Justice Policy
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Gang Wars

*The Failure of
Enforcement Tactics
and the Need for
Effective Public
Safety Strategies*

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The Justice Policy Institute is a public policy institute dedicated to ending society's reliance on incarceration and promoting effective solutions to social problems.

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Youth crime in the United States remains near the lowest levels seen in the past three decades, yet public concern and media coverage of gang activity has skyrocketed since 2000. Fear has spread from neighborhoods with longstanding gang problems to communities with historically low levels of crime, and some policy makers have declared the arrival of a national gang "crisis." Yet many questions remain unanswered. How can communities and policy makers differentiate between perceived threats and actual challenges presented by gangs? Which communities are most affected by gangs, and what is the nature of that impact? How much of the crime that plagues poor urban neighborhoods is attributable to gangs? And what approaches work to promote public safety?

This report attempts to clarify some of the persistent misconceptions about gangs and to assess the successes and failures of approaches that have been employed to respond to gangs. We undertook an extensive review of the research literature on gangs because we believe that the costs of uninformed policy making—including thousands of lives lost to violence or imprisonment—are simply too high.

Los Angeles is a case in point. Author and former California state senator Tom Hayden reports that thousands of young people have been killed in Los Angeles gang conflicts despite decades of extremely aggressive gang enforcement. City and state officials have spent billions of dollars on policing and surveillance, on development of databases containing the names of tens of thousands of alleged gang members, and on long prison sentences for gang members. Spending on gang enforcement has far outpaced spending on prevention programs or on improved conditions in communities where gang violence takes a heavy toll.

Los Angeles taxpayers have not seen a return on their massive investments over the past quarter century: law enforcement agencies report that there are now six times as many gangs and at least double the number of gang members in the region. In the undisputed gang capital of the U.S., more police, more prisons, and more punitive measures haven't stopped the cycle of gang violence. Los Angeles is losing the war on gangs.

Absent better information, lawmakers in the nation's capital and across the country risk blindly following in Los Angeles' troubled footsteps. Washington policy makers have tied gangs to terrorism and connected their formation and growth to everything from lax border enforcement to the illicit drug trade. Federal proposals—such as S. 456, the "Gang Abatement and Prevention Act of 2007"—promise more of the kinds of punitive approaches that have failed to curb the violence in Los Angeles.

Gang Wars presents findings from an extensive review of the research literature on gangs and the effectiveness of various policy responses to gang problems.

The following conclusions may surprise those who follow the public discussion on gangs.

Gangs, gang members, and gang activity

There are fewer gang members in the United States today than there were a decade ago, and there is no evidence that gang activity is growing. It is difficult to find a law enforcement account of gang activity that does not give the impression that the problem is getting worse by the day. Yet the most recent comprehensive law enforcement estimate indicates that youth gang membership fell from 850,000 in 1996 to 760,000 in 2004 and that the proportion of jurisdictions reporting gang problems has dropped substantially. The myth of a growing gang menace has been fueled by sensational media coverage and misuse of law enforcement gang statistics, which gang experts consider unreliable for the purpose of tracking local crime trends.

There is no consistent relationship between law enforcement measures of gang activity and crime trends. One expert observes that gang membership estimates were near an all-time high at the end of the 1990s, when youth violence fell to the lowest level in decades. An analysis of gang membership and crime data from North Carolina found that most jurisdictions reporting growth in gang membership also reported falling crime rates. Dallas neighborhoods targeted for gang suppression activities reported both a drop in gang crime and an increase in violent crime during the intervention period.

Gang members account for a relatively small share of crime in most jurisdictions. There are a handful of jurisdictions such as Los Angeles and Chicago where gang members are believed to be responsible for a significant share of crime. But the available evidence indicates that gang members play a relatively small role in the national crime problem despite their propensity toward criminal activity. National estimates and local research findings suggest that gang members may be responsible for fewer than one in 10 homicides; fewer than one in 16 violent offenses; and fewer than one in 20 serious (index[1]) crimes. Gangs themselves play an even smaller role, since much of the crime committed by gang members is self-directed and not committed for the gang's benefit.

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1 One of the eight crimes listed on Part 1 of the Uniform Crime Reports: rape, robbery, murder, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, theft of a motor vehicle, and arson.

Gangs do not dominate or drive the drug trade. National drug enforcement sources claim that gangs are "the primary retail distributors of drugs in the country." But studies of several jurisdictions where gangs are active have concluded that gang members account for a relatively small share of drug sales and that gangs do not generally seek to control drug markets. Investigations conducted in Los Angeles and nearby cities found that gang members accounted for one in four drug sale arrests. The Los Angeles district attorney concluded that just one in seven gang members sold drugs on a monthly basis. St. Louis researchers describe gang involvement in drug sales as "poorly organized, episodic, nonmonopolistic [and] not a rationale for the gang's existence." A member of one of San Diego's best-organized gangs explains: "The gang don't organize nothing. It's like everybody is on they own. You are not trying to do nothing with nobody unless it's with your friend. You don't put your money with gangs."

The public face of the gang problem is black and brown, but whites make up the largest group of adolescent gang members. Law enforcement sources report that over 90 percent of gang members are nonwhite, but youth survey data show that whites account for 40 percent of adolescent gang members. White gang youth closely resemble black and Latino counterparts on measures of delinquency and gang involvement, yet they are virtually absent from most law enforcement and media accounts of the gang problem. The disparity raises troubling questions about how gang members are identified by police.

Most gang members join when they are young and quickly outgrow their gang affiliation without the help of law enforcement or gang intervention programs. A substantial minority of youth (7 percent of whites and 12 percent of blacks and Latinos) goes through a gang phase during adolescence, but most youth quit the gang within the first year. One multistate survey found that fully half of eighth-graders reporting gang involvement were former members. When former gang members cite reasons why they left the gang, they commonly mention high levels of violence and say that they just grew out of gang activity; only rarely do they cite fear of arrest or criminal penalties.

Most youth who join gangs do so between the ages of 12 and 15, but the involvement of younger children in gangs is not new. Noted expert Malcolm Klein observes: "Although some writers and officials decry the 8- and 10-year-old gang member, they

haven't been in the business long enough to realize that we heard the same reports 20 and 40 years ago."

Leaving the gang early reduces the risk of negative life outcomes, but current policies make it more difficult for gang members to quit. Gang involvement is associated with dropping out of school, teen parenthood, and unstable employment, but the risks are much smaller for those who leave the gang in a year or less. Yet little attention has been devoted to why and how youth leave gangs, and many gang control policies make the process of leaving more rather than less difficult by continuing to target former members after their gang affiliation has ended. Researchers note: "Police and school officials may not be aware of the decision of individuals to leave the gang or may not take such claims seriously, and records may not be purged of prior gang status.… When representatives of official agencies (e.g., police, school) identify an individual as a gang member, they are sending a powerful signal to rival gang members as well as to people in the community about the gang involvement of that person."

Gang enforcement

The record of law enforcement antigang efforts provides little reason for optimism. Media reports are full of stories about cities where crime goes up, a crackdown is launched, and crime goes down. But a review of research on the implementation of gang enforcement strategies—ranging from neighborhood-based suppression to the U.S. Justice Department Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Comprehensive Gang Program Model—paints a very different picture. Findings from investigations of gang enforcement efforts in 17 jurisdictions over the past two decades yield few examples of success and many examples of failure.

The problems highlighted in the research include:

- Lack of correspondence between the problem, typically lethal and/or serious violence, and a law enforcement response that targets low-level, non-violent misbehavior.
- Resistance on the part of key agency personnel to collaboration or implementation of the strategy as designed.
- Evidence that the intervention had no effect or a negative effect on crime and violence.
- A tendency for any reductions in crime or violence to evaporate quickly, often before the end of the

intervention period.
- Poorly designed evaluations that make it impossible to draw any conclusions about the effect of an intervention.
- Failure of replication efforts to achieve results comparable to those of pilot programs.
- Severe imbalances of power and resources between law enforcement and community partners that hamper the implementation of "balanced" gang control initiatives.

The literature survey also yielded the following findings concerning typical gang enforcement initiatives:

Police gang units are often formed for the wrong reasons and perceived as isolated and ineffectual by law enforcement colleagues. A survey of 300 large cities found that the formation of gang units was more closely associated with the availability of funding and the size of the Latino population than with the extent of local gang or crime problems. An in-depth study of four cities determined that gang units were formed in response to "political, public, and media pressure" and that "almost no one other than the gang unit officers themselves seemed to believe that gang unit suppression efforts were effective at reducing the communities' gang problems." Investigators found that gang officers were poorly trained and that their units became isolated from host agencies and community residents. The chief of one police department admitted that he had "little understanding of what the gang unit did or how it operated." The authors observed that the isolation of gang units from host agencies and their tendency to form tight-knit subcultures—not entirely unlike those of gangs—may contribute to a disturbingly high incidence of corruption and other misconduct.

Heavy-handed suppression efforts can increase gang cohesion and police-community tensions, and they have a poor track record when it comes to reducing crime and violence. Suppression remains an enormously popular response to gang activity despite concerns by gang experts that such tactics can strengthen gang cohesion and increase tension between law enforcement and community members. Results from Department of Justice–funded interventions in three major cities yield no evidence that a flood of federal dollars and arrests had a positive impact on target neighborhoods. St. Louis evaluators found that dozens of targeted arrests and hundreds of police stops failed to yield meaningful reductions in crime in the targeted neighborhoods, even during the period of intense police activity. Dallas residents saw

the incidence of "gang-related" violence fall in target areas but had little to celebrate because the overall violent crime numbers rose during the intervention period. Detroit evaluators reported initial reductions in gun crimes within two targeted precincts, but the apparent gains were short-lived: by the end of the intervention period, the incidence of gun crime in target areas was at preintervention levels and trending upward.

"Balanced" gang control strategies have been plagued by replication problems and imbalances between law enforcement and community stakeholders. Gang program models that seek to balance suppression activities with the provision of social services and supports have been piloted in Boston and Chicago with some success. But the results of attempts to replicate Operation Ceasefire and the Comprehensive Gang Program Model in other jurisdictions have been disappointing. Replications of the Ceasefire model in Los Angeles and Indianapolis produced no evidence that efforts to disseminate a deterrence message had changed the behavior of gang members. Meanwhile, replications of the Chicago model in five cities produced mixed results, with just two sites reporting reductions in participants' violent behavior that approached statistical significance. Prevention and intervention appeared to lag far behind suppression efforts in the many sites. The Los Angeles Ceasefire evaluators concluded: "We suspect that *the carrot side of these interventions will always lag far behind the stick side* in spite of the best intentions that it not do so, unless some extraordinary efforts are made" (emphasis added). A recent analysis concluded that two-thirds of resources expended on gang reduction in Los Angeles have gone to suppression activities.

African American and Latino communities bear the cost of failed gang enforcement initiatives. Young men of color are disproportionately identified as gang members and targeted for surveillance, arrest, and incarceration, while whites—who make up a significant share of gang members—rarely show up in accounts of gang enforcement efforts. The Los Angeles district attorney's office found that close to half of black males between the ages of 21 and 24 had been entered in the county's gang database even though no one could credibly argue that all of these young men were current gang members. Communities of color suffer not only from the imposition of aggressive police tactics that can resemble martial law, but also from the failure of such tactics to pacify their neighborhoods. One researcher argues that in

Chicago, for example, a cycle of police suppression and incarceration, and a legacy of segregation, have actually helped to *sustain* unacceptably high levels of gang violence.

Positive public safety strategies

This report does not endorse any particular program or approach for reducing the damage done by gangs and gang members. Instead, it points toward effective actions we can take to reduce youth violence. The most effective route toward reducing the harm caused by gangs requires a more realistic grasp of the challenges that gangs pose. The objective should not be to eradicate gangs—an impossible task—but rather to promote community safety. As one community stakeholder observes, "The problem is not to get kids out of gangs, but the behavior. If crime goes down, if young people are doing well, that's successful."

One city that never embraced the heavy-handed suppression tactics chosen elsewhere has experienced far less gang violence. In New York City, a variety of street work and gang intervention programs were fielded decades ago during a period when gang violence was on the rise. These strategies were solidly grounded in principles of effective social work practices that fall outside the realm of law enforcement, and they seem to have helped dissuade city policy makers and police officials from embracing most of the counterproductive gang suppression tactics adopted elsewhere. No seasoned New Yorker would deny the existence of street gangs. But gang-related offenses represent just a tiny blip on the New York crime screen. Gang experts conclude that the city's serious problem with street gang violence had largely faded away by the end of the 1980s. Youth violence remains a problem in some New York City neighborhoods, but with crime falling to historic lows, the city's approach to gangs and youth crime seems to be remarkably effective.

There is no "magic bullet" to end gang crime, but both the lessons from the past and results from research on more recent innovations in juvenile justice policy point toward more effective public safety strategies:

• **Expand the use of evidenced-based practice to reduce youth crime.** Evidenced-based practices are those interventions that are scientifically proven to reduce juvenile recidivism and promote positive outcomes for young people. Rather than devoting more resources to gang suppression and law enforcement

tactics, researchers recommend targeting funding to support research-based programs operated by agencies in the health and human services sector. As Peter Greenwood, former director of the RAND Corporation's Criminal Justice Program and an evaluator of Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles, notes, "Delays in adopting proven programs will only cause additional victimization of citizens and unnecessarily compromise the future of additional youth."

• **Promote jobs, education, and healthy communities, and lower barriers to the reintegration into society of former gang members.** Many gang researchers observe that employment and family formation help draw youth away from gangs. White youth have greater access to jobs and education, which may explain why there are many white gang members but little discussion of a chronic white gang

problem. Creating positive opportunities through which gang members can leave their past behind is the best chance for improving public safety. This requires both investing resources and reforming policies and practices that now deny current and former gang members access to these opportunities.

• **Redirect resources from failed gang enforcement efforts to proven public safety strategies.** Gang injunctions, gang sweeps, and ominous-sounding enforcement initiatives reinforce negative images of whole communities and run counter to the positive youth development agenda that has been proven to work. Rather than promoting antigang rhetoric and programs, policy makers should expand evidence-based approaches to help former gang members and all youth acquire the skills and opportunities they need to contribute to healthy and vibrant communities.

A Gang, by Any Other Name…

Perhaps the least settled issue in gang research is the age-old question: "What is a gang?" It seems that the majority of academic authorities can agree on only one point in this regard: that there is no agreement—neither among the criminologists who study gangs nor among the cops who police them. The picture becomes no clearer when we narrow the issue by asking, "What is a youth gang?" or "What is a street gang?"

In an essay on gang research published in *Crime and Justice,* John Hagedorn says that the definitional debate about gangs has been "long and rancorous" (Hagedorn 1998). He proposes that, in thinking about what gangs are, a good place to start is with the godfather of gang research, Frederic Thrasher, who pointed out that "ganging" is a normal peer activity for adolescents within a continuum of behaviors that range "from conventional to wild."

In *American Street Gangs,* a popular college textbook, Tim Delaney poses a set of questions drawn from current media depictions to illustrate the problem of defining gangs:

> In fact, there is no single definition, although every definition includes some mention of the word, *group.* For example, is a group of young people hanging out together a gang? What if this group is hanging outside a convenience store talking loud and acting proud? What if this group creates a name for itself, starts identifying members with specific clothing, and uses secret hand signals and handshakes and intimidating nicknames such as "killer" and "assassin"? But the group just described could actually be a sports team! Add to this description the commission of a number of deviant acts and fraternities and sororities would also fit this profile. (Delaney 2005)

For many influential experts (such as Malcolm Klein and Irving Spergel), criminal activity is intrinsic to the definition—but equally influential experts (such as James Short) think otherwise. In his *Crime and Justice* essay, Hagedorn says he prefers Joan Moore's definition:

> Gangs are unsupervised peer groups who are socialized by the streets rather than by conventional institutions. They define themselves as a gang or "set" or some such term, and have the capacity to reproduce themselves, usually within a neighborhood.

More recently, Hagedorn—who believes that gangs are reproducing themselves across a world that is increasingly urbanized—has adopted a more global, "postindustrial" characterization of what gangs are:

> Gangs are organizations of the street composed of either 1. the socially excluded or 2. alienated, demoralized, or bigoted elements of a dominant racial, ethnic, or religious group.
>
> While most gangs begin as unsupervised adolescent peer groups and remain so, some institutionalize in barrios, favelas, ghettoes, and prisons. Often these institutionalized gangs become business enterprises within the informal economy and a few are linked to international criminal cartels. Others institutionalize as violent supporters of dominant groups and may devolve from political or conventional organizations. Most gangs are characterized by a racialized or ethno-religious identity as well as being influenced by global culture. Gangs have variable ties to conventional institutions and, in given conditions, assume social, economic, political, cultural, religious, or military roles. (Hagedorn website)

At the opposite end of the continuum, legal definitions intended to prohibit gang activity focus almost entirely on intentional criminal activity and are typically spare in defining distinct elements of association. California Penal Code §186.22 (e)(f) defines a "criminal street gang" as "any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary ac-

tivities the commission of one or more of the criminal acts enumerated in paragraphs (1) to (25), inclusive, of subdivision (e), having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, and whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity."[1]

After many years of fielding squadrons of specialized "gang" units to combat criminal gangs and compiling lists of hundreds of thousands of people in an effort to identify and target gang members and their associates for harsh treatment in the criminal justice system, American law enforcement agencies have not been able to agree upon a common definition. Perhaps the least of the problems posed by this failure is that accurate tracking of gang-related crime statistics is difficult, if not impossible.[2]

Given the lack of consensus about how and when groups of people do or do not constitute a gang, classification of gangs by type is understandably a fuzzy area. Delaney says that while there are many types of gangs, his textbook (2005) is focused on "street gangs," and he includes only brief discussions of some "non-street gangs": motorcycle gangs, organized crime, the Ku Klux Klan, skinheads, and prison gangs.

Malcolm Klein similarly asserts that prison gangs, skinheads, "stoners," and motorcycle gangs are not street gangs (Klein 1995). Klein says that skinhead groups do not qualify as street gangs because they are usually inside, and when they go out they are "looking for a target, not just lounging around." And bikers are usually focused on their motorcycles, out cruising or selling drugs. He says both types of gangs are narrowly focused in their criminality, "always planning something"—while street gangs are more aimless and casual about the trouble they get into. He

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1 Subdivision (e) enumerates the following offenses: assault with a deadly weapon or by means of force likely to produce great bodily injury; robbery; unlawful homicide or manslaughter; the sale, possession for sale, transportation, manufacture, offer for sale, or offer to manufacture controlled substances; shooting at an inhabited dwelling or occupied motor vehicle; discharging or permitting the discharge of a firearm from a motor vehicle; arson; the intimidation of witnesses and victims; grand theft; grand theft of any firearm, vehicle, trailer, or vessel; burglary; rape; looting; money laundering; kidnapping; mayhem; aggravated mayhem; torture; felony extortion; felony vandalism; carjacking; the sale, delivery, or transfer of a firearm; possession of a pistol, revolver, or other firearm capable of being concealed upon the person; threats to commit crimes resulting in death or great bodily injury; and theft and unlawful taking or driving of a vehicle.

2 Wes McBride, the dean of U.S. gang investigators, warned the authors not to believe gang statistics from any source: "They are *all* wrong."

doesn't explain why "heavy metal–influenced stoners," "punks," "satanic cults," and "terrorist gangs" don't qualify. And he dismisses "low riders" and kids who hang out on street corners without comment.

Brenda Coughlin and Sudhir Venkatesh say that while the popular image of gangs is synonymous with African American and Latino youth in poor urban neighborhoods, this may be "an artifact of definitional boundaries" (Coughlin and Venkatesh 2003). They maintain that evidence of ethnic diversity among street gangs, as well as the existence of delinquent white groups not conventionally considered to be gangs ("fraternities, motorcycle and 'biker' outfits, militias, skinheads, or the Ku Klux Klan"), need more research attention.

Studies based on self-reports as well as localized ethnographic research have documented that white and black gangs are *both* present in urban areas, and that white gangs are *also* involved in serious violence. Yet people of color predominate in law enforcement estimates of gang membership, and most of those arrested for gang offenses are African American and Latino.

"Street gangs" versus whatever

There does not seem to be a consensus on how to distinguish between "drug gangs" and "street gangs." The literature suggests an increasing overlap of these categories. Malcolm Klein differentiates drug gangs on the basis of characteristics that he says street gangs largely lack: "clear, hierarchical leadership; strong group cohesiveness; a code of loyalty and secrecy"; and a narrow focus on drug dealing to the exclusion of other crimes. Most experts agree that drug trafficking is a secondary interest for street gang members, yet they also agree that significant numbers of street gang members are very much involved in drug sales, and that drug profits often play a vital role in keeping street gangs in operation. Felix Padilla has described the evolution of a violent Puerto Rican street gang in Chicago into an organized drug trafficking and distribution enterprise (Padilla 1992).

Tim Delaney says that the "drug gang" concept is relatively new, formulated to account for the increasing number of gangs involved in the sale of drugs. He says that we should not be surprised to find that "street gangs" are actively involved in drug trafficking since it constitutes "the number-one criminal enterprise in the world," and the growing popularity of "crack" cocaine produced new opportunities for

urban youth to make money around the same time that legitimate job opportunities were disappearing in their neighborhoods.

John Hagedorn says that gang participation in a growing global underground economy is the central mechanism whereby gangs "institutionalize on the streets" (Hagedorn 2005). The economic restructuring that has curtailed access to jobs for unskilled urban men means that gangs become an increasingly important source of employment, retaining membership of many individuals into adulthood. He sees drug-dealing gangs as "the main street-level employer of youth in the poorest areas of cities forsaken by industrial jobs."

A typology of youth violence

Mercer Sullivan finds the definitional ambiguities in gang research a distraction from more vital inquiries:

> Youth violence takes many organizational forms. Lumping these together as "gang" phenomena carries distracting baggage. The perennial fascination with gangs is partly, overly romantic. It can, and sometimes does, cloud our view of what we should be placing front and center, the problem of youth violence. (Sullivan 2005)

Sullivan proposes using more neutral analytic terms to make important distinctions among group criminal activities that may—or may not—be related to gang membership: action-sets, cliques, and named gangs:

> An *action-set* is simply an aggregation of individuals cooperating together in a coordinated line of activity. They need not continue their coordinated activity over any specified period of time or share any explicit recognition among themselves or in the view of others that they are associated on any permanent basis.

> A *clique* is an aggregation of individuals with some form of diffuse and enduring bonds of solidarity, at least for the near term. They engage in a variety of activities together on some kind of regular basis. They need not have a name or leader or share ritual symbols of group membership.

> A *named gang* has the properties of a clique, along with a name and explicit criteria of membership recognized by members and others. Gangs are far more likely than cliques to have designated leadership, formalized rules and codes of conduct, and ritualized symbols of membership, but they do not have to have all or any particular combination of these.

Sullivan points up an "odd and oddly little-noticed contradiction" resulting from a lack of careful distinction between youth gangs and group criminal activities—that membership in youth gangs was widely reported to have climbed to unprecedented high levels by the later half of the 1990s, yet youth violence decreased sharply during the same period:

> If gang membership becomes far more prevalent and gang membership is strongly related to youth violence, how can youth violence decline while gang membership remains at historically high levels? Given the choice, who would not prefer more gangs and less youth violence to the opposite combination?

The big American crime story for more than a decade has been the happy news that crime rates are on the decline. Notwithstanding recent media reports of an uptick in violent crime in certain cities, crime rates are still at a 30-year low.

Residents of New York City have enjoyed more than a decade and a half of exceptional crime rate reductions, breaking historic records for declines in lethal violence, as well as record declines across the entire range of index crimes[1] that are roughly double the rates of decline for the nation as a whole (Zimring 2007). In March 2007 New York City's police commissioner, Ray Kelly, announced that over the first three months of the year the murder rate had fallen to a low not seen since the early 1960s, when the first reliable homicide statistics were recorded (Moore 2007).

In areas of the country where an increased number of homicides *were* reported, street gangs were frequently identified by law enforcement authorities as a causal factor. The media eagerly picked up the theme in some cities (including some where homicides continued to trend down), with lurid depictions of heavily tattooed gang-bangers and claims that violent gangs were spreading from coast to coast.

Gang crime is spreading "like a cancer," according to Federal Bureau of Investigation director Robert S. Mueller III. The FBI boasts of its national antigang strategy, involving local police in a network of 131 FBI-led task force operations across the country, coupled with a national "gang targeting enforcement and coordination center," a national "gang intelligence center," and a national task force based in Washing-

ton, D.C., that is focused on Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13,[2] working to merge some 100,000 criminal records from Central America with the FBI's criminal history database (FBI 2007).

While overall crime rates in Los Angeles have been declining for the past half-decade, gang crime is reported to be rising. Citing a 15.7 percent increase in gang crime over 2006, Los Angeles police chief William Bratton declared a crackdown on gangs in January 2007. By the end of March more than 800 people had been arrested by gang enforcement officers. Almost half were said to be members of 11 gangs Bratton designated as "the worst" in Los Angeles. Many arrests were for very minor charges—curfew violation, drug possession, vandalism, noncompliance with probation conditions.

Public defenders in Los Angeles said that court dockets were flooded with cases where prosecutors were overcharging—filing felony charges and seeking gang enhancements to invoke harsh prison sentences in cases involving minor nonviolent incidents that could have been charged as misdemeanors (McGreevy 2007a). Charging that the Los Angeles Police Department is "outnumbered" by gang members, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa sought funding to hire 780 new police officers over the next fiscal year, a move he said was essential for efforts to control gang violence (McGreevy 2007b).

Meanwhile, in America's other "gang capital," where

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1 The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports are based on a national set of crime statistics that focus on "index crimes"—murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson—collected by the FBI from law enforcement agencies across the United States.

2 Mara Salvatrucha was formed in Los Angeles in the 1980s by immigrant Salvadoran youth whose families fled a civil war and U.S. military intervention in their homeland.

the police department reports that nearly half of all murders arise from gang activity, a 278-page report published by the Chicago Crime Commission contended that gangs posed an increasing threat in Chicago's suburbs (Chicago Police Department 2005; Chicago Crime Commission 2006).

No media coverage of national crime trends has failed to note that New York City stands out from the pack in terms of its exceptional crime decline. High rates of chronic gang-rated violence in Los Angeles and Chicago are also noted by the media, yet an important contrast that lies within the exceptional New York crime experience has escaped media notice.

Gang crime makes for occasional—sometimes sensational—news headlines in New York, and no sea-soned New Yorker would deny the existence of street gangs. Yet gang-related offenses represent just a tiny blip on the New York crime screen, and even conservative gang expert Walter Miller concluded that the serious problem with street gang violence experienced some 45 years ago in New York City had, by and large, faded away by the end of the 1980s (Miller 1990).

The next section of this report briefly recounts a 50-year history of gangs and antigang interventions in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. The accounts reveal a sharp contrast between the experience in New York, where the primary strategies were informed by social theory and grounded in traditional social work practice, and in the other cities, where police suppression held the upper hand.

Gangs in New York City

Successive and pronounced cycles of gang violence have been documented in New York City, reaching back well over a century. Social historian Eric Schneider has chronicled the trajectory of the serious and widespread gang problem that plagued the city from the mid-1940s through the mid-1960s, during the transformation of the city's economy from war production and manufacturing to financial and legal services, insurance, real estate development, and civil service jobs (Schneider 1999).

African American and Puerto Rican families migrating into the city faced a highly racialized labor market that systematically excluded them from well-paying job categories and racial segregation that shunted them into older housing stock located in the poorest neighborhoods. Adolescent peer groups formed within crowded city schools competed outside of school with hostile ethnic groups for recreational space along neighborhood borderlines.

As neighborhood rivalries spread, the schools themselves became contested territory between competing groups of cynical youngsters of color who were well aware of the class, racial, and ethnic barriers that stood between them and opportunities for good jobs in the future. Dropping out of school only stiffened the barriers they faced, trapping them within the city's secondary labor market, where discrimination and exploitation rendered employment an episodic experience at best.

War veterans returning to the city introduced emerging street-corner-fighting groups of disaffected youths to more violent tactics and more sophisticated weaponry. The rate of youths killing youths increased markedly as a result. In 1947 the recognition that gang violence was a serious problem led to establishment of the New York City Youth Board.

Youth Board funding became available to support gang intervention projects operated by private social welfare agencies. The Youth Board placed street-level gang workers (termed "detached workers" because they worked entirely outside of traditional social service program offices) in central Harlem, in the Tompkins Park area in Brooklyn, and in the South Bronx neighborhood of Morrisania to intervene whenever violence flared between neighborhood youth gangs.

Schneider recounts how street workers sought to establish relationships with youths they perceived to be gang leaders and tried to deflect gang members from fighting. They organized athletic programs at neighborhood recreation centers, offering advice supplemented with field trips to amusement parks, beaches, and camp sites. They provided resources for organizing neighborhood social events, block parties, and "hall dances." Their most highly valued service by far was intended to draw individual gang members away from gang activities by locating job opportunities for them.

By 1955 the Youth Board was deploying 40 street gang workers in troubled neighborhoods across the city. Ten years later the number had swelled to 150. While gang members were initially suspicious of street workers, they were also status-conscious—well aware that an officially assigned street worker enhanced a gang's prestige by underscoring its reputation as a dangerous group. Mediation sessions engineered by street workers between hostile gangs dampened violent confrontations, but they also provided a level of recognition approaching celebrity for certain gang leaders.

Even the modest resources street workers provided in their efforts to channel gang members' energies toward more positive social activities could bolster gang cohesion. Yet the city's dedicated commitment to street work as the primary strategy to combat violence among street gang members fostered a far more constructive, less counterproductive response to gang violence than the harsh law enforcement tactics employed by police to suppress gangs in other cities.

Soon after the establishment of the Youth Board, criticism from police and politicians forced it to require that street workers inform the police of impending

gang fights, and about caches of weapons. Street workers were thereby compelled toward a limited degree of cooperation with the police. Street workers complained that the policy of cooperation compromised their credibility on the street, while police officers remained suspicious about the role of the street workers. Yet, once channels of communication about potential gang violence were established, they facilitated development of more strategic, better-targeted police patrol tactics designed to quell violence before it started. Schneider credits the citywide decline in large-scale gang "rumbles" during this period to cooperation between the Youth Board and the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

Cooperation between these two diverse city agencies failed to dispel the obvious tension between proponents of harsh police tactics and those committed to innovative social work approaches to address the gang problem. Pandering politicians continued to call for "nightstick justice" against gangs. Use of mediation between warring gangs was frequently condemned—despite its obvious effectiveness in achieving truces, at least in the short term—by those whose crime-control tastes preferred the spicy flavor of police crackdowns.

Yet establishment of a city-funded system of street work and gang intervention programs, solidly grounded in principles of effective social work practice and institutionalized entirely outside of the law enforcement domain, helped to constrain New York's policy makers and police officials from embracing most of the counterproductive gang suppression tactics adopted elsewhere. Kim McGill, founder of the South Bronx–based Youth Force Project who now directs the California Youth Justice Coalition, believes that Youth Board policies and practices in the 1950s established norms that continue to influence and modulate New York City's approach to the problem of street gangs today.

Street work was augmented by more conventional forms of social work and gang intervention programs provided by neighborhood service organizations, churches, settlement houses, and recreation centers. The effectiveness of agency-based programs was limited by issues of control, as competing gangs contested for ownership of the "turf" represented by a particular recreation center, or resisted direction from professional social service staff.

More successful interventions drew from a social work model pioneered decades earlier by Clifford Shaw, a sociologist who established the Chicago Area Project (CAP) in the 1930s. CAP used local residents as family counselors and organizers in their own neighborhoods to engage the energies of youth and adults in projects designed to improve and strengthen social control in the community.

Clashes during the mid-1950s between Mayrose (a street gang made up of white youths of varied ethnicity), Dragons (a Puerto Rican gang), and Sportsmen (African American adolescents living in housing projects) escalated into a violent and deadly gang war in lower Manhattan. An assortment of settlement houses, civic groups, and churches became linked together in a CAP-style gang intervention network under sponsorship of the Lower Eastside Neighborhood Association (LENA).

Gang truces were negotiated by LENA, while Youth Board street workers plied their services to defuse street violence, and social workers at the Henry Street Settlement House set up prevention programs targeting "predelinquent" children to divert them from joining gangs. Gang conflict did not disappear, but Schneider says that cycles of violent attacks and retaliation were somewhat disrupted.

Tasting a modest degree of success, LENA sought funding from the Ford Foundation to build on these efforts. An ambitious planning project begun in 1967 with visionary guidance from faculty members Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin at the Columbia University School of Social Work was expanded after the 1960 election when a newly established President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency joined forces with Ford staff. LENA's mission was broadened into a comprehensive agenda of youth development and community organizing.

Mobilization for Youth (MFY) was launched in 1962 with a rich mix of federal and city funding that enlarged the substantial stream of Ford grant dollars. Five settlement houses located in the target area coordinated an expanded cadre of street workers who mounted intervention efforts with more than a dozen neighborhood street gangs. A raft of job training, job placement, subsidized employment, and social service programs were established to prevent gangs from forming by providing new channels of opportunity for neighborhood residents. A team of activist lawyers was assembled to protect and expand residents' legal rights, advocating for social benefits and economic entitlements.

Drawing on the CAP model, MFY launched an ambitious organizing drive designed to mobilize neigh-

borhood residents for action against entrenched community problems: substandard housing, poorly performing schools, deficient public services. Embrace of confrontational tactics that characterized the 1960s—noisy picketing and "sit-ins" at the offices of government bureaucracies and the homes of bureaucrats, militant rent strikes and school boycotts, forceful agitation against police brutality—rapidly thrust the MFY community organizing tactics beyond CAP's relatively sedate political style toward radical activism.

Predictably, given the agency's generous public funding base, MFY's managers soon found themselves engulfed in a media-fueled political firestorm, almost completely alienated from the government agencies that provided that funding. MFY's political opponents charged loudly that agency staff included communists, that MFY organizers were responsible for the 1964 uprising in Harlem, and that vast sums of public money were being misspent (Moynihan 1969).

By the time investigators determined that these allegations had no basis in reality, MFY's director had resigned and the agency had retrenched, retooling itself to concentrate primarily on delivery of direct services to neighborhood residents. Community organizing was restricted to campaigns that were less likely to disrupt provision of government antipoverty grants. The reorganization served to boost the agency as a prototype model for the community action programs set up across the nation under President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty.

By 1966 the problem of serious gang violence had largely been abated in New York City. The NYPD youth division reported that the number of street gangs had declined. MFY replaced street-work programs with "adolescent service centers" set up to dispense conventional job and educational counseling services. In Schneider's assessment, New York City's gang intervention strategy had proved to be an overall success, with LENA and MFY mounting the most effective tools for keeping gang violence to a minimum and diverting youths away from gang membership.

Mayor John Lindsay applied lessons learned from the community action experience in his citywide effort to avoid the urban conflagrations erupting in other cities across the nation during this period. The Lindsay administration set up the Urban Action Task Force, empowered to step up delivery of city services and channel resources to community leaders in African

American and Puerto Rican neighborhoods, connecting them directly to city hall.

The Youth Board recruited neighborhood troublemakers to serve as youth leaders, organizing summer recreation and employment programs in these communities. Neighborhood youth councils hired the "worst kids" to staff these programs, while city hall bent civil service rules in order to offer them the possibility of upward mobility into permanent jobs in the city bureaucracy. Schneider describes how former gang members helped to quell a 1967 uprising in East Harlem, after which the local youth council was used to channel welfare assistance and jobs to community residents, cementing the direct political ties between the mayor's office and East Harlem's youth leaders.

By no means, however, does Schneider credit the Lindsay administration's political embrace of community action or the gang intervention programs with solving the structural problems that had given rise to the city's serious postwar gang problem, or with providing effective crime control in the long term:

> Gang intervention in all its forms attempted to disrupt the operations of the gang, especially gang fighting, and press youths into making conventional adjustments to working-class life. Because these programs define gangs as the problem, rather than as a symptom of other problems, they were unprepared to confront the fundamental issues that had led adolescents to form gangs in the first place. These were the limits of liberal social reform. The result was that gang intervention, where it successfully disrupted gangs, inadvertently substituted individual deviance in the form of drug use for the collective resistance of the gang. By the mid-1960s, authorities decided that gangs were no longer the problem. They had been displaced by the rapid spread of heroin among New York's adolescents.

Of course, heroin did not *actually* displace gangs in New York City, any more than gang intervention programs erased their existence. But bolstered by other contributing factors—radical movements and community politics that siphoned off the most talented gang leaders, the Vietnam War and a wartime economic boom—the city's sustained investment in street work and gang intervention programs had worked to reduce the level of gang violence below a threshold level, or "tipping point," where cycles of gang attacks and retribution become acute and con-

tinuous. And the spread of heroin that followed the decline in gang violence supplanted the ethos of gang warfare with an emerging drug culture:

> The relationship between drug use and the decline of the gangs was synergistic: the collapse of the gangs furthered drug use and the rising tide of drug use eroded the remaining gangs' abilities to preserve their members and themselves…. Public policy and gang interventions pushed the number of gangs below the threshold level in the early 60s, but it was heroin that kept them there, as one epidemic gave way to another.

Schneider points out that the phenomenon of youth gangs never entirely died out in the city. Cycles of gang activity have continued to the present time, with periodic episodes of gang violence flashing above the tipping point in one distinct area of the city after another.

The 1970s saw a revival of gang activity in the South Bronx, where the ravages of intractable poverty, heroin addiction, and an epidemic of arson had cut wide swathes of devastation in the bleak urban landscape. Youth gangs carried on the customary battles over turf, of course, but they also organized against the drug trade, mounting aggressive campaigns to drive heroin dealers and junkies out of their neighborhoods.

Periodic gang revivals also sparked renewed ethnic violence, as Euro-American gangs, particularly those in Italian American enclaves in the North Bronx and in the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Howard Beach and Bensonhurst, were primed to terrorize any African Americans and Latinos with the temerity to venture into their neighborhoods. Conflict between Chinatown youth gangs mirrored long-standing ethnic, political, and commercial rivalries that had been exacerbated by an influx of immigrants from different regions of China.

Since the waning of the sustained gang violence that plagued the city for two decades after World War II, episodic revivals of gang activity have never rivaled the extent or intensity of the postwar gang crisis. Those who expected that the problem of youth violence would subside as street gangs lost their widespread appeal, however, were sorely disappointed when deadly gun violence reached epidemic proportions among New York City youths in the later half of the 1980s.

The sharp upsurge in the rate of gun homicides was not, for the most part, perceived to be gang-related.

Jeffrey Fagan has described how the escalation of gun violence across the city was fueled by development of a pervasive "ecology of danger" within which the widespread availability of guns helped to spark contagious behavioral norms and "scripts" that reinforced their use, with extraordinarily lethal consequences (Fagan and Wilkinson 1998).

New York's leading urban anthropologist, Mercer Sullivan, closely examined the nature of youth violence in New York during the last decade of the 20th century, when "supergangs" from Los Angeles and Chicago were reported to be proliferating across the nation (2005). He conducted a systematic search for stories published in city newspapers between 1990 and 2000 that included the term "youth gang," pinpointing 1997 as the year when "nationally famous gangs finally came to New York City, at least in name." Newspaper references to Bloods, Crips, Latin Kings, and Ñetas surged that year, raising fears about an impending gang-related crime wave. Yet police reports from the same period indicate that serious violent crime was on the decline in the city well before, and long after, media reports of the emergence of a new generation of violent gangs. *Something* was going on, but clearly it did not produce a crime wave.

Sullivan had amassed a wealth of interview and observational data during ethnographic field research he conducted in three city neighborhoods between 1995 and 1999 to examine the social ecology of youth violence and document changing patterns in violent behavior over the period. The research was specifically designed to trace perceptions of local youth gang activity among parents, teachers, police officers, and youths themselves. The patterns of violence he documented help to explain why the apparent proliferation of notorious national youth gangs was not associated with an increase in serious youth crime.

Sullivan's data contained signs of the gang emergence phenomenon, but he also found evidence that media reports of sensational gang conflict were primarily a relabeling of existing local rivalries. Group violence, when it erupted, stemmed primarily from conflict ("beefs") between informal cliques of youths who lived on particular city blocks and shared a strong sense of identification and loyalty. Sullivan reports that youths in such local groups were familiar with the phenomenon of youth gangs, but they tended to distinguish these from their block-group loyalties:

> In the early period of fieldwork, 1995–1996, beefs between these groups were described in terms of these place-based identifications,

as, for example, "between Redwood and the Desert." By the end of the fieldwork, following the spike in newspaper gang reports of 1997...these conflicts had been redefined. We heard at one point that Redwood and Castle had joined together to fight the Bloods from the Desert who were trying to "take over the neighborhood."

But the "beef" between the Bloods and the block groups was an ephemeral event that was quickly disrupted with targeted police action—and it took place during a period of general decline in violence in this area.

Some indications of localized violence in one particular area of the city coincided with the 1997 spike in media coverage about gangs, yet the scale of the problem fell far short of the gang-related mayhem expected by those who were reading the media accounts:

> Our data suggest mutually reinforcing effects of media panic and street rumor, on one hand, and some real changes in the amount and organization of youth violence on the other.

> At the beginning of the fieldwork period, we documented high levels of fighting among students from the middle school we were studying. Many of these fights involved multiple participants, but they were not organized as named gangs. Some groups involved in fights could be associated with a particular block or housing project, but other fights involved essentially ad hoc groupings, time-limited action-sets rather than cliques, much less named gangs.

> Beginning in 1996 and rapidly increasing in 1997, named gang affiliations swept through the area. Local youth began choosing to identify as either Bloods or Crips, mostly Bloods.

These identifications, however, were ambiguous and highly contested. There was no single group leader or structure within either category, and there were many subsets of these categories. Rumors ran rife and mutated constantly. A favorite topic of conversation was the difference between "real Bloods" and "fake Bloods." Most individuals carrying the insignia of Blood membership were said to be "fake Bloods."

> Many stories were told of the rituals supposedly associated with Blood membership. To be inducted into the Bloods, various accounts claimed that a person had to do something such as randomly slash the face of a total stranger with a razor. In other versions, the slashing victim had to be a family member, or one's own mother. The crescendo of this hysteria peaked on Halloween 1997. As the day approached, rumors circulated throughout New York City that Halloween would be a day of mass Blood initiation. The chancellor of the New York City schools issued a public statement that schools would remain open despite widespread calls from parents and others that they be closed. The Soulville middle school we were studying remained open, but only a handful of students showed up.

> The mass slashings never occurred. ...Some entity or loosely related group of entities called Bloods did appear in New York, but the panic came and went as violent crime citywide continued to decline.

Sullivan wonders whether law enforcement estimates of increasing gang prevalence reported in the National Youth Gang Survey conducted during the period may have largely resulted from a wave of moral panic over gangs.

Gangs in Chicago

While New York City has experienced only sporadic gang problems since the mid-1960s, Chicago's institutionalized neighborhood gangs have remained an entrenched problem since the 1950s. John Hagedorn has traced the roots of violence among Chicago's institutionalized "supergangs" all the way back to post–World War I race riots, when white workers and the Ku Klux Klan expelled African Americans from industrial jobs they had obtained while whites were fighting overseas (Hagedorn undated). During the Depression, as jobs in every sector became scarce and Mexicans were subjected to mass deportation, youth violence increased as small "corner groups" of black and brown youths clashed against white ethnic gangs in defense of their neighborhoods.

As immigrant ethnic groups and racial minorities competed for jobs, hegemony over the city's political machinery shifted among various ethnic elements, with the Irish ultimately sustaining control of the uppermost levels of power. Both licit and illicit opportunity structures were solidly blocked against most African Americans and Mexicans, as white ethic groups held sway in both the labor market and the underground economy. Contained by racism and racial segregation, African Americans remained stuck at the very bottom of the ranks. When deindustrialization gutted the city's supply of manufacturing jobs, they remained trapped in unemployment and poverty. Ranked in terms of black/white dissimilarity in housing patterns, Chicago continues to score as the most racially segregated city in the nation (Frey and Myers 2002).

In *Stateville*, his groundbreaking study of prison culture, James Jacobs examined how police repression and mass imprisonment of Chicago's "supergangs" helped to transform both Illinois prisons and the gangs themselves (Jacobs 1977). In the 1960s federal social policy turned to a focus on juvenile delinquency, and federal dollars began to flow into grassroots organizations in high-crime urban neighborhoods. Around the same time, Chicago street gang leaders began to gravitate toward grassroots political action.

On the South Side, community organizers and church leaders cultivated relationships with charismatic gang members and fostered their development as legitimate grassroots leaders. Both Blackstone Rangers (the street gang that evolved into the Black P. Stone Nation and ultimately became known as the El Rukns) and Devil's Disciples were drawn into The Woodlawn Organization (TWO), Saul Alinsky's dynamic grassroots organization. TWO garnered substantial financial support from both private foundations and the federal Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to create youth employment programs while thumbing its nose at city hall and drawing intense opposition from the Chicago police.

Similar developments ensued on the West Side, where the Lawndale-based Conservative Vice Lords, advised by a Peace Corps veteran, founded Operation Bootstrap. They allied with Jesse Jackson and soon attracted funding for a host of social action programs. But at the same time that the Lindsay administration in New York was embracing community action programs such as these, and deliberately enlisting gang leaders from among the city's "worst kids" to serve as staff for recreation and jobs programs, Mayor Richard J. Daley's response was quite different.

Lacking John Lindsay's progressive vision of "urban action" against poverty, Daley feared that the gangs' increasing role in building grassroots power, and the liberal allies they were attracting, would upset his political machine. As TWO was launching its OEO-funded youth programs, the Daley administration was beefing up the police department's gang intelligence unit and initiating a crackdown of intense police harassment, arresting Woodlawn youths for petty crimes and curfew violations and conducting warrantless intrusions of TWO offices (Jacobs 1977).

In 1968 both the Blackstone Rangers and the Vice Lords gave Daley his due by working hard to upset his political machine at the polls. Daley promptly increased the gang intelligence unit from 38 to 200 officers. Illinois prisons were soon flooded with gang members sent en masse by the Chicago courts. Gang leaders swept into prison as "political prisoners" with a vivid sense of their organizational power. Once they were there, they set vigorous recruitment drives in motion. By 1972 at least half of Illinois prisoners were said to be affiliated with gangs. As the gangs took over the prison market for contraband and solidified their control of prison programs, gang affiliation provided members with both economic and social benefits.

The massive infusion of gang members came at a time when liberal prison reformers were working to loosen the hold of the traditional prison management regime in the state's maximum-security institutions in order to improve prison conditions. As old-time prison guards chafed under a new system of authority geared toward a "human relations" model of management, the Black P. Stone Nation, Vice Lords, Disciples, and Latin Kings came to dominate, control, and transform the prison's social system.

Gang members came to prison with a spirit of rebellion against authority gained on the streets of Chicago during the 1960s and a sense of racial and social solidarity stemming from a mix of street gang traditions and radical black nationalism. They quickly cast aside the traditional "inmate code"—with its hierarchy based on offense type and a "do your own time" ethos—replacing it with strong communal values of solidarity between gang brothers and loyalty to gang leadership. Prisoners learned how to "do gang time."

Prison guards saw themselves undermined by the "pro-inmate" reforms imposed by the new management in power above them and challenged by the belligerent rebels they faced on the tiers. The level of intergang violence increased. As guards became more and more demoralized, prisoners increasingly resisted their control, mounting periodic food strikes, physical attacks on guards, and bouts of taking hostages. In 1973 a prison guard was murdered.

Prison managers responded to strikes and violence with lockdowns. They constructed a special housing unit where supermaximum conditions prevailed. Between 1970 and 1975 Stateville appeared to teeter on the verge of chaos, but a full-scale prison uprising never materialized. Jacobs reports that prison managers, guards, and prisoners alike attributed the

gang leaders, who feared an Attica-style response from the state, with credit for restraining violence within bounds.

Daley's repression of Chicago's politicized gangs only increased their membership and strengthened their cohesion. The policy of prison containment made recruitment easier in a setting where rejecting gang membership meant endangering one's property and personal safety. The crucible of prison tested gang loyalties and forged strong bonds to gang leadership. As prisoners were released to the streets of Chicago, the gang allegiances they gained in prison shaped their reentry experiences.

The experience of surviving mass imprisonment toughened the hide of Chicago gang members and consolidated their organizational structure, making them more durable and contributing to their institutionalization. Hagedorn explains the concept of institutionalized gangs as follows:

> There have been many attempts to categorize gangs, but in the context of this study, US gangs can be differentiated between *interstitial* and *institutionalized* gangs. The US father of gang research, Frederic Thrasher, used interstitial to describe early Chicago gangs. It literally means "in between" or the transitions of youth, as from one neighborhood to a better one and/or from childhood to young adult. Most US gangs were, and continue to be, transitional interstitial groups, rising with one set of peers and declining as its peer group matures.

> But in some cities, particularly Chicago and Los Angeles, gangs institutionalized, or persisted over generations. To say that a gang has institutionalized signifies that it persists despite leadership changes (e.g. killed, incarcerated, or matured out), has an organization complex enough to sustain multiple roles of members (including children), adapts to changing environments without dissolving (e.g. police repression), fulfils some community needs (economic, security, services), and organizes a distinct outlook of its members (sometimes called a gang subculture). (Hagedorn undated)

When Chicago gang members began to look to the civil rights movement and community action programs as vehicles out of poverty and segregation, Mayor Daley's incarceration campaign smashed

their hopes and dreams. But Hagedorn maintains that the lengthy prison terms received by gang leaders could not break their ties to street chapters. By the time they returned to the streets, the decline in Chicago's industrial jobs left them no options aside from what remained in the underground economy. They crowded into Chicago's hypersegregated high-rise housing projects with drugs and guns the only tools at hand.

Federal funds for construction of public housing had become available during the 1960s, but Mayor Daley's deep commitment to racial containment did not allow for dispersal of housing sites outside of Chicago ghettos (Hagedorn and Rauch 2004). The Robert Taylor Homes epitomized the Daley-era approach, with 28 towering blocks of high-rise projects warehousing 27,000 Chicagoans, virtually cutting them off from access to better schools and work opportunities in white neighborhoods.

As the drug economy heated up in the 1980s, the flow of city services and public housing resources began to recede from Chicago projects like Robert Taylor. New York's epidemic of lethal youth gun violence in the late 1980s appeared to fade in the face of concentrated drug enforcement operations by the police. During the same period Chicago police addressed increased levels of violence with a crackdown on the institutionalized gangs that John Hagedorn says may only have increased the level of violence. Police repression only fragmented gang leadership, causing intragang violence.

Gang fragmentation and violence were further exacerbated in Chicago during the mid-1990s when the public housing authority shifted millions of dollars from needed maintenance and renovation of the city's high-rise projects to finance a drug enforcement campaign involving massive gang sweeps.

When that strategy proved largely fruitless, the city began to demolish the projects, forcing more than a hundred thousand tenants to move. Instead of building new housing for them, the housing authority gave displaced tenants rent vouchers. Scattered relocation to other segregated, high-crime areas of the city dislocated people from long-established social networks and increased friction and violence among Chicago gangs.

New York faced similar economic pressures from deindustrialization through the same period. Poor neighborhoods suffered huge declines in housing stock as landlords abandoned buildings to deterioration and arson. But even while the youth homicide epidemic raged, city government committed billions to new affordable housing initiatives, refurbishing abandoned buildings, constructing new housing on vacant land, and sparking an urban revival in burned-out neighborhoods like the South Bronx. Residents experienced far less displacement and were able to benefit from the improvements in their neighborhoods.

While Chicago neighborhoods like Lawndale and Englewood declined during the 1990s, the South Bronx began to climb out of the economic and social blight that prevailed in the previous decade, lessening the level of youth violence and helping to speed the unprecedented drop in New York City's violent crime rate that has continued to the present time.

Hagedorn maintains that the displacement of tens of thousands of African American families, sometimes fracturing renegade splinter groups off institutionalized gangs, has played a role in the persistence of high levels of violence due to gang wars and drug market disputes. While New York's homicide rate plummeted, Hagedorn points out, Chicago's declined only slightly (Hagedorn undated).

Gangs in Los Angeles

Los Angeles has experienced a long-term pandemic of youth gang homicide and violence (California Attorney General's Office 2004). A quarter-century-long "war on gangs" has cost taxpayers billions of dollars, yet—according to a new report by the Advancement Project—there now are six times as many gangs and at least double the number of gang members in the Los Angeles region (Advancement Project 2007).

New York's sporadic cycles of gang violence have never paralleled the deadly carnage experienced in Los Angeles. In *Street Wars,* his insightful study of gangs, Tom Hayden writes that some 10,000 of Los Angeles' young people have been killed in gang conflicts over the past two decades (Hayden 2005). The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) reported 11,402 gang-related crimes in 2005 (Advancement Project 2006). That same year, the New York Police Department reported just 520 (New York City Mayor's Office of Operations 2005). FBI crime reports indicate that New York's homicide rate that year was about half of Los Angeles', while the rate of reported gang crime in Los Angeles was 49 times the rate reported in New York City.

What can account for such startling contrasts? Is New York City in denial about the nature and size of its street gang problem? Or is the city still benefiting from policies set more than 30 years ago that approached the problem of street gangs in ways that avoided the excesses of police suppression that have characterized the policing of gangs in Los Angeles? Do Hayden, the Advancement Project, and the LAPD exaggerate the seriousness and scale of Los Angeles' gang problem? Or has police suppression helped to turn the Los Angeles gang problem into a gang pandemic? A short review of gang suppression efforts in Los Angeles is offered here in order to provide a historical context that may shed some light on these puzzling questions.

During World War II, groups of Mexican immigrant "pachucos" in stylized "zoot suits" and wide-brimmed hats drew hostile police actions when sailors home on leave surged repeatedly into East Los Angeles to attack them. While a handful of sailors were arrested for fighting, hundreds of the Latino youths they attacked were arrested for disturbing the peace.

Hayden recounts that the early African American gangs in Los Angeles—the Slausons and the Gladiators—were formed in the Watts ghetto projects after World War II in response to white youth violence during integration of the public schools. Blacks were beaten and burned in effigy by white public school cliques. African Americans living in Watts faced public signs in nearby Compton, then a white working-class enclave, that warned that "Negroes" had to be out of town by sundown. The white Spook Hunters gang enforced boundary transgressions; when backup was needed it was supplied by the LAPD.

In an interview, a veteran of the 1965 Watts uprising told Hayden about growing up as a Baby Slauson: "We resisted the term 'gang.' We saw the police as a gang, we saw ourselves as a club formed because of discrimination. You couldn't get into the Boy Scouts, you couldn't go to the public swimming pools, you couldn't go into Inglewood. Southgate was off limits."

During the same years that the Youth Board's streetwork efforts in New York City were showing success in assuaging the epidemic of gang violence there, legendary LAPD chief William Parker—who maintained a segregated police force until 1960—resisted the notion of using social work approaches to quell gang violence (Davis 2006). In his view, gang members were incorrigibles, deserving nothing more than a locked-down prison regime. He characterized the city's barrio residents as just one step removed from "the wild tribes of Mexico." During the civil rights era, black gangs and black nationalist groups fused in Parker's mind into a single menace of communist-inspired black power.

As though to confirm Chief Parker's paranoia, hostilities between South Central gangs seemed to evaporate

in August 1965 as members joined Watts residents in battle against the LAPD and the National Guard during five days of sustained civil disturbance. The cessation of most gang hostilities continued more or less for the next half decade, as many prominent gang leaders took up roles in liberation movement organizations. But after the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party was dismantled by the combined efforts of the FBI and the LAPD, old gang hostilities reemerged.

Latino gangs in East Los Angeles were a focus of gang suppression policing in the 1970s. In *The City of Quartz,* his far-reaching study of the impact of globalization on the political economy and community culture in Los Angeles, Mike Davis writes that it was a "major community counter-offensive" led by priests, parents, and veteran gang members that brought the number of gang homicides down from 34 in 1978 to none at all in 1988. Meanwhile, an epidemic of "gangbanging" spread rapidly in South Los Angeles, coinciding with the rapid rise of the crack cocaine market. Davis says that as bad as it was, the outbreak of youth violence never came close to resembling the phantasmagoric images portrayed by law enforcement with inflated statistics and supercharged rhetoric.

Davis characterizes the media-fueled hysteria over gangs in Los Angeles during the period as "a terrain of pseudo-knowledge and fantasy projection." Hysterical rhetoric soon led to a hyperrepressive reaction by police. Davis has described a massive Operation HAMMER gang sweep in Los Angeles during the late 1980s:

> A thousand extra-duty patrolmen, backed up by elite tactical squads and a special anti-gang taskforce, bring down the first act of "Operation HAMMER" upon ten square miles of Southcentral Los Angeles between Exposition Park and North Long Beach, arresting more Black youth than at any time since the Watts rebellion of 1965. Like a Vietnam-era search-and-destroy mission—and many senior police are proud Vietnam veterans—Chief [Darrell] Gates saturates the street with his "Blue Machine," jacking up thousands of local teenagers at random like so many surprised peasants. Kids are humiliatingly forced to "kiss the sidewalk" or spreadeagle against police cruisers while officers check their names against computerized files of gang members. There are 1,453 arrests; the kids are processed in mobile booking cen-

ters, mostly for trivial offenses like delinquent parking tickets or curfew violations. Hundreds more, uncharged, have their names and addresses entered into the electronic gang roster for future surveillance.

In 1987 the Gang Related Active Trafficker Suppression program (GRATS) mounted nine sweeps over a period of two months, netting more than 1,500 arrests. Yet the violence continued, so Chief Gates—fearing a threat by county supervisors to call out the National Guard—threw the sweep machine into high gear, initiating HAMMER-style supersweeps. During an August 1988 raid by HAMMER troops on a group of Dalton Avenue apartment buildings, rampaging cops smashed apartment walls with sledgehammers and spray-painted "LAPD Rules" on those left intact. They wreaked such extensive damage to property and possessions that the Red Cross offered residents disaster relief and temporary shelter. The raid yielded no arrests of gang members and no weapons. Residents were later awarded $3 million by the courts to compensate them for the damages inflicted during the Dalton Avenue police riot. By 1990 HAMMER had pounded more than 50,000 arrestees (Davis 2006).

In *Street Wars,* Hayden related how mounting Latino gang violence in the Pico barrio on the west side of Los Angeles during the early 1990s was quelled by a series of gang truces. Gang warfare in Santa Monica, West Los Angeles, Culver City, and Venice had become a bloody slaughter, conducted with pipe bombs and drive-by shootings. Street gangs were loosely connected through the prison pipeline to Mexican Mafia (La Eme) shot-callers, who called a cease-fire on drive-bys in September 1993—but, according to Hayden, many cease-fire agreements had already been hammered out at the street level between gang leaders, who met regularly in an effort to calm the warfare.

La Eme had been formed in the California prison system during the 1950s for the purpose of protecting Latino prisoners from hostile acts by African Americans and racist whites. As in Illinois, the prison experience galvanized La Eme with a businesslike structure of rules, enforced with muscular leadership. The shot-callers convened the September 1993 mass meeting of more than 1,000 gang members in Elysian Park to deliver the message that the violence between Mexicans had to cease.

After the gangs were convened, the home of a major La Eme organizer was raided by the LAPD. The

organizer turned informant and helped to make the first federal RICO[1] case against a gang in Los Angeles, which—in 1997—resulted in life sentences for 10 La Eme leaders. But the truce process sustained relative peace in West Los Angeles into 1998 (Hayden 2005).

The first civil gang injunction was sought against the Playboy Gangster Crips in 1987 by then–city attorney James Hahn. He requested a restraining order spanning 26 square blocks south of Beverly Hills with 24 specific prohibitions, including "congregating in groups of two or more" and "remaining in public streets for more than five minutes at any time of day or night." The injunction would have banned the wearing of gang colors, imposed a curfew on juveniles, and required that gang members would be subject to arrest for simply passing through the area without an authorization document signed by a "lawful property holder or employer." Hahn was forced to modify his application after opposition erupted from the American Civil Liberties Union—but his gang-busting ambitions were truly fulfilled the following year, when a RICO-style bill he authored in collaboration with Ira Reiner, Los Angeles district attorney, was enacted in Sacramento. The Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act (STEP) made participation in gang activity a felony (Davis 2006).

The STEP act (California Penal Code 186.20) defines a gang as an ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more specified crimes,[2] having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, and whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity.

The law provides that anyone who actively participates in any criminal street gang with knowledge that its members engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity, and who willfully promotes, furthers, or assists any felonious criminal conduct by members of that gang is guilty of a criminal offense. If a person is convicted of a felony committed "for the benefit of, at the direction of, or in association with any criminal street gang, with the specific intent to promote, further, or assist in any criminal conduct

by gang members," the person will receive a sentence enhancement on top of the prescribed prison sentence (for low-level felonies, an extra two to four years; for more serious felonies, five years; for violent felonies, ten years) (Bjerregaard 2003).

The use of civil gang injunctions (CGIs) accelerated in the mid-1990s. Cheryl Maxson reports that at least 22 gang injunctions had been issued in the city of Los Angeles by July 2004. The scope of these gang suppression tools can be drawn very broadly:

> The number of gang members can range from a handful to the hundreds, and the initial string of names often is followed by "and any other members." The targeted area can be a housing complex, several square blocks, or an entire city, but most often CGIs are spatially based, neighborhood-level interventions intended to disrupt the gang's routine activities. Prohibited behaviors include illegal activities such as trespass, vandalism, drug selling, and public urination, as well as otherwise legal activities, such as wearing gang colors, displaying hand signs, and carrying a pager or signaling passing cars, behaviors associated with drug selling. Nighttime curfews are often imposed. Most disturbing to legal scholars and advocates is the commonly applied prohibition against any two or more named gang members associating with one another. (Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane 2005)

A gang database was first compiled in Los Angeles by the Los Angeles County sheriff the same year that James Hahn sought his injunction against the Playboy Gangster Crips. The Los Angeles database was taken statewide a decade later when the California Department of Justice created CalGang, which tracks some 200 datapoints of personal information and gang-related information. By 2003, Loren Siegel reported, 47 percent of African American men in Los Angeles County between the ages of 21 and 24 had been logged into the Los Angeles County gang database, and more than a quarter-million Californians had been entered into the CalGang database by law enforcement personnel across the state (Siegel 2003).

A person can be entered in the CalGang database if a law enforcement officer determines that the person meets at least two of ten criteria (Advancement Project 2006):

1. Admits gang membership or association.
2. Is observed to associate on a regular basis with known gang members.

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1 The Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) Act of 1970 provides long prison sentences for those convicted of certain crimes (e.g., gambling, murder, kidnapping, arson, robbery, bribery, extortion) performed as part of an ongoing criminal organization.

2 See prologue footnote 1 for a list of the crimes.

3. Has tattoos indicating gang membership.

4. Wears gang clothing, symbols, etc., to identify with a specific gang.

5. Is in a photograph with known gang members and/or using gang-related hand signs.

6. Is named on a gang document, hit list, or gang-related graffiti.

7. Is identified as a gang member by a reliable source.

8. Is arrested in the company of identified gang members or associates.

9. Corresponds with known gang members or writes and/or receives correspondence about gang activities.

10. Writes about gangs (graffiti) on walls, books, paper, etc.

Civil injunctions and other public order measures, such as curfews for urban youth, have been embraced by many as progressive alternatives to draconian incapacitation mandated by antigang sentencing enhancements such as are embodied in STEP (Harcourt 2001). Yet introduction of these "alternatives" has not served as a substitute for police repression and imprisonment of street gangs in Los Angeles. Rather, the array of antigang measures have combined to compound the impact of Los Angeles' perennial crackdowns on gangs.

The intensity of the LAPD's war on street gangs and its propensity for corruption were laid bare when investigations of police misconduct exposed the operations of the CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums) program. According to Tom Hayden, CRASH had evolved from TRASH—Los Angeles' first antigang police unit—established under a federal grant in 1977. T stood for *total,* and the goal was total suppression of gangs.

In 1998 a CRASH officer working out of the Rampart police precinct house, Rafael Perez, was charged with theft of eight pounds of cocaine from a police locker. Facing a long prison term, Perez broke the code of silence and revealed the inner workings of the antigang squad.

Operating jointly with federal agents in the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, CRASH officers in the Rampart district conducted gang sweeps in 1997 and 1998 that resulted in Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) deportation of 160 people. Some INS officials in Los Angeles were appalled at the tactics being used. INS documents handed over to a *Los Angeles Times* reporter revealed complaints by INS officers that CRASH was waging war against "a whole race of people." Perez testified that potential witnesses to police misconduct were being handed over to the INS for deportation.

Perez talked of framing cases against some 100 people, and implicated scores of other officers. Perez admitted that he and his partner had shot one Pico-Union gang member in the head and then planted drugs and guns near his fallen body. The brain-damaged victim, released from prison after Perez's testimony, had been sentenced to 23 years in prison for his "crime." Tainted cases were dismissed against 99 other defendants. A *Los Angeles Times* article published in 2000 characterized the Rampart CRASH unit as hosting a secret fraternity of more than 30 officers and sergeants with "an organized criminal subculture." Officers were awarded plaques that celebrated incidents in which they had wounded or killed people (Glover and Lait 2000).

The harsh gang suppression tactics that have been employed for decades by law enforcement agencies in Los Angeles have never suffered from a lack of criticism from academic experts, civil libertarians, and criminal justice reform advocates and activists. California's Youth Justice Coalition (YJC) has been waging a grassroots campaign against Los Angeles' current war on gangs. YJC activists charge that by criminalizing gang membership and gang activity, California's antigang laws result in discrimination on the basis of race, class, and age. They argue that "people should be held accountable for their actions not for their dress, affiliations or where they live or hang out" (California Youth Justice Coalition 2006).

YJC activists condemn the excessive sentences meted out under the penalty enhancement provisions of California's STEP law, especially as they interact with other "get-tough" measures enacted by California voters, such as the "Three Strikes" law and Proposition 21, which made any felony committed "on behalf of a gang" a strike and provides prosecutors with legal authority to file charges against youths as young as 14 years old directly in adult court, without a fitness hearing before a judge. YJC activists charge that once youths are labeled with "gang affiliation," they receive more severe treatment at every stage of the adjudication process. They may be denied release on bond; their defenses may be discounted and their testimony disbelieved by judges and jurors.

Activists charge that instead of targeting individuals

for their criminal activity, gang injunctions sweep entire communities into a net of police surveillance. Moreover, they argue, injunctions, for the most part, are imposed not on the largest gangs or the most notorious gang neighborhoods but rather in areas that are near to white neighborhoods or those most attractive for gentrification. At a city council hearing on these injunctions held in May 2006, community residents from areas under injunction complained of severe curtailment of basic freedom and of routine police harassment.

In April 2007 Los Angeles city attorney Rocky Delgadillo responded to community pressure by announcing new guidelines that mandate significant changes in civil injunction procedures (Los Angeles City Attorney's Office 2007). No longer will police officers determine who will be served with an injunction. They will have to present the city attorney's office with evidence that proves, beyond a reasonable doubt, that a person is an active gang member before adding that person to an injunction list. Those added to a list will be served with legal notice and will be able to petition for removal from an injunction list by explaining that they are no longer active—or never were active—in a gang. Moreover, all cases will automatically be reviewed every three years, and people will be removed from the list unless there is evidence that they have maintained active gang membership.

The revised guidelines mark a major victory for YJC activists in Los Angeles, but they pledge continued pressure to extend the injunction reforms to Los Angeles County, and to end use of gang database systems that remain devoid of meaningful due process. They continue to seek guarantees that people who are added to CalGang will receive official notification and be given clear rights to appeal their inclusion in the database.

The history of failed gang strategies compiled by the Advancement Project for the Los Angeles city council in 2006 notes that Proposition 13 (the landmark tax reform measure enacted by California voters in 1978) resulted in virtual elimination of all of the city's prevention and early intervention programs. Around the same time, the city began to construct its monolithic gang suppression machinery (Advancement Project 2006). In contrast, New York City has made considerable efforts to maintain an adequate level of city funding for youth services, recreation, and employment programs (Advancement Project 2007).

To this day, suppression has remained the primary strategy to address Los Angeles' serious, chronic problem of gang violence. The Advancement Project research team reports that more than two-thirds of the money available for gang reduction efforts is directed to suppression efforts by the LAPD and the city attorney's office, with the largest portion invested in police "gang impact teams."

Los Angeles is well into the third decade of its failed "war on gangs." Despite massive, militarized police actions, strict civil injunctions, draconian sentencing enhancements, and a gang database that appears to criminalize upwards of half of its young African American male residents, gang violence is worsening, according to media reports. With a reported 720 active gangs and 39,488 gang members, Los Angeles retains the dubious honor of being the gang capital of the world.

There is a wealth of research on the origins of gangs and the activities and characteristics of their members, as well as a smaller but useful body of literature that seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of various gang control strategies and tactics. Unfortunately, public officials rarely draw on this resource, opting instead to make policy by anecdote.

Gang policy is often made in moments of perceived crisis, when law enforcement agencies and elected officials feel intense pressure to "do something" about gangs immediately—a poor atmosphere for considering questions that will determine the success or failure of a gang control strategy.

Sober policy making is made even more difficult by the larger-than-life quality that attaches to any conversation about gangs. Gangs thrive on publicity of all kinds. Their members often go to great pains to make themselves visible and to exaggerate the threat they pose to society. They are often aided and abetted by politicians and the media, who also thrive on the sensational reaction that gangs—with their menacing tattoos, graffiti, colors, and hand signs—elicit from the public.

Gang researchers are not immune to America's long romance with gangs, but for the most part their work provides a helpful antidote to the overblown rhetoric of gang members and those who would make the eradication of gangs a national priority. Their work can help us answer critical questions that should—but usually don't—guide policy making: Who are gang members? Why do they join gangs, and—equally important—why do they leave? What do gangs do? What is the relationship between gang activity and crime? What do we want to accomplish through our gang control efforts, and how do we expect it to happen? Should we focus on gangs at all?

The following chapters seek to shed light on these questions and debunk some of the most tenacious myths about what gangs are and how gang problems can best be addressed.

Down for the Count: Exploring the Size and Makeup of the Gang Population

It is difficult to find a law enforcement account of gang activity that does not give the impression that the problem is getting worse by the day. A review of the most recent National Gang Threat Assessment from the National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations (NAGIA) suggests that gangs pose a rapidly growing threat to public safety (2005). Nationally, NAGIA claims that gangs are associating with organized crime; gang members are becoming more sophisticated in their use of computers and technology; Hispanic gang membership is on the rise; California-style gang culture is migrating and spreading gangs' reach; women are taking more active roles in gangs; "Indian Country" sources are reporting escalating gang activity; and motorcycle gangs are expanding their territory.

The report paints an even bleaker picture of regional developments. Nearly half of the key regional findings—11 of 23—contain a variant of the words *increase* or *grow*. All of the following are reputed to be on the rise in one or more regions: neighborhood/homegrown and hybrid gangs; gangs in Hispanic immigrant communities; gang violence and drug trafficking on Indian reservations; graffiti and tagging; gang activity around schools and college campuses; cooperation between gangs to facilitate crime and drug trafficking; sophistication in the planning and execution of gang crime; identity and credit card theft perpetrated by gang members; and use of firearms by gang members. There is, by contrast, no mention of reductions in any form of gang activity.

Yet the most comprehensive survey of law enforcement data on gang activity shows no significant changes in estimated gang membership or the prevalence of gang activity—both of which are down significantly since the late 1990s. Further, law enforcement depictions of the gang population are sharply at odds with youth survey data when it comes to the geography of gang activity as well as the race and gender of gang members.

Data on the prevalence of gang problems and gang membership

The National Youth Gang Survey

The primary source of law enforcement reports on the prevalence of gang problems is the National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS). The survey is distributed annually to all law enforcement agencies that serve suburban counties and cities with 50,000 or more residents, along with a random sample of police departments that serve small cities and rural counties. Each agency is asked to describe the nature of the local youth gang problem and estimate the number and demographic characteristics of gangs and gang members in its jurisdiction. Respondents are told to exclude from their reports motorcycle gangs, prison gangs, hate groups, and gangs composed entirely of adults. Response rates have ranged from 84 to 92 percent since 1996 (Egley, Howell, and Major 2006).

The National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) uses NYGS data to examine the prevalence of gang problems by type of jurisdiction and to estimate the number of gangs and gang members in the United States. The strength of gang prevalence and population estimates is limited by the quality of law enforcement data. Local estimates of gang membership can fluctuate from year to year based on shifting definitions of gang activity and changes in the capacity to track it. NYGC senior research associate

Arlen Egley explains that significant year-to-year variation in the number of gang members reported by a given jurisdiction often reflects a "change in approach" rather than a change in the gangs themselves (personal communication).

Law enforcement estimates of local gang membership can fluctuate from year to year based on changes in police practices.

The number of active gang members reported by the Detroit Police Department nearly doubled between 1996 and 1997, rising from 2,000 to 3,500 before plunging to 800 the following year (Bynum and Varano 2003). Yet gun crimes—which were considered by Detroit researchers to be indicative of gang activity—moved in the opposite direction, *falling* between 1996 and 1997 and *rising* the following year. Elsewhere, the fluctuations can be tied directly to

training and funding for gang enforcement efforts. Indianapolis Police Department estimates of local gang activity jumped from 80 gangs and 1,746 members in 1995 to 198 gangs and 2,422 members in 1997 after the city was selected to participate in a federal gang initiative (McGarrell and Chermak 2003).

Sharp year-to-year changes in local gang population estimates are excellent fodder for sensational media reports but say little about the severity of a local gang problem. Deborah Lamm Weisel and Tara O'Connor Shelley warn that "while it is tempting to use law enforcement data about gangs and gang-related offenses to make comparisons between—or even within—jurisdictions, gang-related data are exceptionally unreliable for this purpose" (2004). The national estimates of gang prevalence published by NYGC are less volatile because they combine results from hundreds of jurisdictions. Nonetheless, trends in estimated city and county gang membership reversed directions three times between 1996 and 2002 (Egley, Howell, and Major 2006).

Despite these flaws, NYGS data do provide a general picture of the scope and direction of the gang problem as it is perceived by law enforcement. The most recent NYGC report indicates that the United States had roughly 24,000 youth gangs and 760,000 gang members in 2004 (Egley and Ritz 2006). The numbers are daunting, immediately conjuring images of a marauding army of gun-toting criminals half the size of the active U.S. military. But NYGC data indicate that the size and reach of gangs have actually declined over the past decade. The estimated gang population is down from roughly 850,000 in 1996, and the proportion of jurisdictions reporting gang problems has fallen sharply.

The number of jurisdictions reporting gang problems fell sharply at the end of the 1990s.

The largest reductions have occurred in rural counties, where the proportion of law enforcement respondents reporting gang problems has fallen by nearly half since the late 1990s. One in eight rural law enforcement agencies (12.3 percent) reported gang problems between 2002 and 2004, while a quarter (24.3 percent) reported problems between 1996 and 1998.

Smaller cities and suburban counties have also witnessed significant drops in the reported prevalence of gang problems since the late 1990s. Over a third

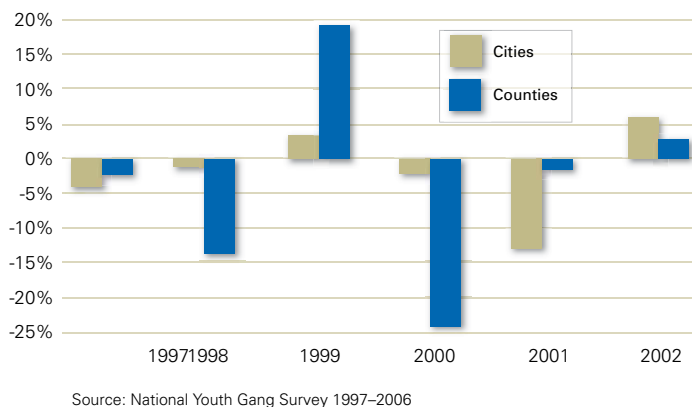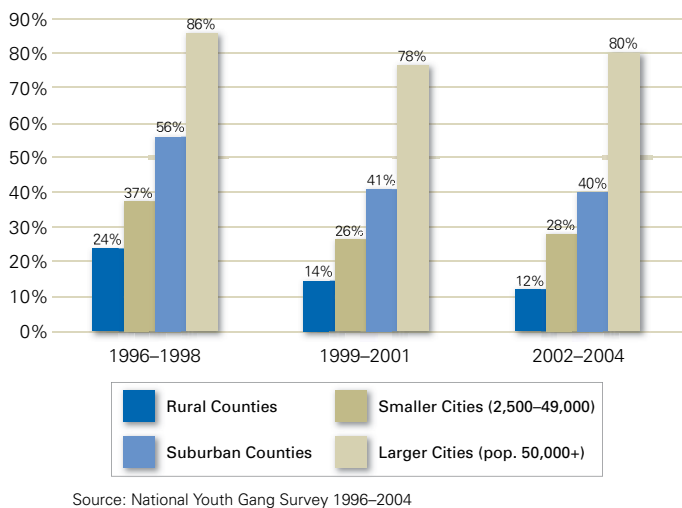**Figure 4.1. Annual change in estimated U.S. gang membership**

Source: National Youth Gang Survey 1997–2006

Figure 4.2. Jurisdictions reporting gang problems

Source: National Youth Gang Survey 1996–2004

(36.5 percent) of cities with 2,500 to 50,000 residents reported gang problems in the late 1990s. A little more than a quarter of small cities (28.4 percent) reported such problems between 2002 and 2004. Gangs were active in a majority of suburban counties (56 percent) during the late 1990s, but that proportion fell to 40 percent in the most recent survey period.

Larger cities experienced a reduction in reported gang activity, according to law enforcement respondents, although the drop was less dramatic. Four in five cities with 50,000 or more residents (79.8 percent) reported gang problems between 2002 and 2004, down from the 85.6 percent that reported such problems just six years earlier. The largest decline in the number of jurisdictions reporting gang problems occurred at the end of the 1990s. The picture has remained stable since the end of the 1990s, with small and large cities reporting a small increase in the prevalence of gang problems while rural and suburban counties reported a slight decrease. None of the recent shifts are large or consistent enough to establish a clear trend, according to NYGC staff (Egley, personal communication).

Youth surveys

The second source of information on the prevalence of gang activity and the characteristics of gang members is a group of youth surveys conducted over the past 15 years. Surveys can provide greater consistency than estimates generated by law enforcement agencies employing varied definitions and data collection methods. And they can track behavior that does not come to the attention of law enforcement.

Yet surveys are limited by how representative the sample is of the general population. Most surveys of youth gang activity target specific locations or segments of the youth population, making it difficult to derive general conclusions about the larger youth gang population. The results of youth surveys—like law enforcement surveys—also depend on the perceptions of survey subjects and their willingness to answer questions honestly.

Malcolm Klein and Cheryl Maxson summarize the results of nearly 20 youth surveys conducted in over 30 cities and four countries in *Street Gang Patterns and Policies* (2006). Rates of current self-reported gang membership in U.S. surveys range from a high of more than 20 percent among a sample of high school students and dropouts in Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Diego (citing Fagan 1990) to a low

of 2 percent for a nationally representative sample of youth who participated in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) (citing Snyder and Sickmund 1999).[1] Reported lifetime prevalence of gang membership ranged from a high of 31 percent among high-risk Rochester, New York, youth (citing Thornberry et al. 2003) to a low of 5 percent among NLSY respondents.

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which was sponsored by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, is the only source of survey data on youth gang membership in the United States that is based on a nationally representative household sample. The survey identified a group of nearly 9,000 youth using cross-sectional and supplemental samples to ensure adequate representation across both geography and race/ethnicity. Youth between the ages of 12 and 16 were interviewed on a wide range of subjects and reinterviewed annually over a four-year period. The large size and national scope of the sample, together with its rigorous methodology, make NLSY the most reliable source of information on the prevalence of gang involvement.

The application of NLSY prevalence rates to 2000 U.S. Census counts produces a total estimated 12- to 16-year-old gang population of roughly 440,000.[2] The figure is roughly half the size of the NYGC estimate, but this result is not entirely unexpected. The 440,000 estimate includes only gang members between the ages of 12 and 16, while NYGC staff estimate that adults make up two-thirds of gang members known to law enforcement (Egley, Howell, and Major 2006). The NYGC estimate and the projection from NLSY prevalence rates appear to fall within the same ballpark, assuming that some of the 440,000 self-reported gang members are never identified by law enforcement and that there are another 500,000 or so gang members over the age of 16 who are not captured by the NLSY survey.

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1 Surveys differ in the way they formulate questions and report results on the prevalence of current gang membership. For purposes of this report, youth reporting gang membership within the past year are grouped with "current" gang members.

2 The 440,000 figure is a midpoint between an estimate of gang membership generated by using the overall 2 percent prevalence rate (415,000) and an estimate generated by applying race- and gender-specific prevalence rates to components of the youth population (470,000). The difference is likely a result of imprecision in the prevalence rates, which have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole percent, as well as the lack of reported prevalence rates for Asians and Native Americans.

Squaring the data: Law enforcement versus youth surveys

Urban and rural youth were equally likely to report current and lifetime gang membership.

The law enforcement and youth survey results part company when it comes to the composition of the youth gang population. NYGC data indicate that gangs are primarily an urban phenomenon: four in five large-city law enforcement agencies report a gang problem compared to fewer than one in seven rural agencies. Even in the late 1990s, no more than a quarter of rural law enforcement respondents reported gang problems. But urban and rural youth were *equally* likely to report current and lifetime gang membership—2 percent and 5 percent, respectively—according to NLSY data (Snyder and Sickmund 2006).

*Girls account for a quarter to a third of adolescent gang members, according to youth surveys.*

Figure 4.3. Gender of estimated U.S. youth gang population
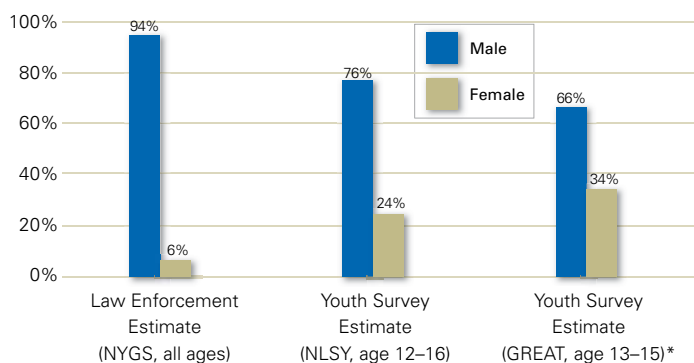
Source: National Youth Gang Survey 2004; National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997; Esbensen and Winfree 2001

*GREAT data are not based on a representative national sample and are provided for comparison only.

Figure 4.4. Race/ethnicity of law enforcement-identified youth gang members and total youth/young adult population
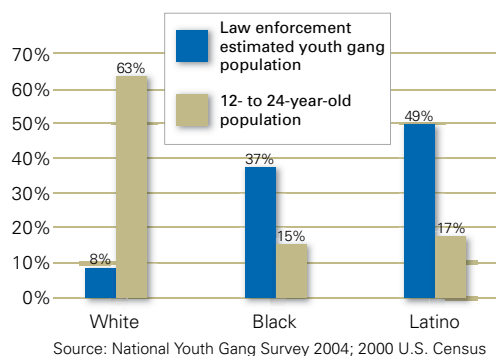
Source: National Youth Gang Survey 2004; 2000 U.S. Census

The NYGC and NLSY data also point toward very different gender breakdowns. NYGC reports that women and girls made up just 6 percent of gang members known to law enforcement in 2000 (Klein and Maxson 2006). Yet NLSY prevalence rates—3 percent for boys and 1 percent for girls—indicate that girls should account for roughly a quarter of the adolescent gang population. The three-to-one ratio of male-to-female gang participation found in the national youth survey is supported by the results of other youth surveys, which found ratios ranging from three to one to nearly one to one (Klein and Maxson 2006). A research team led by Finn-Aage Esbensen reports an even lower two-to-one ratio of male-to-female gang participation based on a survey of nearly 6,000 eighth-grade public school students (Esbensen and Winfree 2001).

The gang prevalence rates generated by the NLSY survey can be used to estimate the gender breakdown of youth gang membership in the United States. The GREAT survey was not designed to select a representative sample of youth, but extrapolating from the GREAT data nonetheless provides an interesting contrast to law enforcement accounts of gang membership, as shown on the following chart.[3]

The most striking difference between gang population estimates generated by law enforcement and by youth surveys may be their racial and ethnic composition. Law enforcement reports indicate that the overwhelming majority of gang members are Latino or African American.

African Americans and Latinos were roughly 15 times more likely than non-Hispanic whites to be identified by the police as gang members.

Latinos accounted for nearly half (49 percent) of the estimated youth gang population in 2004, according to NYGS data, even though they make up just 17 percent of 12- to 24-year-olds in the United States (Egley, Howell, and Major 2006; 2000 U.S. Census). Blacks accounted for more than a third of known gang members (37 percent)—more than twice their 15 percent share of the adolescent/young adult population. Non-Hispanic whites, by contrast, accounted for 63 percent of adolescents/young adults but just 8 percent of gang members identified by law enforcement. In other words, African Americans and Latinos were roughly 15 times more likely than non-

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3 The estimated gender breakdowns presented here differ from those reported by Esbensen and Winfree (2001) for gang members in their sample because their base population differs from the youth population in the United States.

Hispanic whites to be identified by the police as gang members.

Youth survey data also show differences in the prevalence of gang involvement among whites and nonwhites, but the gap is much smaller. Ratios of black-to-white gang membership rates range from a high of nearly five to one among high-risk seventh-graders in Pittsburgh to just under two to one among middle school students in St. Louis (Klein and Maxson 2006 citing Lahey et al. 1999; Curry, Decker, and Egley 2002). The weakness of most of these surveys, for the purpose of examining the racial and ethnic composition of youth gangs nationwide, is that they typically sample urban areas that differ from the suburban and rural areas where the majority of Americans (especially whites) lives.

Two surveys provide a more comprehensive national snapshot of youth gang involvement by race and ethnicity. NLSY data show that 6 percent of black males, 5 percent of Latino males, and 2 percent of white males between the ages of 12 and 16 reported belonging to a gang in the past 12 months; 2 percent of black and Latina females and 1 percent of white females also reported current gang membership (Snyder and Sickmund 1999). The racial and ethnic differences in self-reported gang membership remain substantial but fall *far* short of those reported by law enforcement.

Esbensen and Thomas Winfree reported very similar results from the GREAT evaluation (2001). The GREAT sample was not nationally representative, but it did include 11 geographically and racially diverse communities ranging from large cities like Philadelphia and Phoenix to small cities and rural areas such as Pocatello, Idaho, and Will County, Illinois.

One in 20 white youths (5.1 percent) reported current gang membership, as did one in 10 black youths (10.1 percent) and just over one in 10 Latino youths (11.6 percent). The prevalence of gang membership is higher in the GREAT survey than in the NLSY survey, an outcome that may reflect the selection of communities that were actively seeking to address gang problems. But the ratios of nonwhite-to-white gang participation are remarkably similar to those generated by NLSY researchers: a little more than two to one for Latinos and between two and three to one for blacks.

Whites account for more than 40 percent of adolescent gang members, according to youth survey data.
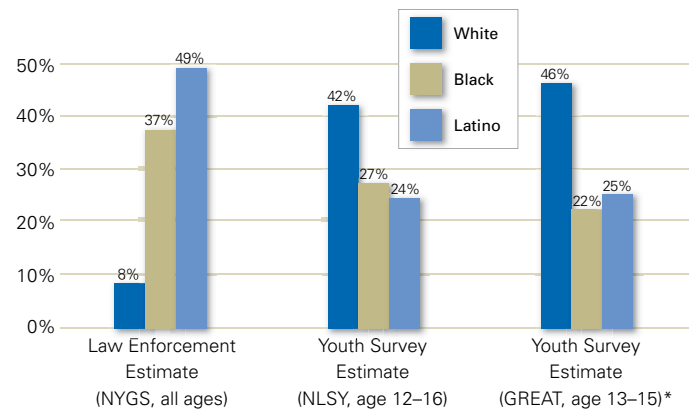
The NLSY and GREAT surveys both indicate a breakdown of gang membership very different from

Figure 4.5. Gang membership rates by race/ethnicity
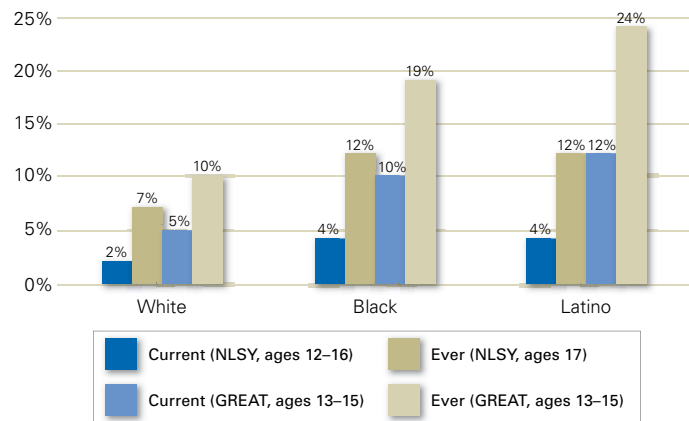
Source: Snyder and Sickmund 1999 and 2006; Esbensen et al. 2001

Figure 4.6 Race/ethnicity of estimated U.S. youth gang population

Source: National Youth Gang Survey 2004; National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997; Esbensen et al. 2001

*GREAT data are not based on a representative national sample and are provided for comparison only.

that reported in law enforcement surveys. When the NLSY prevalence rates are applied to the 12- to 16-year-old U.S. population, they produce an estimated gang population that is roughly a quarter black, a quarter Latino, *and more than 40 percent white.*[4] The GREAT survey was not designed to select a repre-

4 The NLSY results published by Snyder and Sickmund provide gang prevalence for white, black, and Latino youth but not for other racial groups such as Asians or Native Americans (2006). Esbensen and Winfree found prevalence rates for other racial groups that were nearly identical to gang membership rates among Latinos (2001). For the purpose of extrapolating the racial and ethnic breakdown of the adolescent gang population from NLSY data, we have substituted prevalence rates for Latinos for the missing prevalence rates for "others." This assumption may not be correct, but it is based on the best available data. Further, even if the assumption were incorrect, the effect of the error would be minimal since other racial groups account for a small proportion of the total adolescent population.

sentative sample of youth, so the resulting data cannot be used to generate a statistically valid population estimate. But it is worth noting that the application of GREAT prevalence rates to the U.S. youth population produces a racial/ethnic breakdown of gang membership that is nearly identical to the breakdown indicated by the NLSY data, as shown in Figure 4.6. [5] The surveys provide strong evidence that whites make up the *largest* racial/ethnic group of gang youth rather than the small fraction reported by law enforcement.

The disparities between youth surveys and law enforcement accounts of gang membership do not necessarily prove that either source is inaccurate. Law enforcement and youth surveys use different methods to gather information on distinct (if overlapping) populations. Self-reports of gang involvement by youth will not necessarily match the perceptions of police who deal with a larger and older group that has come into contact with law enforcement because of real or perceived criminal conduct. Nevertheless, there must be some explanation for why youth and young adults identified as gang members by law enforcement look so different from youth who identify themselves as gang members.

There are three likely explanations. First, youth who self-identify as gang members may be "fronting," or involved in groups that call themselves gangs but do not engage in serious delinquency. These youth might never come to the attention of law enforcement, or their claims to gang identity might be ignored, because they are not "real" gang members.

Second, the composition of the youth gang population may change drastically between the adolescent years that are captured in youth surveys and the young adult years when law enforcement contact is more frequent. For example, if attrition rates were higher for white than nonwhite gang youth at the end of adolescence, the youth gang population could become less white.

Third, the disparity could be a result of biases in the way gang members are identified or the way data are collected that cause law enforcement officials to underestimate the gang involvement of white, female, and rural youth/young adults and overestimate the gang involvement of nonwhite, male, and urban youth/young adults.

The published results of the major national youth

5 The estimated racial/ethnic breakdowns presented here differ from those reported by Esbensen and Winfree (2001) for gang members in their sample because their base population differs from the youth population in the United States.

surveys that address the question of gang involvement—NLSY and GREAT—do not permit comparisons of urban and rural gang youth. They do, however, provide enough information to begin exploring similarities and differences in gang activity across race and gender lines.

Do youth surveys mix "bad apples" with oranges who only pretend to be bad?

The finding that whites accounted for a significant proportion of self-reported youth gang members came as a surprise to many gang researchers when it was first reported in 1998 by Esbensen and Winfree (Esbensen, personal communication). Many researchers expressed skepticism that white youth who reported gang involvement were "real" gang members, arguing in effect that the survey findings confused true "bad apples" with youth pretending to be bad. Similar objections have been raised to the conclusion—supported by many youth surveys—that females make up a larger share of the gang population than law enforcement reports indicate.

Gang researchers have generally found that most female gang members are involved in largely male gangs rather than all-female gangs. This makes it unlikely that difference in gang characteristics can account for the gender disparity in law enforcement and youth survey accounts of gang membership. There is convincing evidence, however, that female gang members are more delinquent than nonmembers of either gender, but less delinquent than male gang counterparts (Egley, Howell, and Major 2006). Female gang members could therefore be less likely to attract law enforcement attention and to find their way into gang databases.

White gang members report committing delinquent acts at the same rate as black and Latino peers.

On the other hand, the GREAT survey data show that the self-reported gang membership of white youth was as "real" as that of nonwhite peers across various measures of delinquency and intensity of gang participation. The researchers found that the *only* statistically significant difference in rates of offending between white, African American, and Hispanic gang members was a *lower* propensity among African Americans to use drugs. There were no statistically significant differences in self-reported rates of property offending, person offending, or participation in drug sales.

The researchers also examined the relationship between the intensity of gang affiliation and other

characteristics associated with gang involvement. They experimented with more and less restrictive definitions of self-reported gang membership to see whether the demographic and other variables changed with the definition. The definitions included (1) past gang membership; (2) current gang membership; (3) current membership in a gang that participates in delinquent acts; (4) current membership in a delinquent gang with some level of organization (e.g., initiation rites, colors, leaders); and (5) describing oneself as a current "core" member of an organized delinquent gang (Esbensen et al. 2001).

The increasingly restrictive definitions of gang membership correlated to increasing rates of self-reported delinquency. The big jump in delinquency occurred at the point of current gang membership, which was associated with two times more delinquent acts than past gang membership (3.52 versus 1.67). There were also substantial differences between the delinquency rates of organized delinquent gang members (an average of 3.92 delinquent acts) and core gang members (4.41 delinquent acts). The differences between core and noncore members of organized delinquent gangs were particularly notable for person offenses (3.13 versus 3.69) and drug sales (3.89 versus 4.79).

The data show a nonsignificant relationship between gang definition and the racial/ethnic breakdown of gang membership, but in the opposite of the expected direction. White gang youth were *more* likely than black or Latino gang youth to report being core members of an organized delinquent gang. A third of current white gang members (33 percent) fit the most restrictive definition of gang membership, compared to a quarter of Latino gang youth (24 percent) and one in five black gang youth (19 percent). Esbensen notes that white gang members tended to have higher scores on various risk scales than nonwhite gang members, which might explain the intensity of their gang involvement (personal communication).

The fact that a youth engages in delinquent behavior does not necessarily mean the behavior will come to the attention of law enforcement. Delinquency often goes unreported, so it is possible that self-reported gang members could engage in delinquent conduct while remaining below the law enforcement radar.

But research by David Curry provides further evidence that self-reported gang membership is a valid predictor of future contact with law enforcement (2000). Curry collected self-report and arrest data for a sample of 429 Chicago youth to test the relationships between self-reported gang membership,

Figure 4.7. Percentage of self-reported gang members who met most restrictive criteria (core member of organized, delinquent gang)
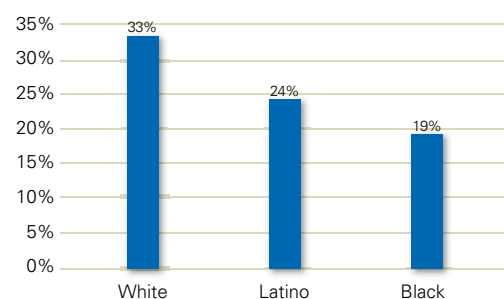
Source: Esbensen et al. 2001

self-reported delinquency, and subsequent officially recorded delinquency. He found that, after controlling for race and prior arrests, the odds of future arrest were doubled for self-reported gang members.

Together these research findings make a persuasive case that the gang involvement of white self-reported gang members is no less "real" than the involvement of black and Latino peers. The disparity between law enforcement and youth survey reports may be explained in part by differences between the character and intensity of male and female gang involvement. But another explanation is required for the racial differences.

Do rural, female, and white gang members quit gangs before their urban, male, and nonwhite peers?

Young adults account for two-thirds of gang members identified by law enforcement, while the youth cohort accounts for just a third. If the demographic profile of young adult gang members differed significantly from that of youth members, it might help to explain the gap between law enforcement and self-report data on the demographics of gang membership.

Researchers have consistently found that gang members join during early adolescence, and that the prevalence of current gang membership begins to fall after age 14 or 15. David Huizinga reports that the overwhelming majority of self-reported gang members in a Denver sample of at-risk youth joined the gang between the ages of 12 and 15 (personal communication). NLSY data show that the proportion of youth reporting ever having been a gang member rose from 3 to 6 percent between the ages of 12 and 15 before flattening out at age 16 (Snyder and Sickmund 1999). Six of seven youth surveys summarized by Klein and Maxson show that the prevalence

of current gang membership peaks at age 14 or 15 (2006).[6] These findings indicate that any differences in the gender, race, and geographic profile of youth and young adult gang members are likely to result from attrition rather than recruitment of young adults into gangs. There is strong evidence that females "age out" of gang activity more quickly than males. NYGC staff reference several studies that show that a majority of female gang members leave within a year (Egley, Howell, and Major 2006).

Whites appeared no more likely than blacks and Latinos to leave gangs at an early age.

Comparisons of gang attrition rates for white and nonwhite youth produce mixed results. The GREAT data do not support the notion that white youth leave gangs more quickly than black and Latino counterparts—at least not prior to the eighth grade. Whites who were gang members at some time in their lives reported current involvement at roughly the same rate (50 percent) as black and Latino youth (53 percent and 47 percent, respectively) (Esbensen et al. 2001).

Nor do the NLSY data for youth ages 12 to 16 provide evidence that white youth leave gangs more quickly than nonwhite youth. The survey found that, among youth who reported ever having participated in a gang, half of white youth and *less than half* of nonwhite youth identified themselves as current gang members. Neither survey provides evidence of higher turnover among white gang youth in early and mid adolescence.

Hints that white youth age out of gangs more quickly than blacks and Latinos begin to appear at the end of adolescence. Non-Hispanic whites were 3.5 times more likely to report having been a gang member by the age of 17 (7 percent) than to report current gang membership between the ages of 12 and 16 (2 percent). The ratios of current-to-ever gang membership were slightly smaller for blacks and Latinos (4 percent current and 12 percent ever), which could indicate lower turnover rates among nonwhites. But these differences are too small to draw any firm conclusions from them about the relationship between race and the persistence of gang involvement.

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6 The GREAT survey findings are excluded because the entire sample was made up of eighth-grade students and age differences in the group could be a result of factors that correlate to gang membership (e.g., excellent or poor high school performance causing a youth to be advanced or held back a grade).

No comparable survey data exist for young adults, so it is impossible to determine whether, and to what degree, differences in gang attrition rates change the face of gang membership in the young adult years. John Hagedorn and other gang ethnographers have argued that the loss of jobs and social capital brought about by deindustrialization has kept young inner-city men involved in gangs into their adult years (Hagedorn 2005). It is certainly plausible that white gang youth who have better employment and educational opportunities available to them are more likely to give up gang life than African American and Latino youth with few prospects.

Yet even if the life courses of white and nonwhite gang members diverged sharply during the young adult years, it is not clear that such a divergence could fully explain the racial/ethnic disparity between youth survey and law enforcement depictions of the youth gang population. Law enforcement reports identify many more black and Latino gang members—and many fewer white gang members—than the survey data suggest should be out there. We can test this proposition by comparing NYGC gang population estimates to projections based on NLSY gang prevalence rates and 2000 U.S. Census data.

The white gang undercount

NYGC staff report that there were roughly 770,000 youth gang members in 2000, including around 250,000 African Americans, 370,000 Latinos, 90,000 whites, and 60,000 members of other racial groups. The application of NLSY prevalence rates to race and gender components of the 2000 youth population produces an estimate of 470,000 12- to 16-year-old gang members, including 130,000 African Americans, 110,000 Latinos, 200,000 whites, and 30,000 members of other racial groups. These competing estimates are not easy to reconcile.

Even if every white gang member quit by the age of 17, the white gang population would be two times the law enforcement estimate.

The first issue is the apparent undercount of white gang members, a problem that persists even if we accept the unproven hypothesis that whites age out of gangs faster than nonwhite peers. If we assume that *every single white gang member* left the gang by the age of 17, there would still have been 200,000 white youth gang members in 2000—nearly *twice* the law enforcement estimate. It is, of course, quite unlikely that white youth quit gangs en masse on their 17th birthdays. If just a third of 16-year-old

white gang members stuck around until the age of 24, the total white gang population would be 300,000—more than three times the law enforcement estimate.

The fact that many white youth gang members go undetected—or at least unrecognized—by law enforcement should not come as a surprise. Juvenile misbehavior may not be reported to police, and law enforcement agencies tend to focus their efforts on crimes committed by adults and older youth. It is plausible that most white gang youth are never identified as such by police because their behavior is not considered serious or persistent enough to attract notice or merit a gang enforcement response. But if we accept this explanation for the apparent white undercount, why should it not also apply to black and Latino gang youth, who are no more delinquent or deeply involved in gangs than white gang youth?

The nonwhite gang overcount

This point leads us to the second issue: an apparent overcount of black and Latino gang members. Based on NLSY prevalence rates, in 2000 there should have been 130,000 black gang members between the ages of 12 and 16—just about half the total law enforcement estimate of 250,000. If we assume that youth gang members fall in the 12- to 24-year-old age group,[7] then black young adults would have to remain involved in gangs at two-thirds the rate of 12- to 16-year-olds in order to meet law enforcement estimates.[8] There is no evidence that African Americans are joining gangs in large numbers after the age of 16, so the numbers would work only if a large majority of black 16-year-old gang members remained active well into young adulthood.

This scenario further depends on law enforcement correctly identifying *every single black youth gang member in the United States*. We know that juvenile

misbehavior often goes unreported and undetected by law enforcement. We also know from the GREAT survey that many black youth have joined and left gangs by the time they reach the eighth grade. If we assume, as we did for white gang youth, that most 12- to 16-year-old black gang members stay below the law enforcement radar (at least until they get older), then the prevalence of gang membership among 17- to 24-year-olds would have to equal the prevalence among 12- to 16-year-olds to meet the law enforcement estimate.[9]

Finally, the gang population extrapolated from NLSY prevalence rates is nearly a quarter female, while law enforcement estimates put the female proportion of gang members at just 6 percent.

Figure 4.8. Scenario No. 1: Law enforcement ID 100% of gang males; 100% of blacks/Latinos and 0% of whites remain active from ages 17 to 24
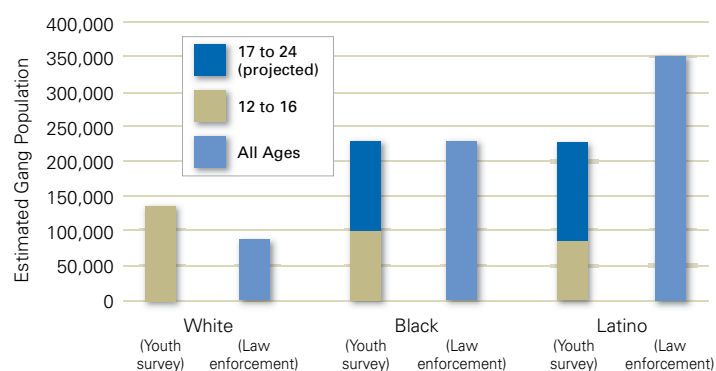
Figure 4.9. Scenario No. 2: Law enforcement ID 50% of 12- to 16-year-old gang males and 100% of 17- to 24-year-olds; 100% of blacks/Latinos and 33% of whites remain active from ages 17 to 24
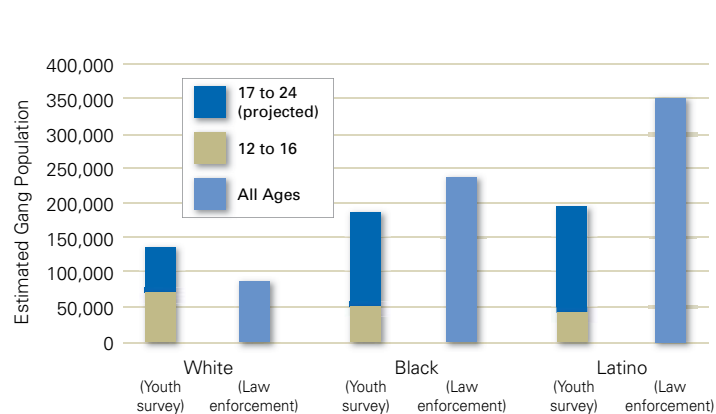
7 This assumption may prove incorrect; however, the evidence from survey research efforts that followed Denver and Rochester youth into adulthood indicate that youth and young adults account for the overwhelming majority of gang activity (Huizinga and Thornberry, personal communication). There is general agreement among gang researchers that gang membership is more likely to persist into adulthood today than a generation ago. But we have found no evidence that older adults (age 25 and up) constitute a significant share of gang members.

8 NLSY results suggest that 4 percent of the 3.2 million black 12- to 16-year-olds were current gang members (6 percent of males and 2 percent of females), generating an estimated youth gang population of 130,000. In order to reach the law enforcement estimate of 250,000 black gang members within the 12- to 24-year-old cohort, the rate of gang membership among the 4.6 million black 17- to 24-year-olds would have to be 2.6 percent.

9 If half of black gang youth (ages 12 to 16) were not detected by law enforcement, the 12- to 16-year-old cohort would account for just over a quarter (65,000) of the law enforcement estimate (250,000), and the prevalence rate among 17- to 24-year-olds would have to rise to 4 percent.

In order to meet a law enforcement estimate of roughly 225,000 black *male* gang members (based on a population of 250,000 gang members that is 94 percent male), the gang prevalence rates for 17- to 24-year-old black males would have to go even *higher*. The numbers work only if black young adult males participated in gangs at a slightly greater rate than adolescents *and* all black male gang members were detected by law enforcement; or if young black men participated in gangs at much higher rates than black male youth and not all gang members were detected by law enforcement.[10]

The disparity between estimates based on law enforcement and those based on youth surveys is much greater for Latinos. NLSY prevalence rates indicate that there should have been 110,000 Latino gang members between the ages of 12 and 16, less than a third of the total law enforcement estimate of 370,000 youth gang members. The only way the number of 12- to 24-year-old Latino gang members could meet the law enforcement estimate is if Latinos participated in gangs at *higher* rates between the ages of 17 and 24 than between the ages of 12 and 16.[11]

This calculation assumes that *all* Latino youth and young adult gang members are identified by law enforcement. It also ignores the difference in the gender breakdown of law enforcement and youth survey gang population estimates. If half of youth gang members and all adult gang members were detected by law enforcement, the overall prevalence of gang membership would have to rise from 3.5 percent among youth to 5.5 percent among young adults. In order to generate a high enough estimate of Latino *males*, the gang prevalence rate among

young adults would have to be nearly double the rate for adolescents.[12]

Figures 4.8 and 4.9 illustrate the difficulty of matching youth survey data to law enforcement estimates, even if one makes very broad assumptions about the divergence between paths of white and nonwhite gang members after the age of 16.

The current exercise is speculative. The available data do not allow us to definitively rule out the possibility that white gang membership is the exclusive province of youth, while black and Latino gang involvement continues unabated (or grows) well into adulthood. We have assumed that the 12- to 24-year-old cohort accounts for substantially all of the youth gang population. But we cannot completely discount the possibility that adults in their late 20s, 30s, or even 40s account for a significant proportion of "youth gang" members.

The relevance of work and family opportunities to the process of desistance from participation in gangs is well documented, and ethnographers have linked the disappearance of blue-collar jobs in urban minority neighborhoods to the extension of gang activity into young adulthood. Even without strong quantitative evidence, we can be fairly certain that the paths of white gang members diverge significantly from those of black and Latino gang members as they enter the adult years. Differences in attrition rates probably explain part of the disparity between youth survey and law enforcement depictions of youth gang populations.

Yet in order for differences in attrition rates to explain much of the disparity, the divergence in the life paths of white and nonwhite gang members would have to be so radical that it would pose its own set of troubling questions. Are the opportunities available to white gang youth as they enter adulthood so much better that they pull all of the white youth—but none of the minority youth—away from gangs? Are the responses of law enforcement and other social institutions to minority gang youth so much

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10 NLSY prevalence rates suggest that in 2000 there were nearly 100,000 black male gang members between the ages of 12 and 16, while law enforcement sources estimate a total black male gang population of approximately 225,000. If all black male gang youth were detected by law enforcement, the gang prevalence rate among 17- to 24-year-old black males would have to be 5.5 percent (just below the 6 percent black adolescent male rate) in order to generate 125,000 additional gang members. The prevalence rate would have to rise to 7.6 percent if all of the young adult gang members, but just half of the youth gang members, were identified by law enforcement.

11 NLSY prevalence rates suggest that 3.5 percent of the 3.2 million Latino/Latina 12- to 16-year-olds (5 percent of males and 2 percent of females) were current gang members, generating an estimated youth gang population of 115,000. In order to reach the law enforcement estimate of 370,000 Latino/Latina gang members within the 12- to 24-year-old cohort, the rate of gang membership among the 5.7 million Latino/Latina 17- to 24-year-olds would have to be 4.5 percent.

12 NLSY prevalence rates suggest that in 2000 there were a little more than 80,000 Latino male gang members between the ages of 12 and 16, while law enforcement sources estimate a total Latino male gang population of around 350,000. If all Latino male gang youth were detected by law enforcement, the gang prevalence rate among 17- to 24-year-old Latino males would have to be 8.9 percent (well above the 5 percent Latino adolescent male rate) in order to generate 270,000 additional gang members. The prevalence rate would have to rise to *10.5 percent* if all of the young adult gang members, but just half of the youth gang members, were identified by law enforcement.

more counterproductive that they severely delay, or completely arrest, the natural process of desistance from gang activity?

Do law enforcement agencies find the type of gang members they look for?

The mental gymnastics required to square law enforcement gang estimates with youth survey data are convoluted, forcing us to carefully consider the possibility that the law enforcement estimates are simply wrong. There are much simpler explanations for why law enforcement would tend to underestimate white gang populations and overestimate nonwhite gang populations.

First, suburban, small-town, and rural law enforcement agencies may be less capable of detecting and tracking gang activity than urban police agencies. Small-town officers may not recognize gang activity, and small-town police departments may find it more difficult to establish and maintain gang databases. These factors could contribute to the undercount of white gang members, who are more likely to live in majority white suburbs and towns than are nonwhite gang members.

Second, the practices employed by urban law enforcement agencies to identify and track gang members may contribute to the nonwhite overcount. Gang databases are notoriously unreliable because there are often too few controls on who is put in them and also because too little effort goes into removing from the database people who are no longer active gang members.

NYGC staff cite the second problem as one reason for the apparent aging of the youth gang population (Egley, Howell, and Major 2006). Jurisdictions that began tracking gang members at a given point keep people in their files long after they have ceased "banging," creating the false impression that the membership is steadily aging and growing. Egley also observes that law enforcement agencies have an institutional bias toward identifying older individuals as the source of gang problems: "The longer they have the problem …the more police start focusing on the older members, thinking that it's going to solve the gang problem" (personal communication).

Third, there is ample evidence that police misidentify minority youth as gang members based on their race and ethnicity, style of dress, and association with gang peers. Loren Siegel notes that, according to a report prepared by the Los Angeles district attorney's

office, "46.8 percent of the African American men between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-four in L.A. County have been entered into the police gang-tracking database" (2003). Siegel also cites a 1993 *New York Times* report that "two of three young black men in Denver were on a gang suspect list." As an NAACP official put it at the time: "They ought to call it a blacklist. … It's not a crackdown on gangs; it's a crackdown on blacks."

Esbensen argues that minority youth are disproportionately identified as gang members because that is who law enforcement officers have been trained to see:

> You find what you're looking for. The training manuals for police departments; law enforcement experts that lecture to community groups and go to police officer trainings—they all perpetuate the myth that gang members are racial and ethnic minorities. Cops are trained to look and that's what they find. The same applies to boys and girls. The Orange County Sheriff's Department training manual says the best indicator of gang membership is self-affiliation except with girls because they're lying. The media reiterates the myths. (Personal communication)

Several years ago, a group of U.S. and European gang researchers launched the Eurogang Project, an effort to develop a common research framework—described by James Short and Lorine Hughes as "the most ambitious street gang research effort ever undertaken" (2006). In Europe, as in the United States, Esbensen reports, law enforcement officials consistently overestimated the role of minority youth and underestimated the role of majority youth in gang activity:

> The Eurogang group has been meeting since 1998 to try and get cross-national multi-site/method studies going. We have developed common measures and strategies and…there has been incredible consistency in the results. In the Netherlands, for example, law enforcement claimed that the gang members were predominantly from Morocco and Antilles, but we found that over half were native-born Dutch. We found that the U.S. is not an anomaly. Everywhere we found a higher prevalence of gang involvement than law enforcement reported. We got a lot more females and majority group members. The results are incredibly robust. (Personal communication)

The failure of law enforcement to recognize white gang activity should not come as a complete surprise. There may be very good reasons for small-town and suburban police to avoid labeling youth as gang members. The overwhelming majority of gang members are not sociopaths but troubled youth. A police officer who looks at a delinquent 14-year-old and sees a future criminal has every reason to put him in a gang database. But an officer who sees a future solid citizen or the son of a family friend may conclude that "boys will be boys" no matter what gang signs the kids think they're throwing.

Perhaps suburban and rural law enforcement agencies have ignored the threat posed by white gangs. Or perhaps the phenomenon of ganging has been misunderstood—and its contribution to the crime problem exaggerated—by urban law enforcement agencies that treat every troubled youth wearing gang colors like an enemy of the state. The following chapters attempt to address this question by examining the process of joining and leaving gangs as well as the gang contribution to the overall crime problem.

Blood In, Blood Out? Why Youth Join Gangs and How They Leave

During the next 12 months, hundreds of thousands of adolescent boys and girls will join gangs or form new ones. That's the bad news. The good news: nearly all will tire of the violence or outgrow their gang fascination, and most will do so in a year or less. Contrary to popular myth, the vast majority will not face the threat of violence from their gang brethren when they leave, although they may continue to be targeted by rivals. And many will meet hostile treatment from social institutions that refuse to accept their status as former gang members.

Joining

Prevalence of gang membership

Most youth do not join gangs, but the appeal of ganging crosses demographic and geographic lines.

Malcolm Klein and Cheryl Maxson emphasize that gang members do not make up a majority of youth, even among high-risk groups in urban settings: "Perhaps the strongest message in this research is that even with unrestricted definitions in high-risk populations, most youth—7 or 8 out of 10—do *not* join gangs throughout adolescence" (2006). On the other hand, gangs claim a sizable minority of youth, and the appeal of ganging crosses demographic and geographic lines.

Nationwide, 7 percent of whites and 12 percent of blacks and Latinos report current or past gang membership by the age of 17 (Snyder and Sickmund 2006). Urban and rural adolescents were equally likely to report current or past gang membership, and white youth participated in gangs at high enough rates to make them the largest group of adolescent gang members. Gang involvement is greater among high-risk youth and in communities where gang activity is prevalent. For example, nearly a third of boys and girls who participated in the Rochester Youth Survey joined gangs at some point during their adolescence (Thornberry 2001a).

Most gang members join between the ages of 12 and 15.

The public is scandalized each time it is reported that gangs are recruiting children. Yet ganging has always been an adolescent pursuit—a developmental phase through which many youth pass on their way to adulthood. The overwhelming majority of gang members join between the ages of 12 and 15, according to Terence Thornberry (personal communication). Klein notes:

> For many decades, the initial entry into gangs has been at around 11 years of age (initial, not typical), and so there is little room for change downward. Although some writers and officials decry the 8- and 10-year-old gang member, they haven't been in the business long enough to realize that we heard the same reports twenty and forty years ago. (1995)

Risk factors

A number of risk factors are associated with gang membership, but no single factor or set of factors can successfully predict which youth will become gang members. The variables that correlated most strongly with gang membership among participants in the Rochester Youth Survey included negative life events, positive values about drugs, and association with delinquent peers (Thornberry 2001b).[1] The most powerful protective factors were education-related and included commitment to school, attachment to teachers, and parents' expectations for school.

Researchers working on the Seattle Social Development Project found similar results (Thornberry 2001b). Availability of drugs, externalizing behaviors, learning disabilities, having "bad" peers, hyperactivity, and low school commitment were

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1 Delinquent behavior also correlates strongly to gang membership; this relationship is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

associated with gang membership. [2] Social competence, conventional beliefs, and attachment to conventional peers significantly reduced the likelihood of gang involvement.

Thornberry notes that gang membership is strongly associated with problems across multiple domains. The Rochester Youth Survey research team found that "a majority (61 percent) of the boys and 40 percent of the girls who scored above the median in seven risk factor domains were gang members" (cited in Wyrick and Howell 2004). The variables that predicted gang membership among Rochester and Seattle youth survey participants were concentrated in the peer, school, and personal domains. But the role of community factors (such as availability of drugs and neighborhood integration) and family factors (such as supervision, parental attachment to the child, proviolent attitudes, and family instability) was also significant. To put it another way, gang members are youth for whom everything is going wrong.

Thornberry's findings fit the experience of Jesuit priest Father Greg Boyle, who founded Homeboy Industries, a program that provides employment opportunities to current and former gang members who want to leave the gang life. Father Boyle observes that what sets gang members apart from other youth is their misery (Boyle 2005). According to Boyle, such youth do not need to be recruited—much less forced—to join a gang. They are the kids who hang around older gang members hoping to be noticed and invited into the circle.

Esbensen, Winfree, He, and Taylor also examined correlates of gang membership using a set of demographic, social learning, and self-control variables, along with the five definitions of gang membership described in chapter 4 (2001). The researchers found that race and family structure were statistically significant predictors of gang membership, but that these factors did not predict the intensity of gang involvement. There were no statistically significant relationships between measures of self-control (impulsivity, parental monitoring, and risk-seeking) and gang involvement under any of the five definitions of gang membership.

Youth who reported having delinquent peers were more likely to report gang membership under each definition. By contrast, having prosocial peers appeared to have no effect on the likelihood of gang involvement among GREAT survey participants.

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2 Race and gender also correlate to gang membership, as discussed in chapter 4.

The other variables that successfully predicted gang membership under all five definitions were tolerance of fighting and a weak sense of guilt. The results suggest that what distinguishes the most deeply involved gang members from peers is a worldview in which fighting is a normal part of life and the rules of mainstream society do not fully apply.

Leaving

It is commonly believed that gang membership is a one-way street leading inevitably to death or jail. This myth is perpetuated not only by the media but also by gang members who exaggerate the stakes of membership in order to underscore the importance and permanence of their collective bond:
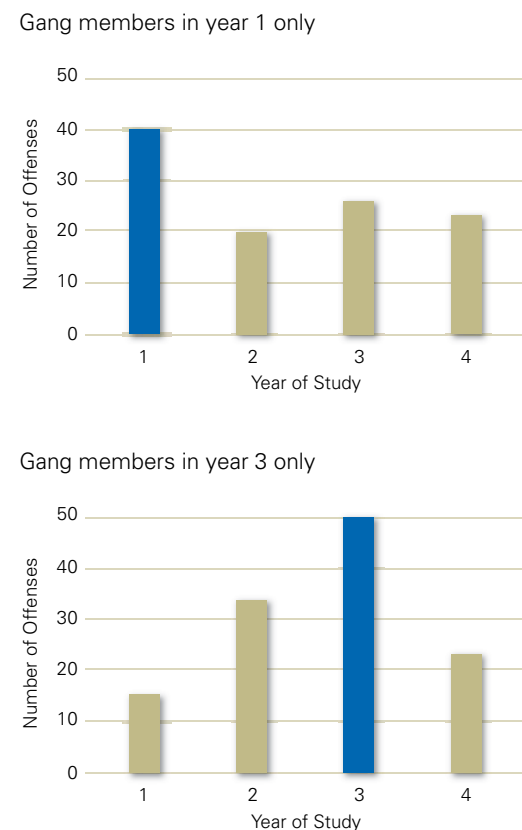
> During the course of the interviews, many gang members expressed the belief that it is impossible to leave the gang. A number of subjects told us that the only way to exit the gang was to be killed. Such beliefs have their foundation in the role of threats of violence for maintaining gang solidarity and membership in the face of threatened and informal sanctions. (Decker and Van Winkle 1996)

Nothing could be further from the truth. Decker and Van Winkle continue, *"Despite such statements, the majority of active gang members (63 percent) told us they knew at least one person who had left their own gang"* (emphasis added). Data from national and local youth surveys indicate that the typical gang member is active for a year or less. Esbensen and his colleagues identified as many former gang members as current gang members in a multisite sample of more than 5,000 eighth-graders (Esbensen et al. 2001). The Rochester Youth Survey research team, which tracked 1,000 high-risk youth into adulthood, found that a large majority of members quit after a brief stay in the gang:

> Gang membership turned out to be a rather fleeting experience for most of these youth. Half of the male gang members reported being in a gang for 1 year or less, and only 7 percent reported being a gang member for all 4 years. Two-thirds (66 percent) of the females were in a gang for 1 year or less and none reported being a member for all 4 years. (Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber 2004)

Huizinga reports similar results from the Denver Youth Survey sample of over 1,500 at-risk youth

Figure 5.1. Offenses committed by youth during years of gang involvement and noninvolvement

Gang members in year 1 only

Gang members in year 3 only

Source: Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber 2004

gang members committed the overwhelming majority of their delinquent acts (80 percent or more) during periods of gang involvement, even though most were active for a year or less (Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber 2004).

Why youth quit gangs

It is surprising that more attention has not been devoted to the question of why and how youth leave gangs. The salutary effect of desistance from gang membership is reason enough to pursue a research and policy agenda that aims to accelerate turnover among gang members. Yet the gang literature is practically devoid of research on desistance. The primary source of information on leaving the gang is a set of interviews conducted by Scott Decker and Barry Van Winkle in the early 1990s with 99 current and 24 former St. Louis gang members (1996). Results that are based on such a narrow sample cannot claim to be authoritative, but they do provide a helpful point of departure for thinking about desistance from gang activity.

A single factor dominated the responses of former gang members who were asked why they gave up the gang life: "All twenty-one individuals who answered this question told us, flat out, that their experience with violence had been the primary motivation for leaving the gang." This finding is at first surprising since researchers have long noted that violence can *strengthen* cohesion among gang members.

Decker and Van Winkle resolve the apparent contradiction by making a distinction between violence that brings gang members together and violence that splinters individuals from the group. They argue that "internal" violence (initiation rites, for example) and "mythic" violence (tales of battles between gangs) intensify gang bonds, but the impact of real violence—whether the gang members experience it directly, or indirectly by way of friends and family—is quite different. The following was a fairly typical response to the question "Why did you decide to leave the gang?":

> Well after I got shot, I got shot in my leg. You know how your life just flash? It like did that so I stopped selling dope, got a job, stayed in school, just stopped hanging around cause one day I know some other gang member catch me and probably kill me.

Interviews with gang members who participated in the Denver Youth Survey provide another glimpse of leaving a gang. Huizinga reports that 30 to 40 per-

(personal communication). Three in five males (60 percent) and nearly four in five females (78 percent) quit after one or two years. One in six remained involved for three to four years (15 percent of males and 18 percent of females). A quarter of males and just 4 percent of females stayed with the gang for five or more years. By way of comparison, the turnover rate among new gang members exceeded the 47 percent turnover rate for workers in the hospitality and leisure industry (U.S. Department of Labor 2006).

Leaving a gang is associated with a sharp reduction in delinquent activity. Thornberry and his colleagues observed that, among youth who were involved during a single year, overall delinquency fell by *half* after they left the gang (Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber 2004). The Rochester research team also found that gang youth report higher rates of offenses against persons only during years of active gang involvement (Thornberry 2001a).

Delinquency rates also fell sharply among Seattle youth who quit gangs for all offense types except drug sales (cited in Thornberry 2001a). Denver youth

cent of former gang members identified maturation as their main motive for leaving the gang (personal communication). These individuals described having "grown up," "grown out of it," taken on "new responsibilities," or simply "got[ten] too old" for the gang life. The maturation process was often linked to having children. Safety concerns accounted for the second-largest set of responses, and moves to new neighborhoods or out of the city also played a role in some cases.

The St. Louis and Denver interviews of former gang members share one critical feature: mention of motives related to law enforcement or the criminal justice system (fear of arrest or incarceration, for example) was almost entirely absent. Decker and Van Winkle make no reference to deterrence-related motives in their description of desistance from gang membership. Huizinga observes that such motives were mentioned by about 10 percent of those interviewed, often in conjunction with other motives (personal communication).

These findings point to a mismatch between traditional gang control policies, which seek to deter gang activity through the use of criminal justice sanctions, and the reality of gang membership. The research team that worked on the Denver Youth Survey found little evidence that arrest or incarceration can deter delinquency or gang membership (Huizinga, personal communication). Huizinga describes the group's findings:

> For gang members, it is the same as for other youth: very little effect, especially for incarceration. They don't see [the criminal justice system] as weak or a paper tiger…but there is a litany, especially from gang members, that being arrested and incarcerated is just to be expected—a rite of passage. In our qualitative research we asked what they learned. The answer was to run next time, to be more careful. They figured out one more thing to do to avoid apprehension. Some say they learned things, especially while incarcerated, and made contacts. (Personal communication)

Ironically, *active* gang members interviewed by Decker and Van Winkle were likely to endorse traditional gang control tactics as effective means to deter gang membership (1996). The gang members' top suggestions were to "(1) talk to individuals about the hazards of life in the gang, [and] (2) provide stricter punishments or discipline for those considering joining the gang." 8 Ball, a 15-year-old Hoover Gang-

ster Crip, suggests that other youth could be "scared straight" despite the fact that the tactic had failed with him:

> 8 Ball: You have to talk to them so you have to catch them at an early age and show them. Bring in some guy that got shot up in a gang, "Look what happened to me, a broken jaw or broken bones and stuff." You got to talk to them. There was a movie called *Scared Straight* and I looked at that and it kind of changed my mind about everything.
>
> Interviewer: But you are still in the gang.
>
> 8 Ball: Yeah because I didn't trip off that because I was young then. I keep telling myself that I'm going to stop, that's what I be saying. I'm going to try to stop, but that's hard to do. You got your reputation.

When it came to eliminating the gangs, "the modal response was that violence would be the most effective means." One gang member asserted that authorities would have to "smoke us all," while another suggested the only solution would be to "put them in one place and blow them up." Conflict with authorities clearly fit easily within the apocalyptic worldview of active gang members, while the mundane reality of maturation did not.

How youth quit gangs

Current gang members interviewed by Decker and Van Winkle maintained that gang members must be "beaten out" or "shoot a close relative, usually a parent." But the researchers found "little evidence that leaving the gang requires group consent." Former gang members "scoffed at these notions, particularly the obligation to shoot a parent as a condition of leaving a gang."

Two-thirds of former members (13 of 19) indicated that they "just quit" the gang, while the next-largest group said that they had moved to another state (4 of 19). Just two former gang members reported having been formally "beaten out" of the gang. The following was a fairly typical exchange between an interviewer and a former gang member:

Interviewer: How did you get out?

Ex007: You just stop claiming.

Interviewer: That's all?

Ex007: See, that's stupid shit. Them young people. They fickle-minded, they don't know shit. I ain't got to kill shit [to get out of the gang].

Huizinga reports somewhat different results from interviews with former gang members in Denver (personal correspondence). Some interviewees described opting to be "beat out" of the gang, often for the sake of children whom they "don't want to end up like [themselves]." The process of being beat out did not appear to deter most youth from leaving the gang, since a large majority of Denver members quit before the age of 18.

The principal barrier to leaving a gang is not fear of punishment by the gang but the difficulty many gang members face when they try to make new lives for themselves. Decker and Lauritsen observe that leaving the gang may require "rejecting one's friends and peers" (1996). Yet mainstream social institutions are reluctant to embrace former gang members. Thus former gang members experience the worst of both worlds: "After all, what incentive is there to leave the gang when it is the source of their friends and when past criminal activities committed as gang members cause many groups to treat them as if they remained in the gang?"

Identification of gang members is seen as an essential tool in gang intervention efforts. But the gang label can make it more difficult for youth to leave the gang. Former gang members may be targeted by law enforcement long after their active participation in the gang has ended. Gang education efforts may dissuade employers from offering jobs to former gang members or youth who merely look like gang members. The refusal of major social institutions to recognize a former gang member's new status can even filter down to rival gangs:

> Police and school officials may not be aware of the decision of individuals to leave the gang or may not take such claims seriously, and records may not be purged of prior gang status. In such cases, the institution continues to treat the individuals as a gang member. When representatives of official agencies (e.g. police, school) identify an individual as a gang member, they are sending a powerful signal to rival gang members as well as to people in the community about the gang involvement of that person. Such a symbol may have consequences for how that individual is treated.

Consequences of gang membership

The negative consequences of past gang involvement persisted well into adulthood for participants in the Rochester Youth Survey (Thornberry, personal communication). At the age of 30, former gang members were much more likely to report being unemployed, receiving welfare, committing crime, or carrying a gun than peers who had never joined a gang.

Thornberry reports that the risk of negative outcomes varied significantly depending on the duration of gang involvement. Males who spent a year or less in a gang were no more likely than nonmembers to be unemployed or receiving welfare by the time they reached 30. "Transient" gang males were more likely than nongang peers to report higher rates of delinquency and gun carrying at the age of 30, but they were less delinquent than "stable" gang peers. The Rochester Youth Survey's pool of female gang members was too small to distinguish between the long-term consequences of transient and stable gang involvement.

Gang involvement clearly disrupts the lives of youth during a critical developmental period when they should be receiving an education, learning life skills, and taking on adult responsibilities. Thornberry's findings indicate that much of the damage might be avoided if policy makers could figure out how to quickly and successfully move youth out of gangs. Decker concurs that we should set a high priority on "[getting] them out as quickly as we can" (personal communication).

Gang control policies that fix the gang label on youth do just the opposite: they keep former gang members from acquiring the social capital they need in order to survive in mainstream society. And they deter youth from leaving the gang by ensuring that they will be treated as pariahs no matter what they do. The scarcity of research on this topic provides further evidence that policy makers have little interest in reclaiming gang youth, despite claims to the contrary.

Researchers who have spent their careers following the lives of gang youth argue strongly for both the elimination of policies that target gang members and the adoption of prevention approaches that have been proven effective with delinquent youth. Decker and Van Winkle conclude that public safety initiatives should "respond to the crimes of gang members, especially their violence, not to the group nature of the affiliations these individuals maintain" (1996). Esbensen, Winfree, He, and Taylor (2001) echo the call for a focus on behavior rather than gang membership:

> Given the permeability of gang membership, policies linking legal action to an individual's perceived status may erroneously criminal-

ize that individual. As such, we suggest that legislation targeting gang status should be discouraged in favor of legislation focused on actual behavior.

Thornberry points out that there is a strong body of evidence on "what works" to keep youth on track, and that these approaches should be the focus of policy and research efforts:

In contrast to the gang prevention literature, in the general literature on preventing delinquency and serious delinquency, there are model programs that have been shown to reduce delinquency and violence. Rather than deal directly with the gangs, use gang membership as a marker to get kids into high-impact treatment programs. Second, figure out which of those programs can be tailored and focused to problems of gang members. (Personal communication)

Public Enemy #1? Gang Crime Myths and Realities

Mayors and U.S. Attorneys are on the front lines in our communities and know better than anyone that gangs have become an increasingly deadly threat to the safety and security of our Nation's citizens.

—U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL ALBERTO GONZALEZ, MARCH 31, 2006

For the most part, gang members do very little— sleep, get up late, hang around, brag a lot, eat again, drink, hang around some more. It's a boring life; the only thing that is equally boring is being a researcher watching gang members.

—MALCOLM W. KLEIN, 1995

Gangs can be understood in many ways. John Hagedorn (2005) and Sudhir Venkatesh (2003) describe gangs as replacements for mainstream institutions (the state, the family) that find themselves in crisis. Others such as Luis Barrios (2003) and David Brotherton (2003) argue that gangs take on aspects of social movements. Finally, many have observed that gangs proliferate and operate within the realm of youth culture, citing among other examples the role of the film *Colors* in the dissemination of Los Angeles gang culture (Klein 1995).

But the dominant public discourse treats gangs as a particularly virulent subset of the crime problem. James Short and Lorine Hughes argue that this tendency has affected gang studies, which largely "*regard gangs as a fractal of crime*" (2006, emphasis in original). The tendency to equate gangs with the most spectacular forms of crime has also generated a set of public myths about the relationship between gangs and crime. These myths hold that:

- Most or all gang members are hardened criminals.
- Gang members spend most of their time planning or committing crimes.
- Gang members are responsible for the bulk of violent crime.
- Gangs largely organize and direct the criminal activity of their members.

There may be a handful of gangs and gang members who meet this description. Researchers who study gangs generally find, however, that most "gang crime" is not well planned or centrally directed, but is instead committed by individual members or small groups on an ad hoc basis.

Ethnographic and survey research have fairly consistently shown that:

- The seriousness and extent of criminal involvement varies greatly among gang members.
- Gang members who engage in crime nonetheless spend most of their time in noncriminal pursuits.
- Gang members account for a small share of all crime (including violent crime), even within communities and neighborhoods where there are gang problems.
- Much of the crime committed by gang members is self-initiated and is meant to serve personal rather than gang interests.

What is a gang crime?

Law enforcement officials generally employ one of two definitions of gang crime for the purposes of tracking and measuring the problem. The first counts all crimes committed by individuals who are believed to be gang members as *gang-related*, regardless of the nature of the offense or the circumstances surrounding it. The second and more restrictive definition includes only *gang-motivated* crimes that are believed to have been committed for the benefit of the gang or as part of a gang function.

Many crimes committed by gang members are unrelated to gang activity.

Cheryl Maxson and Malcolm Klein examined police data in South Central Los Angeles and found that use of a motive-based definition generated half as many gang homicides as a member-based definition (2001). In other words, half of the homicides committed by

gang members were not committed for the gang or as part of gang activity.

Gang-motivated crimes can be further divided into two categories: *self-directed* crimes that are initiated and organized by individuals or small groups of rank-and-file gang members, and *gang-directed* crimes commissioned or orchestrated by gang leaders or the gang as a whole. Finally, gang-motivated crimes can be understood in terms of *instrumental* actions that are intended to advance the material interests of the gang or its leaders, and *expressive* actions that show gang pride and demonstrate that the group is more fearless than its rivals by defending turf, avenging past injuries, and so on.

Consider the following four cases:

1. A gang member gets in a fight with another man who makes a pass at his girlfriend at a party.

2. A gang member assaults a young man affiliated with a rival gang who has ventured onto territory claimed by the subject's gang.

3. A gang member is asked by older gang members to go on a "mission" into enemy territory to find and attack rival gang members.

4. A gang member is asked by gang leaders to punish a witness who testified against another member.

All four cases would fall under the member-based definition of gang crime, but the first would not meet the motive-based definition because the fight had nothing to do with the gang. The third and fourth cases could be considered gang-directed incidents, but not the second, which was initiated spontaneously by the individual in question.

The fourth case could represent an instrumental effort to advance gang members' material interests by deterring witnesses from testifying against the gang. The third case, by contrast, depicts what is probably an expressive use of gang violence that is more likely to harm than to help gang members' material interests by generating further violence and drawing unwanted attention from law enforcement.

Tales of sophisticated criminal conspiracies and calculated use of violence dominate the public discussion of gang crime. But gang-directed, instrumental activities are the exception, not the rule. Descriptions of gang activity drawn from ethnography and survey research provide little support for the view that gangs are a form of organized crime.

As a general rule, gang members do not spend

Figure 6.1. Definitions of gang crime

hours carefully planning out robberies and burglaries with their fellows. They do not turn drug revenues over to the gang to finance its activities, but instead spend their money on clothes and fast food, as many other teenagers do. And most do not wait for permission from higher-ups to attack members of a rival group. Many gang youth engage in violence, but it is overwhelmingly expressive in nature and often initiated by rank-and-file members—at times *against* the wishes of gang leaders who seek to keep a lid on conflicts. Drug sales are also common among gang members, but the activity generally ranges from a completely disorganized pursuit of individuals to loosely organized cooperative endeavors.

The disorganized character of most gang crime does not reduce its significance. Nor can we ignore the moments when the wrong set of circumstances generates the kind of gang threat that we most fear. Short (2006) recounts the efforts of Richard Brymmer to locate the large youth gangs that had been described to him by police and neighborhood residents. After encountering only small groupings of eight to ten youth (*palomillas*) for two years, Brymmer witnessed the sudden transformation of the *palomillas* into a "wall of young males" in response to a threat from a rival gang. The transformation of the *palomillas* into a gang was a rare occurrence, but one with potentially lethal consequences.

But the disorganized character of gang crime does raise the question of whether a gang is best understood as an organization with defined leadership, goals, and means to achieve those goals, or as an activity that orients youth toward crime and conflict with other gang members. Understanding the disorganized character of gang crime also makes it possible to consider the degree to which getting rid of gang leaders, or even the gang itself, is likely to affect the incidence of crime and violence.

Measuring gang crime and delinquency

There are three methods for measuring gang crime and delinquency:

- self-reports of delinquent activity by youth who identify themselves as gang members;
- self-reports of victimization by people who believe that their attacker was a gang member; and
- police reports of crimes committed by known or suspected gang members (typically generated at arrest).

Each type of data has methodological weaknesses. Youth self-reports may inflate or minimize delinquent behaviors if the respondents seek to exaggerate or conceal their involvement in them. Most surveys of youth gang activity target specific locations or segments of the youth population, making it difficult to derive general conclusions about the larger youth gang population. Finally, many of the relevant surveys include only youth under the age of 18 and ignore a young adult gang population that is of great interest to law enforcement, although the Denver and Rochester youth surveys have continued to collect information from participants into their adult years.

The respondents in the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) report victimization by people whom they believe to be gang members, a belief that could be inaccurate or influenced by outside factors such as media reports of gang activity. Further, NCVS data are reported only at the national level and cannot be used to track regional or local trends.

Researchers have found that law enforcement gang membership and crime statistics are not a reliable basis for tracking trends or comparing jurisdictions.

Law enforcement gang crime numbers include only crimes that are reported to police and identified by the police as gang-related or gang-motivated. There is no agreed-upon definition of a gang or a gang crime, much less a uniform system for tracking and reporting it. Finally, the capacity and criteria for measuring gang crime vary greatly between law enforcement agencies and can shift from year to year as priorities change. A number of gang researchers have collaborated with police to improve data collection or used police records to conduct their own analyses of crime data, but these efforts are few and far between.

Deborah Lamm Weisel and Tara O'Connor Shelley

warn that "while it is tempting to use law enforcement data about gangs and gang-related offenses to make comparisons between—or even within—jurisdictions, gang-related data are exceptionally unreliable for this purpose" (2004). Law enforcement data provide no more than a blurry snapshot of the scale of gang crime in a particular jurisdiction in a particular year. Nonetheless, law enforcement gang crime reports are frequently cited because they are often the only figures that can be compared to overall crime reports at the local level.

With the exception of law enforcement agencies that employ the less common motive-based definition, all three measures track crimes committed by gang members that may or may not be gang-motivated. The use of a broad membership-based definition overstates the contribution of gangs to the crime problem, since some members would engage in criminal activity whether or not they were affiliated with a gang.

How much crime and delinquency do gangs and gang members generate?

To repeat, most gang members' behavior is not criminal, and most gang members' crimes are not violent. And of course, most violent people are not gang members, so it's not very useful to define gangs in terms of violent crime alone.

—MALCOLM W. KLEIN, 1995

Juvenile delinquency

Data from youth surveys indicate that gang members commit delinquent acts at much higher rates than nongang peers and account for a significant share of juvenile crime. The research teams that conducted the multiyear Denver Youth Survey and the Rochester Youth Survey found that gang members were responsible for a disproportionate share of self-reported delinquency (Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber 2004).

Youth who reported gang membership prior to the end of high school made up 30 percent of the Rochester youth sample but accounted for over half of arrests (54 percent), close to two-thirds of delinquent acts (63 percent), and 82 percent of serious delinquent acts. The divide between gang and nongang youth was even greater in Denver, where gang members account for a smaller share of the sample (18 percent of boys and 9 percent of girls) but roughly the same proportion of serious delinquency (80 per-

cent of serious and violent crime).

Gang members are responsible for a disproportionate share of delinquency, but most delinquent acts are committed by youth who are not gang members.

It would be incorrect to conclude from these findings, however, that gang members commit the majority of crimes in the United States. The Denver and Rochester teams conducted their surveys in high-risk neighborhoods and oversampled youth considered to be "at high risk for serious delinquency" in order to strengthen the statistical power of their findings on delinquency. The prevalence of gang membership in the Denver sample was roughly 50 percent higher than the rates generated by the nationally representative National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) sample (11 percent of males and 6 percent of females), while rates of gang membership in Rochester were nearly four times the national rate (8 percent overall) (Snyder and Sickmund 2006).

Figure 6.2. Gang member share of youth delinquency
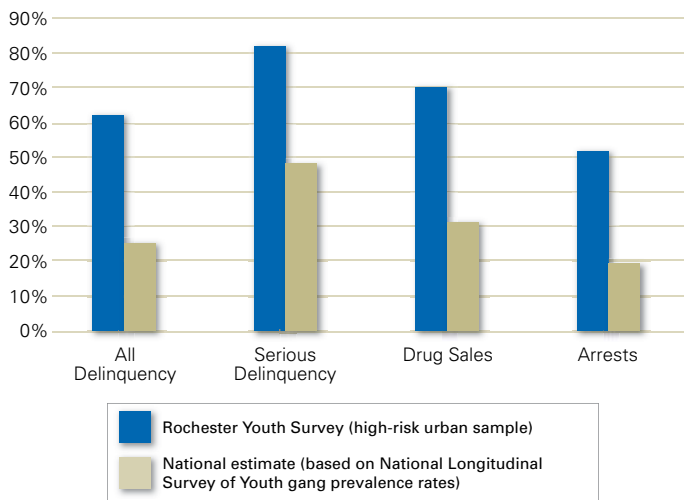
Sources: Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber 2004; National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

The number of gang members in a more nationally representative sample of youth would be too small to drive the overall incidence of crime. For example, gang youth who participated in the Rochester Youth Survey reported three times more arrests, five times more drug sales, 11 times more serious delinquent acts, and four times more overall delinquency than nongang peers. These results are largely consistent with findings from Esbensen and Winfree's research on a broader sample of 5,935 eighth-grade students (2001). Gang members who participated in the latter survey reported committing four to five times more property crimes—and three to five times more person crimes—than nongang peers.[1]

The Rochester Youth Survey results are also roughly consistent with findings from interviews conducted with a snowball sample of high school students and dropouts in San Diego, Los Angeles, and Chicago in the late 1980s by Jeffrey Fagan (cited in Thornberry 2001a).[2] Gang members made up 23 percent of the three-city sample but accounted for two-thirds of self-reported assaults and robberies, nearly seven times the rate for nongang peers.

A very rough estimate of the gang share of juvenile delinquency can be obtained by applying the gang-to-nongang offending ratios generated from the Rochester Youth Survey to NLSY gang prevalence data (8 percent of youth). The resulting picture is quite different: the proportion of delinquency attributable to gang members drops from 63 percent to 26 percent overall, from 82 percent to 48 percent for serious delinquency, from 70 percent to 32 percent for drug sales, and from 54 percent to 19 percent for arrests. Further, these proportions include crimes committed by gang youth before and after periods of gang membership. The Denver Youth Survey research team found that gang youth reported the bulk of their delinquent activity during periods of active gang membership, including 85 percent of serious violent offenses, 86 percent of serious property offenses, and 80 percent of drug sale offenses (Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber 2004). But the fact that 15 to 20 percent of delinquent acts attributed to "gang members" were committed during nongang years indicates that the contribution of *active* gang members to overall delinquency may be closer to 20 percent. The observation that young people who are not gang members commit most juvenile crimes does not diminish the seriousness of the problems posed by juvenile gang members. It does, however, remind us that "gang crime" occurs in a larger context of juvenile delinquency that crosses gender, race, and class as well as gang lines.

Youth typically begin to exhibit somewhat higher levels of delinquency before joining gangs, but their delinquent behavior peaks during periods of gang involvement.

Several research studies have sought to determine whether gang youth are more delinquent than nongang peers because gangs attract delinquent youth,

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1   The pattern was somewhat different for drug sales. Esbensen and Winfree reported gang to nongang offending ratios of

between 9 and 12 to one—much larger than the five-to-one ratio reported by Thornberry. One possible explanation is that the oversampling of at-risk youth in the Rochester project produced higher rates of drug sales among nongang youth.

2   A snowball sample is a nonrandom group of research subjects assembled through a referral process. Snowball samples are often used to reach population groups such as high school dropouts who may otherwise be difficult to locate.

or because the social dynamic of the gang facilitates delinquency among its members. The Denver and Rochester Youth Surveys, the Seattle Social Development Project, and a fourth longitudinal study of youth in Montreal all found that higher rates of self-reported delinquency preceded gang membership (Thornberry 2001a). These findings suggest that seriously delinquent youth select themselves, or are selected by peers, for gang membership.

But the group effect of gang membership appears to exceed the impact of factors that contribute to individual delinquency. Thornberry concludes that "prior to joining the gang, gang members have somewhat higher rates of violent offending than do non-members, but the predominant change in behavior patterns occurs during periods of active gang membership. A similar pattern is observed for general delinquency and property crime."

Gang youth are far more likely to commit delinquent acts during periods of active gang membership than during other years. Thornberry and his colleagues found that male gang members in the Rochester sample tended to report two times more person offenses in gang years than in nongang years. The Rochester team found a similar "gang facilitation effect" for general delinquency and drug sales, but not for property offenses.

Gang youth also reported committing more offenses than other youth with delinquent peer groups. Thornberry and his colleagues found that average levels of self-reported delinquency were two to four times higher among gang members than among non-members with delinquent peers. The Seattle Social Development project data also show that gang youth committed three times more offenses than nongang youth whose best friends had been in trouble with the law (cited in Thornberry 2001b).

Crime

One estimate of gang crime amounts to less than 6 percent of all crime in the United States.

Reliable data on the extent of gang crime do not exist. David Curry, Richard Ball, and Scott Decker produced estimates of total gang membership and gang crime for 1993—a peak moment for juvenile crime in the United States—by tabulating data from law enforcement surveys and using statistical estimates for jurisdictions that failed to provide information in the surveys (1996). Their method produced a "conservative" estimate of roughly 380,000 gang members and 440,000 gang crimes, and a "reasonable" estimate of

Figure 6.3. U.S. index crime and gang crime estimates: 1993

Sources: FBI Uniform Crime Report; Curry, Ball, and Decker 1996
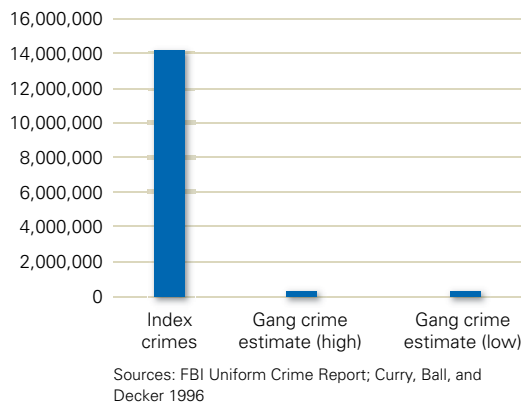
560,000 members and 580,000 crimes.

These gang crime numbers must be taken with fistfuls of salt. Even if all of the assumptions guiding the statistical estimates were accurate, Weisel and Shelley (2004) argue persuasively that there are serious problems with the reliability of the underlying data. Nevertheless, the numbers provide a point of departure for examining gang members' contribution to the total incidence of crime.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program recorded more than 14 million serious (Part I) violent and property crimes in 1993.[3] If a range of 440,000 to 560,000 accurately captured the number of serious property and violent crimes committed by gang members in 1993, then gang members would have been responsible for 3.1 percent to 4.1 percent of serious crime in the United States.

This estimate could be low if police departments recorded in their gang statistics only the most serious and violent offenses—crimes that receive more attention and resources. But the estimate could be high if law enforcement agencies' gang crime reports counted less serious offenses (simple assault, disorderly conduct) or drug offenses that are not included in the overall index crime total.

The gulf between the estimate of gang delinquency obtained from youth survey data (20 to 25 percent) and the estimate of gang crime obtained from law enforcement surveys (3 to 4 percent) demands some explanation. One explanation is that law enforce-

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3 The Uniform Crime Reporting program collects crime report data from local law enforcement agencies. Criminal offenses are classified according to a uniform system to facilitate compilation of national statistics and comparison of jurisdictions. Part I offenses include the most common serious person and property offenses and make up the UCR crime index.

ment agencies may underreport gang crime because many jurisdictions lack the capacity—or the political will—to carefully track the extent of gang involvement in criminal activity. Law enforcement underreporting may account for some of the gap, but the most compelling explanation is that gang activity peaks during early adolescence and drops sharply as youths approach adulthood.

The Rochester research team reports that the prevalence of active gang membership among male survey respondents dropped from 18 percent in the first year (average age 14) to 7 percent in the fourth year (average age 17) (Hall, Thornberry, and Lizotte 2006). Other surveys have found a more gradual drop-off in gang membership. Fagan (1990) reports gang prevalence rates that decline from 26 percent at age 15 to 22 percent at ages 17 and 18 (cited in Klein and Maxson 2006). Data from the Seattle Social Development Project show rates of gang membership that fall from 6 percent at age 15 to 5 percent at age 18 (Hill, Lui, and Hawkins 2001 cited in Klein and Maxson 2006). Nonetheless, it is clear that adults—who commit the vast majority of crimes—participate in gangs at substantially lower rates than adolescents.

It should not be surprising, given the small contribution of gang members to the crime problem, that there is little or no correlation between law enforcement gang population estimates and overall crime trends. An analysis of gang membership and crime data from North Carolina found that most jurisdictions reporting growth in gang membership also reported falling crime rates. Large, urban counties that apparently experienced the greatest growth in gang membership achieved some of the largest reductions in crime. The full results of this comparison can be found at the end of this chapter.

Homicide

Public concerns about gang crime often focus on well-publicized incidents of lethal violence. Many lives have been lost to gang violence over the past decades. African American and Latino parents in high-crime neighborhoods have good reason to fear for the well-being of their sons. Fifteen years ago, for example, the homicide rate for black males between the ages of 20 and 24 in St. Louis—one of the most violent cities in America—reached a shocking 626 per 100,000 residents (Decker and Curry 2003). Nevertheless, gang members are responsible for a relatively small share of the nation's homicides.

Author and activist Tom Hayden cites a 2001 figure of 1,335 gang-related homicides in 132 cities with populations over 100,000 provided by the staff at the National Youth Gang Center (2005).[4] The gang homicide total amounts to 8.4 percent of the 15,980 homicides reported to the FBI and is a little more than half the 2,387 people known to have been killed by family members or intimates in 2001.[5] Malcolm Klein and Cheryl Maxson cite a slightly smaller 2002 figure of 1,119 gang homicides—less than 7 percent of all homicides that year—based on the FBI's Supplemental Homicide Reports, which use criteria that "approximate a gang motive approach to defining gang homicides" (2006).

The reported prevalence of gang-related homicides varies widely by jurisdiction. In California, George Tita and Allan Abrahamse found that "gang killings accounted for 16 percent of all homicides between 1981 and 1991" (cited in Klein and Maxson 2006). Tita and Abrahamse also reported that three of every four California gang homicides took place in Los Angeles County. The most recent available National Youth Gang Survey data indicated that gang members were responsible for more than half of all homicides in Chicago and Los Angeles, and a quarter of homicides in 173 other large cities that reported gang problems and provided gang homicide information (Egley and Ritz 2006).

Gang-related homicides are a serious problem in a number of cities, but nationally just one gang homicide occurs annually for every 18 gangs and 570 gang members.

The National Youth Gang Center estimates that there are roughly 24,000 youth gangs with 760,000 members in the United States. If just one member of each youth gang committed a single homicide each year, the annual number of gang homicides would reach 24,000—nearly 10,000 more homicides than the nation experienced in 2005 under *any* circumstances.

The most recent available figure for gang-related homicides is 1,335 killings in 2001—one homicide for every 18 gangs and 570 gang members. At that rate, it would take 18 years for each gang to be responsible for a single killing, assuming that the homicides were divided evenly (they are not) and that the gangs

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4 The total does not include smaller cities or rural areas, but the impact of the omission is small because gang-related homicides are rare in less-populous jurisdictions. A large majority of rural counties and small cities reported no gang problems at the turn of the century, and among those reporting gang problems, 80 percent reported no gang-related homicides (Egley and Ritz 2006).

5 The FBI does not include victims of the attacks of September 11, 2001, in the annual homicide count.

survived that long (many do not). Since a handful of cities and gangs account for a disproportionate share of killings, we can infer that most gangs will *never* have a murderer in their midst.

Most law enforcement agencies reported zero youth gang homicides between 2002 and 2004.

Most law enforcement agencies reported *zero* youth gang homicides between 2002 and 2004. Jurisdictions that experienced no gang homicides over the three-year period included two in five larger cities (50,000 or more residents), a majority of suburban counties, and four in five smaller cities and rural counties. Just one in 10 larger cities—and one in 37 suburban counties—reported 10 or more gang-related homicides in at least one of the three survey years. Gang-related homicides happen occasionally in a large number of jurisdictions and are a major problem in a handful of cities, according to the surveys. Murders committed by family members and partners are a more serious issue in most jurisdictions.

Policy makers and the public at large generally believe that gang killings are fueled by struggles for control of the illegal drug trade. Yet researchers have consistently found that drug motives are present in a very small proportion of gang homicides. Carolyn and Richard Block conducted a comprehensive analysis of gang homicides in Chicago at the height of the crack epidemic and concluded that guns, not drugs, were behind a spike in gang killings (2001).

Fewer than 3 percent of gang-motivated murders that took place between 1987 and 1990 were drug-related, according to Chicago homicide data, and just five of 288 cases (1.7 percent) were connected to drug business. There was also a much stronger correlation at the neighborhood level between gang-motivated homicides and nonlethal violence than was found between gang homicides and gang-motivated drug crimes.

A spatial analysis of violent incidents showed that gang-related homicides and nonlethal violence were much more likely to occur at the border of gang territories than in places with high levels of gang-related drug activity. The researchers found that "street gang–motivated homicides tended to occur within or close to the boundaries of turf hot spot areas, and only rarely in drug hot spot areas except when a drug hot spot area intersected with a turf hot spot area."

The number of gang-motivated homicides rose sharply in Chicago at the end of the 1980s, from 50 in 1987 to a record 101 gang-motivated homicides in

1990. The spike in homicides did not correlate to an increase in levels of nonlethal gang violence, which actually declined slightly over the period. Instead, the researchers report that "virtually the entire increase in the number of street gang–motivated homicides seems attributable to an increase in the use of high-caliber, automatic, or semiautomatic weapons."

Research teams in Boston and Los Angeles conducted extensive analyses of homicide patterns and came to the same conclusion. They found that youth and young adult gang members were killing each other in a cycle of violence that had no motive other than the perceived need to defend symbolic turf and retaliate for past violence. The Boston researchers who designed Operation Ceasefire (discussed in chapter 7) determined that most incidents "were not in any proximate way about drug trafficking or other 'business' interests" (Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl 2001). Further, youth known to be associated with homicides were more likely to have been arraigned in the past for violent, property, and disorder offenses than for drug offenses.

The RAND Corporation researchers who assisted in the replication of Operation Ceasefire in Los Angeles report that their findings "drew incredulous responses from members of the working group, including one law enforcement member who insisted 'these kids are...being killed because of [dope]'" (Tita et al. 2003). A review of the case files with the detective who assembled them confirmed the team's initial assessment: the kids were not being killed over dope. The findings from Chicago, Boston, and Los Angeles are supported by research studies that produced similar results in Miami, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis (cited in Howell and Decker 1999 and Tita et al. 2003).

In a recent summary of gang research literature, Short observes that both intergang and intragang homicides are associated with external challenges to group solidarity and internal challenges to group norms (2006). The perceived need to uphold a code of honor drives violence among gang members more than the interests of the gang or its members:

> Donald Black (1993) and Mark Cooney (1998) note that the violence associated with such concerns appears to be overwhelmingly "moralistic" rather than "predatory." That is, it occurs in response to "a violation of standards of acceptable behavior" rather than as a means of achieving personal gratification. (Cooney, p. 4)

The intention here is not to minimize the toll gang wars have taken on youth, especially youth of color, over the past two decades, but instead to place it in context. Lethal violence remains a serious problem in the United States, and it requires a thoughtful response. Blaming the problem on "gangs" may be politically expedient, but it does little to advance a solution.

Violence

Research results in three gang problem cities show that gang members were responsible for less than 10 percent of violent crime.

Researchers working at the local level have also reported that known gang members account for a small fraction of violent criminal activity, even in cities and neighborhoods that report serious gang problems. Las Vegas law enforcement officials talked up the extent of gang violence prior to the passage of a law establishing enhanced sentences for gang-related crimes. But when researchers went back to examine police data, they determined that the prevalence of gang violence had been greatly exaggerated. Defendants identified by police as gang members accounted for just 6 percent of violent crime charges and 5 percent of drug charges filed in Las Vegas between 1989 and 1995 (Miethe and McCorkle 2002).

Data published by a team of researchers that evaluated a gang suppression effort in Dallas show that gang-related offenses accounted for less than 10 percent of serious violent crime in the year preceding the intervention, even in target areas that experienced "large amounts of gang violence" (Fritsch, Caeti, and Taylor 2003). The same conclusions can be drawn from data collected by investigators evaluating the efforts of a gang task force in Westminster, California (Kent et al. 2000). Gang-related offenses

in Westminster peaked at roughly 7 or 8 percent of all crime during the preintervention period, and the researchers concluded that "violent gang crime is a relatively small proportion of violent crime" in the jurisdiction.

The data from Las Vegas, Dallas, and Westminster roughly correspond to previously reported findings from the National Crime Victimization Survey that gang members are responsible for a small share of violent crime (Ziedenberg 2005). The proportion of violent crimes in which the victim believed the perpetrator to be a gang member peaked at 10 percent of all victimizations in 1996 before declining 6 percent in 1998 and remaining stable thereafter.

One study of highly organized gangs in New York's Chinatown found that most violence was motivated by gang rivalries or personal disputes, and that it was initiated by rank-and-file members rather than gang leaders.

It is often assumed that gang leaders orchestrate violence in order to secure control of drug markets and other criminal enterprises. This notion has been challenged by findings from ethnographic research that gang violence is often expressive in nature and initiated from below. Ko-lin Chin interviewed 62 male members of Chinese gangs in New York's Chinatown in 1992 and found that, while fighting was common among the gang members he interviewed, the violence originated in personal disputes and gang rivalries rather than in instrumental concerns (1996). He also reported that leaders of Chinatown's youth gangs and adult criminal organizations were more likely to restrain than to encourage gang violence.

Law enforcement authorities had identified drug trafficking as a major gang activity and a leading cause of violence among Chinese gang members. But the gang members interviewed by Chin reported little involvement in drug sales; just one in six indicated that he had ever sold drugs. The top two reasons supplied by the interviewees for violence between members of rival gangs were "staring" during chance encounters in public locations (mentioned by 45 percent of respondents) and fights over turf (32 percent). Disputes over money (25 percent) and girls (21 percent) were the most commonly cited reasons for conflict between members of the same gang.

Chinatown gang leaders were more likely to intervene to restrain, rather than to promote, conflict between gang members.

Most gang members reported that gang leaders, sometimes joined by representatives of adult criminal

Figure 6.4. Proportion of violent crime committed by people believed to be gang members
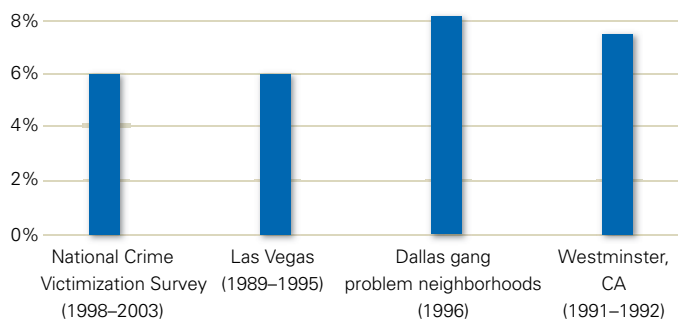
Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics; Miethe and McCorkle 2002; Fritsch, Caeti, and Taylor 2003; Kent et al. 2000

organizations, would intervene to resolve intergang and intragang conflicts. Chin concludes that "(a) violence between gang members is freelance and erupts rather spontaneously over personal matters, and (b) gang leaders strive to control and contain violence for purely pragmatic purposes…. Drug use, drug trafficking, tong [organized crime] affiliations, protection rackets, and community politics appear to have little influence on gang violence in New York City's Chinatown."

Drug distribution

National and local law enforcement officials have long argued that gangs are heavily involved in drug trafficking and distribution, but the evidence behind the contention is thin. The National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) reported in the October 4, 2005, issue of *Narcotics Digest Weekly* that gangs (including street gangs, prison gangs, and outlaw motorcycle gangs) are "the primary retail distributors of drugs in the country." The National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations (NAGIA) makes a similar claim in its most recent National Gang Threat Assessment, which is based on a survey of gang investigators at 455 law enforcement agencies (2005).

The NAGIA survey is not, as the authors readily admit, "representative of the nation as a whole, nor is it based on a statistically valid sample." Beyond problems with the representativeness of the sample, however, the NAGIA report clearly overstates the survey findings. Three in five law enforcement respondents (60.2 percent) reported "moderate" or "high" gang involvement in total street-level drug sales in their areas. But when the responses are broken down by substance, it becomes clear that the figures are driven primarily by marijuana distribution.

Marijuana is the only drug for which a majority of law enforcement respondents reported "moderate" or "high" gang involvement in distribution.

Marijuana is the only drug for which a majority of law enforcement respondents reported "moderate" or "high" gang involvement in distribution (64.8 percent). Close to half reported moderate to high levels of gang involvement in the distribution of crack cocaine (47.3 percent), while fewer than 40 percent of respondents identified a significant role for gangs in the distribution of methamphetamine (39.1 percent), powdered cocaine (38.2 percent), or heroin (27.9 percent). Just a quarter of law enforcement agencies in Southern states indicated moderate or high gang involvement in the distribution of meth-

amphetamine (24.9 percent), despite local media reports that have suggested much closer ties between gangs and meth trafficking.

Researchers found that law enforcement officials overestimate gang member involvement in drug distribution.

Further, researchers Malcolm Klein and Cheryl Maxson found that law enforcement officials have an exaggerated perception of gang member involvement in drug distribution. In the mid-1980s the two conducted research on cocaine sales in South Central Los Angeles, where they were told that "upward of 90 percent" or "almost all" sales were gang-related (Maxson 1995).

A review of police records, however, showed that the share of arrests attributable to gang members ranged from 9 percent in 1983 to 25 percent in 1985. Despite stereotypes that gang drug activity is associated with "high levels of violence" (NDIC 2005), the researchers found that gang members were no more likely to carry firearms than nonmembers (Maxson 1995).

Maxson replicated these findings six years later when she used police records to examine 1,563 cocaine sale incidents and 471 other drug sale incidents in Pasadena and Pomona, California. Gang members accounted for just over a quarter of cocaine sale arrests (26.7 percent) and one in nine non–cocaine sale arrests (11.5 percent). The proportions of cocaine sales attributable to gang members—21 percent in Pomona and 30 percent in Pasadena—were consistent with the last year of the Los Angeles data (25 percent) and well below law enforcement estimates, which ranged from 30 to 50 percent.

The proportion of non–cocaine sale arrests attributed to gang members (one in nine) also failed to meet the expectations of law enforcement officials who reported that "gangs were prominent in the distribution of marijuana, heroin, and PCP, although less so than in the distribution of cocaine." Maxson further notes that these proportions may overstate the role of gangs in the drug trade since many gang members sell drugs independent of their gangs: "It should also be noted that these gang member arrestees might have been entrepreneurs. Involvement of the gang might have been minimal."

Gang members arrested for drug sales were no more likely than nonmembers to carry weapons or engage in violence associated with the sale.

Maxson's findings also belied the stereotype of heav-

ily armed gang members who use violence to control local drug markets. Gang members arrested for cocaine sales were no more likely than nonmembers to carry a firearm (10 percent) or to engage in violence in conjunction with the sale or arrest (5 percent). Cocaine sales by gang members were somewhat more likely to involve the rock form of cocaine. But the average amount of cocaine sold by nonmembers was twice that sold by gang members (6.95 grams and 3.55 grams, respectively). The only other significant differences between cocaine sale incidents involving gang members and those involving nonmembers were that gang members were disproportionately black, male, and young (a mean age of 22.5).

Youth survey and interview data suggest that a significant proportion of gang members participate in drug sales during their time in the gang. Members of gangs that were considered by law enforcement to be the most highly organized in Chicago and San Diego all reported drug sale activity to interviewers (Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 2001). A large majority of St. Louis gang members said that more than half of their gang peers sold drugs (Decker and Van Winkle 1996). Several other studies conducted during the early 1990s found rates of self-reported participation in drug sales that ranged from a low of 30 percent to a high of 95 percent (Maxson 1995).

One study found that just one Los Angeles gang member in seven sold drugs as often as once a month.

The character of gang-member-involvement drug sales is poorly understood. Drug selling is not typically a full-time occupation for gang members. A study conducted by the Los Angeles County district attorney's office in 1992 found that *just one gang member in seven sold drugs on a monthly basis* (Howell and Decker 1999). Scott Decker and Barry Van Winkle describe the drug sale activity of St. Louis gang members as "sporadic," observing that they sold drugs "when they wanted to make money, not at any fixed time" (1996). "It is probable," the authors conclude, "that the majority of the drug sellers in the St. Louis area are not gang members."

Instead, drug sales represent an occasional source of income that allows gang youth to obtain the consumer goods and services that are readily available to more affluent teens. Nearly two-thirds of St. Louis gang members said that most of their drug revenues were spent on clothing. San Diego gang members told interviewers that their drug profits were spent on fast food and parties (Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 2001).

Gang members are clearly not the primary retail distributors of drugs in the country. In Southern California cities with recognized gang problems, gang members accounted for roughly a quarter of drug sale arrests. It is safe to assume that gang members account for a much smaller share of drug sale arrests in jurisdictions with smaller gang problems. It is also likely that gang members are heavily underrepresented in the many drug transactions that take place in more affluent neighborhoods where police make fewer drug arrests.

Gang members do not even account for a majority among youth who have sold drugs. Sixteen percent of 17-year-olds report selling drugs at some point in their lives, while just 8 percent report past or current gang membership (Snyder and Sickmund 2006). The prevalence of drug sale activity was even higher among white youth (17 percent) despite the fact that white youth had a lower rate of gang involvement (7 percent).

Several researchers have described gang member involvement in drug sales as sporadic and poorly organized.

Law enforcement officials generally perceive the involvement of gang members in drug sales as a criminal conspiracy on the part of the gang to traffic in drugs. Most of the ethnographic and survey literature paints a very different picture of the relationship between gangs and the drug trade. They describe gang member drug activity as sporadic and disorganized—less Drug Traffickers Inc. than a fraternal association whose members network and occasionally do deals with one another.

Scott Decker, Tim Bynum, and Deborah Weisel interviewed 85 active members of the four most organized gangs in Chicago and San Diego (2001). All of the interviewees reported selling drugs, and most said that their gangs were involved in organizing drug sales. But their responses generally suggested low levels of organization with few defined roles or rules. According to one San Diego gang member:

> The gang don't organize nothing. It's like everybody is on they own. You are not trying to do nothing with nobody unless it's with your friend. You don't put your money with gangs.

Drug profits were not primarily used to finance gang activities but instead were retained by individual drug sellers. Even members of Chicago's Gangster Disciples—arguably one of the most highly organized street gangs in the United States—overwhelmingly reported that drug profits went into their own pock-

ets and not back to the gang. San Diego gang members were even more emphatic, with one responding, "A percentage of the drug money [to the gang]? Hell, no. You keep it to yourself."

Decker and Van Winkle found similar results in their investigation of St. Louis gangs: "Although every gang in our sample had some members who sold drugs (crack cocaine, in the main), gang involvement was generally poorly organized, episodic, nonmonopolistic, carried out by individuals or cliques on their own, and was not a rationale for the gang's existence and continuance" (1996). Gangs did not dominate the drug trade in St. Louis, nor did they attempt to do so. Gang members who were interviewed often referred to nonmembers who sold drugs, and to drug houses within gang neighborhoods that were not controlled by the gang.

The drug economy plays a significant role in the lives of many gang members, a fact that has been well documented by Hagedorn (2005) and others. But the drug trade is not responsible for the existence of gangs or the activities of their members. And gangs are not responsible for the flow of drugs and drug dollars into low-income communities.

Perception and reality

All of the available evidence indicates that gang members play a relatively small role in the crime problem despite their propensity toward criminal activity. Gang members appear to be responsible for fewer than one in four drug sales; fewer than one in 10 homicides; fewer than one in 16 violent offenses; and fewer than one in 20 index crimes. Gangs themselves play an even smaller role, since much of the crime committed by gang members is self-directed and not committed for the gang's benefit. The question, then, is why the problem of gang crime is so commonly overstated by law enforcement and media reports.

There are several possible explanations for why law enforcement and media reports consistently overestimate the role of gangs and gang members in crime and violence. First, gang members often make themselves highly visible, while others who commit crimes try to keep a lower profile in order to avoid arrest. Graffiti, colors, hand signs, and dramatic rivalries ensure that gang activity will be more memorable and more newsworthy than the less spectacular offenses that drive crime statistics.

Second, law enforcement and media depictions of gangs fuel gang crime myths by equating all gang activity with criminal activity and by tarring all gangs

and members with the worst crimes committed by any gang member. Klein succinctly illustrates the tendency of law enforcement agencies to cram all drug crime in a gang box when he quotes the deputy chief of a large police department on the subject of crack sales:

> Look, this narcotics stuff is all a matter of gangs and conspiracy. To me, a gang is any two or more guys working on crime together. In a drug sale, you got at least the seller and the distributor involved. Now that means it's a conspiracy. And there's two guys, right. So all these crack sales are gang crimes.... Two or more guys conspiring to make crack sales means it's a gang affair...that's how we define gang around here. (1995)

Law enforcement and media accounts also tend to attribute to the gang any crime for which an alleged gang member stands convicted, charged, or even suspected. This practice implies that every member of a gang has committed, or is at least capable of committing, a laundry list of heinous offenses. Some agencies such as North Carolina's State Bureau of Investigations (SBI) go even further by lumping together the alleged activities of many gangs. The gangs of Charlotte/Mecklenburg County, for example, are said to engage in:

> homicides, threats against law enforcement, firearm possession, drug possession, assaults, fighting, kidnapping, carjacking, armed robbery, home invasions, vandalism (graffiti), auto theft, breaking into vehicles, restaurant robberies, gun trafficking, extortion, prostitution and gambling.

The list of alleged gang activities creates the impression that every Charlotte gang member is a sociopath with a long criminal record, or, at a minimum, that every gang contains murderers, drug traffickers, carjackers, armed robbers, and their ilk. A quick review of the national gang data dispels any such idea.

The typical gang is not an army of killers or even potential killers. It is a group of youth and young adults who are alienated from mainstream society and caught up in a mythical world of excitement and danger. The damage that these young people do to themselves, to each other, and to more than a few bystanders is very real. But as Klein and many other researchers have observed, most gang members are more talk than action. A more realistic assessment of the gang contribution to the crime problem is needed if policy makers are

to avoid playing into the gang myth by inflating the dangers to public safety posed by gangs.

North Carolina: More gangs, less crime

Mercer Sullivan contends that the focus on gangs distracts researchers and policy makers from the real problem of youth violence (2006). He points to the lack of a correlation between youth violence and the most solid measure of gang prevalence, the National Youth Gang Center gang population estimates:

> During the 1990s, youth gangs were widely reported to be increasing in numbers and membership throughout the United States (Miller 2001). Yet, during the latter part of the decade, youth violence decreased sharply (Butts and Travis 2002), while gang membership underwent but a slight decline and remained at historically unprecedented levels.... Given the choice, who would not prefer more gangs and less youth violence to the opposite combination.

A comparison of North Carolina crime data and gang membership estimates provides further evidence for Sullivan's argument, as well as an example of how gang hysteria can elicit counterproductive policy responses. Legislation introduced by Representatives Henry Michaux, a Democrat from Durham, and Phillip Frye, a Republican from Spruce Pine, in February 2005 declared that gang activity had brought North Carolina to a "state of crisis":

> The General Assembly, however, further finds that the State of North Carolina is in a state of crisis that has been caused by violent street gangs whose members threaten, terrorize, and commit a multitude of crimes against the peaceful citizens of their neighborhoods. These activities, both individually and collectively, present a clear and present danger to public order and safety and are not constitutionally protected.

H.B. 50 would have made participation in a street gang a separate criminal offense; added 10 years to the sentence of anyone found to be an "organizer, supervisor or manager" of gang activity; required judges to make a determination on the record as to whether an offense was committed to benefit a street gang; allowed the state to seize property used for gang activity; added at least five years to the sentence of any defendant convicted of a serious felony committed to benefit gang activity if he or she was in possession of a firearm; and established a grant program for gang

prevention and intervention efforts.

The legislature's Fiscal Research Division estimated that the proposed changes would cost the state nearly $80 million to implement over the first four years if just 1 percent of eligible offenses resulted in convictions. The monies would have gone largely to the construction and operation of nearly 400 new adult and juvenile corrections beds. The estimate did not include any costs associated with the penalty enhancement provisions of the bill. The legislation would also have exposed children as young as 12 to stiff penalties, prompting concern that troubled youth could suffer lasting damage at the hands of the criminal justice system.

The public often assumes that such harsh and costly measures would be proposed only in the face of a true public safety crisis. A review of the gang literature, however, shows that some jurisdictions have adopted tough gang control measures only to discover that the gang threat was greatly exaggerated. Nevada state lawmakers enacted strict gang sentencing enhancements based on law enforcement claims that arrest data did not support. A review of crime trends suggests that North Carolina risks repeating Nevada's mistake.

Families Against Mandatory Minimums organizer LaFonda Jones says that the gang panic was precipitated by several killings in Durham. Jones agrees that Durham has a youth violence problem. But she argues that youth violence is a long-standing local problem with roots in youth unemployment and the "severe gap between haves and have-nots" rather than a statewide crime epidemic.

Uniform Crime Report data support Jones's contention: statewide index crime rates *fell* by 12 percent during the five-year period that preceded the introduction of H.B. 50, dropping from 5,267 crimes per 100,000 residents in 1999 to 4,642 crimes per 100,000 residents in 2004. Violent crime rates saw an even greater 16 percent decline, dropping from 551 to 461 crimes per 100,000 residents over the period. Even juvenile violent crime arrests declined slightly, from 2,749 per year in 1999 to 2,574 in 2004.

Despite falling crime rates, two reports issued by state law enforcement agencies fueled fear of gangs by appearing to show rapid growth in gang activity. The North Carolina State Bureau of Investigations produced a report summarizing gang activity in 15 alleged "hot spots" for the General Assembly's Fiscal Research Division.

The language of the SBI report is alarming: Durham's

Hispanic gangs were "becoming more visible"; Charlotte/Mecklenburg County had a "growing number of Hispanic gangs" as well as Asian gangs that were "becoming more active"; Wake County had seen "a large influx of gang activity"; Hispanic gang activity had "increased significantly in the town of Angier" and "recently emerged in the Fayetteville area"; "gang members from Charlotte" were committing crime in Catawba/Iredell County, which was also witnessing the "development of MS-13 [Mara Salvatrucha gang] activity in the area"; gang activity had "erupted in the Kinston area...in the last three or four years"; Hispanic gangs were "emerging" in Wilmington/New Hanover County; and Henderson County had "seen Hispanic gangs move into the area." The report contains no references to gang membership decreasing, nor does it mention gangs becoming less active in any of the 15 hot spots.

The Governor's Crime Commission also released a report that compared local law enforcement estimates of gang activity in 2004 and 1999. Author

Richard Hayes notes that apparent changes in gang activity over the period might in fact be changes in law enforcement *acknowledgment* of gang problems. Nevertheless, a more than 3,000-person jump in the estimated gang population—from 5,068 in 1999 to 8,517 in 2004—led the *News and Observer* to print a story headlined "Gangs on the Rise in N.C." (Manware and Wootson 2005). The article quoted Charlotte-Mecklenburg gang detective Joel McNelly, who told the paper that "the spike in gang numbers is as much about gang members who've moved to the city as about officers better documenting them."

Yet the pattern of rising gang activity and falling crime was evident at the local level. Most North Carolina counties either failed to report any gang activity or reported an "unknown" number of gang members in one or both of the surveys. But 22 counties did provide estimates of local gang membership in both 1999 and 2004. Nineteen counties, including some of the state's largest, submitted uniform crime reports for the same years, permitting comparison between

Table 6.1. North Carolina local gang membership and crime trends: 1999 to 2004

| County	Members 1999	Members 2004	Members change (#)	Members change	Index crime change	Violent crime change
Cumberland	2547	259	-2288	-89.8%	7.3%	17.6%
Burke	154	12	-142	-92.2%	-12.8%	-51.3%
Guilford	144	68	-76	-52.8%	-17.0%	-22.9%
Stanly	58	18	-40	-69.0%	-37.0%	-6.4%
Avery	22	10	-12	-54.5%	-21.1%	-52.6%
Brunswick	9	7	-2	-22.2%	-0.5%	-21.0%
Lenoir	20	21	1	5.0%	16.4%	3.1%
Rowan	32	34	2	6.3%	8.6%	-4.8%
Duplin	23	30	7	30.4%	-13.4%	-16.0%
Northampton	15	22	7	46.7%	36.2%	11.0%
Franklin	16	27	11	68.8%	-19.4%	-23.3%
Rockingham	15	30	15	100.0%	-6.8%	-42.9%
Catawba	8	60	52	650.0%	-0.6%	5.1%
Davidson	187	263	76	40.6%	1.8%	22.2%
New Hanover	20	105	85	425.0%	-5.7%	1.0%
Nash	7	300	293	4185.7%	0.0%	-0.3%
Pitt	40	835	795	1987.5%	-13.8%	-11.3%
Mecklenburg	168	1739	1571	935.1%	-14.4%	-24.7%
Wake	30	1753	1723	5743.3%	-32.4%	-21.3%

Source: Governor's Crime Commission 2005; FBI Uniform Crime Reports 1999 & 2004

gang membership and crime trends.

The results are striking. Of the four counties reporting the greatest increase in gang membership, three (Wake, Mecklenburg, and Pitt) saw substantial drops in violent and overall crime rates, while the fourth (Nash) saw no change in its overall and violent crime rates. The county with the greatest reported *decrease* in gang membership—Cumberland County, where the number of reported gang members dropped by 90 percent—saw growth in overall and violent crime rates and a 62 percent spike in its murder rate. Other counties that reported declining gang membership also experienced falling crime rates. But only one (Stanly County) saw a greater reduction in overall crime than Wake County, where reported gang membership increased by nearly 6,000 percent as the index crime rate dropped by 32 percent.

Five of North Carolina's six largest counties were profiled by the SBI report. Gang membership and crime trends moved in opposite directions in four of the five counties.

Charlotte/Mecklenburg County

Gang members 935.1%

Violent crime -24.7%
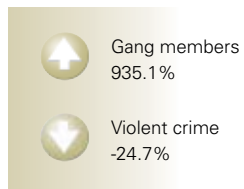
The SBI report indicated that the Charlotte area was plagued by a "growing number of Hispanic gangs," that MS-13 had become "the most violent gang" in the city, and that Asian gangs were "becoming more active." A comparison of law enforcement survey data from 1999 and 2004 shows that the number of alleged gang members grew tenfold, from 168 to 1,739, while the number of gangs shot from 15 to 65. Yet crime trends went in the opposite direction over the five-year period. The overall index crime rate decreased by 14.4 percent, and the violent crime rate fell by an even larger 24.7 percent.

Wake County

Gang members 5,743.3%

Violent crime -21.3%

The SBI report notes that Wake County municipalities had seen a "large influx of gang activity," including United Blood Nation and Crips, as well as Hispanic gangs, which posed the "largest threat" to the county. Law enforcement survey data also indicate a tremendous proliferation of gang activity, with the number of gangs jumping from one to 39 between 1999 and 2004, while the population of gang members shot from 30 to 1,753. But crime trends moved in the opposite direction. Wake County's overall index crime rate was down by a third (32.4 percent) and violent crime fell by a fifth (21.3 percent) over the period.

Greensboro/Guilford County

Gang members -52.8%

Violent crime -22.9%

The SBI report indicates that a number of gangs are involved in criminal activities in the Greensboro/Guilford County area, but it provides no information on recent trends. Law enforcement survey data show that gang membership actually dropped sharply between 1999 and 2004, falling from 144 to 68 known members (a 52.8 percent decrease). Crime rates also declined in Guilford County, although the overall reduction was smaller than that achieved in Wake County. Total index crime was down by 17 percent, and violent crime was down by 22.9 percent.

Fayetteville/Cumberland County

Gang members -89.8%

Violent crime 17.6%
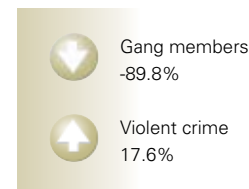
The SBI report notes that Fayetteville gangs have strong ties to other parts of the country and states that "Hispanic gangs have recently emerged" in the area. But law enforcement officials in Cumberland County actually reported a 90 percent *reduction* in youth gang membership—from 2,547 members in 1999 to 259 members in 2004—along with a drop in the number of gangs from 23 to 14. Crime trends moved in the opposite direction of reported gang membership; the index crime rate climbed by 7.3 percent and the violent crime rate jumped by 17.6 percent over the period.

Durham

Gang members 333.3%

Violent crime -34.6%
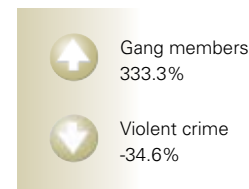
The SBI reported that Durham's largest gang, United Blood Nation, had "ties to New York" and was engaged in "numerous" shootouts with rival Crips. Hispanic gangs were becoming "more visible" and had documented ties to the largest population of MS-13 members on the East Coast, located in Fairfax County, Virginia. The city of Durham was said to have "over 20 organized gangs" that were "constantly attracting new members from all ethnic backgrounds." The same year, the Governor's Crime Commission reported the existence of 10 "criminal youth gangs" in Durham based on law enforcement surveys, a threefold

increase over 1999. Yet again, crime trends moved in the opposite direction. Between 1999 and 2004, Durham's overall and violent crime rates dropped by a third—33.6 percent and 34.6 percent, respectively.

There are several possible explanations for the lack of correspondence between law enforcement reports of crime activity and crime trends. The apparent rise in gang membership may reflect a change in law enforcement priorities rather than new gang activity. A recent influx of Latino immigrants may have led officers to misidentify young Latino men as gang members. On the other hand, it is conceivable that gang activity could be growing even as crime falls, since gang members account for a very small share of the crime problem. In any case, the data provide no support for the notion that North Carolina is experiencing a gang crime crisis.

Getting Less for More: The Failed Legacy of Gang Enforcement

When the existence of a gang problem has been announced or acknowledged by public officials, the conversation generally turns to how law enforcement should solve it. The following are fairly typical policy responses to the emergence of a gang problem:

1. Form a specialized gang unit within the police department if one does not already exist.

2. Launch a crackdown in high-crime neighborhoods by adding police patrols, aggressively enforcing public ordinances, and using every available opportunity to stop and question local residents.

3. Target alleged gang "leaders" and "hard-core" gang members for heightened surveillance and stiff criminal justice sanctions.

Other policy makers may propose adoption of a fourth option—a "balanced" approach that combines the gang enforcement tactics described here with provision of services and supports to gang members and gang-afflicted communities. The choice of a gang enforcement strategy is frequently based on political and institutional considerations. Officials seek strategies that let the public know they are "doing something" about the problem without requiring fundamental changes in the police department's operations.

The official response to an emerging gang problem is rarely based on a solid understanding of gang issues or a coherent theory of what an intervention should accomplish. The hysteria that greets the sudden emergence of a gang problem creates a poor atmosphere for considering the questions that will determine the success or failure of a gang control strategy: What are its *objectives*? Whom will it *target*? And what *effect* will the initiative have on the targets in order to achieve the objectives?

The objectives of a gang control effort depend on whether the problem is defined as gang violence, gang crime, or the gangs' very existence. Law enforcement officials often take the public position that gangs must be eradicated. In the words of Captain Ray Peavy, who heads the Los Angeles sheriff's homi-

cide bureau, "Everyone says: 'What are we going to do about the gang problem?' It's the same thing you do about cockroaches or insects; you get someone in there to do whatever they can do to get rid of those creatures" (Garvey and McGreevy 2007).

Others take a different perspective on what gang control efforts can, or should, set out to accomplish. As a representative of one urban community development corporation told a researcher, "The problem is not to get kids out of gangs but the behavior. If crime goes down, if young people are doing well, that's successful" (Villaruel, personal communication). Some law enforcement officers also acknowledge—usually in private—that their goal is not to eliminate gang *membership* but to reduce levels of gang *crime* and *violence* (Villaruel, personal communication).

The second important question for gang control efforts is whom to target. On one hand, an initiative may elect to target "leaders" or "hard-core" members who are believed to be the driving force behind gang crime. On the other hand, the initiative may target "fringe" members or even nonmembers whom policy makers believe can more easily be enticed or deterred from gang activity.

The most appropriate target depends on one's theory about how gangs operate. Some law enforcement officials subscribe to the view that gangs can be eliminated or at least neutralized by removing their leadership ("cutting the head off the snake"). Others argue that gang leadership is fluid, and that gangs—like the mythical hydra—are capable of growing new heads faster than law enforcement can decapitate them. Some contend that so-called "hard-core" members should be targeted because they do (and suffer) the most damage. But others believe that a focus on newer and more marginal members will not only save more youth but also limit gangs' ability to reproduce themselves over time.

If drive-by shootings and other spectacular acts of gang violence are committed by younger members

at the behest of leaders, then it is possible—although not certain—that removing the leaders from the community might reduce violence. If, on the other hand, drive-bys and other acts of violence are initiated by younger and more volatile members with poor impulse control and a desire to "prove" themselves, then removing leaders will do nothing to quell the violence.

The third critical question for gang control efforts is what effects they are intended to have on the targets. A gang control initiative may set out to *incapacitate* gang members who are deemed too dangerous to remain on the street due to their role in the gang or their personal involvement in crime and violence. An initiative may also seek to use "carrots" or "sticks" to *persuade* individuals to change behaviors ranging from gang membership to gun violence. Finally, a gang control initiative may try to *disrupt* gang activities by making it impossible for individuals or the group as a whole to function normally.

Boston's Operation Ceasefire is an example of a gang control effort with clear objectives, targets, and intended effects. The architects of Operation Ceasefire set *reducing gun violence* as the principal objective and stuck with that objective throughout the life of the project. They developed a strategy that was designed to *persuade* both *hard-core* and *fringe* youth gang members to stop engaging in acts of retaliatory violence.

Targeted youth were told that further acts of violence would place them and their gangs under heightened law enforcement scrutiny; they were offered supports and services designed to facilitate the transition from gang activities to other activities. Police also conducted saturation patrols and prosecuted targeted gang leaders, but these actions were considered components of the main "lever-pulling" strategy rather than competing strategies.

The conceptual clarity that characterized Operation Ceasefire is rare among gang control efforts. Few initiatives have proved capable of orienting their activities around realistic, measurable public safety objectives. And most are unable to articulate a viable theory of how gang control activities will have the intended effect on their targets. Gang enforcement efforts mounted in response to public concerns about gang and gun *violence* have driven up arrests for *nonviolent* offenses with no reduction in violence. Gang intervention programs that were intended to target active members wind up serving nonmembers because the staff is unwilling to work with "that kind of kid." Conceptual clarity is no guarantee of success. The failure of efforts to replicate the Ceasefire model in Los Angeles and Indianapolis cast doubt on the underlying theory of "lever pulling" and deterrence "retailing." But such clarity does make it easier to evaluate and debate competing proposals.

Further, the thrust of most gang enforcement efforts runs counter to what is known about gangs and gang members, rendering the efforts ineffectual if not counterproductive. Police officials make much of targeting reputed "leaders" while ignoring the fact that most gangs do not need leaders to function (not to mention the risk that removal of leaders will increase violence by destabilizing the gang and removing constraints on internal conflict). Research on the dynamics of gang membership indicates that suppression tactics intended to make youth "think twice" about gang involvement may instead reinforce gang cohesion, elevating the gang's importance and reinforcing an "us versus them" mentality. Finally, the incarceration of gang members is often considered a measure of success, even though prison tends to solidify gang involvement and weaken an individual's capacity to live a gang- and crime-free life.

It is easy to provide anecdotal evidence for the effectiveness of any one of these strategies: media reports are full of stories about cities where crime goes up, a crackdown is launched, and crime goes down. But a review of research on the implementation of gang enforcement strategies—ranging from neighborhood-based suppression to the U.S. Justice Department Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Comprehensive Gang Program Model—provides little reason for optimism. Findings from investigations of gang enforcement efforts in 17 jurisdictions over the past two decades yield few examples of success, and many examples of failure.

The problems highlighted in the research include:

- Lack of correspondence between the problem, typically lethal and/or serious violence, and a law enforcement response that targets low-level, nonviolent misbehavior.
- Resistance on the part of key agency personnel to collaboration or implementation of the strategy as designed.
- Evidence that the intervention had no effect or a negative effect on crime and violence.
- A tendency for any reductions in crime or violence to evaporate quickly, often before the end of the intervention period.

- Poorly designed evaluations that make it impossible to draw any conclusions about the effect of an intervention.

- Failure of replication efforts to achieve results comparable to those of pilot programs.

- Severe power and resources imbalances between law enforcement and community partners that hamper the implementation of "balanced" gang control initiatives.

The following sections describe common gang enforcement strategies and explore findings of program evaluations from 17 jurisdictions.

Institutional responses: The rise of police gang units

Over the past decade and a half, we have witnessed a proliferation within law enforcement agencies of specialized units that focus on gang enforcement. The formation of a gang unit is often viewed as a rational response to an emerging gang threat. But researchers have concluded that gang units are more often formed in response to pressure on police to "do something," or as a way to secure additional resources for the agency. Once gang units are launched, the experts find they often become isolated from the rest of the department, a development that can render them ineffective or even facilitate corruption.

Roughly half of local law enforcement agencies with 100 or more sworn officers maintain special gang units, according to a 1999 survey, including 56 percent of municipal police department, 50 percent of sheriff's departments, and 43 percent of county police agencies (Katz and Webb 2003a). In 2003 Charles Katz and Vincent Webb estimated that the total number of police gang units (including state police agencies) stood at 360, most of which (85 percent) were no more than 10 years old (2003b).

Why law enforcement agencies form gang units

The proliferation of specialized gang units has been justified as a natural response by police officials to the spread of gangs and growing public concerns over gang crime. The argument for such units is that they permit officers to develop the technical skills and expertise needed to diagnose local gang problems and to assist the rest of the agency and the community to address them. But the idea that the formation of a gang unit is "a result of *rational considerations* on the

part of police agencies" that face "*real* gang problems" has been challenged by several researchers (Katz and Webb 2003a). Marjorie Zatz examined the establishment of a gang unit in Phoenix and determined that police officials had invented a serious gang problem in order to secure federal resources (cited in Katz and Webb 2003a).

Richard McCorkle and Terance Miethe found that the formation of a gang unit in the Las Vegas Police Department was driven by a search for resources and scandals within the department rather than an emerging gang crime problem (cited in Katz and Webb 2003a). Law enforcement officials fomented a "moral panic" by linking "national reports of a growing problem to local concerns of increasing crime in order to divert public attention away from problems within the police department and to justify an infusion of additional resources into the department."

Gang panics are not always generated by law enforcement. Carol Archbold and Michael Meyer document a particularly disturbing example of how a handful of troubling incidents can snowball into a full-scale moral panic (cited in Katz and Webb 2003b).

The researchers found that the public fear generated by a series of youth homicides in a small Midwestern city led police to begin designating local minority youth as gang members. Fear continued to rise as the number of documented "gang members" grew. The situation eventually "spun out of control, resulting in community panic, even though there was no actual evidence of any gang-related activity in the city."

Charles Katz, Edward Maguire, and Dennis Roncek examined factors that influenced the establishment of police gang units in about 300 large U.S. cities (Katz and Webb 2003b). The researchers found no relationship between the formation of a gang unit and "the size of a community gang or crime problem." Instead, they found that gang units were most likely to be formed in cities with larger Hispanic populations, and among police departments that received funding for gang control efforts. The authors "reasoned that police organizations might be creating units when the community feels threatened by a minority group." They also concluded that at least some of the gang units "might have been created prior to receiving external funding for the purposes of justifying the need for more resources."

Other investigations have emphasized the role of institutional factors in the formation and persistence of gang units. Katz conducted research into a police

gang unit in a Midwestern city and found that the unit "was created under pressure from influential community stakeholders" (Katz and Webb 2003b). Katz's finding fits previous research that demonstrates that the creation of specialized police units is "offered as a symbolic act to show the community, potential offenders, and police officers that the police department is taking a particular problem seriously (Meyer 1979; Scott 1995)."

This finding was strengthened in subsequent research by Katz and Webb examining police responses to gangs in four Southwestern cities: Albuquerque, New Mexico; Inglewood, California; Las Vegas; and Phoenix (2003b). The authors concluded that the creation of gang units was largely a reaction to "political, public, and media pressure" rather than a response to an objective problem *or* a strategy for securing additional resources or controlling marginalized populations. Katz and Webb report that "much of the data suggested that minority communities played a major role in shaping the nature of the police organizations' responses to gangs."

Their conclusion that public pressure influenced the formation of gang units fit with the findings of Weisel and Painter, who conducted interviews with police gang specialists in five cities and determined that "most police agencies had responded to gang problems because of well-publicized gang homicides and fights. They reported that the police departments in their study typically had responded by establishing specialized units that emphasized suppression" (cited in Katz and Webb 2003b).

What gang units do

It should be no surprise that gang units whose formation was precipitated by external pressures or opportunities rather than a coherent law enforcement strategy would have difficulty establishing a role within the agency. Katz found that "once the gang unit was created it was often required to incorporate competing ideas and beliefs into its organizational structure and operational strategy to communicate an image of operational effectiveness when it otherwise was unable to demonstrate success" (cited in Katz and Webb 2003b).

Katz and Webb found that most gang units gravitated toward intelligence-gathering and enforcement/suppression activities while devoting less attention to investigations and very little to prevention (2003a). The authors' conclusions on the operation of gang units are not encouraging. The majority of the po-

lice departments they studied lacked formal mechanisms to monitor gang unit officers and hold them accountable for job performance.

The gang units tended to engage in "buffet-style policing," accepting only cases that involved high-profile crimes such as homicides, drive-by shootings, and aggravated assaults. Priorities were not set by a well-articulated vision of the unit's mission but instead were determined by a "unique workgroup subculture…that reflected internally shared beliefs about the nature of the local gang problem and the appropriate response to that problem" (2003b). The chief of one police department admitted to the researchers that he had "little understanding of what the gang unit did or how it operated" (2003a).

The absence of strong departmental oversight and the physical separation of gang units from the rest of the police force—three of four units operated from "secret" off-site facilities that were known only to gang unit officers—contributed to a "decoupling [that] led gang unit officers to isolate themselves from the rest of the police organization and from the community and its citizens." Although gang units are supposed to afford an opportunity for officers to develop specialized expertise, the authors found that the officers were poorly trained and had little direct exposure to gang members: an average of just one to three contacts per eight hours worked.

Gang unit officers "rarely sought citizen input" or partnerships with community organizations, according to the researchers: "None of the gang unit officers in any of the study sites appeared to value information that *non*–criminal justice agencies might provide, nor did they recognize potential value in sharing their own information and knowledge with non–criminal justice personnel." Gang units appeared instead to have adopted a Spy vs. Spy worldview that extended to their own departments. Some gang officers professed that "regular precinct stations or police headquarters were subject to penetration by gangs, purportedly rendering intelligence files vulnerable to destruction and manipulation."

Given the isolation of gang units from their departments and their communities, it is not surprising that interview participants "were hard-pressed to offer specific evidence of the units' effectiveness" and "rarely commented on the gang units' impact on the amelioration of local gang problems." Lack of confidence in the gang units' effectiveness was most pronounced on the topic of suppression. The researchers found that "almost no one other than the gang unit

officers themselves seemed to believe that gang unit suppression efforts were effective at reducing the communities' gang problems."

The isolation of gang units from host agencies and their tendency to form tight-knit subcultures—not entirely unlike those of gangs—also contributes to a disturbingly high incidence of corruption and other misconduct. The Los Angeles Police Department's Rampart scandal is only the most famous example of a gang unit gone bad. Katz and Webb cite several other places where police gang units have drawn attention for aggressive tactics and misconduct, including Las Vegas, where two gang unit officers participated in a drive-by shooting of alleged gang members; Chicago, where gang unit officers worked with local gangs to import cocaine from Miami; and Houston, where gang task force officers were found to routinely engage in unauthorized use of confidential informants, warrantless searches, and firing weapons at unarmed citizens.

Katz and Webb conclude by recommending that police departments with gang units take steps to make them more effective, including better integrating gang units into the department's patrol and investigative functions; strengthening managerial controls and accountability; and incorporating community policing strategies. But their research findings also suggest that police officials should reconsider whether gang units are an effective law enforcement tool or a potentially dangerous distraction from the real work at hand.

Neighborhood gang suppression

The 1980s and 1990s saw a significant shift away from prevention and treatment responses to gang activity in favor of suppression (Katz and Webb 2003a). The specific aims of suppression programs differ: some aim to halt potentially lethal behaviors such as gun carrying, while others seek to drive youth out of gangs entirely. But suppression efforts generally share a focus on specific geographies or gangs, and they require the investment of law enforcement resources in stepped-up efforts to monitor gang members.

The purpose of suppression is to reduce gang-related activity by current gang members, and to reduce the number of people who choose to participate in gangs, by providing for swifter, severer, and more certain punishment. The guiding assumption is that, in the words of Malcolm Klein, "the targets of suppression, the gang members and potential gang members, will respond 'rationally' to suppression efforts [and] will weigh the consequences of gang activity, redress the balance between cost and benefit, and withdraw from gang activity" (Katz and Webb 2003a).

The reality of gang suppression is more complicated. Father Greg Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries, argues that gang membership is not a rational choice but rather a desperate response to profound misery (2005). He believes that police attempts to deter gang activity by making life more difficult for gang members miss the fact that youth join gangs because they are already miserable. The research literature on gangs also indicates that suppression efforts can be counterproductive. Such tactics can increase gang cohesion by reinforcing an "us versus them" mentality, and by providing external validation of the gang's importance:

> Gang researchers have noted the potential for gang suppression programs to backfire in the face of group processes that undermine deterrence messages through status enhancement, building cohesion within the gang, and invoking an oppositional culture, all of which lead to increased gang activity (Klein, 1995). A member of the 18th Street gang in Los Angeles makes the same point succinctly: " 'We're not taking it seriously.'…He said that the official attention on the gang—which the police say has up to 20,000 members in Southern California—united members and helped attract recruits. 'Other gangs are getting…into 18th Street,' he said. 'It's growing' " (Lopez and Connell, 1997). (Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane 2003)

Suppression efforts face other challenges as well. Suppression campaigns tend to cast a wide net that catches gang members and nonmembers alike. Stepped-up enforcement of public ordinances and the use of aggressive stop-and-search tactics can increase tensions between law enforcement and community members who feel that police are targeting the wrong people or engaging in racial profiling. Community members may feel less inclined to cooperate with police, making the task of law enforcement even more difficult.

Suppression efforts also require the investment of significant law enforcement resources in activities, like saturation patrolling, that are designed to prevent crime. Such investments may strain the capacity of police to solve crimes elsewhere, or limit the ability of local officials to provide other services that could have a greater long-term impact on crime and violence.

The combination of police-community tensions and high cost can make suppression efforts difficult to sustain. Unless the community has been transformed during the period of active suppression, gang activity is likely to resurface—if it ever went away in the first place—as soon as the police presence diminishes. Finally, suppression efforts may simply displace gang activity from target neighborhoods to surrounding areas.

Suppression is a popular response to perceived gang problems, despite the challenges outlined here and the lack of evidence of either short- or long-term reductions in crime. Suppression-oriented activities can provide a feeling of efficacy to law enforcement officers frustrated by their inability to rein in crime and violence, and they create the public impression that policy makers are "doing something" about crime.

The public discourse on gang enforcement is full of anecdotal accounts that credit suppression efforts with reducing gang crime. The typical scenario begins with a spike in violence or high-profile crime that triggers a "crackdown" on gang activity. If crime begins to fall, officials credit the suppression effort. If crime does not fall, new enforcement efforts are mounted until it does.

As long as suppression campaigns are launched during crime surges, success is virtually assured. The odds of crime falling back toward normal levels after a sharp increase would be good even if the police took no unusual steps. And as long as officials continue to announce new gang initiatives, it is all but certain that one of them will eventually correspond with a drop in crime.

When suppression efforts are subject to more rigorous evaluation, however, researchers often find that celebrated drops in crime are attributable to larger trends, seasonal fluctuations, or chance. Studies of gang suppression programs in three jurisdictions highlight the limitations of suppression tactics as well as weaknesses in the research literature on suppression.

The Anti-Gang Initiative: St. Louis, Dallas, and Detroit

St. Louis, Dallas, and Detroit were among 15 cities that received federal funds for gang suppression under the Anti-Gang Initiative of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. All three efforts centered on targeted patrol operations in limited geographic areas with identified gang crime problems.

St. Louis

Violent crime has long been a problem in St. Louis. During the 1990s, the city's homicide, robbery, and aggravated assault rates were consistently among the top five in the nation (Decker and Curry 2003). Young black men were disproportionately represented among homicide suspects and victims. In 1995 the St. Louis police recorded 52 gang homicides and 1,573 gang-related assaults.

St. Louis police used a $500,000 grant from the Department of Justice to implement a "zero-tolerance" gang suppression program in the College Hill and Fairground Park neighborhoods during 1996 and 1997. The neighborhoods were reported to be the home of five active gangs and 200 gang members. The strategy developed by the police combined aggressive curfew enforcement; the use of consent-to-search tactics to reduce the availability of guns; and the targeting of known gang members by the Gang Intelligence Unit. The activities actually undertaken by officers differed from the plan, however, due to resistance on the part of some police units to assigned tasks.

Scott Decker and David Curry gathered data on Anti-Gang Initiative activities and crime outcomes in St. Louis. The researchers found that the initiative generated a considerable amount of police activity within the target neighborhoods, resulting in 301 pedestrian and traffic stops conducted under the curfew enforcement program and 63 arrests of known gang members conducted under the zero-tolerance program. But many of the activities did not fit within the stated goals of the initiative.

The conflict between the priorities set forth in the initiative and the priorities of the enforcing officers is evident in the curfew enforcement program. Officers were assigned to curfew enforcement and directed to send juveniles they encountered to a "curfew center," but no juveniles were referred to the center on 24 of 31 nights of operation. Police officers were reluctant to enforce the curfew because they "didn't regard curfew enforcement as 'real police work,' and [believed] that it was unlikely to address 'real' gang problems."

A memo generated by the lieutenant in charge of the initiative shows similar resistance to the notion that police should enforce curfews. The lieutenant proposes that officers find ways to use curfew enforcement as an opportunity to do "real" police work: "Once the car is stopped…only time will tell what may be found….While our roll [sic] is curfew enforcement, the manner in which we carry out our

roll [*sic*] is strictly up to us. As you can see…the above-mentioned activities plus the ones you and your officers think up can all be conducted from the Anti-Gang Initiative Curfew Car."

Problems also plagued the gun enforcement component of the Anti-Gang Initiative. The researchers found that the unit charged with gun enforcement "served a record number of warrants in the second half of 1996" and "actively implemented its mandate to sweep target neighborhoods for suspected gang members." But the unit failed to use consent searches and "subverted" the goals of the program, according to the researchers, by using the process as an opportunity to make arrests. During 1996 the Mobile Reserve Unit conducted just 39 consent searches and made arrests in *more than half* of cases. Further, on two occasions, researchers conducting "ride-alongs" noted that Mobile Reserve Unit officers were "unable to identify the target neighborhoods."
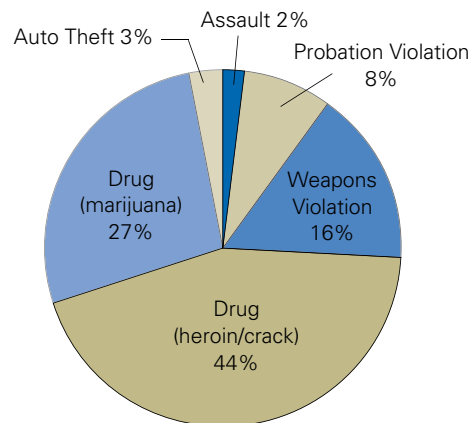
The activities of the Gang Intelligence Unit officers conformed more closely to the "zero-tolerance" strategies set forth under the initiative, perhaps because the officers saw the arrest of known gang members as "real" police work. The unit was responsible for 77 arrests over a 14-month period. Nearly all (91 percent) of the arrestees were African American males, and most (71 percent) of the resulting charges were for drug offenses. Weapons offenses accounted for 16 percent of arrest charges, and violent offenses accounted for just 2 percent. Probation violations (8 percent) and property offenses (3 percent) accounted for the remainder of the arrest charges. The arrests resulted in the seizure of 37 weapons.

The researchers compared the incidence of crime during the 12 months leading up to implementation of the Anti-Gang Initiative to the incidence of crime during the 15 months of program operations. They found no statistically significant changes across nine crime categories in College Hill, and just one statistically significant change in Fairground Park—a drop in unarmed robberies from three per month in the preintervention period to just under two per month during the suppression program. The researchers also examined crime trends in two comparison neighborhoods with similar results. The comparison areas each saw a statistically significant change in just one of nine crime categories—an increase in assaults and an increase in unarmed robberies, respectively.

Decker and Curry conclude that the results were "somewhat discouraging given the targeted suppression focus and high levels of activity in small geographic areas with modest populations." They suggest that the participation of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department in a federally funded initiative put

Figure 7.1. Charges resulting from the St. Louis Anti-Gang Initiative Zero Tolerance Program

Auto Theft 3% — Assault 2% — Probation Violation 8% — Weapons Violation 16% — Drug (heroin/crack) 44% — Drug (marijuana) 27%

Source: Decker and Curry 2003

Table 7.1. Change in crime (gang and nongang) associated with St. Louis Anti-Gang Initiative

Crime category	Target neighborhoods		Control neighborhoods	
	College Hill	Fairground Park	O'Fallon Park	Hyde Park
Murder	NS	NS	NS	NS
Robbery	NS	NS	NS	NS
Robbery—weapon	NS	NS	NS	NS
Robbery—no weapon	NS	-35.7%	NS	+52.6%
Assault	NS	NS	+64.0%	NS
Gun assault	NS	NS	NS	NS
Person crime	NS	NS	NS	NS
Property crime	NS	NS	NS	NS
Index crime	NS	NS	NS	NS

NS Statistically nonsignificant

Source: Decker and Curry 2003

the agency on the map as "an important and capable institution," but that it also "continue[d] the department's isolation from social intervention strategies."

The St. Louis case study starkly illustrates the potential downside of suppression efforts. Officers failed to follow strategies set forth under the initiative because they did not consider the prescribed activities "real" police work. Dozens of targeted arrests and hundreds of police stops failed to yield meaningful crime reductions in the targeted neighborhoods, *even during the period of intense police activity*. Finally, a half-million-dollar federal grant—not to mention untold resources expended by local and state authorities to process and punish individuals targeted under the initiative—failed to generate much more than a few dozen drug arrests.

Dallas

Eric Fritsch, Tory Caeti, and Robert Taylor report contradictory results from their evaluation of a parallel antigang initiative that was mounted in Dallas during 1996 and 1997 (2003). Gang-related violence fell in target areas, but violent crime levels remained stable and the incidence of robbery increased. Target areas achieved larger reductions in gang-related violence than control areas but underperformed the control areas on broader violent crime measures.

The Dallas Police Department reported 79 gangs

and 1,332 gang-related crime incidents in 1996. The Dallas Anti-Gang Initiative set out to reduce violent activity in five target areas by funding aggressive curfew and truancy enforcement, along with saturation patrols. The gangs targeted under the initiative were believed to account for 18 percent of the city's known gang members and for 35 percent of all gang-related violent crime.

Fritsch, Caeti, and Taylor matched the five target areas with four control areas not covered by the initiative and compared changes in monthly reports of gang-related violence. The results were mixed: three of five target areas saw statistically significant reductions in gang-related violence, but so did two of four control areas. The overall incidence of gang-related violence dropped significantly in both target and control areas, although the decline was greater in the target areas (57 percent versus 37 percent). Because reports of gang-related violence were relatively infrequent even before the intervention, the total gang crime reduction in the target areas amounted to 12 fewer incidents per month, compared to a reduction of eight incidents per month in control areas.

The researchers sought to explain the difference in target area outcomes by analyzing the specific activities of police patrols. They found that police patrolling the target areas where gang violence fell significantly had devoted 80 to 90 percent of their overtime hours to curfew or truancy enforcement. Police units in target areas that did not see statistically significant reductions in gang violence, by contrast, had engaged primarily in saturation patrols. The researchers concluded that "saturation patrol to increase police presence only was not effective in decreasing the level of gang violence in these areas."

Fritsch and his colleagues also compared overall crime trends in target and control areas, expecting to find both a drop in reports of violent and property crime and an increase in the number arrests for weapons and drug offenses generated by officers freed from responding to calls for service. The data showed the opposite result: the only statistically significant violent crime trend in the target areas was a 23.8 percent *increase* in the number of reported robberies. The target areas actually *underperformed* the control areas, which saw no significant change in violent crime reports.

Target and control areas performed equally, and poorly, in the area of property crime. Target areas experienced a statistically significant 15.4 percent increase in auto thefts. And control areas saw a statistically significant 11.4 percent rise in other thefts.

Figure 7.2. Statistically significant changes in crime (gang and nongang) associated with Dallas Anti-Gang Initiative
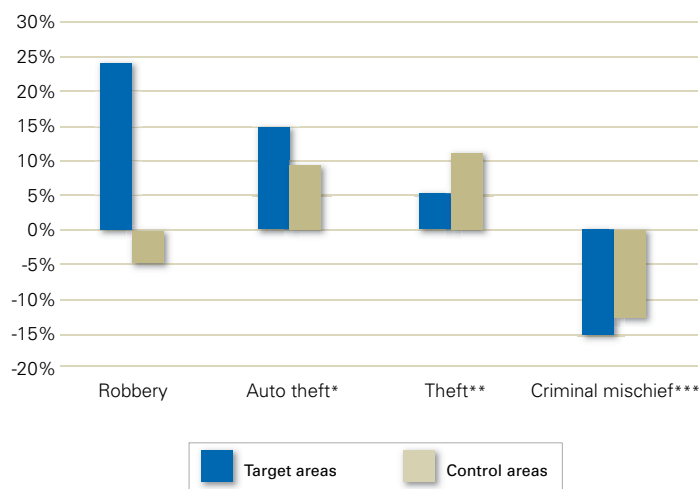
*   Significant in target area only
**   Significant in control area only
*** Significant in both areas

Source: Fritsch, Caeti, and Taylor 2003

The *only* statistically significant crime reduction in the target areas was for criminal mischief. This trend was evident in the control areas as well, which suggests either a citywide drop in "criminal mischief" or a change in charging policies.

Finally, arrests for weapons offenses actually *fell* by a statistically significant 29 percent in the target areas while remaining stable in the control areas—an indication that the initiative may have been *less* effective than policing-as-usual at catching weapons-related activity. The target areas did see a 24 percent jump in drug arrests while control areas saw a much smaller 8.3 percent increase. The changes in drug arrests were not statistically significant and therefore may not be meaningful. But the results fit the pattern seen in St. Louis, where drug charges accounted for the overwhelming majority of arrests made under the "zero-tolerance" gang policing initiative.

There are several potential explanations for the apparently contradictory outcomes of the Dallas Anti-Gang Initiative. First, it is possible that apparent reductions in gang violence were a consequence of changes in the way offenses were reported by the police department rather than a drop in violence. The classification of an offense as "gang-related" can be highly subjective, and the integrity of the classification process can easily be compromised by changes in staffing or reporting procedures. Such problems have led some researchers to warn against the use of law enforcement gang data to track trends or make comparisons between jurisdictions, as discussed in chapter 6.

Second, the apparent contrast between sharp drops in reports of gang violence and the lack of change in overall crime rates could be explained by the fact that gang-related incidents accounted for a small share of violence, even in the target areas. The five areas targeted under the initiative were selected, in part, because they "experienced a large amount of gang violence in the preceding year" (Fritsch, Caeti, and Taylor 2003). But even before the initiative began, reported incidents of gang-related violence represented less than 10 percent of all violent incidents in the target areas.

On a monthly basis, target area residents reported an average of 61 robberies, 92.3 aggravated assaults, and 181.6 simple assaults. Yet the police department recorded an average of just 20.9 incidents of gang-related violence per month. It is possible that the target neighborhoods became less safe despite a real decline in gang-related violence, with the monthly increase in robberies (up 14.5 per month) exceeding the drop in gang-related violence (down 12 per month).

Regardless of whether the results are an artifact of reporting problems or evidence that police in Dallas won the battle with gangs while losing the war on crime, they do not speak well for the effectiveness of gang suppression. Residents of the target neighborhoods experienced *higher* levels of violent crime, including a statistically significant increase in robberies, during the intervention period than during the previous year, while police made significantly *fewer* arrests for weapon offenses. The outcomes suggest that the Dallas Anti-Gang Initiative was, at best, a distraction from the real problem and, at worst, a counterproductive exercise that increased levels of violent crime.

Detroit

Timothy Bynum and Sean Varano examined a third federally funded antigang initiative in Detroit and concluded that the effort contributed to a substantial reduction in violence (2003). But this conclusion appears to have been biased by the selection of the evaluation time frame. A comparison of crime trends over a longer period suggests that violent gun crime trends in the target precincts may have matched or underperformed a comparison district.

Detroit launched its Anti-Gang Initiative in 1997. Police estimates of gang membership were somewhat inconsistent at the time (ranging from a high of 3,500 in 1997 to a low of 800 in 1998), and the department did not track the incidence of gang-related crime. The research team used gun crime as their primary measure of the problem, based on a finding that self-reported gang members were more likely than other arrestees to report carrying guns most or all of the time (13 percent versus 4 percent).[1] More than 12,000 gun-related crimes were

Figure 7.3. Incidence of gun-related crimes in Detroit target and control precincts before, during, and after Anti-Gang Initiative intervention
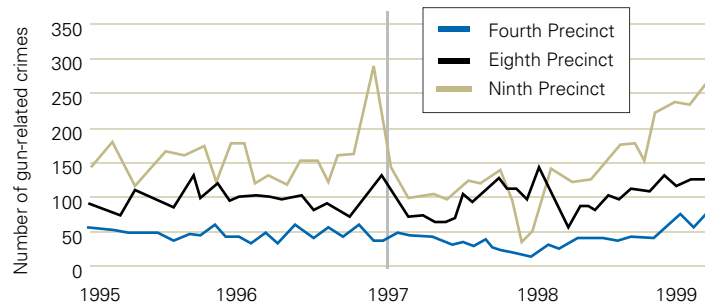
Source: Bynum and Varano 2003

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1 The data on gang membership and gun carrying was collected through Detroit's Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring program.

reported to Detroit police in 1996, including 5,293 aggravated assaults, 4,877 robberies, 1,801 weapon offenses, and 346 murders.

Federal funds provided to Detroit's Anti-Gang Initiative were used to establish the Gang Specialist Unit within the Detroit Police Department's Special Crime Section (SCS). The new unit was staffed by both SCS gang specialists and patrol officers from the targeted precincts. The main activities undertaken by the Gang Specialist Unit were:

- "aggressive enforcement of city ordinances, including curfew and truancy sweeps" in target geographic areas;
- joint police-probation operations targeting gang members for possible violations of probation conditions; and
- regular visits to local schools to speak with school administrators and question people "hanging around" the school perimeter during the school day.

The Wayne County prosecutor's office also assigned a staff person to serve as a liaison to the unit and oversee the prosecution of gang-related crimes.

The research team sought to assess the impact of the initiative by examining arrest patterns in the two target precincts and by comparing gun-related crime trends in the target precincts and a third "control" precinct. Most of the arrests that took place in the target precincts were for disorderly conduct or violations of local ordinances. Drug offenses accounted for 17 percent of arrests, while person and weapon arrests were 9 percent and 7 percent, respectively, of the total.

The research team also compared the monthly incidence of violent crime during the quarter preceding the launch of the operation to the incidence of violent crime a year later. They found that the number of assaults, robberies, burglaries, and gun assaults had fallen drastically, led by a drop in gun assaults of more than two-thirds. The control precinct, by contrast, saw growth in the incidence of assaults and burglaries, along with a more modest drop in robbery reports.

In order to control for the effects of seasonal fluctuations and external variables, Bynum and Varano conducted a time-series analysis of gun-related crime trends. They found that the initiative was associated with a statistically significant reduction in gun-related crime in the Ninth Precinct. Gun crime also fell in the Fourth Precinct, but the decline was nonsignificant—a result that the researchers

attributed to the low incidence of gun crime in the area. The researchers concluded that the Detroit Anti-Gang Initiative had reduced the number of gun-related offenses in the Ninth Precinct by 112 crimes per month, and that it may also have reduced the level of gun-related crime in the Fourth Precinct by eight crimes per month.

These results may say more about the researchers' selection of a time frame for comparison than about the effectiveness of gang suppression efforts in Detroit. The three-month period the researchers selected to measure levels of crime "before" the intervention included a dramatic spike in gun crime in one of the target precincts. Monthly gun-crime reports reached roughly *300 per month* in the Ninth Precinct at the end of 1996 before dropping back to a more typical 150 per month at the beginning of 1997.[2] The selection of a time period that includes such a dramatic crime spike inflates estimates of preintervention crime and all but guarantees that the intervention will "succeed" when crime returns to historic levels.

The three-month period selected to measure postintervention crime levels is similarly problematic. The authors explain that they picked the last quarter of 1997, rather than the end of the intervention period, in order to control for seasonal variations, and because "most of the components had been implemented" by that point. The choice is fortuitous for proponents of the Anti-Gang Initiative since both the Fourth and Ninth Precincts saw gun-related crime hit four-year *lows* during the last quarter of 1997 before beginning to climb back toward preintervention levels. The number of gun-related crime in the "control" precinct, by contrast, hit a four-year *high* at the end of 1997.

The time frame selection problems could be solved by comparing the incidence of crime during the second and third quarters of 1996—a time period that immediately preceded the spike in gun crime—with the incidence of crime during the second and third quarters of 1998, when the intervention ended. The results would look quite different, as is evident from Figure 7.3, depicting gun crimes in the target and control precincts.

Figure 7.3 shows that the incidence of gun-related crime was *higher* in the Ninth Precinct at the end of the intervention period than during mid-1996. By the time the intervention ended, the Ninth Precinct was receiving more than 200 reports of

2 Gun-related crime information is derived from Figure 9.2 Comparisons of Pre- and Postintervention Effects for Target and Control Precincts in Bynum and Varano 2003.

gun-related crimes per month—well above typical preintervention levels.

The incidence of gun-related crime in the Fourth Precinct at the end of the intervention period was a bit below mid-1996 levels. But within three months of the program's end, the number of monthly gun-related crime reports in the Fourth Precinct hit a four-year record *high*. Large investments of money and time in gang suppression clearly did not achieve substantial and lasting reductions in levels of gun crime in Detroit's Fourth and Ninth Precincts—a result that casts further doubt on the notion that aggressive "public order" policing (use of traffic laws and city ordinances to stop and question residents, for example) can deliver community safety.

Suppression remains a popular response to gang violence, despite the failure of such tactics to reduce crime. A recent spike in gun violence led Boston police to launch a series of neighborhood sweeps. Of approximately 1,250 people taken into custody during an eight-month period, only 16 percent were arrested on violent crime charges and just over 4 percent were arrested on gun charges (Smalley 2006). The operations angered community leaders, who alleged that police were targeting the wrong youth. Police officials eventually acknowledged that "the sweeps were not as effective as they had hoped and led primarily to arrests for trespassing, drug possession, and other misdemeanors…. [Some suspects] were taken into custody just on motor vehicle violations."

Gang injunctions

Civil gang injunctions are legal tools that are designed to enhance targeted suppression efforts. The injunctions treat gangs as unincorporated associations whose members can be held responsible by civil courts for creating a public nuisance and enjoined from otherwise lawful behaviors. Enforcement of gang injunctions requires a heavy and sustained police presence, much like other suppression tactics. But injunctions apply only to named (alleged) gang members rather than to all youth who hang out on the street, skip school, or violate city ordinances.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued unsuccessfully to block enforcement of a gang injunction in San Jose, California, in the mid-1990s (Siegel 2003). Individuals named in the original San Jose injunction, or subsequently added to it, were prohibited from "standing, sitting, walking, driving, gathering, or appearing anywhere in public view" with a suspected gang member. Alleged gang mem-

bers were also prohibited from "approaching vehicles, engaging in conversation or otherwise communicating with the occupants of any vehicle." Violation of the injunction could result in arrest, a six-month jail sentence, and a fine of $1,000.

Gang membership is often established based on very loose criteria. In the San Jose case, police admitted that "a person could be labeled a gang member if he or she were seen on just one occasion wearing clothing indicative of gang membership, such as a blue jean jacket, cut-off sweat pants, any clothing associated with the Los Angeles Raiders, or white, blue, gray, black, khaki, or any other 'neutral' colored item."

The use of gang injunctions is most widespread in Southern California, where, Cheryl Maxson, Karen Hennigan, and David Sloane report, "at least 30 gang injunctions were issued" between 1993 and 2000 (2003). More than two-thirds of the injunctions were issued in Los Angeles County. Maxson and her colleagues conducted a survey of Southern California gang officers to gather information on their use of injunctions. Most considered gang injunctions a "last resort" when "a gang is entrenched in a small area or…gang-related violence is so far out of authorities' control that it is worth the resources that are required to obtain and maintain an injunction." One officer described injunctions as a measure that "severely restricts [the] movement of citizens—like martial law."

The restrictions to civil liberties that accompany a gang injunction are justified by a perceived need to save communities from a gang-imposed "state of siege." But community residents often play little or no role in the process. Two-thirds of Southern California law enforcement respondents told the researchers that they "did not feel that community support was crucial" to the success of an injunction. Roughly half "did not suggest that the community played any role at all in the development of injunctions."

Law enforcement and the media report impressive reductions in crime and fear through the use of gang injunctions. Maxson and her colleagues observe that these stories "are often compelling, but are never buttressed with supporting evidence that meets minimal scientific standards of evaluation." A typical gang injunction implemented in Inglewood, California, is "cited as a success in the practitioner literature." But Maxson and Theresa Allen found "little support for a positive effect" when they examined crime patterns before and after the injunction (Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane 2003).

The ACLU Foundation of Southern California examined trends in San Fernando Valley police reporting districts covered by the Blythe Street gang injunction and came to an even more disturbing conclusion. The organization reported that implementation of the injunction was associated with an *increase* in violent crime: "The Blythe Street gang injunction was preceded, and has been followed, by elaborate claims for its effectiveness in cutting crime and making communities safer. According to statistical materials provided by the LAPD, the truth is precisely the opposite" (cited in Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane 2003).

An analysis by Jeffrey Grogger of 14 Los Angeles County injunctions, on the other hand, provides evidence that the injunctions were associated with modest 5 to 10 percent reductions in violent crime. The impact of the injunctions appeared to be "concentrated in reductions in assault, rather than robbery" and did not extend to property crimes (cited in Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane 2003).

Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane also found that a gang injunction in San Bernardino had reduced "the visibility of gang members, gang intimidation, fear of gang confrontation, and fear of crime." But the researchers determined that the injunction had not led to improvements in indicators of "neighborhood efficacy, social cohesion, or informal social control" (Klein and Maxson 2006). The positive effects were limited to areas that were described as "most disordered." Less disordered areas experienced "more gang visibility and property victimization and less belief that the neighborhood could solve its own problems."

Klein and Maxson conclude that changes in residents' experiences and perceptions of their communities brought about through gang injunctions could "evolve into increased collective efficacy and the buttressing of social control via expanded social linkages." In other words, gang injunctions could empower community members and provide breathing room to rebuild community institutions that have been weakened by neglect. But they caution not only that such an outcome would require time and "vigilant attention to ongoing implementation," but also that it "appears unlikely in the face of a lack of investment in the social fabric of communities":

> [The San Bernardino] injunction was largely a one-man show, and that man was the police, employing the new injunction penalties in a suppression operation. To do otherwise would have required law enforcement to engage com-

munity members in a process that promoted social ties, provided a forum for the development of mutual trust or social cohesion among neighbors, and reactivated the mechanisms of informal social control. Admittedly, this is a lot to ask of law enforcement, but community engagement is the sole parameter that distinguishes injunctions as an innovative strategy for improving gang neighborhoods from a run-of-the-mill gang suppression strategy.

Targeting "hard-core" gang members

The "targeting" of selected gang members by the criminal justice system is a second popular response to gang problems. Proponents argue that focusing attention and resources on "hard-core" gang members will deter them from criminal behavior by increasing the certainty and severity of punishment, or prevent them from committing new crimes in the community through incarceration.

The tactics employed to target gang members can include sentencing enhancements, special prosecution units, and stepped-up surveillance by law enforcement and corrections officials. Some jurisdictions focus on a single targeting tactic, while others set up comprehensive programs. A task force initiative launched in Westminster, California, under the acronym TARGET (Tri-Agency Resource Gang Enforcement Team) is a good example of a comprehensive program. The primary components of TARGET were:

(1) Vigorous arrests of identified target subjects;

(2) Effective prosecution and conviction of target subjects;

(3) Vigilant supervision of target subject probationers;

(4) Expanded intelligence and information-sharing between cooperating agencies;

(5) Development and implementation of innovative crime reduction tools.

(Kent and Smith 2001)

Targeting, like suppression, faces a number of challenges. The first and foremost is the difficulty of identifying the right targets. One common approach is to target alleged gang "leaders," but gang researchers largely report that leadership functions are fluid in youth gangs. Many have also found that gang violence is more likely to be initiated by rank-and-file members than by leaders.

A second approach targets so-called "hard-core" gang members who are believed to be responsible for the bulk of gang crime. This task is easier said than done. The majority of youth who join gangs remain involved for periods of a year or less. Their delinquent behavior rises sharply during periods of gang activity and falls thereafter. There is no way to predict how long an individual will remain in a gang, which makes it difficult to distinguish those who continue to pose a risk to public safety from others whose days of serious offending are behind them.

Further, research findings indicate that young gang members with limited criminal records may be responsible for a disproportionate share of serious gang violence. A RAND Corporation research team found that "new baldies"—new gang members intent on proving themselves to older members—were committing much of the violence in the Hollenbeck area of Los Angeles (Tita, Riley, and Greenwood 2003). These individuals are difficult to target successfully because much of the damage is done before they are identified by law enforcement.

The second challenge is to intervene with targeted gang members in ways that do not exacerbate the problem over the long run. The most likely outcome of targeting is the incarceration of gang members in youth detention facilities, jails, or prisons. And there is evidence that these institutions not only weaken the capacity of incarcerated individuals to lead law-abiding lives upon release but also strengthen gang ties. Jeremy Travis has documented the many obstacles to success that face former prisoners when they return to their communities, ranging from difficulty securing housing to a paucity of medical, mental health, and addiction treatment services (2006). A report recently released by the Justice Policy Institute found that the detention of juveniles is associated with a number of negative outcomes, including higher rates of future offending (Holman and Ziedenberg 2006).

Nor does incarceration necessarily suspend gang involvement. Some incarcerated gang members remain active participants in the life of their old gangs, some develop new gang affiliations behind bars, and some do both. Incarcerating the "right" gang members often does little more than postpone the community's day of reckoning until the incarcerated individual returns. And incarcerating the "wrong" individuals risks trapping youth who would otherwise have outgrown gang activity in a life of crime. Decker notes that the "latent consequence [of incarceration] is to

get them together in prison. [Gang members] get out largely unchanged, maybe worse, with more contacts and older" (personal communication).

The research literature on targeting is much weaker than the literature on neighborhood-based suppression efforts. Just three studies were found in the current literature survey, and two of them suffer from serious methodological problems. Neither study of gang task force initiatives could show that the programs examined had actually changed the treatment of targeted individuals in the criminal justice system, much less that the programs had reduced crime.

Gang task forces in San Diego and Westminster, California

San Diego

Jurisdictions United for Drug Gang Enforcement (JUDGE) was formed in California in 1998 as a multi-jurisdictional task force to combat drug trafficking by gang members in San Diego County. Researchers with the San Diego Association of Governments attempted to conduct a process and impact evaluation of the program in the early 1990s and published their results in 1996 (Pennell and Melton 2002).

When the JUDGE program began, San Diego County reported 27 active street gangs with an estimated 2,300 members in an initial grant application. The document described the county's gang problem as follows: "The current situation of gang related narcotics control has created a wave of violence involving several drive-by shootings and homicides. Street gangs have begun to resemble modern organized crime operations in terms of sophistication and tactics." It is worth noting that this diagnosis is at odds with the results of in-depth studies of gang violence in several jurisdictions (including nearby Los Angeles), which found that the role of the drug trade in gang violence has been vastly overstated by law enforcement (see Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl 2001, and Tita, Riley, and Greenwood 2003).

Task force members responded by targeting juvenile gang members who were either on probation for narcotics offenses or known to be involved in drug distribution. Youth were considered to be documented gang members if they met one of five criteria, which ranged from admitted gang membership to having a close association with known gang members. Targeted individuals were subject to:

- intensive supervision by the probation department's Narcotics Task Force;

- special enforcement operations by law enforcement; and

- stepped-up prosecution by the district attorney's office, which committed to "vertical" prosecution, opposing pretrial release, and seeking the most severe possible sentence.

During the first two years of the program, nearly all of the JUDGE targets were black (45 percent) or Hispanic (52 percent); and male (98 percent). The overwhelming majority were between the ages of 14 and 17 when they were targeted, with 16- and 17-year-olds constituting the largest group (56 percent of JUDGE targets). All were identified as gang members, and 96 percent had been convicted or arrested for a drug offense. Just one in five (22 percent) had been arrested for a violent offense.

The research team initially sought to compare recidivism outcomes for JUDGE targets with outcomes for gang members who were not targeted by the program. This approach proved impracticable because too many control group members were eventually targeted. Instead, the researchers compared the criminal records of JUDGE targets before and after they were targeted.

A large majority (83 percent) of JUDGE targets were rearrested in the two years after targeting. Felonies accounted for just 30 percent of new arrests, down from 58 percent in the two years before targeting. Probation violations accounted for 37 percent of new arrests, up from 10 percent in the earlier period.

The researchers determined that under the program, JUDGE targets were assigned a greater number of probation conditions, ranging from drug-testing requirements to prohibitions on riding in vehicles with other juveniles. The average number of probation

violation arrests per youth jumped more than three-fold, from 0.3 to 1.0, while the average number of felony and misdemeanor arrests fell from 3.7 to 2.0.

The research team also found that JUDGE targets "spent a considerable amount of time behind bars during their JUDGE tenure." Two in five spent a year or more in a juvenile hall or other local institution, while another 25 percent spent six months to a year in custody. But the absence of a suitable control group made it impossible for the team to determine whether the JUDGE targets spent more time behind bars as a result of the program than they would have without the program. The researchers note that the harsher treatment youth received after being targeted could have been the result of longer exposure to the criminal justice system and the advancing age of the targets rather than an effect of the program.

Concerns about youth gang violence were put forward as part of the initial rationale for the program. But the arrest data do not indicate that the program reduced violent behavior. The number of JUDGE targets arrested for violent felonies was identical before and after targeting (62 in each period).

In 1995, four years after the initial evaluation period, the research team reviewed updated files on the 279 JUDGE targets. They found that new court cases had been filed against two in three (64 percent) targets, with an average of three cases per person. This finding suggested to the researchers that "many JUDGE targets remained involved in criminal activity and that the task force had appropriately focused on isolating a small segment of offenders who appear particularly crime-prone, monitoring their behavior closely, and applying sanctions swiftly and with certainty."

Yet swift and certain application of sanctions apparently failed to deter the large majority of JUDGE targets from committing further crimes. The researchers acknowledge that the program might have done more harm than good: "[The long-term recidivism] finding is difficult to interpret because not enough is known about this group of offenders to determine whether they are particularly crime-prone or the extent to which an enforcement approach actually contributes to reoffending because it does not address other issues such as drug treatment, education, and employment."

The notion that JUDGE may have *increased* recidivism among targeted youth is supported by research findings on the dangers of juvenile detention. If the program did meet goals to "resist the release of defen-

Figure 7.4. San Diego JUDGE targets arrested before and after targeting
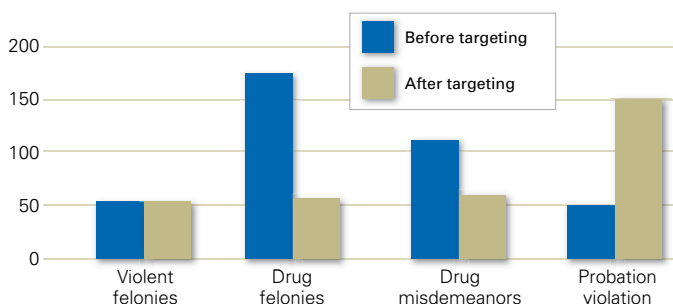
Source: Pennell and Melton 2002

dants from custody before the trial or hearing" and "ensure that the most severe possible sentenced is imposed," it may have increased the likelihood that targeted youth would be detained and made them more, rather than less, prone to crime.

A recent literature survey on the impact of incarcerating youth in detention and other secure facilities found that first incarceration experiences make youth more likely to commit new crimes. Research on youth committed to state facilities in Arkansas found that prior incarceration was a stronger predictor of future recidivism than gang membership, carrying a weapon, or a poor parental relationship (Benda and Tollett 1999).

Such targeting efforts also run the risk of devoting a greater and greater share of resources to detecting and imposing sanctions on less and less serious criminal conduct. This is a particular risk with juvenile gang members, who may go through periods of heightened offending followed by sharp drops in delinquent behavior that are associated with maturation and the weakening of gang ties.

The majority of youth targeted by JUDGE had already passed the age of peak gang participation (15 years old) by the time they were identified by the program, and most became adults during the two-year follow-up period. It is possible that many who came to the attention of San Diego law enforcement during periods of heightened offending continue to be targeted and punished for minor delinquent behavior despite posing little risk to public safety. There is some evidence to support this view: before targeting, half of arrests involved felony charges and just over half (52 percent) of youth were held in custody at arrest. After targeting, the proportion of felony arrests fell to just 30 percent while the proportion of youth held in custody at arrest rose to more than two in three (68 percent).

Westminster

Criminal justice officials in Westminster, California, adopted a similar approach to reducing gang crime. The Tri-Agency Resource Gang Enforcement Team (TARGET) was launched in 1992 as a collaborative effort of the Westminster Police Department, the Orange County district attorney's office, and the county probation department to identify "repeat gang offenders" and remove them from the community.

A team of researchers examined program results and declared TARGET a successful model that should be considered for replication (Kent et al. 2000). But a closer analysis reveals that the researchers failed to gather enough information to determine whether the program had any impact at all on the target population.

On its face, TARGET appears to have achieved remarkable results. The number of reported gang crimes dropped sharply in the first year of the program—from nearly 30 per month at the beginning of 1992 to fewer than 15 per month at the end of the year—and remained below preintervention levels for the entire evaluation period. By the end of 1997, the researchers found a 47 percent cumulative reduction in gang crime.

The drop in gang crime that took place during the first year of the program coincided with a nearly fivefold jump in the number of target subjects in custody, appearing to confirm the hypothesis that removing "repeat gang offenders" from the community was an effective crime-control strategy. The researchers also examined overall crime trends and determined that gang crime had fallen more rapidly than nongang crime during the first year of the program, lending support to the notion that the drop in gang crime was due to the intervention rather than part of a larger decline in crime.

Finally, the research team found that violent crime rates fell further in Westminster than in two comparison communities during the intervention period. The researchers conclude based on these findings that the program was successful in reducing gang violence and that it should be considered for replication.

There are serious flaws, however, in the TARGET evaluation design that undermine the research findings. The researchers argue that an experimental research design, which compares outcomes for a "treatment" group and a nontreatment control group, is neither practical nor desirable in the context of gang enforcement.

They instead employ a "logic model" research design that tracks variables related to the program's ultimate goals and intermediate variables related to how the program proposes to achieve its goal. If both sets of variables move in the expected direction, and if the evaluation can demonstrate a positive relationship between them, then the program is deemed a success.

The TARGET evaluators selected the number of targeted "repeat gang offenders" in custody as their intermediate variable and the number of monthly gang-related crimes as their final outcome variable. Their logic model proposes that the TARGET program will increase the likelihood that "repeat gang

offenders" will end up in custody and that incapacitating more "repeat gang offenders" will reduce levels of gang crime.

But the research team never provides evidence that the intervention increased the time targeted individuals spent behind bars. Gang members with prior criminal convictions would have been strong candidates for detention and incarceration under any circumstances. The relevant measure of the program's effect is not how many of the targets end up in custody, but how many *more* are placed into custody as a result of the intervention. Unfortunately, without a control group or a baseline, it is impossible to assess the program's impact on the disposition of target cases.

Nor can the research team demonstrate that more people who met the "repeat gang offender" profile were in custody during the intervention period than before the intervention because they track only the custody status of the targets and not the larger pool of "repeat gang offenders." Their data show that roughly 40 targets were added to custody at the end of the first program year.

But the researchers fail to examine how many previously detained or incarcerated "repeat gang offenders" were released back to Westminster during the same year.[3] In order to prove the logic model, the researchers would have to change their measure from the number of *targets* in custody to the total number of "repeat gang offenders" in custody *including* those who were detained or incarcerated before the program began.

There are also problems with the researchers' use of gang crime as a primary measure of the project's success, since the police department did not track gang crime before the program began. The researchers produced a retrospective count of gang crime during the preintervention period using 12 months of police data. These data show a sharp spike in gang-related crime immediately preceding the intervention.

Without more than a year's worth of data, it is impossible to know whether the change that took place during the intervention period represented a real change or merely a return to normal levels of gang crime following a temporary surge. As the researchers note, "because baseline observations are limited

to 12 months, and because the baseline trend is not stable, interpretation of the gang crime pattern is subject to plausible alternative explanation."

Gang prosecution units in Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada

An evaluation of the use of gang prosecution units in Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada, bolsters the suspicion that programs setting out to "target gang offenders" may have little concrete effect. Terance Miethe and Richard McCorkle found that gang members prosecuted by specialized gang units were no more likely to be convicted or imprisoned than defendants whose cases were handled by prosecutors in traditional "track" units (2002).

The Clark County district attorney's office, which serves the Las Vegas metropolitan area, established a gang prosecution unit in 1991. State lawmakers had recently enacted a series of penalty enhancements for crimes that were considered gang-related, including a statute that doubled penalties for felonies committed to further gang activity. Three full-time deputy district attorneys screened and prosecuted felony complaints involving gang members. The unit worked closely with the Special Enforcement Detail of the Las Vegas Police Department and attempted to enhance communication between law enforcement and other agencies concerned with gang activity.

Three years later, the Washoe County district attorney's office, which serves Reno, launched a Dangerous Youth Offender prosecution team to handle gang and nongang cases involving youth who were "considered a threat to the community." The team "rapidly became a specialized gang unit after the number of gang-related offenses in Reno rose from 77 to 193 in the last 6 months of 1994." The unit's goals were to "rigorously prosecute the minority of gang members who commit serious crimes" and to provide "community alternatives for at-risk youths who are just marginally involved in gang activity."

Both the Clark and Washoe County gang prosecution units employed vertical prosecution "whereby the same attorney follows a case through successive stages of criminal processing." Vertical prosecution is often promoted as a more effective means for handling gang cases than horizontal prosecutions because it permits prosecutors to become more familiar with the details of a case and address gang-specific concerns (the possibility of witness intimidation, for example).

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3 The researchers can no more determine whether the total population of "repeat gang offenders" in custody has increased or decreased than a new clerk can tell whether the number of hotel guests has increased or decreased based solely on how many people he or she checked in and how long they stay.

Miethe and McCorkle found no evidence that consolidating gang-related cases in the gang unit resulted in more successful prosecutions or tougher penalties than the traditional process. Defendants prosecuted by gang units were more likely to be imprisoned than defendants whose cases went to track units, and they also received longer prison terms. But these differences were entirely attributable to factors such as prior record, age, and the number of charges. There were "no statistically significant differences between gang units and track units in the likelihood of conviction and imprisonment upon conviction" after controlling for relevant variables.

The establishment of Clark County's gang prosecution unit also failed to increase the conviction rate for gang members, which remained stable before and after the change. The researchers concluded that "gang prosecution units do not enhance the success of criminal processing beyond that provided by other nongang prosecution units." These results reinforce a point that should be obvious: gang members who commit serious crimes and have extensive criminal records are likely to receive harsh penalties whether or not they have been "targeted" by a task force or special prosecution unit.

Gang sentencing enhancements in California and Nevada

California's Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention (STEP) Act

In 1993 California enacted a far-reaching piece of legislation designed to heighten penalties for gang crime. The Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act has two relevant provisions. One makes "knowing participation and willful furtherance of felonious conduct by members of a criminal street gang" a separate crime. The other creates a sentencing enhancement that applies to "any felony or misdemeanor committed for the benefit of a criminal street gang" (Jackson 2004). The penalties under the second provision are severe: an extra two to four years of imprisonment for "garden-variety" felonies, five years for "serious" felonies, 10 years for violent felonies, and life terms for crimes such as carjacking and committing drive-by shootings.

Proving the elements of the second enhancement provision is simple. The prosecutor must show that the defendant is a member of—or that his or her actions benefit—a group of three or more people with a common sign or symbol, and that two or more of the group's members have been convicted of or adju-

dicated for one of 25 designated crimes.[4] And as Los Angeles County deputy district attorney Alan Jackson notes, "*the prosecutor does not even have to prove that the defendant is a member of the gang*, as long as his conduct promotes or benefits the gang" (emphasis added).

State policy makers have never evaluated the effectiveness of the STEP Act, but a glance at the daily news from Los Angeles indicates that the statute has done little or nothing to resolve the city's gang problems.

Nevada's gang sentencing enhancements

Several years before STEP took effect, Nevada's legislature enacted an even tougher set of gang penalties and sentencing enhancements. The lawmakers were spurred on by a series of high-profile gang crimes and dire statements by law enforcement officials about the growing gang menace. A subsequent analysis determined that gang members were responsible for a small share of the crime problem: just 6 percent of violent crime charges and 5 percent of drug trafficking charges were filed against known gang members (Miethe and McCorkle 2002).

Miethe and McCorkle examined the use of Nevada's antigang statutes and found that the charges were comparatively rare (2002). An enhancement doubling the length of confinement for crimes committed to promote the activities of a criminal gang was charged 263 times in Clark County and 24 times in Washoe County over a four-year period, resulting in just 41 convictions. A statute prohibiting the discharge of a firearm from a motor vehicle (i.e., a drive-by shooting) was charged 199 times in Clark County and 26 times in Washoe County over a six-year period, resulting in a total of 23 convictions. The authors note that many of the drive-by shooting charges were multiple counts filed against the same defendant for a single criminal incident.

Prosecutors and judges argued that the enhancements played an important role in plea bargaining, but the researchers could find no evidence of such an effect. Conviction rates did not change in gang cases after enactment of the enhancement statute. Nor did the enhancements appear to affect the use of other felony charges in cases involving gang members.

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4 The three offenses required to prove the STEP enhancement—
the current offense and the two predicate offenses committed by
members of the gang that "benefits" from the current offense—
must have taken place within three years of one another, which
means that neither the time between the first and second
predicate offense nor the time between the second predicate
offense and the current offense can exceed three years.

"Balanced" approaches to gang enforcement

Public officials who recognize the failure of traditional suppression and targeting efforts to reduce gang violence have sought to develop more "balanced" models of gang enforcement. The two best-known models for balanced gang enforcement are Operation Ceasefire, an initiative launched in Boston to reduce youth gun violence, and the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model, which was developed by researcher Irving Spergel in Chicago.

Both models require law enforcement and other key institutions to change how they work with one another, and how they respond to gang problems. Each aims to:

- "Balance" suppression and other enforcement activities with efforts to provide services, supports, and opportunities to both gang-involved youth and gang problem communities.

- Specify the role of law enforcement by delineating which tactics support the overall initiative and which should be avoided because they could be counterproductive.

- Engage a broader group of stakeholders—including schools, social service providers, and grassroots community groups—in the development of gang policy.

- Collaborate with researchers on the design, implementation, and evaluation of the initiative.

- Keep the focus on reducing gang *violence* rather than mounting a fruitless effort to eliminate gangs or gang crime.

The Ceasefire and Spergel models appear to have achieved notable successes in their pilot phase, but the results of replication efforts have been much less promising. Replications of the Ceasefire model in Los Angeles and Indianapolis produced no evidence that efforts to "retail" a deterrence message—communicating the message directly to targeted individuals—had changed the behavior of gang members, casting doubt on a central premise of the Ceasefire model. Meanwhile, replications of the Spergel model in five cities produced mixed results, with just two sites reporting reductions in participants' violent behavior that approached statistical significance.

There are several possible explanations for the failure of the replication efforts to achieve the desired results. The results of the Ceasefire replication efforts strongly suggest flaws in the theory behind "retailing deterrence." It is equally possible, however, that the models work, but only under a narrow set of circumstances. The Ceasefire and Spergel model replication efforts both attempted to transplant successful initiatives to cities with very different demographics, geographies, and gang problems.

Finally, the fundamental problem may be that the models require unrealistic changes in the behavior of the institutions charged with implementation. Results from several of the replication efforts suggest that law enforcement agencies may be unwilling to abandon "real" police work in favor of activities that produce fewer arrests, or to share power with community groups. On the other hand, the replication efforts demonstrate that most of the community stakeholders lack the resources necessary to become real partners in collaborative gang control efforts.

The Ceasefire model: "Pulling levers" and "retailing deterrence"

Boston

Killings rose dramatically in Boston at the end of the 1980s, peaking at 152 homicides in 1990. Roughly half of homicide victims that year were under the age of 25. The incidence of such youth homicides fell sharply between 1990 and 1991 but remained substantially above 1980s levels throughout the early 1990s (Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl 2001).

City officials, law enforcement, and community allies launched a number of initiatives in response to the surge in violence committed both by and against youth. Police and probation officers conducted joint patrols as part of the well-publicized Operation Night Light. The police department began to collaborate with the Ten Point Coalition, a group of black clergy formed after a gang attack on mourners at a funeral. But none of the measures implemented prior to Operation Ceasefire appeared to significantly affect youth violence.

In 1994 Boston police commissioner Paul Evans invited Harvard University researchers Anthony Braga, David Kennedy, and Anne Piehl to examine the problem of youth homicide and design an intervention. The research team conducted a review of homicides involving youth offenders and victims. They found that a majority of cases (60 percent or more) were gang-related, but that the cases did not fit the stereotype of gang violence motivated by "drug trafficking or other 'business' interests." Instead, the researchers concluded that youth homicides had been driven up

by chronic "beefs" between gangs, as well as spiraling fear of violence that led more youth to carry and use handguns.

The research results were presented to a working group made up of researchers and frontline staff from key law enforcement and social service agencies. The working group concluded that the best way to reduce the number of youth homicides was to begin persuading gang members to break the cycle of retaliatory violence. The group believed that this aim could be accomplished through an exercise in focused deterrence that provided strong incentives for aggrieved gang members not to retaliate. They proposed:

- Targeting gangs engaged in violent behavior.
- Reaching out directly to members of the targeted gangs.
- Delivering an explicit message that violence would not be tolerated.
- Backing up that message by "pulling every lever" legally available (i.e., applying appropriate sanctions from a varied menu of possible law enforcement actions) when violence occurred. (Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl 2001)

At the same time, social service agencies, probation and parole officers, and community groups (including churches) were to offer gang members services and opportunities that might provide a viable alternative to gang life. The hope was that a combination of "sticks," "carrots," and efforts to get the word out about the new initiative could create a "firebreak" that would allow fear and violence to reach a new, lower equilibrium point. The strategy was dubbed Operation Ceasefire.

The Operation Ceasefire approach was inspired by a 1994 police effort to reduce gun violence among members of the Wendover Street gang. The street was quiet by the time the operations ended, and gang members were reportedly "walking up to [the Youth Violence Strike Force's] Warren Street headquarters with paper bags full of guns and dropping them off."

Officers credited the success of the operation to a combination of focused attention and "honesty." They pulled every legal lever at their disposal to disrupt the gang and make its members uncomfortable. But they also told the gang members how to make it stop: end the violence and hand over the illegal guns. " 'We're here because of the shooting,' the authorities had said. 'We're not going to leave until it stops. And until it does, nobody is going to so much as jaywalk, nor make any money, nor have any fun.' "

The tactics employed in the Wendover Street action and adopted by Operation Ceasefire are largely familiar: saturation patrols, home visits by police and probation officers, enforcement of local ordinances, and so on. But the strategy of trading zero-tolerance fantasies of eradicating gangs, drugs, and low-level criminality for leverage over youth violence was a radical departure from law enforcement orthodoxy:

> Operation Ceasefire's Working Group understood that law enforcement agencies do not have the capacity to "eliminate" all gangs or powerfully respond to all gang offending in gang-troubled jurisdictions. Pledges to do so, although common, are simply not credible. (Braga et al. 2001)

The researchers argue that the strategy entailed not a "deal …[to] win gangs the freedom to deal drugs or commit other crimes" if they refrained from violence but rather a "promise" to bring the weight of the justice system down on gangs whose members engaged in gun violence (Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl 2001). Yet the strategy was premised on the belief that youth gang members would rather "make money" (read "sell drugs") and "have fun" (read "engage in low-level delinquency") than spend all of their time fighting with the police.

Most gang enforcement initiatives view the existence of gangs and the persistence of gang crime as the problem. The architects of Boston's Operation Ceasefire saw an opportunity to use the gang structure as a means for transmitting their message, and they saw nonviolent delinquency as a source of leverage for addressing the real problem of youth violence. Their strategy aimed to turn "gang offenders' behaviors against themselves, taking advantage of the vulnerabilities created by their chronic misbehavior and turning them into a violence prevention tool." And it sought to use the same group dynamics that contributed to the rise in violence to constrain gang members, if not for themselves then for the sake of the gang.

The research team conducted a time-series analysis of crime trends before and after the first lever-pulling meeting and concluded that the intervention was associated with statistically significant reductions in youth and gun violence (Braga et al. 2001). These reductions included a 63 percent decrease in youth homicides; a 32 percent reduction in shots-fired calls; and a 25 percent drop in gun assaults. A comparison of violent crime patterns in 39 major U.S. cities and 29 major New England cities showed that the

crime reduction could not be explained by national or regional trends, although a large number of cities also experienced a "sudden, significant reduction in youth homicides" during the 1990s.[5]

These results should be interpreted with caution because they are based on a relatively small number of incidents and occurred during a time when violence was trending down. Richard Rosenfeld, Robert Fornango, and Eric Baumer conducted their own analysis of the numbers, comparing Boston's reduction in youth homicides to trends in other cities (2005). Rosenfeld and his colleagues integrated homicide data for the nation's 95 largest cities into a statistical model that incorporated other explanatory variables, including measures of economic disadvantage, population density, policing levels, and incarceration rates. They report that Boston appeared to outperform the average, but that the difference did not reach the level of statistical significance:

> After adjusting the changes for the effects of the covariates, Boston's youth firearm homicide rate fell an estimated 30% per year during the intervention period [while] the [95-city] average rate fell by 16%. Although the estimated decline in Boston's rate was nearly double that of the sample average in the conditional model, the difference is not statistically significant.… The lack of statistical significance reflects Boston's low youth firearm homicide counts during the intervention period (ranging from 21 in 1996 to 10 in 1999).

The failure of replications of the Ceasefire model in Los Angeles and Indianapolis to achieve comparable results provides further cause for caution. Evaluations of these efforts cast doubt on the effectiveness of retailing deterrence and suggest that the model may work under a very narrow set of circumstances, if it works at all.

Los Angeles

The RAND Corporation led an effort to determine whether elements of the Boston model could be used to address gang violence in Los Angeles (Tita, Riley, and Greenwood 2003). A team of researchers began collaborating with law enforcement and community groups in early 1999, with support from the National Institute of Justice, to identify places in Los Angeles County where an intervention might have the great-

est impact. The working group eventually settled on Hollenbeck, an area with entrenched gangs and high levels of youth violence despite relatively low overall crime rates.

Law enforcement and community sources attributed the violence to the narcotics trade, which was said to be "the underlying cause of nearly every violent act involving a gang member." The research team's analysis of homicide data found, however, that the killings had very little to do with drug activity. A drug motive was present in just one in five homicides committed by gang members and fewer than one in ten homicides defined by investigators as "gang-motivated." Further, the motives in drug-related gang homicides typically related to disputes between business partners, or the attempted robbery of drug sellers, rather than to struggles to control drug markets.

Gang homicides in Hollenbeck were being driven instead by gang rivalries. The researchers described the typical killing as one in which a gang member "drives up or walks up to a youth from a rival neighborhood and asks the question, 'Where are you from?' " The research team mapped the social networks of 37 Hollenbeck street gangs and identified the Boyle Heights community as a place where a coordinated intervention might break a relatively self-contained cycle of retaliatory violence.

The working group found it difficult to identify levers for changing the behavior of targeted members of the four most active gangs. Few of those identified by law enforcement as "shot-callers" or "shooters" had probation or parole conditions that could serve as a source of leverage. More than 70 gang members had outstanding warrants—many for nonviolent offenses—but personnel were not available to serve them in a coordinated fashion. Finally, a disproportionate number of violent crimes were committed by "new baldies"—a term for recently initiated gang members who "act brazenly or outside the control of the more established gang members in an effort to gain the respect of their older peers." The "new baldies" were less likely not only to consider the consequences of their actions, but also to be subject to probation conditions or outstanding warrants.

The limited capacity of Operation Ceasefire to generate individualized responses to outbreaks of gang violence forced the initiative to rely heavily on the use of police patrols in the territory of gangs whose members were responsible for violent incidents. The Boyle Heights community was concerned by the possibility that Operation Ceasefire would be another heavy-

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5 The authors report that Dallas, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and Tucson all reported sharp drops in youth homicides during the period.

handed exercise in gang suppression. Community leaders insisted that pulling levers should be paired with violence prevention programming and other services designed to support the efforts of gang members and their families to break the cycle of gang violence.

But events overtook the development of the community's capacity to provide gang prevention and intervention services. An escalation in violence between the Mob Crew and Cuatro Flats gangs culminated in a walk-by shooting that left a gang member and a 10-year-old girl dead. The police increased patrols in the five reporting districts that encompassed the two gangs' territory and the site of the homicide, and placed two officers on mounted patrol. Additional officers were deployed from specialized units including Metro Unit (home of the SWAT team) and the Special Enforcement Unit and Traffic Bureau working out of the Operations Central Bureau.

Police and probation officers visited the residences of more than 30 members of both gangs over the next three months, making eight arrests. The city deployed health and child welfare agency staff to inspect the properties where gang members gathered. Speed bumps were installed in the area of the homicide, and a nearby alley was fenced off. A $5,000 reward was posted for information related to recent violent incidents between the two gangs. Operation Ceasefire was up and running without the ability to offer carrots alongside the enforcement sticks.

Before the intervention, police and community groups collaborated in efforts to retail the message that violence would no longer be tolerated in Boyle Heights. They promised to meet each incident of gang violence in the neighborhood by pulling levers on members of the offending groups, while offering services to those who were willing to refrain from violence. Once the operation was launched, however, "the working group members did not constantly reprioritize and reallocate resources after each violent incident, but rather focused almost exclusively on the two gangs involved in the triggering incident." Other shootings took place in the week following the walk-by killings, for example, but the incidents did not produce a similar response from Operation Ceasefire.

The RAND research team conducted an extensive analysis of crime patterns to determine whether the intervention had reduced violent, gang, or gun crime in the six months following the triggering incident. The researchers set up three comparisons to test whether the intervention had generated greater reductions in crime than would have taken place in its absence:

- Boyle Heights versus the remainder of Hollenbeck;
- the five police reporting districts where the bulk of the enforcement actions were taken versus the remainder of Boyle Heights; and
- the target census blocks versus a matched set of census blocks in Boyle Heights.

The first comparison was designed to test the effectiveness of efforts to retail the message throughout Boyle Heights. The second and third were designed to measure the effect of the police suppression and follow-up deterrence efforts. The results of the analysis are mixed at best. Violence declined in Boyle Heights and the rest of Hollenbeck at exactly the same rate—a 28 percent reduction between the six months that preceded the intervention and the six months that followed—indicating that the intervention had no effect on the neighborhood as a whole. The target areas saw modest reductions in violence compared to the rest of Boyle Heights and large gains compared to the matched comparison blocks, which suggests a localized impact.

Gang and gun crime reports dropped much more

Table 7.2. Findings of RAND analysis of Los Angeles Operation Ceasefire intervention effects

Crime type	Boyle Heights vs. rest of Hollenbeck	Target districts vs. rest of Boyle Heights	Target blocks vs. matched blocks
Violent	None	Positive	Positive
Gang	Positive	Mixed	None
Gun	Positive	None	None

Source: Tita et al. 2003

Figure 7.5. Hollenbeck Area Crimes involving TMC or Cuatro Flats Gang Members Before and After Operation Ceasefire
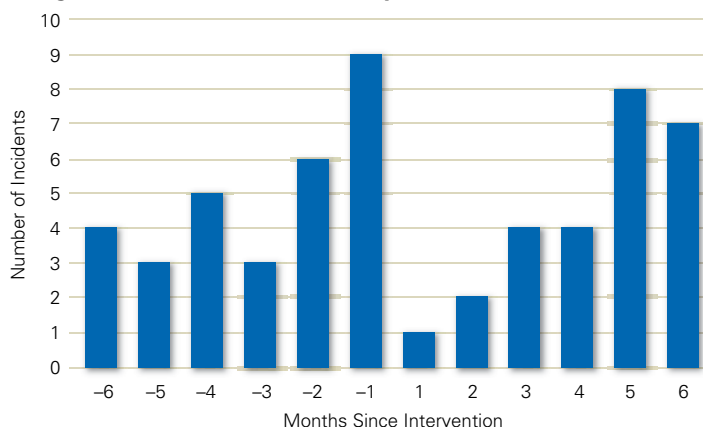
Source: Tita et al. 2003.

quickly in Boyle Heights than in the rest of Hollenbeck during both the four-month "suppression" period and the two-month "deterrence" period of the intervention. The apparent effect vanishes, however, in the target areas, where patterns of gang and gun crime did not differ significantly from those of either the rest of Boyle Heights or the matched comparison blocks.

The researchers reported that the target districts outperformed the rest of the neighborhood in reducing gang crime during the suppression period of the intervention. Yet the *net* drop in gang crime between the pre- and post-intervention periods was *smaller* in the target reporting districts (19 percent) than in the rest of Boyle Heights (45 percent).

A comparison of violent, gang, and gun crime trends during the suppression and deterrence phases of the project also produced inconsistent results, particularly with regard to gang crime. The researchers found statistically significant reductions in gang crime *only during the deterrence phase* in the interneighborhood comparison; *only during the suppression phase* in the first intraneighborhood comparison; and *not at all* in the second intraneighborhood comparison.

There are several ways to interpret such varied results, but the most compelling interpretation is that the intervention simply did not work. An analysis of crimes involving the Mob Crew and Cuatro Flats gang members in the pre- and postintervention period provides a clearer picture. The number of incidents spiked immediately before the intervention began, dropped sharply in the first month of suppression activities, and climbed steadily thereafter. By the fifth and sixth months of the operation (the deterrence period), crime committed by members of the targeted gangs exceeded preintervention levels. If the intervention worked at all, it did not work for long.

The RAND report authors conclude that efforts to retail the message had "no discernible effect on crime in the immediate aftermath of implementation or during the suppression period." They have a more positive evaluation of law enforcement activities in the target areas, noting that four of six violent and gang crime comparisons showed "reductions of crime in these areas during the suppression period to be significantly greater than in the comparison areas."

There are several reasons to question the meaning and significance of these conclusions. First, it is possible that the drop in violence following the trigger incident was nothing more than an example of regression to the mean—a built-in tendency of numbers to trend from high and low points back toward average levels. Sudden drops in gang violence are common and may have no more to do with law enforcement activity than the surges that preceded them. Second, there are methodological problems with the use of gang crime as a measure, since gang crime statistics are sensitive to changes in law enforcement practice.

Third, the findings are based on a small number of incidents: an average of just 25 violent crimes, nine gun crimes, and five to six gang crimes per month in the targeted areas during the preintervention period. The targeted areas saw a drop in violence that was 13 percent greater than the drop in the rest of Boyle Heights (37 percent versus 24 percent), and 31 percent greater than the matched comparison blocks (34 percent versus 3 percent). This means that the intervention might have averted between three and eight violent crimes per month. A larger *number* of violent incidents were averted in the *nontargeted* sections of Boyle Heights, where the monthly average fell from 67 in the preintervention period to 51 in the postintervention period.

At best, Operation Ceasefire can lay claim to a modest, localized, and temporary reduction in gang violence, a program effect that was too small to affect violent crime rates in Boyle Heights and too insubstantial to persist after police scaled back suppression activities. At worst, Operation Ceasefire did nothing more than dump law enforcement resources on a neighborhood *after* violence had peaked and then claim credit for an inevitable return to normal—if unacceptable—levels of violence. In either case, the fears of local residents were realized: the initiative became yet another suppression-heavy, "Band-Aid" response to entrenched gang violence.

The latter point is particularly important. Despite the best intentions of the plan's architects, Los Angeles' Operation Ceasefire was unable to balance law enforcement suppression with opportunities for gang members seeking a new life or supports for residents who wanted to rebuild their community. The RAND research team concluded that a resource imbalance between law enforcement and community groups made this outcome all but inevitable:

> Thus the stick side of the intervention, when it finally developed, had a lot of power and force behind it. This is not the case with our community partners. Although equally committed to the goals of the project, they have far less flexibility in terms of resources committed to the project, and less experience in mounting a

coordinated ongoing effort with other agencies. *We suspect that the carrot side of these interventions will always lag far behind the stick side in spite of the best intentions that it not do so, unless some extraordinary efforts are made to provide the community-based organizations with additional resources and the kinds of training that can help them become much more effective partners.* (Tita, Riley, and Greenwood 2003, emphasis added)

Indianapolis

Indianapolis experienced a rise in homicides during the late 1990s. The number of murders, which had fluctuated from 60 to 90 per year during most of the 1980s, rose steadily and peaked at 157 in 1997 (McGarrell and Chermak 2003). Conventional wisdom held that the violence was produced by the late arrival of crack cocaine to Indianapolis, although researchers Edmund McGarrell and Steven Chermak note that the proportion of arrestees testing positive for cocaine peaked three years earlier.

City leaders began to search for possible solutions to the homicide epidemic and quickly seized on Boston's Operation Ceasefire. A multiagency working group, the Indiana Violence Reduction Partnership (IVRP), was formed with the participation of corrections; the courts; and local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

The group began its investigation with a review of 1997 homicide cases and determined that a majority of cases involved drugs (52.7 percent); that many suspects were young (median age 23); and that most suspects belonged to groups of "known, chronic offenders" (58.9 percent). Use of the term "known, chronic offenders" reflected "the lack of a consensual definition of a gang and the reality that much gang activity in Indianapolis is of relatively loose structure." McGarrell and Chermak observe that many groups of known, chronic offenders "have names and colors, but their membership is fluid and many are not territorial."

The working group's conclusion that drugs were involved in half of homicides is at odds with the findings from Boston and elsewhere that drug motives and efforts to control drug markets play a minor role in gang-related killings. The difference may reflect particular local circumstances. It may also result from the use of an extraordinarily broad definition of "drug-involved," which included not only homicides with drug motives but also any homicide involving a known drug user or drug seller.

The working group settled on two strategies for reducing homicide levels: first, to increase "the arrest, prosecution, and incarceration of the most violent offenders" through a program with the ominous name of VIPER (Violence Impact Enhanced Response); and second, to engage in "lever pulling" with high-risk individuals by persuading them that they faced serious criminal sanctions and offering them "legitimate opportunities and services." The latter strategy, inspired by Boston's Operation Ceasefire, generated a series of meetings launched in late 1998 in which 220 probationers and parolees received presentations from law enforcement officials about the legal consequences for violent crime and presentations from community representatives to express their concerns about elevated levels of violence.

The plan called for "regular responses to homicides involving groups or gangs, chronic hot-spot locations, and/or drug markets" in the form of "directed police patrol, narcotics enforcement, warrant service, and similar enforcement efforts." McGarrell and Chermak report that these responses took place "fairly regularly" in 1999 and "much less frequently" during 2000. The meetings and responses were organized by neighborhood but not, as in Boston, by gang. IVRP also launched a public ad campaign in 2000 that was "designed to communicate the dangers of violent crime as well as advertise the punishments available to the criminal justice system when offenders commit violent crimes" (McGarrell and Chermak 2004).

The research team used several measures to gauge the effectiveness of the IVRP and VIPER initiatives. First, the researchers tracked homicide and other vio-

Figure 7.6. Proportion of Indianapolis arrestees who perceived the chances of being sanctioned for a crime as "good" or "very good"
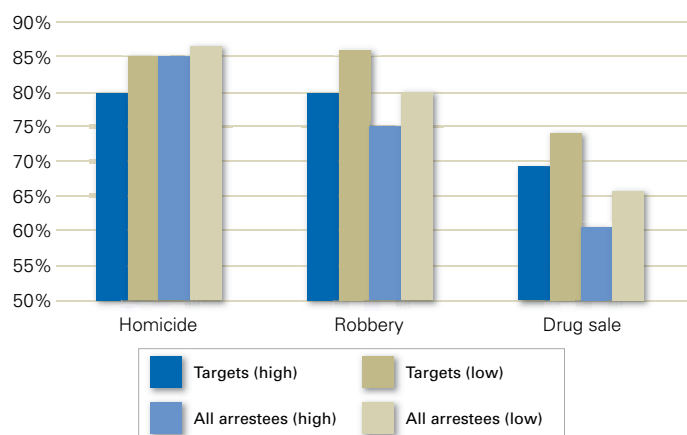
Source: McGarrell and Chermak 2004.

lent crime trends to determine whether the intervention was associated with a reduction in killings. They report that homicide levels remained high in Indianapolis "from the beginning of the project in 1998 through early 1999." The pattern changed around the time of a crackdown on a major drug-dealing organization. The April 1999 bust was the result of a separate long-term investigation and not the efforts of IVRP, but the working group nonetheless used the publicity surrounding the operation in their efforts to retail the deterrence message.

The arrests of 16 alleged Brightwood Gang members were associated with a decline in homicides from 149 in the prior 12 months to 101 in the following 12 months. The researchers conducted time-series analyses of violent crime trends and concluded that the timing of the Brightwood arrests correlated to statistically significant reductions in both citywide homicides and incidents of serious violence in Brightwood.

The research team's statistical models explained 22 percent of the variation in monthly citywide homicide totals and show an estimated 42 percent drop in homicide levels at the time of the intervention. The models also explained between 5 and 17 percent of the variance in armed robbery and gun assaults within the Brightwood neighborhood, producing an estimated reduction in serious violence of two to three offenses per month. The models showed no statistically significant effect of the Brightwood arrests on the citywide incidence of armed robbery and gun assaults.

Second, McGarrell and Chermak measured arrestees' perceptions of law enforcement efforts by adding questions about various program components to the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) survey, which is given quarterly to a random sample of arrestees. Arrestees reported low awareness of both initiatives: between 3 and 10 percent had heard of IVRP and 8 to 17 percent knew of VIPER. One in five was familiar with the lever-pulling meetings in the first wave of interviews, although the ratio fell to one in 11 by the end of 2001. More arrestees reported knowledge of probation contacts and sweeps (roughly a third) and police stops (over half).

Awareness of program components did not increase with successive waves of interviews, although it did spike during the second quarter of 1999, when the Brightwood arrests took place. Lever-pulling meeting attendees demonstrated greater familiarity with the initiatives and probation activities than other arrestees but were slightly less likely than their counterparts to report knowledge of police stops. One in

five meeting attendees was familiar with IVRP (20.5 percent), and just over a third knew of VIPER (35.9 percent). Surprisingly, just three in four lever-pulling meeting attendees (74.4 percent) reported that they had heard of the lever-pulling meetings.

A large majority of arrestees reported having seen television commercials (77.1 percent), billboards (63.7 percent), or bus signs (62.9 percent) sponsored by the initiative after the ad campaign was launched in January 2001. But the significance of this finding is undermined by the fact that most arrestees from the previous wave of interviews *thought* that they had seen IVRP television commercials (56.9 percent), billboards (51.4 percent), or bus signs (41.1 percent) *before* the campaign was launched. The false-positive responses to questions about a media campaign that did not yet exist indicate that the popular culture may already be so saturated with tough-on-crime messages that the impact of new messages is marginal.

Meeting attendees were more likely than other arrestees to report that their chances of being arrested, charged, convicted, or imprisoned for a robbery or drug sale were "good" or "very good." The researchers considered this finding "evidence that the direct communication of the lever-pulling message to probationers and parolees had some effect" (2003). The fact that the respondents had just been arrested, however, suggests that the effect was not the intended one. The meeting attendees appear to have continued to engage in criminal conduct even after "getting the message"—an indication that there may be serious flaws in the theory of retailing deterrence or its application in Indianapolis.

Meeting attendees also appear to have received the wrong message. The Boston Operation Ceasefire and IVRP initiatives were purportedly designed to deliver the message that *homicides* would trigger a robust law enforcement response. Yet the IVRP meeting participants were slightly *less* likely than other arrestees to believe that the chances of being sanctioned for homicide were "good" or "very good."

Meeting participants rated their chances of being sanctioned for a homicide (80 to 85 percent "good" or "very good") *the same* as their chances of being sanctioned for a robbery (80 to 87 percent "good" or "very good"), and *not much higher* than their chances of being sanctioned for a drug sale (69 to 74 percent "good" or "very good"). Other arrestees, by contrast, had a more accurate picture of the response of the justice system to various crimes. They perceived the

chances of being sanctioned as "good" or "very good" 85 to 87 percent of the time for a homicide; 75 to 80 percent of the time for a robbery; and 60 to 66 percent of the time for a drug sale.

Perhaps meeting attendees were simply more likely than other arrestees to have been arrested for a robbery or a drug sale, raising their perceptions of the likelihood of sanctions for those crimes. But it is also possible that the intended message, "We're coming after you if the killings don't stop," was heard simply as "We're coming after you." The latter message may be music to the ears of police, but it violates a core principle of the Ceasefire model that law enforcement responses focus on—and be directly tied to—lethal and potentially lethal violence. In place of a laser focus on homicide, IVRP communicated a deterrence message about everything *but* homicide.

Third, the research team attempted to assess the impact of the lever-pulling meetings by comparing attendees' behavior to that of other probationers convicted of similar offenses. This effort was hampered by difficulty in finding a suitable comparison sample and reaching the target probationers, many of whom failed to show up for appointments or had moved without providing a forwarding address. But the researchers were ultimately able to collect surveys from 69 meeting participants and criminal record information for the whole group. And they were able to identify a control group that matched the attendee group in terms of gender, age, marital status, and education (but not race or income).

The researchers found that the meeting attendees surveyed were not only more likely than control group members to have heard of the IVRP program elements, but also "more likely in *every case* to believe more strongly in the effectiveness of the strategies for deterring crime" (emphasis in original). But the meeting participants were just as likely as their counterparts to commit new offenses.

Close to half (44.6 percent) of meeting participants were arrested while they were on probation for the current offense, and nearly a third (31.3 percent) were arrested after attending a lever-pulling meeting. Control group members were rearrested on probation at a slightly lower rate (36 percent). None of the differences between meeting participants and control group members on measures of criminality (arrests, convictions, sentences to probation or incarceration) were statistically significant. As the researchers observe:

It seems that the offenders who attended the

meetings were slightly more likely to be aware of the initiatives of the Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership and to believe in their effectiveness. Unfortunately, their corresponding behavior does not reflect a change in their willingness to change their offending habits. Similarly, most attendees understood and remembered at least one of the lever-pulling messages though, again, their behavior did not correspond to the lever-pulling message.

A comparison of attendees' and control group members' perceptions of the likelihood of criminal justice sanctions produced results that were nearly identical to those generated by the ADAM surveys. Lever-pulling meeting participants were more likely than control group members to rate their chances of being sanctioned for a robbery or drug sale as "good" or "very good," but there were no meaningful differences when it came to homicide—further evidence that IVRP targets got the reverse of the intended message.

Finally, IVRP appears to have failed miserably in its efforts to link meeting participants with services and opportunities that could draw them away from a life of crime. Less than a third (29 percent) of meeting participants reported getting a job or employment training. Less than a quarter (23.2 percent) said that they were "hanging out with different friends." And fewer than 15 percent of attendees had started school, entered substance abuse treatment, or begun going to church regularly. Worse, these figures may exaggerate the successes of meeting attendees because they include only those who could be located and persuaded to complete a survey.

Control group members were far more likely to report positive changes in their lives over the previous six months. Close to half (44.9 percent) got jobs or training; two in five (40.4 percent) had begun treatment and/or were hanging out with a different crowd (42.9 percent); and a quarter had enrolled in an education program (29.6 percent) and/or started going to church (24.4 percent). The only area in which control group members reported worse results than meeting attendees was missed meetings with probation officers: one in five control group members reported missing a meeting compared to one in 10 attendees.

Limitations in the research design make it impossible to draw strong conclusions from the differences between outcomes for attendees and control group members. But the results do suggest that the meetings did little or nothing to connect at-risk individuals with opportunities and services.

The murder rate fell sharply in Indianapolis during the time when an initiative based on the Boston model was active. McGarrell and Chermak provide some evidence that an operation unrelated to the Ceasefire replication could have contributed to the reduction in violence. The arrest of 16 Brightwood Gang members may have helped to facilitate a return to more normal levels of serious violence in the Brightwood neighborhood, and more normal levels of homicide throughout Indianapolis.

But the evidence collected by the research team strongly indicates that the drop had nothing to do with activities undertaken by IVRP. Probationers who participated in lever-pulling meetings were as likely as their counterparts to commit new crimes. They were no more likely to anticipate that committing a homicide would result in criminal justice sanctions. And they were much *less* likely than control group members to report recent positive life changes. Finally, there is no reason to believe that the Brightwood arrests had an impact on other forms of serious or gun violence outside the Brightwood neighborhood, or that IVRP had any impact on crime whatsoever.

There are two likely explanations for the failure of lever-pulling and deterrence-"retailing" strategies to change the behavior of probationers in Indianapolis. The first is that the strategies simply do not work, and that the sharp reduction of homicides in Boston is attributable to other law enforcement activities or unrelated factors.

The second possibility is that the lever pulling and message retailing worked in Boston due to a unique set of circumstances that were not present in India-

napolis. The Boston working group built its strategy around youth and young adults in small, highly territorial gangs that were involved in long-standing disputes with local rivals. The strategy gave the gang members an incentive to constrain lethal violence in order to avoid law enforcement interference with activities that were more pleasurable ("hanging out") or lucrative (drug sales). Indianapolis authorities had to contend with youth gangs and groups that were more fluid and less territorial, making it more difficult to exert leverage over any one group.

Two important lessons can be drawn from the Indianapolis and Los Angeles Ceasefire replication efforts. The first is that there is no such thing as a "balanced" approach to gang enforcement. The structural imbalance in power and resources between law enforcement and community groups ensures that suppression tactics will never be matched with an adequate level of services and supports. The continuing imbalance also ensures that community stakeholders will have little role in decision making. At the end of the day, the police will do what they think best, and residents will have no choice but to hope that it works.

The scale of the imbalance is evident from the evaluations of the Indianapolis and Los Angeles initiatives. Providing services and building community were clearly afterthoughts in Indianapolis, where the researchers failed to present an adequate measure of the supports provided to targeted probationers. The RAND research team made a much more concerted effort to engage community stakeholders and support their efforts. But Tita and his colleagues provided no concrete evidence of changes in the availability of critical services to gang members and their families. Further, the researchers concluded that such changes were unlikely to take place without a major infusion of resources.

The failure of Ceasefire replication efforts to demonstrate any gains in the provision of services to gang members or gang communities should not come as a complete surprise. The architects of Ceasefire incorporated carrots in their model but failed to report on how availability of services changed as a result of the program. Nor did Kennedy and his colleagues demonstrate a relationship between provision of services and the reduction in violence. The Ceasefire model pays lip service to a balance between sticks and carrots, but the program is really about using sticks to enforce compliance—and not about growing carrots.

The imbalance between law enforcement and social service responses to gang problems is not unique to

Figure 7.7. Changes in lives of Indianapolis "lever-pulling" meeting attendees and control group members
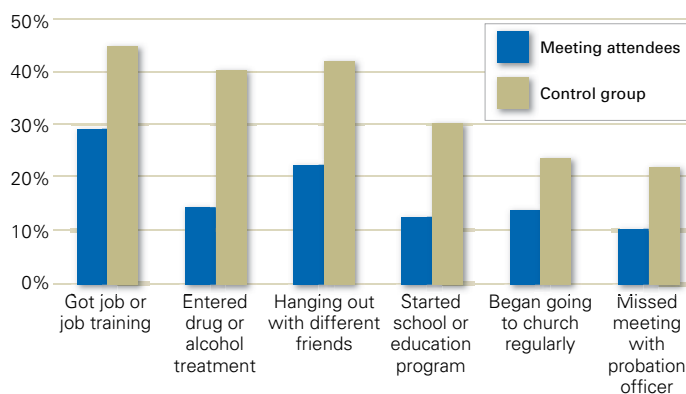
Source: McGarrell and Chermak 2004

Ceasefire but is structural. As Decker observes:

> Give police money and they are ready to go tomorrow. But it takes six months to get an after-school program. Go to agencies that do intervention with active gang members, and those take six to nine months to roll out. We can get suppression out on the street tomorrow but other resources take longer to pull together. (Personal communication)

The second lesson is that lever pulling and deterrence retailing work under narrow and specific circumstances, if they work at all. Efforts to sell the deterrence message had no impact on violence in Boyle Heights, nor did they affect the behavior of probationers in Indianapolis. The Indianapolis lever-pulling meetings did leave an impression on participants, but it was not the intended one. These results may indicate that lever pulling and deterrence retailing never worked. Or the results may show that the strategies work only with small, territorial youth gangs whose members would rather sell drugs with minimal interference than fight with the police.

This is not to say that a coordinated law enforcement and community effort to target youth violence could not establish a "firebreak" that would allow violence to reach a new and lower equilibrium point. It is also conceivable that a single police operation against a criminal group (the Brightwood bust, for example) could facilitate a return to more normal levels of violence by changing the dynamic of conflict in a city.

Instead, we would argue that such successes are impossible to replicate because they depend on too many factors that are not only unknown but also beyond the control of policy makers. Criminologists know little about what produces drastic changes in murder and violent crime rates. They can produce models that attempt to measure the effect of an intervention after the fact but have been unable to develop a model that successfully predicts future spikes in violence.

The Comprehensive Gang Program Model

The Comprehensive Gang Program Model (also known as the "Spergel model" for its architect, Irving Spergel) is designed to provide both social controls and supports to gang members and youth at high risk of gang membership. The model was developed in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood during the early and mid-1990s and replicated in five cities with support from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). It requires extensive collaboration between law enforcement, schools, social service agencies, and community organizations.

The Little Village pilot program provided direct services to gang youth who were "active in carrying out or planning violent activity," along with other youth considered at risk for gang involvement (Spergel, Wa, and Villareal Sosa 2006). Police and probation officers and youth workers were the frontline staff:

> The youth workers emphasized individual youth and family counseling, referrals for jobs, and social services. Police and probation officers carried out their traditional law enforcement and supervision activities, targeting many of the same youth as the outreach youth workers and also referring target youth (and youth to be targeted) back to the youth workers for services. Youth workers clarified information about serious gang assaults, aiding project police to determine who were, and were not, offenders.

The research team tracked the behavior of program participants as well as the incidence of crime in the target neighborhood. Participation in the program was associated with a statistically significant reduction in serious violent crime arrests among older youth (ages 17 and up), although the differences were not significant among 14- to 16-year-old youth. The researchers also found a significant reduction in arrests for gang-motivated aggravated battery and assault at the neighborhood level. A higher rate of worker contacts was associated with reductions in violent behavior.

Drug arrests and gang involvement also declined among program youth, although the research team found no significant effect on the larger neighborhood. Program youth experienced fewer drug arrests in the program period than in the preprogram period, even though the number of gang-related drug arrests in the neighborhood rose by 1,000 percent. Program youth were more likely than their counterparts outside the program to reduce their gang activity; youth who received successful job placements or who were reenrolled in school showed the greatest reductions.

The organizers had difficulty institutionalizing the model in Chicago despite these accomplishments. The Chicago Police Department "chose not to integrate the project into its regular operations or its community policing program …[because according to police officials] the department's primary mission

was suppression not community organization or social work." But OJJDP picked up the model and funded replication efforts at five sites: Mesa, Arizona; Riverside, California; Bloomington-Normal, Illinois; San Antonio, Texas; and Tucson, Arizona.

The results of the replication efforts were mixed at best. No site fully implemented the model, and most of the projects did not reduce arrests at either the individual youth or the neighborhood level. None of the sites achieved statistically significant reductions in arrests for violent offenses among program youth compared to nonprogram youth, although Mesa and Riverside both reported decreases that were marginally significant.[6] Program youth increased their gang involvement at three sites (Mesa, Bloomington-Normal, and Tucson), while gang involvement remained unchanged in the remaining two sites. The effect of the program on arrests did not vary by level of gang involvement: gang members, gang "associates," and nongang youth were equally likely to benefit (or not) from their participation in the program.

Target neighborhoods in Mesa and Riverside saw greater reductions in violent crime and drug crime arrests than comparison areas, but no significant changes in gang membership. Bloomington-Normal and San Antonio target neighborhoods experienced larger *increases* in overall and violent crime arrests than comparison areas, despite significant decreases in reported gang membership.

The largest effect found by the researchers across all six sites was not a program effect but regression to the mean. Arrests of youth with the greatest number of arrests during the preprogram period were likely to decline to more typical levels during the program period. The converse was true of youth with the smallest number of arrests in the preprogram period, who tended to be arrested more often in the program period. Age also had a significant effect on arrests. The oldest group of youth (age 19 and up) saw arrests decline in the program period, while the youngest group (16 and under) saw arrests rise.

The researchers collected extensive information covering not only program outcomes but also the nature of the specific services provided. They concluded that the comprehensive gang program model was poorly implemented in Bloomington-Normal, San Antonio, and Tucson. Implementation problems at these sites ranged from lack of commitment on the part of the lead agency to difficulty engaging the criminal justice system to an overemphasis on suppression.

The research team found that implementing the model in San Antonio was a low priority for both the police department, which served as the lead agency, and neighborhood residents (Spergel, Wa, and Sosa 2005a). Bloomington-Normal law enforcement used the project as an opportunity to "mount an aggressive, no-nonsense campaign to repress African-American gangs" but solicited little input from grassroots groups (Spergel, Wa, and Sosa 2005b). Tucson's program failed to involve a broad range of stakeholders and failed to develop education and employment opportunities (Spergel, Wa, and Sosa 2005c).

The researchers' evaluation of implementation efforts in Riverside and Mesa was more positive, but both projects rated poorly on scales of grassroots involvement and received only "fair" marks for provision of educational, employment, and cultural opportunities (Spergel, Wa, and Sosa 2005d, e). Malcolm Klein and Cheryl Maxson argue that in its attempt to be comprehensive, the Spergel model may inadvertently have made implementation impossible: "The very complex process is both the source of the Spergel Model's strength *and* a prescription for inadequate implementation. Every opportunity to bring about an effective component is at the same time an opportunity for things to go wrong" (2006).

The results of the Comprehensive Gang Program replications broadly correspond to those of the Los Angeles and Indianapolis Ceasefire replication efforts. In neither case could the replication site reproduce the positive outcomes attained at the pilot site. Both cases highlight the difficulty (if not the impossibility) of achieving a balance between criminal justice agencies and suppression tactics on the one hand, and community stakeholders and services on the other. Finally, each case highlights the challenge of transplanting model programs to places with different gang problems and political cultures.

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6 The researchers define a "marginal decrease" as a difference between program and comparison group outcomes where the P value falls between .06 and .15 (i.e., a 6 to 15 percent chance that the program had no effect on the outcomes).

Real Solutions to Youth Violence: Evidence-Based Practices

First, we must address the personal, family, and community factors that cause young people to choose gangs over more productive alternatives. The more success we have in prevention, the fewer people we'll have to prosecute for violent activity down the road.

—U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL ALBERTO R. GONZALES, 2006

Although there is no clear solution for preventing youth from joining gangs and participating in gang-sanctioned violence, there are evidence-based practices that work with at-risk and delinquent youth, the same youth who often join gangs. Whether these programs work with gang members depends more on the individual youth than on whether he or she belongs to a gang.

Evidence-based practices are practices that have undergone rigorous experimental design, have shown significant deterrent effects on violence and serious delinquency, have been replicated, and sustain their effects over a period of time. For example, an intervention like multisystemic therapy (MST) provides intensive services, counseling, and training to young people, their families, and the larger network of people engaged in young people's lives through schools and the community. MST has been shown to produce positive results for youth and their families, including improved mental health and substance use outcomes, reduced recidivism, and improved educational performance. While the United States surgeon general has named only three "model" programs for treating violent or seriously delinquent youth—multisystemic therapy, functional family therapy, and multidimensional treatment foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001)—policy makers continue to fund and use hundreds of programs that either have not been adequately evaluated or have been evaluated and found to be ineffective or even harmful (Greenwood 2006). Peter Greenwood, former director of the RAND Corporation's Criminal Justice Program

and author of *Changing Lives: Delinquency Prevention as Crime-Control Policy*, warns that "delays in adopting proven programs will only cause additional victimization of citizens and unnecessarily compromise the future of additional youth" (Greenwood 2006).

Studies have shown that evidence-based practices that work with violent and seriously delinquent youth are more cost effective and produce more benefits than traditional punitive measures. A recent study by the Washington State Institute of Public Policy reported lower recidivism rates and higher monetary benefits to taxpayers and crime victims when these "model" programs were administered instead of detention or unproven alternatives (Aos, Miller, and Drake 2006). Furthermore, a meta-analysis of juvenile intervention practices found that these evidence-based programs were more effective when they were implemented in community settings than when they were used in custodial settings (Lipsey and Wilson 1998). A report by the surgeon general found that "the most effective programs, on average, reduce the rate of subsequent offending by nearly half (46 percent), compared to controls, whereas the least effective programs actually increase the rate of subsequent offending by 18 percent, compared to controls" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001).

This reduction in recidivism leads to substantial monetary benefits to taxpayers (and emotional benefits to those who avoid being crime victims) equal to thousands of dollars per participant (Aos, Miller, and Drake 2006). Spending just one dollar on evidence-based programs can yield up to fifteen dollars in benefits to society, whereas more punitive approaches like detention and juvenile boot camps yield less than two dollars in benefits. Utilizing these programs for at-risk and seriously delinquent youth, including gang members, can substantially increase public safety while saving money.

Given the very high cost that citizens appear to associate with any victimization in their community, it would be foolish to put money into a crime-prevention effort that did not maximize the size of the crime-prevention effect.

—PETER GREENWOOD

Public opinion on the issue of rehabilitation versus incarceration for youthful offenders is mixed, but recent polls indicate that people are more willing to pay for rehabilitation programs than for longer prison sentences when the programs are proven to reduce crime. A 2006 poll of 1,500 Pennsylvania residents found that, given the option of using tax dollars for either rehabilitation or incarceration of young people in conflict with the law, the average person was willing to pay 21 percent more of his or her tax money for rehabilitation programs for delinquent youth than for increasing a young person's length of incarceration (Nagin et al. 2006). Another recent poll of 1,300 U.S. households found that the average household would be willing to spend between $100 and $150 per year "for crime prevention programs that reduced specific crimes by 10 percent in their communities, with the amount increasing with crime seriousness" (e.g., robberies versus murders) (Cohen et al. 2004).

The finding that taxpayers are willing to pay for prevention and rehabilitation programs is in contrast to the belief popular among politicians that their constituents are demanding more punitive responses to criminal activity. One reason this view persists is that much of society is still unaware of the effectiveness of rehabilitation alternatives for delinquent

youth (Greenwood 2006). Once the success of these programs is better publicized, lawmakers and politicians may be more willing to give them a chance, as some have already done. For example, the Pennsylvania Commission to Address Gun Violence recommended in its 2005 report that the state continue to implement "evidence-based programs to address violence, which, in turn, impacts gun violence, and encourage the selection of those programs proven to be cost-effective."
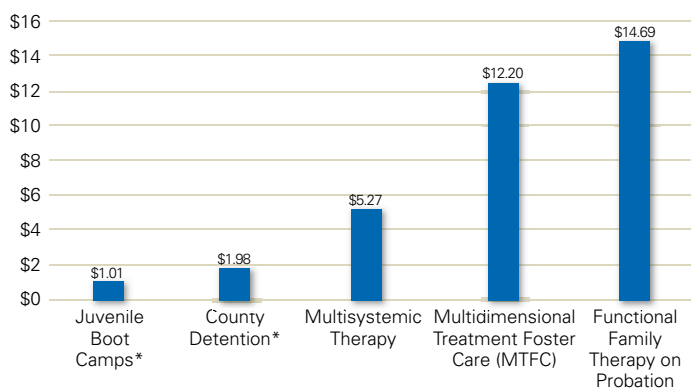
In 1996 the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) at the University of Colorado at Boulder designed and launched a national violence prevention initiative to identify effective violence prevention programs. The project, called *Blueprints for Violence Prevention*, has identified 11 prevention and intervention programs that meet a strict scientific standard of program effectiveness and have been effective in reducing adolescent violent crime, aggression, delinquency, and substance abuse. Soon after *Blueprints'* initiation, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) became an active supporter of the project and provided funding to sponsor program replications in sites across the United States. When *Blueprints* was first published in 1998, functional family therapy had been evaluated 14 separate times and has since been replicated at hundreds of sites across the country; multisystemic therapy has been replicated in more than 80 sites and evaluated in four randomized trials; and multidimensional treatment foster care has been evaluated in four trials and now has been replicated dozens of times across the country, with plans for more program sites in the works (Greenwood 2006; TFC Consultants undated).

Over the past decade, criminal-justice agencies were provided with ample opportunities and funding to develop prevention programs through the federal Office of Justice Programs and the COPS program established by the 1994 crime bill. Very few of the programs attempted have been identified as promising, and not one is considered proven.

—PETER GREENWOOD (EMPHASIS ADDED)

The Bureau of Justice Assistance noted in its evaluation of gang programs that traditional law enforcement efforts are in the long run not effective at addressing gang violence and that "most stand-alone gang prevention, intervention and suppression programs in the community that have generated positive results have generally produced modest and/or short-term impacts" (Bureau of Justice Assistance

Figure 8.1. For every dollar spent on Functional Family Therapy, there are almost $15 worth of benefits to taxpayers and victims of crime. In comparison, placing juveniles in county detention provides less than $2 in benefits.

Program	Value
Juvenile Boot Camps*	$1.01
County Detention*	$1.98
Multisystemic Therapy	$5.27
Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC)	$12.20
Functional Family Therapy on Probation	$14.69

*County Detention and Juvenile Boot Camp numbers were calculated in 2002, the most recent year available.   Sources: Aos, Miller, and Drake 2006, and Aos 2002

website). Greenwood warns that one entity should not share the responsibility of both prevention and punitive activities, which blurs the boundaries between them; one may start to overrun the other, rendering both ineffective.

Primary responsibility for developing and operating delinquency-prevention programs should be assigned to an appropriate agency in HHS [health and human services] unless immediate public protection is an overriding concern.

—PETER GREENWOOD

One of the reasons criminal justice programs are ineffective is the primary focus of law enforcement on immediate solutions to threats to public safety rather than long-term solutions to underlying problems. In contrast, health and human services (HHS) agencies focus on the long-term goals of educating and training individuals to learn how to deal with their own lives with their well-being in mind. Greenwood notes that "the primary capabilities of [HHS] agencies lie in assessing and prioritizing individual risks and needs, and ensuring that those plans are carried out to the extent permitted by available resources."

HHS staff members are better equipped to handle delinquency problems, as is evidenced by their track record of outperforming law enforcement staff at some of the same programs while also better monitoring the outcomes, despite chronic underfunding for these services. There are several prevention and intervention programs run in residential settings that are similar to those used in the community, but they have not been shown to render the same results. Treatment in residential settings may include milieu therapy, which utilizes the entire environment to be therapeutic, and programs such as individual counseling and social casework. These programs have been found to be ineffective, for many reasons, when they are implemented in residential settings; one of the most prevalent reasons is that the programs are run in an artificial setting, making it hard for the young people to apply the skills they learned in the program when they return to the community (Greenwood 2006). Community-based versions of these programs, such as multisystemic therapy and functional

family therapy, which are run by HHS agencies, dig deeper into the social and everyday issues that young people face, and they work on problem-solving skills that are more applicable to life in the community. These programs have been critically evaluated and proven to work with at-risk and delinquent young people—in contrast to similar programs in residential settings that have not been evaluated.

"Criminal justice agencies," Greenwood writes, "rarely evaluate the effectiveness of their programs or activities, while HHS programs are more often evidence-based and subject to evaluation." In other words, law enforcement programs have not been and cannot be evaluated in the same manner as evidence-based programs provided through HHS, so there is no evidence in support of their effectiveness at preventing and deterring crime. Therefore, funding should be reallocated from the criminal justice system to proven programs through HHS, in order to get the maximum benefits.

Additionally, providing education and employment services has been shown to correlate with lower crime rates. According to the OJJDP, "If, as research has found, educational failure leads to unemployment (or underemployment), and if educational failure and unemployment are related to law-violating behavior, then patterns of educational failure over time and within specific groups may help to explain patterns of delinquent behavior" (Snyder and Sickmund 2006). Providing education and employment services for at-risk youth to increase graduation rates, as well as wages and employment rates, could greatly reduce crime, benefiting both young people and society as a whole (Raphael and Winter-Ebmer 2001; Grogger 1998; Lochner and Moretti 2004).

As the evidence that punitive responses to youth crime do not effectively increase public safety mounts, lawmakers and law enforcement should support implementation of evidence-based practices to treat young people who are in conflict with the law. Furthermore, policy makers must realize that funding for such programs should be routed through the health and human services system, where they have been proven to be more effective than in the criminal justice system, and implement such policies accordingly.

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JUDITH GREENE is a criminal justice policy analyst and a founding partner in Justice Strategies. Over the past decade she has received a Soros Senior Justice Fellowship from the Open Society Institute, served as a research associate for the RAND Corporation, as a seniorresearch fellow at the University of Minnesota Law School, and as director of the State-Centered Program for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. From 1985 to 1993 she was Director of Court Programs at the Vera Institute of Justice.

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