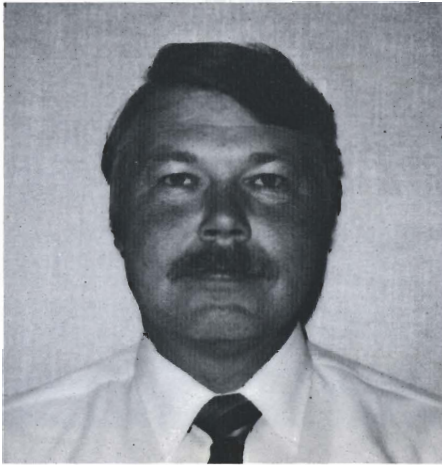


STREET GANGS — A SPECIALIZED LAW ENFORCEMENT PROBLEM —

A LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSPECTIVE AND RESPONSE



Sergeant Wes McBride joined the Sheriff's Department in 1966 and has served in the Custody, Court Services, Patrol and Detective Divisions. He has spent 13 years of his career working with gangs and has qualified as an expert on street gangs in both Municipal and Superior Courts. He currently is the President of the California Gang Investigators' Association.

In the combined jurisdictions of Los Angeles County there exists over 400 street gangs with an estimated membership of 40,000 to 50,000.

In 1980, 351 persons were murdered, in Los Angeles County, as a direct result of gang violence. Due to the inter-actions of county and city law enforcement agencies, along with the efforts of the District Attorney's Hardcore unit and the specialized Gang Probation units, these figures have been significantly impacted. In 1983, the gang homicides had declined to 216. This figure, although dramatically lower than 1980, is still much too high and further inroads are hoped for.

To understand why gangs do what they do and why, a short historical background is necessary.

Street gangs have existed in Los Angeles since the turn of the century and probably even before that. Gangs are nothing new to our society. Historically, they have existed in nearly every civilization back through recorded history.

There are many types of gangs that plague today's society ranging from organized crime to street gangs. These modern day street gangs have permeated lower socio-economic areas and are now becoming entrenched in some middle

By Wes McBride

class areas. The focus of this paper will be the street gangs, which pose the greatest physical danger to the public at large.

Not only is the citizenry in mortal danger from street gangs, but the influence wielded by the gangs has a trickle down effect on all aspects of life for the residents of an area afflicted with a street gang. Street gangs prey upon their neighborhood much like a malignant growth which continues to spread through its host until only a wasted shell remains.

There are generally two types of street gangs, referred to as either traditional or non-traditional. Traditional gangs are the typical Hispanic gangs found in barrios that can, many times, trace the member's gang heritage back to previous generations. An established system of traditional motivations have been formulated and are adhered to. Many times this gang is also referred to as a "Turf Gang."

The non-traditional gang is called a transitional gang. This type of gang is transitioning into a traditional gang, but has not been active over a time period long enough to have adapted long standing traditions. Here is where we find our black street gangs of today. These gangs are still struggling with their gang identity. A state of flux remains as traditions are still being sorted out.

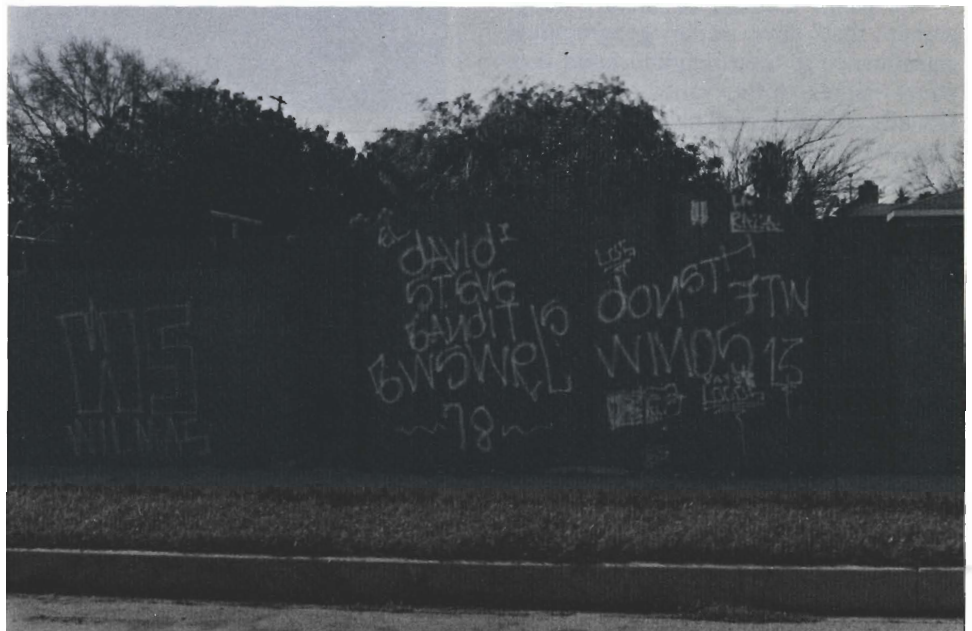
The transformation of a youth into a gang member does not take place over

night, of course, but involves a slow assimilation of the youth into the gang. Older members have been informally observing the development of the recruit and gradually allow him to associate with the gang. Once he reaches an age where he can prove himself with peer leaders within the gang structure he may perform some sort of rite of passage or ceremony which officially recognizes his full membership. This process is called "jumping in." Or alternately he may be "courted in" where he is simply accepted into the gang and does not have to prove himself in any particular way.

The ego of the gang youth must be inflated to an extreme degree. In many cases, the youth will have minimal financial or worldly assets; therefore his most important possession becomes his reputation. A "hard look" or minor insult directed at a gang member by a rival gang member must be avenged, for such "hard looks" threaten not only his own self-esteem but his standing within the gang and by extension his identity. It is this attitude that results in the blood baths often seen on Los Angeles streets. A gang member seldom forgets or forgives a rival gang intrusion on his "space" whether it is his personal honor or his neighborhood.

The structure of Hispanic street gangs is similar throughout the Western United

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States. Codes of conduct have been established from which traditions have evolved after generations of previous gang activity. Leadership roles in Hispanic gangs are not formally recognized positions. No one is elected to posts such as President, Vice-President, or Warlord, as they are in some eastern gangs. Leadership positions are not usually assumed by any one individual on a permanent basis but by any member who has demonstrated unique qualities of leadership needed by the gangs at a particular moment.

On the whole, these street gangs lack a solid infra-structure or chain of command and cannot operate efficiently as a total unit. Therefore, by necessity they have divided themselves into groupings called cliques. Cliques are normally formed according to age. A clique will have its own name, such as Winos, Tiny Locos, Locos and the like.

The gangs themselves usually adopt names that have some geographical significance to their neighborhood (i.e. street names, hills, valleys and occasionally old traditional neighborhoods or regional names). Examples of this practice would be Maravilla (regional), 18th (street), Lomas (hills), or a combination such as Geraghty Loma (street and hill). The gang sees itself as the protector of its neighborhood from all aggressors, be it rival gangs or government agencies. To many gang members, this so-called turf becomes their world. In some cases, gang members do not attend schools because many of the schools are located outside their turf and they must pass through the turfs of rival gangs, which is dangerous to do. Gang wall writings or graffiti are also an extension and identification of the gang and are used to identify the boundaries of their turf.

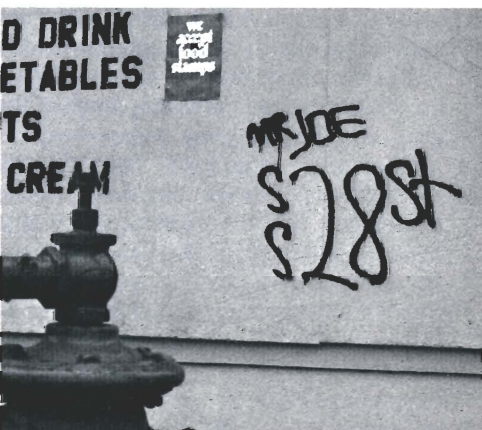
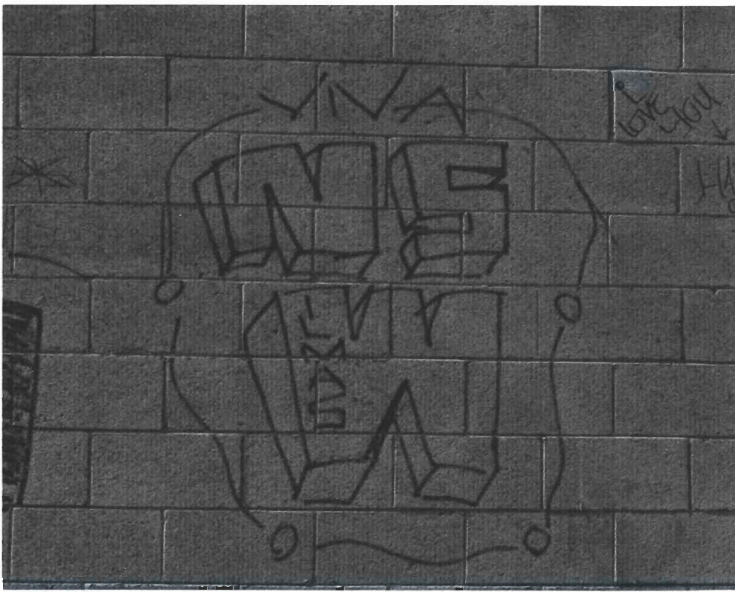


Black street gangs have existed in the Los Angeles area for many years. These gangs went virtually unnoticed by the general public. Their lack of exposure was due to the relatively few gangs and the limited geographic area of their activity. These gangs concentrated their criminal activity within the black neighborhoods. Most of these early gangs have now faded away.

At that time a group of young high-school-age "thugs" began to terrorize their local campuses and neighborhoods in which they lived. This gang called themselves the "Crips" and extorted money from other students and were also involved in violence. Most of these gangs

tended to be made up of neighborhood groups which in their own turn followed the street gang pattern of violence. This type of activity grew and in matter of a few years, many neighborhoods had their own gangs. The violence of the groups was directed not only at rival gang members, but often at innocent non-gang victims.

Some of these rivals continued to fight amongst themselves, and a polarization of forces apparently had developed from these feuds. The black gangs divided themselves into Crips and non-Crips. In street or gang terminology, the factions were called "Bloods" (non-Crips) and "Cuzz" (Crips). (Cont. on page 8.)



Black street gang activity is no longer an isolated problem. Clashes are no longer just between local neighborhood gangs but have extended to include larger groups outside the neighborhood. The activities of such groups, as is well known, are not restricted to gang feuds but crime of various sorts in affluent areas.

Gang activity is a complex term to define. Its meaning is as varied as the background and perspectives of those attempting to define the term. Many gang activities are frequently shared by a large portion of society but when a gang is involved in a weekend party, a fund raising car wash, or even a family picnic, the potential for violence and criminal activity is far greater than for any other group of people. Gangs pose a serious threat to society because of this inherent violence that is associated with their activities. A chance meeting at an amusement park between rival gangs all too often ends with innocent non-gang victims seriously injured. This type of incident is not uncommon and police files are filled with similar and tragic examples.

One should keep in mind that most gang members are unskilled and poorly educated, especially during their younger and active years. The member's life style options are limited to such an extent that criminal activities increase the gangs' cohesiveness and perpetuate the gangs' identity. In turn, the gang offers the member protection, alibis, and total acceptance.

Gang activity on school campuses is evidenced by various symptoms. Acts of vandalism, arson and graffiti painting, although secretive in nature, are often considered gang involved. Stabbings and shootings between rival gangs take a toll of innocent students and teachers. Student extortion and teacher intimidation are also present. The presence of a sufficient number of gang members in a class effectively renders the teacher powerless to enforce discipline or to teach.

Gang activity, when viewed from a law enforcement perspective, is a study in violent crime. A perpetual cycle of violence has been established within the street gang milieu. Gang rivalries dating back many years exist. As new generations of gang members enter the main stream, they are taught to hate their rivals as vehemently as their predecessors. In conversations with gang members, investigators have found that many times they do not know the reasons why they came to be rivals of a particular gang originally. They only know of the more recent incidents. One gang member stated to an investigator "I don't know why we

fight them. We've fought'em since my father's time."

With this mentality affecting the socialization and personality growth of a child, it is easy to see why conventional law enforcement techniques are difficult to apply to street gangs. Many of the Hispanic street gang members see their violent behavior toward rivals as legitimate behavior. An affront to their machismo that must be defended at all costs.

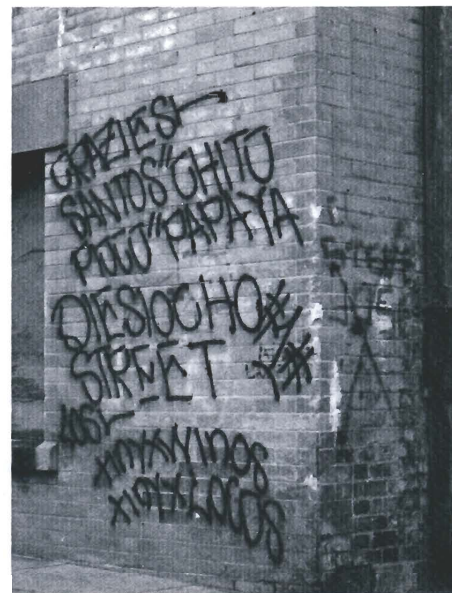
On January 1, 1979, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department enlisted the cooperation of the County Criminal Justice agencies in a localized experimental effort to stem the rising tide of street gang-related crime. This effort was entitled "Operation Safe Streets." Prior to that date, traditional methods to combat gang violence and lawlessness had proven largely unsuccessful. Recognizing this fact, the Sheriff's Department sought to focus the combined resources of the Sheriff's, District Attorney and Probation Departments upon selected, violent street gangs at four Sheriff station areas. This concentrated effort targeted the hardcore membership of the gangs, directing all energies toward their judicious elimination. This effort was based on a very successful experimental project done in 1976 at the Firestone Sheriff's Station.

As a result of that success, the Department sought funding from the Federal Government to continue their war on street-gang violence and crime on a broader scale. This initial federal grant proposal requested, and obtained \$559,620.00 to fund two sergeants, twelve deputies and clerical/logistical support.

The Sheriff's Department was embarking on an inventive and challenging course in an effort to combat the estimated 212 street gangs with over 20,000 members in Sheriff's jurisdiction.

This first small group of personnel represented a commitment by the Sheriff's Department to a new approach in solving the long standing problem of street gang-related crime. The group was aptly named the Operation Safe Streets Detail or as they are more commonly referred to as simply O.S.S.

The Sheriff's Department's Operation Safe Streets approach to their apprehension phase of the street-gang program entailed the "targeting" of four of the most violent and active gangs in their jurisdiction. The manpower allocated to these gangs called for assigning three deputies per gang. Supervising these four groups of deputies were two sergeants. The gangs were to become the focus of suppression efforts, indepth criminal investigations, coordinated-vertical prosecution by Hardcore District Attorneys



and intense probation supervision.

It soon became obvious that the Operation Safe Streets concept was proving to be even more successful than previously hoped. Gang crime within the targeted gangs dropped as much as 50%.

The Sheriff's Department sensing that a viable solution to gang violence had been found and realizing a public need existed, began to expand the concept, although the federal funding had been exhausted.

Presently, there are ten Operation Safe Streets teams in existence. Nine at Patrol Stations and one is located in the Men's Central Jail. Gang fights, extortion of inmates and assaults by inmate gang members began to escalate at an alarming rate in 1982 which prompted the Department to place an Operation Safe Streets team in the Men's Central Jail.

The Custody Division Operation Safe Streets team has met with unqualified success. Its programs and operations now serve as a model being considered for implementation by state and local custodial facilities.

Operation Safe Streets has proven to be an effective pro-active method of preventing as well as apprehending and convicting serious gang offenders. The technique employed by this program has shown that quality investigations, arrests and prosecutions do have a direct impact on weakening and curtailing much of the gang activity and gang cohesiveness.

Currently, Operation Safe Streets Detail has a personnel compliment of two lieutenants, twelve sergeants, thirty-nine deputies and target 13,000 gang members in eighty-two of the 212 gangs within Sheriff's Department's jurisdiction. At this time, studies are ongoing within Los Angeles County as to the feasibility of expanding O.S.S. to combat a rising tide of gang violence. ●