National Gang Problem Trends: 1996 to 2009

Introduction

There is no uniform nationwide timeline of street gang emergence in the United States. As discussed in Chapter 1, each of the four major geographic regions saw uneven development of gangs in the history of this country. Serious gangs first emerged on the East Coast in the 1820s, followed by the Midwest (Chicago) and West (Los Angeles) regions a century later, and in the South after another half century. In the more recent era, gang activity in America appears to exhibit a more uniform pattern. The National Gang Center (NGC) has tracked U.S. gang activity since its first systematic National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS) in 1996. This is the first study in any country that surveys a nationally representative sample of authoritative respondents annually regarding the prevalence of gang activity.

This chapter first reviews the history of gang growth in the United States over the past half century. Next, trends in U.S. cities’ histories of gang activity are examined using a new analytical tool that groups cities with similar gang problems. Next, factors that contribute to widespread gang activity are considered. Last, an overview of gang activity in other countries is provided.

An Overview of Nationwide Gang Activity in the Modern Era

Gang Growth From the 1960s to the 1990s

W. Miller (2001) combined data from several sources to reveal sharp increases among counties and cities that reported gang problems at any time between the 1970s, 1980s and the early 1990s (Figure 7.1). Despite the limitations of these data, a large proportion of
jurisdictions that experienced gang activity in the mid-1990s said that their gang problem first emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, suggesting a sharp increase in the emergence of gangs in that period with a peak around the mid-1990s (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1 Cumulative Numbers of Gang Cities in the United States, 1970–1995, by Decade

Source: W. Miller, 2001, p. 15.

Given consistent growth of gang activity early in U.S. history, and evidence that gangs were present in almost 200 cities by the end of the 1970s, it is surprising that between 1967 and 1973, three major federal commissions, each presenting comprehensive reviews of a wide range of major crime problems in the country, reached the following misleading conclusions (Miller, 1975, p. 75):

- Youth gangs are not now or should not become a major object of concern in their own right.
- Youth gang violence is not a major crime problem in the United States.
- What gang violence does exist can fairly readily be diverted into “constructive” channels, primarily through to provision of services by community-based agencies.

In a sharp contradiction of these assumptions, W. Miller (2001) summarizes his findings in the following manner:

Youth gang problems in the U.S. grew dramatically between the 1970s and the 1990s, with the prevalence of gangs reaching unprecedented levels. This growth was manifested by steep increases in the number of cities, counties, and states reporting gang problems. Increases in
the number of gang localities were paralleled by increases in the proportions and populations of localities reporting gang problems. There was a shift in the location of regions containing larger numbers of gang cities, with the Old South showing the most dramatic increases. The size of gang problem localities also changed, with gang problems spreading to cities, towns, villages and counties smaller in size than at any time in the past. (p. 42)

Miller’s landmark study also produced another very important conclusion regarding the locations of gangs. “More seriously criminal or violent gangs continued to be concentrated in slum or ghetto areas, but in many instances the actual locations of these districts shifted away from central or inner-city areas to outer-city or suburban communities outside city limits. [Yet] there was little evidence of any substantial increase in the proportions of middle-class youth involved in seriously criminal or violent gangs” (p. 78). The assumption was that gangs were migrating outward from “gangland,” in downtown areas of New York City, in the transition zones where Thrasher found them in Chicago. Rather, “what has happened . . . is that slums or ghettos have shifted away from the inner city-to suburban outer-city, ring-city, or suburban areas—often to formerly middle- or working-class neighborhoods. Special concentration occurs in housing project areas. The gangs are still in the ghettos, but these are often at some remove from their traditional inner-city locations” (p. 76). This important discovery is also reflected in national gang surveys begun in the mid-1990s, which are discussed in a later section of this chapter.

**Explanations of Gang Growth in the 1980s and 1990s**

Factors that account for the growth in serious gang activity in large U.S. cities during this period are discussed in some detail in Chapter 8. Here, possible contributing factors to more general emergence of gang activity across the United States in the 1980s and 1990s are discussed briefly.

A large influx of immigrant groups arrived in U.S. communities after the mid-1960s. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 ended the national quotas on foreigners in the United States. Bankston (1998) notes this led to a shift in immigration to the states, from European origins to Central and South America and Asia. The new groups, according to W. Miller (2001), consisted largely of Asians (Cambodians, Filipinos, Koreans, Samoans, Thais, Vietnamese, and others) and Latin Americans (Colombians, Cubans, Dominicans, Ecuadorians, Mexicans, Panamanians, Puerto Ricans, and others). But not all of these groups have experienced similar problems in assimilation in America’s communities. Bucericus (2010) contends those affected most “disproportionately originate from Mexico, Latin America and the Caribbean countries, including El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the West Indies” (p. 235). By the late 1980s, according to Portes and Zhou (1993), the children of many American-born or Americanized parents among the new immigrants, dubbed “the new second generation,” had reached adolescence. According to Rumbaut’s Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study, in 2005, children of post-1965 immigrants had grown to more than 30 million with a median age of eighteen (as cited in Zhou, Lee, Vallejo et al., 2008, p. 37). Gang joining tends to commence with second-generation youth (Telles & Ortiz, 2008).
However, as W. Miller notes, “There is little consensus as to what has caused the striking growth in reported youth gang problems during the past 25 years. It is unlikely that a single cause played a dominant role; it is more likely that the growth was a product of a number of interacting influences” (p. 42). These include:

- **Drugs**—This popular explanation centers on the growth of the drug trade, and there is little doubt that this was one important factor in the gang growth, but most gang involvement is at the street level, in individual sales, and not drug trafficking, according to law enforcement survey responses.
- **Gang names and alliances**—In the 1980s, the pattern of adopting a common name and claiming a federated relationship with other gangs expanded enormously. The most prominent of these were the Los Angeles Crips and Bloods that originated in the 1960s. In succeeding years, hundreds of gangs adopted their names. Similar loose alliances of People and Folk “nations” formed in Chicago.
- **Migration**—Those who also support the drug-trade explanation also particularly favor attributing the spread of gangs to migration of gangs themselves.
- **Government policies**—Permissive policies that followed the civil rights movement and urban riots of the 1960s allowed more ganging. In addition, the exodus of better educated and more prosperous city residents led to a reduction in the anti-gang influences the previous residents had provided in inner-city areas.
- **Gang subculture and the media**—Contributions of the media to increased popularity of the gang culture is of central importance to recent youth gang growth in the United States from the mid-1970s onward. (pp. 42–46)

This latter factor—the diffusion of gang culture—may well be the most important accounting for growth in reported youth gang problems in the 1980s and early 1990s, for reasons that W. Miller (2001) succinctly articulates:

The lifestyle and subculture of gangs are sufficiently colorful and dramatic to provide a basis for well-developed media images. For example, the Bloods/Crips feud, noted earlier, caught the attention of media reporters in the early 1990’s and was widely publicized. Gang images have served for many decades as a marketable media product—in movies, novels, news features, and television drama—but the 1980s saw a significant change in how they were presented.

In the 1950s, the musical drama *West Side Story* portrayed gang life as seen through the eyes of adult middle-class writers and presented themes of honor, romantic love, and mild rebellion consistent with the values and perspectives of these writers. In the 1990s, the substance of gang life was communicated to national audiences through a new medium known as “gangsta rap.” For the first time, this lifestyle was portrayed by youthful insiders, not adult outsiders. The character and values of gang life described by the rappers differed radically from the images of *West Side Story*. Language was rough and insistently obscene; women were prostitutes (“bitches,” “ho’s,” and “ sluts” ) to be used, beaten, and thrown away; and extreme violence and cruelty, the gang lifestyle, and craziness or insanity were glorified. Among the rappers’ targets of hatred, scorn, and murder threats were police, especially black police (referred to as “house slaves” and “field hands”); other races and ethnic groups; society as a whole; and members of rival gangs.
The target audience for gangsta rap was adolescents at all social levels, with middle-class suburban youth constituting a substantial proportion of the market for rap recordings. The medium had its most direct appeal, however, for children and youth in ghetto and barrio communities, for whom it identified and clarified a set of values, sentiments, and attitudes about life conditions that were familiar to them. The obscene and bitterly iconoclastic gangsta rappers assumed heroic stature for thousands of potential gang members, replacing the drug dealer as a role model for many. Gangsta rap strengthened the desire of these youth to become part of a gang subculture that was portrayed by the rappers as a glamorous and rewarding lifestyle. (pp. 45–46)

Klein (2002) describes the result as “general diffusion of street gang culture—the dress and ornamentation styles, the postures, and the argot of gang members—to the general youth population of the country” (p. 246). Now, “most young people in America recognize the look, the walk, and the talk of gang members. Many mimic it in part or in whole. Many try it out as a personal style. Play groups, break-dancing groups, taggers, and school peer groups experiment with gang life” (p. 246). Gang culture is intertwined with the general youth subculture.

**Nationally Reported Youth Gang Activity From the Mid-1990s**

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention established the National Gang Center, formerly called the National Youth Gang Center (NGC), in 1995. Since 1996, the NGC has conducted an annual gang survey of a nationally representative sample of law enforcement agencies. The agencies included in the two nationally representative NYGS samples are detailed in Table 7.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.1 National Youth Gang Survey Samples</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1996–2001 NYGS Sample (Former Sample)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>All police departments serving cities with populations of 25,000 or more (N = 1,216)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All suburban county police and sheriffs’ departments (N = 661)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A randomly selected sample of police departments serving cities with populations between 2,500 and 24,999 (N = 398)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A randomly selected sample of rural county police and sheriffs’ departments (N = 743)</td>
</tr>
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Hereafter, *larger cities* refers to cities with populations of 50,000 or more, and *smaller cities* refers to cities, towns, and villages with populations between 2,500 and 49,999. Finally, *study population* refers to the entire group of jurisdictions that the current sample represents, that is, all jurisdictions served by county law enforcement agencies and all jurisdictions with populations of 2,500 or more served by city (e.g., municipal) police departments.

In the NYGS sample for 2002 to present, 63% of the agencies were also surveyed from 1996 to 2001, permitting an ongoing longitudinal assessment of gang problems in a large number of jurisdictions. The average annual survey response rate is approximately 85% for the entire sample, as well as within each area type. Of the respondents in the current sample, 99% have provided gang-related information in at least one survey year.

Survey recipients are asked to report information solely for *youth gangs*, defined as “a group of youths or young adults in your jurisdiction that you or other responsible persons in your agency or community are willing to identify as a ‘gang.’” Motorcycle gangs, hate or ideology groups, prison gangs, and exclusively adult gangs are excluded from the survey. Using this definition, the NYGS measures youth gang activity as an identified problem by interested community agents, specifically law enforcement officials.

Across survey years, questionnaire items have been designed to evaluate the soundness of this definitional approach. Respondents in the 1998 NYGS overwhelmingly defined gangs in terms of their involvement in criminal activity (National Youth Gang Center, 2000). Although some U.S. gang researchers have questioned the reliability and validity of information that law enforcement officers provide on gangs (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001; Sullivan, 2006), Decker and Pyrooz (2010b) and Katz and Fox (2011) proved the NYGS survey to have good reliability and validity in independent tests. *Reliability* refers to the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study. *Validity* refers to whether the research truly measures the phenomenon that it was intended to measure. Katz, Webb, and Schaefer (2000) suggest that law enforcement gang intelligence databases can provide a useful estimate of city gang activity. Pyrooz, Fox, and Decker (2010) note the police frequently interact with gangs and gang members, with ample opportunities to observe, document, and address emerging gang trends on the street.

Based on nationwide law enforcement reports in 2009, Egley and Howell (2011) estimate there were 28,100 gangs and 731,000 gang members throughout 3,500 jurisdictions in the United States. Table 7.2 provides percentage changes in these key indicators of gang activity from 2002 to 2009. The number of jurisdictions with gang problems increased 21% from 2002 to 2009, and the estimated number of gangs increased 29% in the same period. The estimated number of gang members, which has averaged over 750,000 across survey years, decreased slightly from 2008 to 2009, but remains unchanged from the 2002 total. The prevalence rate of gang activity increased slightly from 2008 to 2009, to 34.5%, meaning that just over one in three localities reported gang activity in 2009 (Figure 7.2). Over the entire survey period, three trends are apparent in the level of gang activity: (1) a sharp decline throughout the late 1990s, (2) a sudden upturn beginning in 2001 and continuing until 2005, and (3) a relative leveling off thereafter.
Figure 7.2 Prevalence of Gang Problems in Study Population, 1996 to 2009

Source: National Gang Center, part of the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice

Table 7.2 Percentage Changes in Nationwide Gang Estimates from 2002 to 2009

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang-problem jurisdictions</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>&lt;1.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangs</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>&lt;1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang members</td>
<td>&lt;1.0</td>
<td>−7.4</td>
<td>−5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang homicides (cities over 100,000 population only)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Egley & Howell, 2011

Figure 7.3 shows the prevalence of gang activity within each of the four NYGS subsamples, (1) police departments serving cities with populations of 50,000 or more, (2) suburban county police and sheriffs’ departments, (3) police departments serving cities with populations between 2,500 and 49,999, and (4) rural county police and sheriffs’ departments. Gang activity in all subsamples increased somewhat from 2002 to 2009. Each subsample follows a similar trend over time but at distinctly different levels.
Larger cities consistently exhibit the highest prevalence rates of gang activity among the four groups, followed, in order, by suburban counties, smaller cities, and rural counties. The rates of reported gang activity in suburban counties are closest to rates for larger cities because of the relatively large populations in suburban counties (i.e., a higher capacity to sustain gang activity, Egley et al., 2006), the shifting of previous inner-city slums and ghettos to ring-city or suburban areas (Miller, 1982/1992), and the growing popularity of gang culture in these areas (W. Miller, 2001). Mirroring the overall prevalence trend, each of subsamples show uniform declines in the late-1990s, reaching a low point in 2001 and then steadily increasing before leveling off somewhat in recent years. Again, larger cities’ gang problems are considered in Chapter 8.

**Figure 7.3** Reports of Gang Problems: 1996 to 2009, by Area Type

Egley and Howell (2011) report the 2009 survey respondents also estimated year-to-year changes regarding other gang-related crimes and violence in their jurisdictions. For the gang-related offenses of robbery, aggravated assault, drug sales, and firearms use, most frequently reported by respondents was “no substantial change” (i.e., neither significant increase nor decrease) from 2008 to 2009 in the number of offenses.
committed. Among agencies reporting gang problems in 2009, half (49.8%) characterized their gang problems as “staying about the same,” the highest percentage ever recorded in the NYGS. Agencies reporting a fluctuating pattern of gang activity over the past 5 years were more likely to characterize their gang problems as “getting worse” than were agencies consistently reporting gang activity.

The next section examines localities’ histories of reported gang activity. For the first time, analysts are able to display groups of cities’ in terms of the consistency with which they report gang activity.

Patterns in U.S. Localities’ Histories of Gang Activity

Trajectory models are used here to group jurisdictions that share similar trends in the outcome of interest (gang activity in this instance) and to graphically illustrate those patterns over the 14-year period. For example, some jurisdictions may report a consistent presence of gangs while others could experience no gang activity over time, rapid increases over time, rapid decreases, fluctuating presence of gang activity, or other more complex trends between 1996 and 2009.

**Figure 7.4** Trajectory Model: Presence of Gang Activity, 1996 Through 2009

Source: Howell et al., 2011
The trajectory model in Figure 7.4 displays trends in the presence of gang activity across 1,517 jurisdictions—the total number of surveyed localities nationwide surveyed every year—participating in the annual NYGS between 1996 and 2009. Of the total, 664 (43.8%) of the jurisdictions fall in the first trajectory (T1). This group exhibited a relatively lower prevalence of gang activity in 1996, which declined precipitously until 2001 before experiencing some growth that continued through 2009. By contrast, more than half of the jurisdictions (T2, N = 853; 56.2%) reported a near-chronic presence of gang activity across the time period. Thus, this trajectory model reveals that a small majority (56%) of all respondents reporting gang activity have a persistent gang problem that, apart from the minor deviation in 2001, has remained virtually constant over time. In other words, just over half of all localities that reported gang activity across the 14 survey years experienced near-chronic gang activity.

In summary, the 14-year gang problem prevalence trend reported in the NYGS (Figure 7.2) shows two peaks in reported gang activity, in 1996, and in 2007–09. This view of gang activity also suggests a sharp drop in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, the trajectory analysis shows that more than half of the localities represented in Figure 7.1 rather consistently experienced gang problems across the 14 years. In Chapter 8, trajectory models are used to gain insights into patterns with respect to serious gang problems in large cities.

**Perpetuation of Gang Presence**

In addition to social, economic, and cultural conditions that give rise to gangs, two important factors perpetuate their presence, prison gangs and gangs’ histories. Each of these factors is discussed next. Attention is also called to an often overlooked area of gang problems in Indian Country.

**Prison Gangs**

The growth of prison gangs and the concomitant effects of returning inmates can affect local gang activity. This development is examined in more detail in the next chapter, but it is important to introduce the topic here because the potential that returning gang inmates have for sustaining local gang activity could be substantial. Owing to the dearth of prison gang studies, the relationship between prison gangs and gangs on the street is not well understood. Jacobs (2001) contends that “the worst-case scenario is that prison gangs serve to strengthen gangs on the street. There is fluid communication between the gang members outside and inside prison. Criminal schemes are hatched in prison and carried out on the streets and vice versa” (p. vi). In one study, Curtis (1999), reported middle-age returnees who attached themselves to street-corner groups found themselves challenged by youngsters eager to make a reputation on the street. These youngsters soon had stitches and broken bones to prove their lack of respect for returning original gangsters. In another study that researched the dynamic relationship between prison gangs and youth gangs, Valdez and colleagues (2000) found Mexican American prison gangs gradually came to dominate and dissolve the local gangs in a large southwestern city.
According to Fleisher (2006a), the Gypsy Jokers were the first known American prison gang formed in the 1950s in Washington state prisons. Lyman (1989) defines a prison gang as “an organization which operates within the prison system as a self-perpetuating criminally oriented entity, consisting of a select group of inmates who have established an organized chain of command and are governed by an established code of conduct” (p. 48). Lyman also noted an important distinction between prison gangs and street gangs. “The prison gang will usually operate in secrecy and has as its goal to conduct gang activities by controlling their prison environment through intimidation and violence directed toward non-members” (p. 48). Toch (2007) asserts that validating gang membership is very difficult, even within prisons. Al Valdez (2007) adds that most core members of prison gangs have committed violent crimes and the street gangs are a central cadre from which the prison gangs recruit. Interestingly, gang members who once were bitter rivals on the street become ethnic allies within the prison. Members of racial and ethnic groups stick together because “once inside, protection comes from members of your own race” (p. 239).

The term *prison gang* traditionally meant both prison gangs, such as Mexican Mafia, and prison counterparts of street gangs (hereafter, prison street gangs), such as Gangster Disciples (Fleisher, 2006b). Now, Decker (2007) contends prison gangs have increasingly stronger ties to street gangs. The other major prison gangs are *Nuestra Familia* (our family), Aryan Brotherhood (a White supremacist group), the Texas Syndicate, and Mexikanemi (known also as the Texas Mexican Mafia) (Fleisher & Decker, 2001). Yet another one, the Netas, recently moved into the U.S. prison system from Puerto Rico prisons. Other well-represented street gang members inside prisons are Crips, Bloods, Vice Lord Nation, 18th Street, and Latin Kings (National Alliance of Gang Investigators, 2005).

The Mexican Mafia and Nuestra Familia supergangs emerged in California prisons. Al Valdez (2007) tells the intriguing story of their origins. A power struggle among inmates within the prison system in the 1950s caused prison officials to separate the violent and defiant factions. The 13 “worst of the worst” wards of the California Youth Authority were sent to the Duel Vocational Institute located in Tracy, California. Because these inmates were juveniles, they were housed in a special section of the adult correctional facility. Between 1956 and 1957, these young offenders formed the “gang of gangs,” commonly known as the Mexican Mafia or *La Eme*.

Texas is also known for the Texas Syndicate and Mexican Mafia, which have been the two best-known Mexican prison gangs in Texas for decades (Vogel, 2007). A third major Texas gang, Tango Blast, formed inside Texas’s state prisons during the early 1990s, established to shield inmates from other prison gangs. Many older members claim the word *Tango* is an acronym standing for “Together Against Negative Gang Organizations.” However, the most common translation of Tango is “hometown clique,” in specific reference to the Houston-based parent gang, Houstone Tango Blast. Vogel (2007) notes one unique feature of Tango Blast as its organization, divided up by cities, or hometowns for expansive protection; another is that no lifelong commitment is required.

It is surprising that there are no reliable national data on the prevalence and membership of prison gangs. Based on self-reported information from surveyed inmates,
the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Beck et al., 1993) estimated that only about 6% of inmates in adult state prisons were gang members; however, other more realistic estimates range upward from 25% (Olson & Dooley, 2006). Indeed, the first collection of research articles was published on them just a decade ago in a special issue of Corrections Management Quarterly. The few established experts agree that prison gangs got bigger and more entrenched in the 1980s and 1990s. “Prison gangs are more structured than street gangs and have much stronger leadership. The rank-and-file membership often has several gradations, making prison gangs look much like organized crime groups” (Decker, 2007, p. 395).

Among prison inmates, Griffin and Hepburn (2006) find gang members more than twice as likely to commit an assault within the first 3 years of their imprisonment than nongang members, and Olson and Dooley (2006) claim they also have higher recidivism rates following release. Transferred juvenile gang members are also significantly more likely to assault fellow inmates in adult prison compared to nongang members (Tasca, Griffin, & Rodriguez, forthcoming). As Tasca and colleagues suggest, it is likely that youth who are gang members import norms from the streets into institutions that promote violence to gain power and respect, as well as use violence to deal with conflict.

**Gang’s Histories**

Street gang histories and gang lore serve to perpetuate gang activity. Prominent gang names are often copied in distant cities, and this, along with glorification of gang life, past exploits, and acclaimed victorious battles serve to bolster recruitment and member retention.

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**In Focus 7.1**

**Regional Trends in Gang Activity as Viewed by the FBI and Police Agencies**

The following documentation lists gang activity trends in large cities and states during the past few years compiled by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and state and local police agencies. This information suggests that gangs are often very adept in perpetuating gang culture.

**Northeast region.** New York City is no longer the epicenter of serious street gang activity in the Northeast as was the case in the early 1900s. Gradually, gang activity in this region expanded to include other East region and New England states, particularly Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Connecticut (FBI, 2009). According to the FBI’s intelligence reports, “The most significant gangs operating in the East Region are Crips, Latin Kings, MS-13, Ñeta, and United Blood Nation” (p. 16). “The most significant gangs operating in the New England Region are Hells Angels, Latin Kings, Outlaws, Tiny Rascal Gangster Crips, and UBN” (p. 17).

**Central region.** In the Midwest region, traditional Chicago gangs still have the strongest presence. According to the Chicago Crime Commission (2006), in 2008, the largest street gangs in Chicago include the Gangster Disciple Nation (GDN), Black Gangsters/New Breeds (BG), Latin Kings (LKs), Black P. Stone Nation, Vice Lords (VLs), the Four Corner Hustlers and the Maniac Latin Disciples
Gang Activity in Indian Country and Among Native American Youth

Given the similar geographical segregation, and economic, social, and cultural marginalization to which Native American Indians have been subjected in comparison with Blacks, Mexican Americans, and other minority groups, it is reasonable to expect that gang activity would flourish in Indian Country. Unfortunately, only limited information is available on the seriousness of gang activity therein. Indian Country is defined in 18 U.S.C.$1151 (1948) as including (1) land within Indian reservations, (2) dependent Indian communities, and (3) Indian allotments. Reservation trust lands refer to areas that have been set aside and the federal government recognize as being held in trust for a particular federally recognized tribe. A variety of federal treaties, regulations, and acts over the years have established these trust areas and have established laws governing sovereign Indian nations.

Gangs made up of Native American youth are believed to have originated in 1990–91, according to Al Valdez (2007). He bases this period specification on oral reports to him made by educators, tribal police officers, council members, and Native Americans themselves. A national survey of gang problems in Indian Country conducted in 2000 revealed that 23% of Indian Country respondents (tribal leaders and law enforcement agencies) reported having active youth gangs in their communities during 2000. A majority of 70% responded that there was no gang activity in their communities, and
7% could not make a determination (Major, Egley, Howell, Mendenhall, & Armstrong, 2004). This report refers to each respondent tribe, reservation, and Alaska Native village as a community, which includes a wide range of settings—pueblos, rancherias, villages, towns, and rural settlements. Communities also include people who have been recognized by the U.S. government as a tribe or tribal community, but who do not occupy tribal trust, tribally owned, or Indian allotment lands. Communities are the people and land together or tribal community viewed as a group.

An analysis of gang membership in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Glesmann, Krisberg, & Marchionna, 2009) relays that Native American youth (15%) are about twice as likely to be gang members as any other race/ethnicity. Al Valdez (2007) reports that “recent interviews with educators who work at Native American schools or at schools with Native American populations have confirmed an increase in gang dress, gang graffiti, gang crime and the gang mentality since 1997” (p. 423).

**Gang Activity Patterns in Other Countries**

The purpose of this overview is to give readers a snapshot of gang activity in countries other than the United States. First, information is provided on two unique and highly publicized U.S. gangs that also have a presence in Mexico and Central America. Next, gang trends in Canada are examined. Last, European gang activity is reviewed.

**Transnational Gangs and Gangs in Mexico and Central America**

If one is using the term transnational broadly to mean multinationality of membership, then transnational gangs are not a new phenomenon in the United States. Franco (2008b) explains that so-labeled U.S. gangs have included [those] composed of members of Asian, Russian, African, Serbian, Bosnian, Jamaican, and other races, ethnicities, and nationalities. Some of these transnational gangs have evolved into highly organized and sophisticated criminal enterprises known for influencing government officials and the judiciary in the countries in which they operate. In the U.S., the most well-known example of this type of crime syndicate is the Mafia, or La Cosa Nostra. (p. 2)

For a gang to be considered transnational, Franco suggests that it should have more than one of the following characteristics: criminally active as well as operational in multiple countries, activities of a gang’s members must be at the direction of gang leaders in another country, highly mobile, and involvement in sophisticated crimes that transcend national borders. However, “much of the literature characterizes . . . gangs as transnational merely because they are present in more than one country” (p. 2).

The notorious 18th Street gang (M-18) and Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) Los Angeles gangs have been called transnational gangs.

**18th Street gang.** According to Valdez (2006b), the 18th Street gang (also called Calle 18, or Barrio 18) emerged in the 1960s. This gang was created because a local Mexican
gang, Clanton Street, rejected all youths who could not prove 100% Mexican ancestry. “As a result, the kids from the Clanton Street neighborhood who were denied membership because of their tainted ancestry formed their own gang. They became the original 18th Street gang” (p. 146). To date, Al Valdez (2007) claims it “is probably one of the largest Hispanic street gangs in the country and it has become established nationally and internationally” (p. 145).19

Because it broke the racial barrier in accepting largely immigrant youths and those of mixed racial backgrounds, the 18th Street gang quickly grew enormously. “Predominately composed of Hispanics, some cliques of the 18th Street gang have even recruited African Americans, Asians, Whites, and Native Americans for membership. . . . Another unique aspect about the 18th Street gang is that, although it was primarily turf-oriented, some gang members traveled to other areas and states to establish cliques and start illegal activities” (Al Valdez, 2007, p. 146).

This gang epitomizes the enormity of the Mexican American gang phenomenon in Los Angeles. “Like most gangs,” claims Al Valdez (2007), “18th Street is involved in many types of criminal activities including auto theft, car-jacking, drive-by shootings, drug sales, arms trafficking, extortion, rape, murder, and murder for hire” (p. 147). The 18th Street gang is also said to have connections with the Mexican Mafia prison gang, according to Al Valdez.

Mara Salvatrucha. As Central American gang expert Cruz (2010) explains, the word mara in the Salvadoran vernacular commonly refers to any group of people, and is widely synonymous with folks and also is slang for gang. According to Manwaring (2005), trucha is also a slang term for shrewd. Thus, Mara Salvatrucha specifically refers to a gang of shrewd Salvadorans. Generally speaking, the term maras (and also pandillas) can be used to denote Central American gangs. McGuire (2007) clarifies that a purely Salvadoran gang term, pandilla, is distinct from mara. “In English the maras are frequently referred to as Central American gangs. This is somewhat of a misnomer, since the commonly understood origin of these gangs is not in Central America, but within the political boundaries of the United States” (p. 4).

Mara Salvatrucha (also called MS-13; the numeric 13 refers to M as the 13th letter of the alphabet) originated among Salvadoran refugees, who, according to McGuire (2007) were “fleeing civil wars [1979–1992] in which the United States–backed forces were known for committing human rights abuses.” (p. 4). McGuire details this movement as follows:

As the now standard account of the origin story goes, Central American gangs began to form in Los Angeles in the 1980s as the large numbers of war refugees and their children made their way into previously Mexican and Mexican-American dominated neighborhoods. Upon arrival in Los Angeles, these Central Americans encountered Mexican and Mexican-American gangs, which, as documented by Vigil and others, had long existed in the L.A. area. In part to defend themselves, they formed their own gangs based on national identities, like Mara Salvatrucha, which was originally linked to specifically Salvadoran immigrants. (p. 4).

Many Salvadoran youths faced a choice, either join the large Mexican American 18th Street gang or, for protection, form a gang of their own. Those who chose the
latter option formed what became known as Mara Salvatrucha, and the rivalry between the two groups began (Al Valdez, 2007).

Within 2 years after the civil war ended in the early 1990s, Cruz (2010) recounts 375,000 Salvadorans voluntarily returned home, and another 150,000 Central Americans were deported to their home countries in a three-year period during the mid 1990s. This “reverse migration” of youth to Central America facilitated contact between the new gang culture transported from Los Angeles gangs and older local maras in Central America. Within 5 years, gangs in Central America had adopted the culture of gangs in Los Angeles, particularly imitating the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs. According to the Washington Office on Latin America (2010), “What began in the 1980s as a series of small differentiated local gangs became by 1993 two larger and generally loosely associated trans-national groups of gangs extending between the U.S. and Central America” (p. 4).

Cruz (2010) relays that by 1996, 85% of youth gang members in El Salvador said they belonged to either the MS-13 or 18th Street gangs. Other gang cultures were also diffused from Los Angeles to the region but Cruz (2010) contends most local youth mimicked these two gangs, particularly in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Although “press reports and some current and former Central American officials have blamed MS-13 and other gangs for a large percentage of violent crimes committed in those countries . . . some analysts assert that those claims may be exaggerated” (Seelke, 2008, p. 4). Local gangs (maras) and a variety of criminal groups already were active in the region. Thus “other gang experts have argued that, although gangs may be more visible than other criminal groups, gang violence is only one part of a broad spectrum of violence in Central America” (Thale, 2007, as cited in Seelke, 2008, p. 4).

U.S. gang involvement in drug trafficking along the U.S.–Mexico border. Even less information is available on specific crimes that can be attributed to the 18th Street and MS-13 gangs. A 2006 assessment of gang activity in Mexico and Central American countries conducted by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supported the following general conclusion: “Gangs such as MS-13 and 18th Street conduct business internationally, engaging in kidnapping, robbery, extortion, assassinations, and the trafficking of people and contraband across borders” (p. 6). Ribando (2007) relays MS-13 members are reportedly being contracted on an ad-hoc basis by Mexico’s warring cartels to carry out revenge killings, and regional and U.S. authorities have confirmed gang involvement in regional drug trafficking. But the question remains as to the extent to which the U.S.–based gangs are involved with drug cartels in the region. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2007 concluded that “while some drug trafficking may involve gang members, the backbone of the flow seems to be in the hands of more sophisticated organized crime operations” (p. 17). Other observers agree that “organized crime is now the main cause of the bloodshed. Central America form a bridge between Columbia, the world’s biggest cocaine producer, and Mexico, which is the staging post for the world’s biggest market for the drug—the United States” (The Economist, 2011, p. 45).
It is difficult to determine at this time the extent of U.S. gang or Central America maras' involvement in drug trafficking in the Mexico–Central America region. Figure 7.5 shows the five major drug-trafficking cartels, their sphere of operations, most commonly trafficked drugs, and affected counties. Various Mexican drug cartels also operate in the region, including La Familia Michoacana (LFM), Los Zetas, Tijuana, and the Beltran-Leyva Organization, and they have been battling among themselves, and with other drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs) and Colombian cartels over the past several years for lucrative smuggling routes (Manwaring, 2009a, 2009b). Among these drug cartels, West and Burton (2009) assert the LFM has drawn the most attention in the U.S. government because of its vigilante origins and acclaimed extensions into the states, as far north as Chicago. In addition, homicides related to drug trafficking in Mexico more than doubled recently, from 2,275 in 2007 to 5,207 in 2008. In particular, Grayson (2009) asserts the Michoacana family, or La Familia, is an increasingly important contributor to the extremely bloody drug wars among Mexican cartels. Evidence is lacking with respect to U.S. and Central America gang involvement in these wars. It also is difficult to draw a bright line between traditional street gangs, paramilitary organizations, and other criminal groups that operate in Mexico, Central America, and South America (Manwaring, 2009b).

**Figure 7.5  Major Drug Cartels**

Still, there are gaps in knowledge of U.S. gang involvement in drug trafficking with Mexican DTOs. Burton and West (2009) explain, “The exact nature of the relationship between Mexican cartels and U.S. gangs is very murky, and it appears to be handled on
such an individual basis that making generalizations is difficult. Another intelligence gap is how deeply involved the cartels are in the U.S. distribution network” (p. 7). No doubt, some U.S. gangs play an active role in street-level drug marketing north of the border. “However, the U.S. gangs do not constitute formal extensions of the Mexican DTOs. Border gangs developed on their own, have their own histories, traditions, structures and turf, and they remain independent” (p. 4). Their involvement in narcotics is similar to that of a contractor who provides certain services, such as labor and protection, while drugs move across gang territory, but drug money is not usually their sole source of income.3 “Linkages to gangs located in Central America are not needed to source these drugs, and it appears both are mainly sourced from the Mexican drug trafficking organisations that control U.S. drug markets” (UNODC, 2007, p. 64). The UNODC report goes further in questioning this linkage:

The maras are often referred to as ‘transnational’ in their character, as groups exist with the same name in different countries. Since some mareros are former deportees, it would [be] odd if there were not some communication between these groups. But the specter of ‘mega gangs,’ responding to a single command structure and involved in sophisticated trafficking operations, does not, at present, seem to have been realised, at least insofar as drug trafficking is concerned. It is likely that the gang members are preoccupied with more local, neighbourhood issues. (p. 64)

Reports to Congress have suggested an MS-13 presence in a relatively large number of states (Franco, 2008a). However, the size and strength of MS-13 gangs outside Los Angeles have been questioned. The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) conducted a brief evaluation and analysis of the characteristics, both local and transnational, of Central American gangs in the Washington, DC, area (McGuire, 2007). This study revealed that 18th Street, at that time, did not “have a strong presence in the DC area, though small cliques may form and disband occasionally. Mara Salvatrucha, perhaps the most well known of the gangs that exist in Central America and the U.S., does have a presence in the Washington area” (pp. 1–2). McGuire drew four main conclusions. First, despite sensationalist media coverage of gang violence, “Central American youth gangs are a relatively minor security problem in the DC area” (p. 2). Although the gang problem is significant for particular communities, “relative to other public security threats in the area, Central American gangs are not a high-priority concern for area law enforcement” (p. 2). Second, based on her interviews of former gang members, “widely held stereotypes about gangs and gang members are oversimplified and often inaccurate” (p. 2). Last, McGuire’s study concluded that “while there are cases of Central American gangs attacking random citizens, the overwhelming majority of their crimes are perpetrated against rival gangs, or against other Latinos in their communities” (p. 29).

MS-13 and 18th Street may well be the strongest, most influential, and most dangerous street gangs in Central American countries, but not in the United States (Howell & Moore, 2010). In Central America, these gangs threaten to destabilize neighborhoods, and in Mexico, some gangs have links to narcotics-trafficking cartels that go head-to-head with the military. At the present time, Howell and Moore (2010) believe
political and governmental conditions in these countries are more conducive to gang
development and expansion than in the United States.

Howell and Moore (2010) also note the extent of collusion among U.S. gangs,
DTOs, and other criminal organizations along the U.S.–Mexico border is not clear.
Nevertheless, this intermingling is not a welcomed development for MS-13 and 18th
Street gangs that already are considered to be among the most dangerous in this coun-
try. The involvement of the Mexican Mafia and other prison gangs in drug trafficking
and other criminal activity in the West–Southwest region is also an unwelcomed devel-
opment of great concern, along with the peripheral involvement of local U.S. gangs
along the U.S.–Mexico border. These situations represent formidable challenges to U.S.
public safety in the West and Southwest regions, gang policies, and programs.

Gangs in Canada

The scope and seriousness of Canada’s gang problem is a matter that is widely
debated in Canada. Three gang assessment exercises have produced differing impres-
sions of the seriousness of gang problems over the past decade. In 2002, the core U.S.
National Youth Gang Survey questions were replicated in Canada, and these were
supplemented with a few other survey items (Chettleburgh, 2003). An estimated 434
gangs and 7,071 gang members were reported.

Chettleburgh (2003) points out the Canadian youth gangs depicted in the 2009
survey were broadly distributed throughout the country in police service jurisdictions
that served 65% of the population. Similar to American gangs, almost half of Canadian
youth gang members are young people under the age of 18. However, the racial/ethnic
mix of gangs in the two countries widely differed. The largest proportions in Canada
are African Canadian/Black (25%), followed by First Nations (indigenous peoples)
(22%) and Caucasian/White (18%). In contrast, the most broadly represented racial/
ethnic groups in American gangs in 2002 were Hispanic/Latino (48%), African
American/Black (38%) and White (10%) in the 2009 National Youth Gang Survey.
Another distinction is the greater prevalence Chettleburgh reports of hybrid gangs in
Canada. Most important, however, is the far lower homicide rate among Canadian
gangs versus American gangs, as seen earlier in this chapter. However, almost half of
the Canadian gangs were reportedly active in other violent crimes including assault
and drug trafficking, and often in collaboration with organized crime groups in the
latter area. In addition, “The movement of gang members from one jurisdiction to
another, in addition to the return of gang-involved youth or adult inmates from
Canadian correctional facilities, appears to be having an impact in a large number of
Canadian jurisdictions” (p. 2).

The second Canadian gang assessment, made by the Criminal Intelligence Service
Canada (2006) estimated more than 300 gangs in Canada with approximately 11,000
gang members, and overwhelmingly comprised of adult members, ages 20 to 30 years
of age. This federal law enforcement agency also reported more extensive involvement
of Canadian gangs in drug trafficking and with organized crime groups (particularly
outlaw motorcycle gangs and Italian or Asian criminal groups). It also reported an
increase in gang-related violence, “often related to street gang expansion, recruitment,
and encroachment on other criminal groups’ territory” (p. 23). In addition, this gang assessment notes extensive gang activity within low-income housing areas and inside Canadian federal and provincial correctional institutions, while “occasionally influencing gang activity outside institutions” (p. 25).

The older gangs described in this Canadian report resemble in some respects the largely adult criminal gangs that first emerged on the streets of New York City and Chicago. Aside from the ages of their members, the main parallels are their connections with organized crime groups, some money laundering, and involvement in the illicit sex trade. The most active adult criminal gang areas in Canada are in the Ontario (particularly Toronto) and Quebec provinces (especially Montreal). Considerable gang activity is also reported in the Alberta, Sask, and Manitoba provinces, along with southern British Columbia (the Vancouver area). In the Quebec province, gangs sometimes form alliances and rivals occasionally fight one other in the U.S. fashion over territorial encroachment and interpersonal disputes, sometimes with firearms, as Chettleburgh (2007) describes in the preceding discussion.

In a third Canadian gang assessment, Wortley and Tanner (2007, 2008) set out to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and social circumstances that push and pull youth toward gangs. The key reasons a representative sample of gang youth in Toronto gave correspond closely to the factors U.S. gang members most frequently mention, detailed in Chapter 5. Wortley and Tanner (2008) pinpoint the experiences and social circumstances that promote gang involvement:

- Neighborhood, peer, and family influences
- Protection
- Support and companionship
- Status and respect
- Money
- Racial injustice (p. 198)

Across Canada, neighborhood residential instability—measured by family mobility, home renting, and single parenthood—predicts youth gang membership (Dupere, Lacourse, Wilms Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2007). However, as in the American communities, some minority groups are more disadvantaged than others, particularly the Aboriginal youngsters in Canada (Deane, Bracken, & Morrissette, 2007). It is often argued that Vigil’s (2002, 2006) multiple marginality theory applies to this and other minority groups in Canada. It is not surprising, then, that a similar proportion of Canadian and U.S. youngsters join gangs. In the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, gang involvement was measured at age 14. Dupere and colleagues (2007) found 6% of the nationally representative sample self-identified as gang members, a slightly lower proportion than in the United States (8%).

In sum, essentially the same conditions lead to gang joining in Canada as in the United States. Each country’s gangs emerge from social, cultural, political, and economic conditions. In this respect, Canada’s gang problem appears similar to the U.S. gang situation except on an infinitely smaller scale. Chettleburgh (2003) notes that the Canadian population is roughly 11% of the U.S. population, and Canada’s estimated
youth gang membership is less than 1% of the U.S. figure. There are, however, some important differences. The street gangs of Canada seem more intertwined with organized crime groups. More racial/ethnic mixing of gang members occurs in Canada. Another key difference is the extremely low level of gang-related homicide in Canada. Largely on this basis, some well-informed observers protest that some Canadian media and government officials overstate gang problem seriousness in the country as a whole (Wortley & Tanner, 2007, 2008).

**Gangs in Europe**

Although the first active gangs in Western civilization—which Pike described in 1873 as gangs of highway robbers—may well have existed in England during the 17th century, it does not appear that these gangs had the features of modern-day, serious street gangs. Murray (2000) asserts more violent gangs formed in the early 1900s as the historic Troubles in Northern Ireland gave rise to two violent gangs in the Bridgetown area, known as the Billy Boys (a Protestant gang) and the Norman Conks (from Norman Street, a Roman Catholic residential area), in concert with the sectarian conflicts. Fifty years later, according to Boyle (1977), Glasgow, Scotland had more stereotypical gangs—much like American forms, but Sanders (1994) notes these had dissipated by the early 1980s.

The presence of modern-day gangs in Europe prompted establishment of the Eurogang Programme in 1997, in which European and American researchers have undertaken a collaborative effort to research street gangs in Europe. Presently, Klein (2008) tabulates more than 60 gang-involved cities recognized in Europe, and the number continues to grow. Three comprehensive books have been published on European gangs in the past decade. These three volumes are impressive and quite accessible: The first one, written by (Klein, Kerner, Maxson, and Weitekampf (2001), explores known gang problems in Europe. In the second volume, Decker and Weerman, (2005) introduce the Eurogang Programme participants’ agreed-upon gang definition and feature the near-decade of research on the status and nature of gangs in Europe. The third volume—on street gangs, migration, and ethnicity—features Van Gemert, Peterson, and Lien’s (2008) compiled papers from the Eurogang Programme’s first thematic focus on multi-ethnic gang issues. In a fourth summary report, Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry (2006) synthesize the results of Eurogang studies to date in 12 countries and compares the seriousness of European gangs with U.S. counterparts. This review suggests that level of violence in European gangs is less serious than within U.S. gangs and that “differences may be attributable to the recentness of the European gang development, the lower levels of firearms availability, and lower levels of gang territoriality in Europe” (p. 413). There are notable exceptions, of course. In South Manchester, Bullock and Tilley (2002) claim gang members carrying firearms is common, about 60% of shootings are thought to gang related, and these are perpetrated by loosely turf-based gangs.

The following are more detailed research observations from Klein and colleagues’ (2006) review, concerning the relationship between European street gangs and violent behavior. First, the frequency, severity, and lethality of youth violence are, generally
speaking, lower in European countries than in the United States. Second, despite this
differential, gang membership appears to have the same worsening effect on the behav-
ior for gang-involved European youth as it does for U.S. youth. Third, as in the states,
the researchers’ qualitative reports of European gangs suggest that the nature of
violence is varied—though typically limited to physical fighting—and similarly
motivated. Fourth, again, as in American communities, gang membership in Europe
facilitates violence over and above the baseline impact of association with delinquent
peers. “Overall, perhaps what is most impressive about these results is their near uni-
versality . . . across a diverse set of European countries that probably have more differ-
ences than similarities [and these findings are] observed in both quantitative and
qualitative studies and in both comparative and single-country studies” (p. 434).

Klein and colleagues (2006) caution that some important limitations apply to this
summary: “These conclusions derive largely from unplanned comparisons and from
single studies brought together after-the-fact so that patterns have been inferred rather
than directly tested” (p. 434). The next phase of Eurogang Programme research is
multi-site comparative research on street gangs.

In another excellent summary of the Eurogang Programme research, Weerman
and Decker (2005a) report on studies in six European countries (the Netherlands,
Germany, Russia, Scotland, Italy, Norway) and Scandinavia. The following are impor-
tant findings from these studies. In general, Weerman and Decker (2005b) caution that
“it is not correct to speak of ‘European gangs’ as if all gangs in Europe were the same
or shared a number of common features that distinguish them from American coun-
terparts” (p. 306). Just as is the case in the United States, street gangs and troublesome
youth groups in Europe vary considerably with respect to key features—including
dermatological characteristics, background, social, and economic elements,—as well as
structural components, particularly the degree of organization. Although some of the
European gangs “have existed for quite a while and have developed structures and
leaders, many others (probably most in Europe) are shorter lived and more loosely
organized” (p. 305). Again, as in the states, territorial claiming tendencies in European
gangs vary. There also is less preoccupation with gang identity among European gangs.
“There are many groups that have no names for themselves and do not see themselves
as gangs; others do self-identify as gangs and have dangerous names based on locality
or inspired by American gang culture” (p. 306).

Future reports from the Eurogang Programme bear close watch. This is an impor-
tant collective effort involving a network of researchers guided by a common defini-
tion and consistent research methods.

**Concluding Observations**

Overall, two predominant gang trends are evident across the 14 years of the National
Youth Gang Survey. First, there is remarkable stability in reported gang activity in the
very large cities. Few significant changes are seen in cities with populations greater
than 50,000 persons, where nearly two-thirds of all gangs and 8 out of 10 gang mem-
ers are found. In addition, 8 out of 10 of these cities reported gang activity each year
from 2005 to 2009. Of utmost concern however, is the consistent increase from 2002 in reported homicides across 167 very large cities, with populations greater than 100,000. This trend is examined in more detail in Chapter 8. Second, gang activity is highly unstable in smaller cities, towns, villages, and rural counties. These localities have very small gangs, largely transitory gangs, few gang members, and little violence. To be sure, few gangs survive in these areas.

Recent developments have extended and expanded the scope and dangerousness of three U.S. street gangs—MS-13, 18th Street, and the Mexican Mafia—in particular. First, the funneling of major drug-trafficking routes from air transport and sea-crossing to the overland route via Central America and Mexico has opened more lucrative drug-trafficking opportunities to U.S. gangs along the border and within the Southwest and West regions. Second, expanded and intensified interactions with Mexico and Central American countries over the past 20 years or so have contributed to the growth of the MS-13 and 18th Street gang. Third, the prison-based Mexican Mafia is said to control many of the Hispanic gangs in Southern California.

The European gang situation remains clouded, both in terms of prevalence and seriousness. Similarly, the scope and seriousness of Canada’s gang problem is a matter that is widely debated. The United States remains unique in the scope and seriousness of gang activity, although the situation is rivaled by gangs in Mexico and Central America in their violent capacities. Some Central American gangs threaten to destabilize neighborhoods, and in Mexico, some gangs have links to narcotics-trafficking cartels that go head-to-head with the military. At the present time, political and governmental conditions in these countries are more conducive to gang development and expansion than in the United States.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Why do you suppose the presence of gang activity has an ebb and flow pattern?
2. What does this ebb and flow pattern have to do with the seriousness of gang crime?
3. How can prison gangs become involved in drug trafficking on the streets?
4. What are the prospects for American street gang involvement in drug trafficking in Central America?
5. How could street gangs in any country develop the capacity to operate transnationally?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Explanations of Gang Growth in the 80s and 90s


**Transnational Gangs: Mexico and Central America**


**Gangs in Other Countries (Outside Europe)**


**Prison Gangs**


Chapter 7 National Gang Problem Trends: 1996 to 2009


Notes

1 President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967); National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (Mulvihill & Tumin, 1969); National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (1973).

2 *Ethnicity* merely reflects cultural differences, whereas *race* overlaps with ethnicity and “refers to a group that is defined as culturally or physically distinct and, furthermore, ranked on a social hierarchy of worth and desirability” (Telles & Ortiz, 2008, p. 23). Mexican Americans have an ambiguous status. “Although Mexican Americans are often referred to as and ethnic group and not as a race, they were referred to as the latter in earlier times and arguably continue to be referred to and treated as such in societal interactions today” (p. 24).

3 This paragraph contains verbatim extracts (with minimal editing) from Stratfor Global Intelligence (Burton and West, 2009).