

Books for Research (updated May 2010)

- [*Code of the Streets: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*](#) by respected sociologist Elijah Anderson. The book is thorough telling of the impacts of the community on youth and what the painful results can be when racism and poverty are part of the landscape. This is a must read book for anyone doing thorough research on the issue of what moves youth into gangs.
- [*The American Street Gang: Its Nature, Prevalence, and Control*](#) by Malcolm Klein – Klein's first work on gangs and an interesting read...it was written in the 70s and not much has changed.
- [*The Eurogang Paradox - Street Gangs and Youth Groups in the U.S. and Europe \(Paperback\)*](#) by Malcolm Klein – This book is an interesting comparison of what European countries are struggling with in terms of gangs. A good resource for comparing strategies that work and don't work. Also, this is an interesting theoretical work on how gangs evolve.
- [*Neither War Nor Peace*](#) by Luke Dowdney : The United Nations did a study of 10 countries and the youth involved in violence. The countries include the US as well as Jamaica and South Africa. A fascinating read. Click here for a three page synopsis.
- [*Gangs and Delinquency in Developmental Perspective*](#), Terrance Thornberry, Marvin Krohn, Alan Lizotte, Carolyn Smith, Kimberly Tobin – Good resource for stats and historical development of gangs in the US.
- [*Learning to Survive, Black Youth Look for Education and Hope*](#), Atron Gentry, Carolyn Peelle. Poignant and searing book on what is going on in our schools.
- [*Literacy and Advocacy in Adolescent Family, Gang, School, and Juvenile Court Communities: Crip 4 Life*](#), by Debra Smith and Kathryn F. Whitmore – The goal of this book is to encourage educators and researchers to understand the complexities of adolescent gang members' lives in order to rethink their assumptions about these students in school. The particular objective is to situate four gang members as literate, caring students from loving families whose identities and literacy keep them on the margins of school. The research described in this book suggests that advocacy is a particularly effective form of critical ethnography. Smith and Whitmore argue that until schools, as communities of practice, enable children and adolescents to retain identities from the communities in which they are full community members, frightening numbers of students are destined to fail. Fine (1991) says, *"If the lives and subjectivities of low income adolescents are taken seriously, then the very boundaries and concerns of public school must stretch to incorporate that which is central to their lived experiences"* (p. 221).

Teachers who move into the role of advocate, however, might accomplish the three "unequivocal beliefs" Fine offers to create change: [F]irst, that educators must reflect on practice critically, extract from it, and innovate collaboratively; second, that this is possible only in radically transformed educational settings; and third, that public high

schools, as they currently exist, mitigate the possibilities for teachers' collective reflection, active critique, or democratic participation. (p. 226).

- [*The Right Mistake: The Further Philosophical Investigations of Socrates Fortlow*](#) (Hardcover) by Walter Mosley

Walter Mosley is an African American treasure of a writer. Most will remember him from *Devil in a Blue Dress* with Denzel Washington starring in the movie of the same name. In this novel, Mosley poses some very interesting questions about violence, community dialogue and responsibility. Young people may find this an interesting conversation starter about violence in communities and poverty in general. The Seattle Times stated: "*The Right Mistake...* is a thought-provoking exploration of wickedness -- and what's to be done about it."

- [*Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets*](#) (Hardcover) by Sudhir Venkatesh

As a young graduate student fresh off an extended stint following the Grateful Dead, Venkatesh began studying urban poverty. With a combination of an ethnographer's curiosity about another culture and some massive naïveté, he gathered firsthand knowledge of the intricacies of Chicago's Robert Taylor projects. Early on, he met a megalomaniac gang leader known here as J.T., who became his mentor. Venkatesh observed and learned how the crack game works, and how many have their fingers in the pie and need life to remain the way it is. He observed violence, corruption, near homelessness, good cops, bad cops, and a lot of neglect and politics-as-usual. He made errors in judgment – it took a long time for his street smarts to catch up to his book smarts – but he tells the story in such a way as to allow readers to figure out his missteps as he did. Finally, as the projects began to come down, Venkatesh was able to demonstrate how something that seems positive is not actually good for everyone. The first line in his preface, "I woke up at about 7:30 a.m. in a crack den," reflects the prurient side of his studies, the first chapter title, "How does it feel to be black and poor?" reflects the theoretical side, and both work together in this well-rounded portrayal. –*Jamie Watson, Harford County Public Library, MD*

- [*Gangs in Garden City: How Immigration, Segregation, and Youth Violence are Changing America's Suburbs*](#), Sarah Garland

Through poignant stories about young men and women from South America, Ms. Garland traces the growth and violence of MS 13 on the east coast.

The center researchers cautioned that many of the new cliques sprouting up in far-flung cities and suburbs were copycats and that, "in most instances, there is little, if any, real connection between local groups with the same name other than the name itself." According to the center, the gangs were generally "homegrown," and the "factors which contribute to the emergence of gang activity in a community are not necessarily the same as those which contribute to its persistence." In other words, the gangs might have

originated in Los Angeles and Central America, but they flourished in places like Fairfax and Nassau County because of specific local conditions there that facilitated the alienation and anger that gave rise to gangs.

- [*Policing Gangs in America*](#), Charles Katz and Vincent Webb

This is an interesting historical record of how Police departments have evolved over the past 30 years in dealing with the gang problem in several cities. It's historical perspective is very helpful in understanding also some of the policy challenges Communities have had as well.

This book is concerned with advancing our understanding of how police gang units respond to community gang problems. To date, little research has examined the realities and experiences of those working day-to-day within a police gang unit. The research reported in this book describes assumptions, issues, problems, and events that have characterized, shaped, and defined the police response to the gang problem.

- [*Murder Is No Accident: Understanding and Preventing Youth Violence in America*](#) by Deborah Prothrow-Stith, Howard R. Spivak

Review by Publishers Weekly:

Prothrow-Stith, a Harvard School of Public Health associate dean and professor, and Spivak, New England Medical Center's chief of general pediatrics and adolescent medicine, bring impressive credentials and two decades each of experience in medicine, public health and violence prevention to this essential primer on adolescent violence. In impassioned, colloquial prose, the authors delineate the causes of teen violence (e.g., easy access to weapons; violent entertainment); elucidate past approaches, including police intervention for urban youth and mental health intervention for suburban youth; explain the impact of racism and classism on teen violence; offer first-person testimonies as exhortations; and detail ploys to combat the problem before it hits any more crisis points like the Columbine disaster or Los Angeles's street gang wars.