youth at risk of becoming gang members.
6. Affordable summer school programs should be provided with additional scholarships and financial aid availability in high-risk neighborhoods.

7. Quality vocational educational training centers should be made available.
8. Reentry to an appropriate school setting should be facilitated for youth released from detention.
9. Alternative education options need to be made attractive and accessible to youth at risk.

#### **ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS**

1. Schools must develop policies and procedures for sharing information among agencies about specific youth involved in gang-related activity in the schools.
2. Schools must establish and enforce reasonable consequences for bad decision making by students.
3. Schools must establish rules and regulations for behavior in schools that help curtail gang involvement and all inappropriate, unacceptable behavior.
4. Schools must be willing to take serious steps to maintain a safe school environment free of drugs and weapons.
5. Schools should prohibit gang dress, hand signs, graffiti, and all other gang symbols in school.
6. Schools should remove graffiti as soon as it appears.
7. Schools should be knowledgeable about and maintain a list of community resources and make referrals to community-based services as necessary.
8. Schools should provide identification cards for all students.

#### **PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR NEIGHBORHOODS**

1. Neighborhood Associations and other neighborhood organizations must collaborate

to mobilize their communities to identify and address their specific problems.

2. Neighborhoods should develop block watch programs to increase communication among neighbors about criminal activities.
3. Neighborhood organizations should encourage police officers to become more involved in the neighborhoods by:
  - a. Inviting them to attend community meetings.
  - b. Asking them to serve on boards of community-based organizations.
4. Citizens should write letters to radio and television stations and sponsors encouraging positive and responsible advertising and programming for youth, discouraging messages which glamorize violence, gang activity, sex, alcohol, drugs, etc.
5. Neighborhoods should expect parents to accept responsibility for their children.
6. All citizens should organize to assist and support the efforts of the neighborhood schools.

#### **INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR NEIGHBORHOODS**

1. Neighborhoods need to organize to take a proactive role in meeting the needs of citizens either through existing structures (Crime Watch Groups, PTA's, etc.).
2. Neighborhoods need to devise strategies to:
  - a. Support at risk residents most vulnerable to gang intimidation (elderly, single female household, etc.) by being aware of what is happening in the neighborhoods.
  - b. Identify and provide positive role models/mentors for youth at risk.
  - c. Communicate with each other through telephone, newsletters, regular meetings,

block watch programs, etc.

3. Citizens should demonstrate pride in their neighborhoods by having clean up projects, graffiti paint outs, etc., and by involving youth.

### **ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES FOR NEIGHBORHOODS**

1. Citizens must educate themselves about community issues if they are to solve problems.
2. Citizens should know those in decision making positions and communicate concerns when appropriate.
3. Citizens should monitor meetings of all governing bodies so that they can be informed and press for change when necessary.
4. Neighborhoods should meet regularly with the police officers who patrol the area to communicate concerns and to receive suggestions and information from officers in a collaborative attempt to fight crime.

### **STRATEGIES FOR MEDIA**

1. All forms of published and broadcast media need to promote awareness of and respect for cultural differences and ethnic diversity.
2. Newspapers, radio, and television should research, develop, and publish/broadcast media messages about gangs and the dangers of drugs and alcohol use and abuse to students and parents.
3. Editors/policy makers should demonstrate a responsibility to the welfare of youth in programming in all facts of the media by:
  - a. Minimize all programs or messages which have a negative impact on youth and

show consequences of choice of these types of behavior.

- b. Providing programs which accentuate positive, acceptable behavior and promote and condone ethical behavior.
- c. Publicizing accomplishments of youth both individually and collectively.
- d. Balancing bad news with good news whenever possible.

### **INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR MEDIA**

All media should collaborate to plan and implement campaigns that:

- 1. Focus on positive alternative to gang involvement.
- 2. Publicize resources available to youth wishing to disassociate from gangs through every avenue available.
- 3. Adopt an anti-gang slogan.
- 4. Create and display anti-gang posters throughout communities.

### **ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES FOR MEDIA**

- 1. Media should publicize the hard work and accomplishments of enforcement agencies, recognizing group and individual efforts.
- 2. Print media should write and publish editorial supporting legislation which seeks prosecution and reasonable consequences for gang related crimes.

### **STRATEGIES FOR BUSINESS**

- 1. Businesses should promote awareness of, sensitivity to, and respect for cultural and ethnic diversity within the community.
- 2. Businesses should provide more job fairs, jobs, and job training opportunities.
- 3. Businesses should be willing to hire at risk youth.

4. Businesses should provide programs and opportunities for youth to develop job skills: how to write resumes, apply for a job, interview, etc.
5. Businesses should provide apprenticeships in skilled labor positions to enable youth to obtain skills.
6. Businesses should provide opportunities for youth to see firsthand the value of a strong work ethic.
7. Businesses should help provide gang awareness information in appropriate languages throughout the community by offering assistance to schools and agencies serving youth.
8. Businesses should provide jobs for youth in high risk areas being sensitive to transportation needs, availability of proper clothing, provision of adequate training and supervision.
9. Businesses could sponsor access to safe, positive social activities for youth (Wet and Wild, bowling, skating rinks, football games, baseball games, etc.).

#### **ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES FOR BUSINESS**

1. Businesses and organizations should provide resources to assist community groups in an effort to immediately remove graffiti thus sending a message to gangs that they are not welcome.
2. Businesses should take the lead with the community to communicate to gangs that crime, violence, and graffiti will **not** be tolerated.
3. Businesses should work with the police to develop a reporting system to encourage reporting of gang activities.

4. Businesses need to remove graffiti as soon as it is written on their property.
5. Businesses should collaborate with neighborhood groups, schools, and youth-serving agencies to develop a community-based plan to fight crime.
6. Businesses should organize a Business Watch group to discourage crime in the community.

### **PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH-SERVING AGENCIES**

Agencies must recognize and respect cultural differences of clients and their families by:

1. Providing staff training which includes information about cultural differences and ethnic diversity present among the client population.
2. Creating a supporting activities/programs for youth which promote ethnic pride.
3. Providing staff who can effectively communicate with the client population.
4. Translating and publishing all written communiques into the primary language spoken by clients.
5. Employing staff members who are sensitive to the culture of the client population.
6. Agencies should incorporate gang awareness and violence prevention into training of staff working directly with youth.
7. Agencies should develop a plan for identifying wannabes, fringe members, and gang members and be knowledgeable enough about existing programs to refer youth to appropriate prevention services.
8. Agencies should use every opportunity to enhance family awareness of youth involvement with gangs and the potential dangers.



9. Agencies need to recognize and share the responsibility that schools are having to assume in providing education and training on ethics and social issues to youth by:
  - a. Providing, strengthening, and increasing programming which promotes development of positive self-esteem, feeling of self-worth, self-reliance, good decision making skills, consequences of bad decisions, etc.
  - b. Educating youth about social and life issues.

## **PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES**

### **THE NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: REASONS FOR FAILURE**

Failure to solve the youth gang problem is a consequence of major procedural and policy deficiencies nationally, statewide, and locally. Reasons for these deficiencies given by Walter B. Miller (1990), retired from the Center for Criminal Justice of the Harvard Law School, from a national perspective, are:

1. The nation has failed to develop a comprehensive gang control strategy.
2. The problem is viewed in local terms instead of from a national perspective.
3. Programs are implemented in the absence of demonstrably valid theoretical rationales.
4. Efforts to systematically evaluate program effectiveness have been virtually abandoned.
5. Resources allocated to the gang problem are incommensurate with the severity of the problem.
6. Responsibility for gang problems is not assigned to any single agency.
7. A deep-rooted reluctance to face up to the implications of the social context of gang life.

## WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A NATIONAL GANG POLICY?

Miller suggests the following elements must be included in any successful national youth gang policy:

1. Efforts in local communities should be informed by policies based on a national-level perspective.
2. Gang-control operations should be supported by sound theoretical rationales.
3. The determination of which methods are most effective must be based on carefully conducted research.
4. Serious efforts must be made to convince those who control resources that gang control should be granted a much higher priority.
5. A federal office of youth gang control should be established.
6. Accurate information on the social class and ethnic characteristics of gang communities should be used as a major element in the development of more effective gang control strategies (Miller 1990).

## WHAT IS BEING DONE NATIONALLY?

1. A National Center for Gang Policy was established recently in Washington, D.C., for the purpose of developing policies, strategies, and programs to prevent gang violence and crime; to offer constructive opportunity to gang members and young people at risk of becoming gang members; and to promote safe streets for families and communities. The stated agenda of the NCGP includes public education about gangs, seminars, conferences, briefings, sponsorship of research, evaluation of policies and programs, counsel and technical assistance to government, private foundations, and

community organizations, maintenance of a database of policies, strategies and programs related to gangs, tracking national and state legislation, and management of speakers bureau.

2. The Youth Services Bureau of the Department of Housing and Human Services has awarded one of six research grants to the Fort Worth Police Department for the purpose of determining identifiable characteristics youth who join gangs and as opposed to others in the same environment who do not.
3. The Office of Justice Programs has begun an initiative to define gang related crime and coordinate data provided by other agencies in an effort to create a support system for more effective investigation, evidence gathering, and prosecution of gang-related crimes. It will provide a clearinghouse for new ideas and innovative programs.
4. The Office of Juvenile and Delinquency Prevention has responded to the increase in gang activity across the nation by developing a national training initiative, Gang and Drug Police Operations Leading to Improved Children and Youth Service (POLICY). A series of seminars is being held throughout the nation to help jurisdictions develop an interagency plan to combat gangs and drugs.
5. The Office of Juvenile and Delinquency and the National School Safety Center, have developed workshops for community development of a SAFE POLICY, School Administrators for Effective Police, Prosecution, Probation Operations Leading to Improved Children and Youth Services. Focus is on how chief executives of schools and the criminal justice system can coordinate their efforts and share information to improve school safety, supervision, control, and delinquency prevention efforts.

6. The National Institute of Justice is developing an analysis of emerging theory and practice on gangs which will include descriptions of anti-gang programs and a synthesis of opinions about which approaches work best with which gang types and age groups. NIJ's 1991 Research Plan examines the issues of gangs, drugs, crime, violence, the link between gangs and organized crime, and the criminal career of gang members. Particular attention is being given to the phenomenon of gang migration, its extent, the gangs involved, factors contributing to its development, and effective strategies for combating it.

#### WHAT IS BEING DONE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM ON THE STATE LEVEL?

The Texas Attorney General's Report of 1991 cites the need for a comprehensive gang policy and gang law which should include several features. First, guidelines or mandates for establishing and maintaining a statewide gang database, based on uniform criteria for what determines a gang, gang members, gang activity, and gang-related activities. Second, suppressive measures, in the form of enhanced penalties and vertical prosecution strategy for gang-related offenses should be implemented. Finally, provisions for gang prevention programs with an emphasis on community involvement and provisions for supervised recreation and economic opportunity should be made.

#### WHAT IS BEING DONE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM IN EL PASO, TEXAS?

The issues which are of concern at both a national and state level are concerns for El Paso as well. The El Paso Police Department is attempting to accomplish the following:

1. Develop a legislative package, under the leadership of "The Stop the Violence Coalition," which includes changes to the Texas Penal Code, the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Texas Family Code which will provide more sanctions for juvenile gang offenders.
2. Convene a series of community meetings throughout the county, in an effort to provide a forum for citizens to voice concerns, to provide resources and information, and to facilitate community mobilization to address the issues of specific neighborhoods.
3. Develop strategies for schools, businesses, community-based organizations, media, youth-serving agencies, government on all levels, neighborhoods, and criminal justice to address the problem of gangs in El Paso.
4. Improve communication between and among law enforcement agencies concerning gang activities.
5. Strengthen the Repeat Offenders Program (R.O.P.), a comprehensive and cooperative information and case management process that enables the criminal justice to focus informed, additional attention on criminals who repeatedly commit serious crimes.
6. Strengthen the Serious Habitual Offender Comprehensive Action Program (S.H.O.C.A.P.), a comprehensive and cooperative information and case management process that enables the juvenile and criminal justice system to focus informed, additional attention on juveniles who repeatedly commit serious crimes, with particular attention given to providing relevant and complete case information for more informed dispositional and sentencing decisions.

7. Strengthen the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.), an approach to educating young people how not to give into negative peer pressure, to make mature decisions, and learn to cope with life's problems in positive ways.
8. Continue the "Stop the Violence" campaign to encourage the reporting of violent gang activities to the police department's Hot Line. The program provides a private outlet to help stop the violence. 150+ schools in El Paso County are targeted in the form of written handbills and posters. Other mass media efforts include outdoor bill boards, bus benches, radio and TV/cable exposure.
9. Add to Police Community Store Fronts to help provide services for the community in areas such as law enforcement, domestic matters, juvenile matters, consumer fraud, housing problems, traffic problems, presentations, tours, and tax assistance.
10. Increase the Gang Diversion Program to educate students about handling gang situations, to teach parenting skills and modifying delinquent roles with positive police officer role models. The program would also promote and offer outside agency and program intervention and referrals and conduct youth and parent counselling on an individual basis.
11. Support for the Stop the Violence Coalition which was established with a commitment to develop new initiatives and improve the existing responses to gang and drug issues through an effective inter-agency approach based on recognizing the need for a balanced and comprehensive gang policy.

## CONCLUSION

While many people think gangs are a problem only in certain parts of big cities, gangs, in fact, are growing everywhere.

Different levels of gang-involvement and different kinds of groups require different strategies, goals should not be just crime reduction and prevention, but individual and public safety as well. On both the state and community levels, our response to the gang problem needs to be balanced in terms of suppression, intervention and prevention, and it needs to be based on a sound assessment of unique local conditions.

Significant numbers of gangs are involved in serious criminal activities such as drive-by shootings, dealing drugs, theft, and mounting senseless assaults. Committed gang members of serious gangs should be targeted for prosecution and should have priority status in the criminal justice system.

Many gang members are not and never will be a serious law enforcement problem. Delinquent youth gangs, by definition, are groups of young people who engage in no more serious offenses than truancy, drinking alcohol and experimenting with drugs. And many peripheral members of more serious gang are not themselves committing serious crimes; if anything, they are jeopardizing their own safety by associating with serious criminals. They are most often impoverished and without prospects. They tend to be in poor health and greatly at risk of being victims of violence. This has not so much to do with public safety as with chronic poverty, work force competence, productivity and the possibility of decent self-sufficiency.

Ultimately, the sheer numbers of young people flirting with gang behavior will force us to move beyond a single-minded law enforcement-oriented approach to the gang problem. Community and state leaders alike will have to turn their attention to the pervasive social conditions that leave families without adequate child care and allow significant numbers of children to fail at school. In difficult economic times, it is unlikely that expensive solutions, however just or needed, will be available. Though much remains to be done in the area of research, it is not too soon to move forward with solutions based on what is already known. Progress will have to come through cooperation, collaboration, accountability and the most effective and efficient program strategies that can be found.



## APPENDIX A

### THE EVOLUTION AND SOCIOLOGY OF GANGS

#### EVOLUTION OF GANGS IN AMERICA

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1700s - (Pre Civil War) | - Irish immigrant gangs identified   |
| 1865 - (Post Civil War) | - First Ku Klux Klan founded in Tennessee  |
| 1873                    | - <b>Industrial Revolution</b> (brought more immigrants to U.S.)<br><br><b>Child Labor Reform</b> (put 100,000 of children, ages 5-15, out of work and on the streets) |
| 1900                    | - Thousands of street gangs exist  |
| 1912                    | - Irish gangs declined - Italians, Jews, Chinese Tongs formed gangs  |
| 1915                    | - Second Klan chartered in Georgia   |
| 1914 - 1918             | - <b>World War I</b> - Gang activity diminishes  |
| 1919                    | - <b>Era of Prohibition</b> - "Golden Age of Gangs"  |
| 1920                    | - Immigration from Asia and Europe stopped first sign of black gangs   |
| 1924                    | - <b>Depression</b> - Klan reaches height with 5 million members   |
| 1943                    | - <b>World War II</b> - Heavy migration of blacks and Puerto Ricans to North seeking wartime jobs. Zoot Suit Riots   |
| 1945                    | - White soldiers return from war reclaiming jobs, displacing minorities  |

- 1950 - Introduction of drugs causes gangs to become more formalized unit
  - 1954 - **Desegregation** triggers white supremacists activities
  - 1958 - **First Neo Nazi Movement** in U.S.
  - 1960 - National Klan Committee meets in North Carolina, Texas Prison Gangs begin developing
  - 1964 - **Civil Rights Movement** begins
  - 1965 - **Immigration and Naturalization Act:** turning point in history of Chinese immigration to U.S.
- Vietnam War**
- Busing/Desegregation**
- Black Militant Movement**
- War on Crime**
- 1970 - Crips found in Los Angeles
  - 1974 - Jamaican gangs originated in Kingston
  - 1976 - **Fall of Saigon**
  - 1979 - Immigration of Boat People
  - 1981 - Downward trend of Klan activity, Identity churches emerge
  - 1989 - Neo Nazi group found in Dallas
  - 1990 - George Bush signs **Federal Hate Crime Statistics Act** (Huff 1990)

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