

# ***Forces...***

*Gangs to Riots...*

*why and how some communities erupt...  
...and how we may end it.*

Second Edition

Volume 1

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## Foreword

I have known Steven Valdivia for many, many years. We first met when I searched him out after a spate of gang violence in the Los Angeles area resulted in a number of gang “experts” being interviewed on television. Steve was the only one who made sense to me. While the others spoke in terms of reaction, containment and control, Valdivia addressed the root problems, insisting that there were reasons for the behavior that was causing so much fear in the community. While concerned, as was everyone, with finding a solution to this problematic behavior, he insisted that without understanding and addressing the root causes, the systemic problems creating the circumstances that made what is essentially self-destructive anti-social behavior attractive to young men and women, we were attempting to put a band-aid on a gushing wound and would only condemn ourselves to a losing battle that promised further and growing warfare in the community.

Sadly, his words were prophetic.

Steven Valdivia’s years-long efforts to pinpoint and articulate the fundamental issues at the root of our “gang problem” have now been condensed into a form available to us. If we hope to create a responsible – and responsive – society that embraces its members and deals with its problems effectively and realistically, we must open ourselves to the views of those who have had the courage to go to the source - to examine the issues from a human perspective – and heed them.

Some years back I heard then-President Bill Clinton address the “gang problem.” As is the wont of too many so-called ‘leaders,’ he characterized gangs as ‘the enemy’ and discussed some of the ways in which we must fight them. I found myself wanting to shout, “These are our children you’re talking about! Why don’t we take a look at how we’re failing them?” Why don’t you, I thought, talk to Steve Valdivia?

*Mike Farrell*

I have been involved for a number of years in activities in Los Angeles as well as other parts of the country to prevent youth violence and have worked with Steven Valdivia on many of those occasions. I have read Mr. Valdivia's concept outlining the importance of examining provenance of violence elements by evolutionary phases to fully understand how violence develops is on target, and believe his new reasoning and approach goes to the fundamental building blocks of youth violence.

*Edward James Olmos*



For mom...

...and all God's children that she helped and will help...

This book is dedicated to God who guides my life, *and to our Mom, Eva* who raised us, taught us decency, good values and self-respect; My wonderful wife Bernice, (Neecee) for her Love and for standing with me during some very tough times (and Clori & Lynae); To my courageous sister, Christina, our earliest heroine (thank you), and Howard and Stephanie for supporting her; Vincent the tough and talented businessman and Rebecca; To my big little sister Leila Renée who, for as long as I can remember has done for others, changing the system along the way - and her partner in crime, Marty; Yvonne (and Megan, Anthony, Raymond & Katelyn), and Deanna (and Rianna, Elijah, Anthony, Rudy & Jocelyn) mi Familia, mi Corazon. Two friends and confidants Dr. Julius Griffen and Pastor Richard Matas for getting me through some of my darkest hours; Kelly Presley who worked for all people in all things and Gene Anderson, a true revolutionary for children – two un-rewarded friends and mentors who are comfortable traveling outside any box; and Rosa Ordaz for timely help and encouragement. To Dr. Fernando Hernandez who became my friend after he became my friend; and Eddie Olmos and Mike Farrell who see what I see and do what they do. To late artist and sculptor Robert Graham who used his talent to instill hope and rebuild families; and Leo, Margaret, Viv, Alex (Moto) and Olga, too; and Lonnie Wilson whose heart had room for all. And LAPD Captain Bob Ruchoft, a good and loyal friend then and now. The Rogers family and Ray Otero who talked me into this work in the first place; Her Honor, US District Judge Marcia Cooke - our heart to heart talks prompted this next phase. The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). To all those doing it then, now and tomorrow; and those whose lives were lost from birth, may you rest in peace.

For all of our children - they are why we do what we do.



## *Dedication*

*This book is dedicated to those who would heed its message. This is a work on gangs and community violence...and hopefully a spark to ignite a movement to take back communities from the gangs and make fundamental changes to a system that supports their existence.*

*I wrote this especially for the next young bucks going heart first and unreservedly into the violence maelstrom with the desire to change it.*

*This is a guide – a roadmap that I wish someone had left for me when I began in 1971. Perhaps more children would have survived. So please continue the work...ask God for strength, wisdom and guidance and go ahead and change our world.*

*Steven*



*Forces...*

*Valdivia/Hernandez*

## *Contents*

## Why This Book

There was urgency then, there is urgency now.

I remember back to my first days as a youth counselor, cringing at the official explanations for young people killing each other...and are still told today: “They’re born that way; it’s in their genes”, “It’s part of their culture”, “They learn it from their elders”, “It’s territorial...like an animal peeing on trees and then they will kill to defend it”, it’s the “The Hatfields and McCoys”, and “They have a blood lust because they descended from African tribes and Aztecs who cannibalized and sacrificed their own”. The reasoning goes round and round in training and in books with the same deviant themes embedded in racial, cultural and familial peculiarities. These have become accepted as causes of endless cycles of violence. Some explanations are more elaborate than others, but the premise is the same: *it’s all their own doing*.

At the height of my career I questioned my own 25 year involvement in the quest to end gang violence. I knew that something was missing. The other experts I had heard were not hitting it...I was not hitting it.

While for years many of us knew gang violence was self-destructive, in 1993 I publicly expressed a different way of viewing such violence: “*gang violence is hate violence...self-hate violence*” (*L.A. Times* 2/19/1993). At the time, that news article announced my exit from gang work. However, it also marked the beginning of this book.

We had made significant contributions to the work and to communities experiencing gang activity that are a matter of public record, including combining corporate funds with local dollars to build a community center; then revolutionizing gang work by developing the first cross-disciplined target area strategy that assessed gang influence in specific areas and combining prevention, education, mobilization and intervention strategies via agency consortia to maximize resources and for accountability. Although we pioneered these in the 70’s and 80’s, these core strategies remain today.

I left the work a tired and humbled man, knowing that while some efforts saved lives and changed how the battle against gangs was fought, I knew instinctively the wrong battle was being waged.

The gang phenomenon is viewed primarily as a minority-group issue. Justice agencies struggle with how to contain them and gang researchers struggle with definitions and how to count them. And science is again attempting to follow a genetic path. Law enforcement is doing everything they can to stop gangsters. They find new ways to praise themselves for any dips in violence but blame the communities when numbers return to their upward movement. No matter...for they too are fighting the wrong battle.

This book will take you into violent neighborhoods and into the mind of the gangster so you may better understand this upside-down world. We present a different picture of how and why gangs form, why youth join them and where they are headed. We discuss the relationship between gangs and riots, the allure of prison and the Rap phenomenon.

As may surprise some, the gang issue is only one aspect of the turmoil roiling particular communities. We open up the entirety of the violence phenomenon and explain the relationships of the variations of community violence within the community and within the society. The ideas and theories presented connect the dots of community violence logically and understandably. And we offer hope for real solutions.

Early on, my co-author, Dr. Fernando Hernandez explained that some of my theories were consistent with classic theories not extended to the area of youth and community violence. As we talked, it became clear that if this is so, then perhaps those involved, or in danger of becoming involved, could be treated with traditional therapies. But one would have to humanize those persons and the condition first, as dehumanization is an underlying factor.

We suggest that, with added knowledge there are “therapies” for individuals, for their communities *and for societies*.

We ask you to view youth and community violence as a solvable human and social condition with implications for psychology, sociology, civic and urban studies, anthropology and education and an added focus for criminology among others. The reader is challenged to consider a new paradigm and with it a new methodology and framework toward understanding the processes that not only induce violence but that lead to peace.

Any human being is capable of violence. And violence begets violence. One must accept that violence comes in many forms. Here we posit that a society can structurally help determine group behavior and that permanent solutions to violence are not possible until symbiotic relationships are examined and understood. As these and other dynamics become more fully understood, similarities with other cultures and societies experiencing unrest and upheaval begin to emerge. For human behavior is, after all, human behavior.

This book is a tool to better understand gangs and other community violence. It will challenge you to expand your thinking beyond usual explanations and theories. And as you do, other areas of impact will become evident.

There was urgency then, there is urgency now and unless we change the established patterns of all of our behaviors, the urgency will continue to move toward becoming a man-made debacle.

*Steven D. Valdivia*



## **My Collaboration**

Fernando Hernandez, PhD

I have known Steve Valdivia for over 25 years. I had first heard of the important work he had done in building Cleland House in East Los Angeles. Together with local residents determined to improve their community organized a community where several gangs had been at war in order to rebuild a multi-service community center that had burned to the ground during the tumultuous 1960's. They recruited persons from different gangs to work on the project, earning the center the reputation as a neutral location where making peace became one of their most important and successful programs. The center became a showcase of community self-determination combined with business logic. Steve was always known for being able to tackle the most difficult jobs, and working gangs in Los Angeles in the 1980's was among the toughest of jobs. So in 1983, when he was recruited to head Community Youth Gang Service project (CYGS), he took on one of the most difficult tasks in the country. Steve became a nationally recognized expert on gangs, but not on purpose. When he spoke, he hardly mentioned colors or turf. He talked of history and aspirations and families broken and dreams unrealized. He told of children and mothers experiencing a world that few understood. He spoke of generations of failure for all of us. But when he was done, you understood the gang problem. He did a great job as Executive Director of that agency and his Target Area Strategy remains the underpinning of gang intervention work in the nation. I was privileged to have served first as a member of the board and later as Chairman of the Board of Directors of CYGS.

I was interested in serving because as a youth I grew up in Wilmington, California. It was a tough place with gangs within it and surrounding it. Somehow I survived the poverty and violence that existed there. It was, however, not as violent as today. There was little gun violence then and while all manner of drugs were available, the violence associated with today's drug business was not widespread. The violence in this community mainly consisted of fist fights, knife fights, or using clubs and the like. Death was not a common outcome of these

forms of violence. Nevertheless, the possibility of violence with attendant fear and insecurity was always present. A wrong look, a careless phrase or word, and a young man would find himself in a fight with one or many other young men. Add to this insecurity the economic uncertainties that go with poverty, and a family could hit bottom very quickly.

Steve and I discussed possible linkages between the groups engaged in violence and society. It was clear that the same groups that were doing the violence were the same groups on the periphery of the American political and social structure. As we questioned when the beginning of this seemingly social duality might have been, I began to look back at the history of our country. It was not easy because textbooks I read in school did not provide a true picture of what really happened. The picture provided was an idealized one of “liberty and justice for all”. What became obvious was that the Founding Fathers were not as concerned with liberty and justice for all as they were for themselves. Many of them owned slaves. And the first Constitution did not even give the basic civil and human rights they themselves so cherished to their wives, mothers, sisters, aunts, daughters or the females they courted. It was not until 1920, and after a considerable struggle, that their own female offspring were given the basic rights they had painstakingly established for themselves. So how could anyone expect these rights to be extended to those who did not live with them or in any way resemble them? People from Africa and Native Americans were excluded from the very beginning. And those they would come in contact with, such as Mexicans, Asians, Irish, Italians and Jews, would feel the sting as well.

The concept of race was invented and a hierarchy established that laid the foundation for the justification of continued exploitation of particular groups (*Graves, 2001*). While white women were perhaps more privileged than other groups, they still had to toe the line if they were to benefit from the system the ruling elite established. To this day, Black people in this country are still not fully enfranchised, nor are Asians, Latinos or Native Americans. Non-white persons are still at the margins of society and the entire society pays the price. The concept of race has taken root and has been used to create a variety of hierarchies. Income, intelligence, education, social status could easily be predicted based on this false “marker”. It was imbued with the legitimacy given to the concept by science, which we later came to find out was specious. The concept of race was a social construction and not a biological one. What

we found was that once the true science of genetics evolved, there were some black-skinned people that were more alike genetically to the white cop that was racially profiling them than they were to their black-skinned neighbor.

This insidious “marker” practice occurs in some societies including America, and is institutional racism. Once rooted, it is passed from one generation to another on both sides: on one side is the bully and on the other the demoralized and exploited. Leaders in each generation take these attitudes and beliefs and preserve and reinforce their use in the various institutions they control. Thus the practice not only remains but spreads to all persons affected by the particular institution. It is the silent force of oppression whose genesis and manifestations must be included in any discussion of collective dehumanization and its link to community discontent.

In collaborating with Steve, I hope that I can bring to bear my knowledge of psychology, culture and learning to begin a dialog aimed at preventing and treating the root causes of community violence. This book will be useful for schoolteachers, counselors, therapists, religious leaders, police officers, parents and policy makers - not to replace the work they are doing, but to provide valuable insight leading to greater effectiveness in their endeavors. We hope to present the beginning of a dialog and actions that will connect us in more human ways to all of our children. For those that are connected to others through their humanity cannot kill their neighbors. This book is also collaboration between one who has been on the front lines and one who has had to work with the victims and casualties of the violent conflicts that plaque our world today. Together we have produced a book that will have the right combination of theory and reality to make it useful.





As a young man I had the opportunity to volunteer with young people from the San Fernando Valley and really enjoyed it. But my career was headed toward business and real estate. In 1971, I agreed to take a short six-month break to assist my friend Ray Otero to rebuild a community center that had been a community anchor since 1928, located in the heart of East Los Angeles. It was then that I was introduced to the gangs – an introduction that would last a lifetime.

I found the gang world bone-chilling and impossible to understand - that children could murder children and all around were resigned to it. I still do not know what made me change course but I spent the next twenty-five years deeply involved in trying to end it. It was tough and I wanted to retreat many times. However, I as well as many others couldn't and wouldn't accept failure in this seemingly no-brainer quest to stop youthful murder.

We were always outnumbered and short on resources. We tried almost in vain to stop the waste and carnage, rushing back and forth giving everything we had to stem the crimson flow. I was one with many other peace warriors, not knowing why, ready to do and some of us died.

I worked hard and fought harder in the mindless struggle disguised as a war against gangs. I witnessed acts unheard of in a modern society, yet not worthy of the news of the day. I witnessed the gang wars, the funerals and the riots. I saw parents' anguish, their unfathomable grief and losses of innocence multiplied a thousand-fold where there should have been happy childhoods and families. I died a little each time a senseless act claimed another predestined victim. And as everyone else involved, I had no time to think, only to react.

I'm not a cop or a banger but got to know both sides well, better than they knew each other. I count among my acquaintances dealers and prosecutors, cops and killers. I was respected in both camps. But as happens in this upside down world, I was sometimes targeted by errant members of both factions. It was a strange world of action-reaction mixed with mayhem and confusion.

For the last ten years of my career, I served as head of the nation's then largest anti-gang agency, a killer job that should not need to exist. And I survived, sort of. Many did not. I finally retreated from that world of dread, thankful to be alive, not immediately realizing the full toll to be paid. I may never be the same but know I am one of the lucky ones. For once the maelstrom of youth violence lands, it shows no mercy and plays no favorites.

In the process I learned something. I found a thread to other threads that connect the dots to what is officially a mystery of the age - a mystery that destroys our peace and shakes our complacency - a mystery that brutally but finally grabs your attention when you bury your dead. I wish to pass on this information in the interest of maybe saving the life of a future president of this great nation, or maybe more important, the father or mother of an intact family. And so others wanting to help may learn from my experiences, both good and bad. I learned the subject well...got it firsthand. As you read on you will come to understand what I came to realize: that there is no mystery at all. There is a method to this madness and logic to the puzzle of youth violence.

### *...and my road to understanding...*

One year after agreeing to a six-month stint to help rebuild the Cleland House Community Center, I was appointed its executive director. I was 23. I was learning about gangs and the madness surrounding them while planning the new center out of one of the few dilapidated buildings left standing. Just outside, drugs and violence ruled this world while inside were children and families. Out of the barrios, a few bold local leaders emerged led by Leo Cortez. These young men were making peace among themselves and other gang neighborhoods. The Cleland House would serve as the support and host for their efforts. It was dangerous, but working alongside some truly dedicated people, peace was established in one of the toughest and deadliest gang areas of Los Angeles and at that time, the country.

Leo and Margaret Cortez were instrumental throughout. Leo organized and headed the *Federation de Barrios Unidos*, the volunteer group of gang leadership working as peace ambassadors to negotiate volatile issues to peaceful resolution and to quell disturbances before they got out of hand. Leo's Federation was the gang intervention and organizing element. Cleland House or what was left of it was where

prevention, intervention and community mobilization programs emanated. This became the model for creating peace in a gang community.

Leo and the ambassadors hammered out peace agreements among the barrios...and those years saw the lowest rate of gang homicides in decades. Later they would select young fathers from the local gangs to work on the construction of the new community center. Margaret organized the mothers and youth in community improvement activities and fund raisers. The place was buzzing “like in the old days”. Our success attracted attention and with the help and investment of many but especially one Francis Breen of the Max C. Fleischmann Foundation, we built the new community center with day care, counseling/tutoring rooms, pool, gym and more. And with it a great measure of pride was injected into a community. This was the first time a state of the art community center was built sans government help but with local fund raisers and private donations. The new center opened its doors in 1983 to the entire community and for years was not marked by graffiti or warfare.

Then in 1983 I was asked to lead Los Angeles’ Community Youth Gang Service (CYGS) project, a gang intervention operation whose design was based on the Federation concept. Our “target area” was now Los Angeles. It stretched from Compton to the San Fernando Valley and from Santa Monica to the San Gabriel Valley. Our group and many others were in the thick of it during the most tumultuous period in gang violence history. I was given a crash course in the politics of gangs and of gang programs. CYGS was restricted to employing ex-gang members to quell gang disturbances but without the prevention, community mobilization or resources. I worked desperately to expand the strategy while cleaning up a program in disrepute (LA Times Metro 2/14/93).

We surreptitiously secured funding for prevention, education, employment, mobilization and other activities but for a very few areas. And again gang activity markedly subsided as verified by the Los Angeles Police and Sheriff’s Department and the Los Angeles City Office of Criminal Justice Planning. We managed to help organize communities while installing programs in schools and communities such as Career Paths, Star-Kids, and A Season of Peace (Thanksgiving to New Year peace treaties – a foothold that could be extended and worked from).

We never did get the resources or the “OK” to do the job right. In fact, the opposite was true. Comprehensive efforts were heavily discouraged to the point funds were withdrawn rather than used for holistic services.

It was during this time that my good friend, then Probation Officer Gene Anderson and I formalized this Target Area Strategy (TAS), the cornerstone that still stands as the best and most effective method for a community to combat gangs - the same approach that brought peace to the Cleland House area of East Los Angeles.

The Target Area Strategy (TAS) was subsequently adopted by the greater Los Angeles Inter-Agency Gang Task Force and served as a national model. The first ever major change in gang work was underway. The plan was used to train the Los Angeles Sheriff Department, the LAPD and more than 85 community agencies. This was the first time anywhere that an integrated, multi-agency gang abatement plan required inter-agency coordination and collaboration. The strategy required agencies to work together under one lead agency to minimize administrative overhead thus better serve a target area. This “consortium model” was also adopted as a national model.

The TAS first educated a local target area “team” about the types and gradations of gangs and activity. Agreement was reached about which services were appropriate to address particular situations. Monitoring tools would measure the effectiveness of each targeting plan. The strategy required participation by an area’s local businesses, schools, churches, parents, community groups and law enforcement under one coordinating umbrella. We as an agency were prevented by funding mandate from doing this ourselves but assisted target area teams to implement their integrated plan as consortia. This strategy continues to be the recommended method for combating gang violence. In 1993, my efforts were acknowledged in the *Congressional Record*.

*...to new questions...*

However, a shift away from working at the street level is necessary to create permanent change as permanent change cannot happen on the streets. To do this we must leave traditional beliefs, assumptions and hyperbole and move on to basic questions: Why do some persons in a social system resort to group violence as a life strategy and/or a way of dealing with existing conditions? Where and how did this phenomenon

begin and how did it evolve? Why does it continue? What are the forces at work?

It is clear that those involved in this type of violence engage in abnormal behaviors. The most severely involved fully submerge their personal well-being for the good of the cause - *to the death*. But how did they get there individually and as a representative part of particular groups? Is there a Gestalt involved here that makes the outcome inevitable? What happened in a person's young life to turn him against himself and others? And for a people, what happened in their history that turned them against themselves and each other, or even an entire society, seemingly forever or to their death – whichever occurs first? And is society in any way culpable? Or is this truly a group peculiarity?

On the face of it, part of the American gang violence process involves elimination of *enemies*. These enemies are sometimes one's own kind and sometimes they are others. How does this "enemies" scenario come about? Do some need to *be* an enemy? Why do some groups pass through a *gang stage* and evolve out of it, while other groups remain seemingly hopelessly entrapped, especially since gangs seem to entail a process of destruction whose logical end is self-elimination? What are the factors that determine if, to what degree and how long a group experiences such violence? What about those groups that once had gangs but their gangs disappeared?

People seem to be imprisoning themselves. Is it possible that those seemingly imprisoned do not understand any of this either? Even though in the roughest and most violent areas there are always signs of humanity.

A young person may be exhibiting identifiable and measurable sociopath behaviors even as he or she attends church, has a family and even supports community. Sadistic and masochistic behaviors may even be emerging and becoming manifest. Is this a part of the violence pattern?

Is there a release process involved? Do they attack for release or is there a sociopath compulsion involved? Are they responding to society's apparent disdain? Are some groups genetically predisposed to violence or is there a correlation to a group's experience within a host society? When acts of varying severity occur, how is the trauma managed? Over time, does a pattern of shared violence experience result in group psychosis? Is there a state of continuing trauma affecting some groups that must be accounted for? And is society blameless in all of this? And

merely left to pick up the pieces of what seems to be accepted as group sociopath behavior?

Is there also a “fear factor”? That is, as people feel more insecure or unsafe, do they feel a need to vanquish an “enemy”? Does the excitement and danger of a “gang-war” give temporary security from a fear-laden existence? Are they seeking temporary slices of “safety” perhaps as an escape from a much greater and perhaps “learned” fear such as fear of a distrustful and distrusting society? Has society effectively “cowed” some groups by lynching, raping and murdering previous generations while “obtaining” their lands, homes and businesses? In this way are they finding comfort in communal insularity, even one that includes violence mechanisms as social modifications?

Aftereffects of war and battles may also be apparent. Do they feel increasingly deadened as they engage their enemies? Do they feel even more hopeless and lost once the act is committed? Do the survivors feel guilty for their continued existence? Does “survivor guilt” or self-blame lead some to self-destruct?

What part does anger play in the process? Does anger signal a retreat from solution or is it an extension of hopelessness? Is anger masking pain? Are the various self-destructive behaviors among some groups a product of externally generated shame, hopelessness, inferiority, self-deprecation and blame turned to easily aroused rage?

It is plausible that some affected persons would look to outside agents, substances and/or events to obtain (temporary) release based on their degree of fear, uneasiness and rage. This would indicate a secondary symbiotic relationship associating substances and other self-abuse with various escapist and rage release triggers and events, again at varying levels and to varying degrees. Besides release, the outside agents, substances and/or events could also fulfill an unnatural and subconscious drive to self-destruct.

Could release from fear, feeling ineffectual, and the desire to self-destruct be achieved if they came to realize a real basis for their condition? What if the basis for their fearful and tortured condition is not what they have effectively internalized over generations as a negative belief structure? How effective would true knowledge be in ameliorating negative beliefs and consequent negative acts?

Do the most violent areas have something more in common than gangs, drugs and violence? And if there is a relationship, can a truly comprehensive risk index be developed - a risk index that includes more

than simply the individual, his peers and immediate family? For once such risk values were arrived at perhaps we would gain the ability to predict outcomes and behaviors. And from such predictive modeling ostensibly mitigate or even eliminate violent outcomes through a combination of education, treatment and structural change management, for starters. Or, we can continue as we have been and merely watch the numbers and trends and continue to count dead bodies. The question must now be asked, “What happened or didn’t happen that resulted in a group’s evolving virulent community violence?” And from that, “What might be happening or not happening now with a particular group that may be fomenting tomorrow’s violence”?

As these and many other questions and possibilities are raised, questions as to accepted explanations and solutions should also be raised. As a society, we should with all that is within us delve into the very depths of what causes young people to destroy themselves and each other rather than even remotely accommodating their destruction. Instead, we have been led to stand by helplessly and view their destruction as somehow intrinsic, perhaps even genetic, that inner-city youth are somehow “hardwired” for violence even as increasing numbers of white young people join their ranks. Sure, there will always be a small percentage of persons that do bad things within any group. But the high numbers of ethnic and racial minorities involved in their own destruction begs larger questions that the easy answers we have accepted already do nothing to illuminate. Under this paradigm how can we ever find a solution?

God has made each of us for a purpose and it is not to kill and maim or waste away on drugs or in prison. He did not instill murderous hatred of ourselves and others as our pathway to Him according to group - that we picked up on our own. There is a responsibility here if we would only go there.

### *...and a new beginning*

Some charged with researching and solving these problems look at the criminality and connect it to a people. They seek to restrict violence and criminality to their inbred behavior or genetic predisposition, and search no further. Our chronic community violence is thus divided by race and ethnicity, culture and geography, and even by victims. I offer a different view – and with it different questions. Violence directed toward



self and others may be a reaction, but to what actions? Or is it a symptom? There has to be more to it than measuring trends and counting bodies.

\*

Stop and think...many nations suffer seemingly endless cycles of violence. The reasons for their acts of brutality would seem to differentiate them. But these cycles have more in common than meet the eye. They are born of similar seeds of anger and rage.

The violence occurs when rage can no longer be contained. Groups in other nations aim at the heart of their “oppressor”. American gangs have traditionally turned their response inward, but not anymore.

Recognizing that there are cycles is not enough, for there is always a larger process in play. We must understand what sets the cycles in motion before we can know how to end them. This book helps explain that process.

This book is intended to add to a revolution in understanding and thereby solution to the problems of youth and community violence. We offer this book not as *thee* answer but a new way with new questions that may perhaps lead to a new understanding and a new beginning – for all of us.

This book is intended to help make peace among the children, *all of the children*. There will be no bloody scenes here. Instead, you will find reason and revelation.

*Steven D. Valdivia*

Peace and violence are relative points in time and place and are driven by many variables but emerge as periodic outcomes of historical socialization processes.

Thus, gangs and other types of virulent community violence are *outcomes*...as is peace. And...outcomes are temporary and can be changed but only as a manifestation of active socialization processes...*we get there on purpose.*



## **Part 1**

*The Birth of a Nation Divided – Roots to Riots*

## *Getting to the roots of youth violence*

There is another world hidden in plain sight, mirroring our own but upside down and opposite. Its birth made possible by raging hostilities, in secret and exposed. To ensure its continuation we all fight on in scaled down battles reflecting the need to maintain a war footing, guarding it as if it were a sacred right. Real blood and real guts are spilled, nonetheless. And gatekeepers hold sway until bastions are toppled one by one - but not fast enough as some are dying to tell us.

In dark places, wounded young soldiers collect their deadly inheritance fighting themselves to an early grave, for nothing short of death will do. Their self-destructive violence would seem to confirm their worthlessness, but it's their way of proving themselves finally worthy. Some are nothing less than suicidal. Their running battles a last cry for help in their mini-world of hopeless desperation, seeking a martyr's death as their last act of vengeance against sworn enemies.

These soldiers, our children, share a kinship with groups from other lands yet unrevealed as they go about ceaselessly imploding; a kinship by default with groups that use a broader form of terrorism as their calling card; groups that want the world to see how it feels to be on guard for the next drive-by shooting. *Our* groups are caught in a maze shooting at their own shadows for no apparent reason while *their* groups hit directly at the society they see as culprit. They are the advanced players in a war also birthed in powerlessness, intolerance and persecution, now turned to hate, blinding rage and revenge. Both have roots on similar ground.

While this existence is an anomaly, even a perversion, they are all a part of the human condition. They are connected by response to real and imagined attacks for which they willingly give their lives in retribution, mistakenly believing that through violence they can gain power over their own lives and the lives of others. Over time their reasons to struggle have lost out to their acts of senseless brutality.

Children killing children, regardless of age or station...the thought of it is mind numbing and heart wrenching, but we prepare ourselves for the next one.

If we in America truly wish to reclaim our communities from violent youth, we must reclaim our communities from the true reasons for community violence. Then we must move boldly as if all of our own children's lives depended on it, because they do. If we are to save our communities before they slip further away, we had better begin to understand this violence thing.

Our children's future has a present that will tomorrow be a past of one form or another. I can safely say that while you ponder these written words, several people will be lost forever with youth violence as culprit. With them, a family lineage is forever vanished. And believe this, if radical changes are not made now, babies born to you today will be shooting at you tomorrow.

Youth violence is community violence. And as it increases it becomes national violence. We examine this seemingly endless brutality in the microcosm that is America. And the manner and reasoning propagated for the ongoing march of youth toward violence. We discuss the child, the family, the environment and the various beliefs, theories, assumptions and even the folklore. We look at how resources are directed and some of the reasoning behind it. We also take a hard look at society and how it has operated in relation to communities engaged in violence.

As we explore these areas, tough questions will arise which the reader will be challenged to answer. It is hoped that an open discussion of these questions helps signal a new direction for the future of many of our children, including those not yet born.

Our aim is to better understand how some can get to this dark place and if and how we can get them out. In so doing, we may learn lessons that go beyond this nation's borders and help achieve a more peaceful future for all of God's children.

# 1

## **Mecca and Meltdown...**

America is the home of Star-Wars and gang wars...child stars and child killing machines. Taking the form of gangland meltdown and race-war Armageddon, America is a place where growing numbers of youth are beyond angry and ready to explode. Each day thousands of community militias declare their deathly presence with bloody bursts of insurrection. And instant cold-blooded death is just a shot away. The American dream turned nightmare for tens of thousands of our families. For with all its beauty, richness, wonders and freedom, America is a place where children murdered at the hands of other children is a major cause of death.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force on Violence, America has the highest death rate by homicide of any of the developed nations. And teenagers more likely to die of gunshot wounds than all natural causes combined. Homicide rates for males, ages 15 to 19 increased 113 percent between 1985 and 1995, and suicide and homicide have become the second and third leading cause of death of teenagers, behind accidents, (Task Force on Violence, Jan, 1999).

FBI statistics show that incidents of youth violence bottomed in the year 2000 and began to rise up to 2004. Then in 2005 they were once again on the decline (CDC NCIPC, 2009). This ebb and flow of teenage death is clearly a continuing national nightmare and spreading. What gives? Why in a land of so much opportunity, wealth and beauty are so many willing to terminate one another's lives? And what if any is the connection with other kinds of community violence not only here but in other lands?

### **...Heroes and Villains**

Violence can be an act of physical force, meant to cause injury and death. Violence can also be covert, unseen and ruinous. It can be an act of infringement, profanity or distortion. Violence can be the unjust

exercising or withholding of power. Violence can occur by mischaracterizing, defining or re-defining. Violence can by act, treatment, behavior or procedure, traumatize those it touches. An act of violence can be a life altering experience. Youth often view the world as a place of virtue or evil. They do not see the shades of gray.

In some communities, violence and gangs are synonymous. But there is more to community violence than gangs as will be discussed. Gangs come in all colors. Some are seen as a force to hold up a community for all to acknowledge and fear. Society sees them as criminal organizations bleeding the nation of its resources, peace and tranquility. All agree that their roots go deep. Their numbers and staying power demonstrate they fill too many young people's basic needs. Gangs engage in violence although their reasoning may differ.

There are many reasons given for young person's joining violent groups: peer pressure; a phase of growing up; a function of growing up in poverty; a way to success; an outlet for frustration; for protection and to defend turf from other "enemy" groups; because they're brought up that way, or as part of their culture; a manifestation of loneliness and exclusion; to gain the status and respect not obtained through legitimate means; "cause the girls dig it"; media hype; to create a family where none exists; a means to express anger, fear, outrage, hate and vengeance; teen rebellion; a way to play the chip on one's shoulder, and so on...

Joining a violent group can be to impress the girls or to play out a fantasy. It may be a statement of self-expression or even defiance; or a means of exerting emancipation and freedom; or fill a need for anger expression. There is evidence connecting group violence to poverty and social segregation (Crutchfield and Wadsworth 2003).

Some hold that media violence can increase the propensity of physical and verbally aggressive behavior (Anderson et al. 2003). On the face of it, gangs seem to be centered in the barrios and ghettos of America primarily among minority youth. The National Institute of Mental Health is exploring genetic links to violent behavior with research directed at inner-city youth (Stolberg 1993). The United States Surgeon General views violence in relation to "risk factors" of the individual, family, peer and community (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001). Criminal justice agencies cite high crime areas and groups that reside there. But are some groups inherently violent and form gangs to express it? Where does the violence come from?



Young people have their own ideas about the causes of violence, per a national survey given to youth in high-crime areas by the National Campaign to Stop Violence:

**Top 10 Causes of Violence in the Order that Children Cited Them:**

1. The Media
2. Substance Abuse
3. Gangs
4. Unemployment
5. Weapons
6. Poverty
7. Peer Pressure
8. Broken Homes
9. Poor Family Environment / Bad Neighborhoods
10. Intolerance / Ignorance

**Source:** Jack Anderson. "Lucifer on the Loose" in *Meridian Magazine*, 2000.

URL: ([www.meridianmagazine.com/ideas/990430looselucifer.html](http://www.meridianmagazine.com/ideas/990430looselucifer.html))

It is noteworthy that children cite media as the most influential. They seem to understand the influence of media as a primary shaper of societal behaviors (Anderson 2001).

The list cites societal issues indicating that “causes” may be being mistaken for outcomes, e. g. is media a cause of violence or do media represent a societal viewpoint? And if gangs cause violence, what causes gangs? What causes risk factors? And high-crime areas? Do currently identified causes and correlates fully account for elevated levels of community violence, or are there aspects not yet taken into account? As matters of belief and practice, gangs are considered an intransigent minority problem impossible to change except to peel off the worst actors.

On that assumption, many researchers follow minority groupings around to see what they will do next. Consider the following quote from one of the nation’s preeminent gang researchers, Malcolm Klein:

*“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

Changes are reported in numbers: up or down, transitory or stable, or how they may have morphed.

So this is where we are – and have been for decades...guessing and assuming but not knowing really how or what causes gangs and violence but content to watch them as they waste away time and thus, their lives. And this is where this party begins:

## 2

**It's a Gang Thing**

*Gangs and violence are synonymous. In America, gangs are big. But what is a gang? And are gangs to blame for gangs? While gangs are a significant part of today's community violence, they are only part of the violence story.*

There is no set age that youth begin on the road to such violence. As far as we know, children are not predisposed with the desire to kill or be killed. But somewhere along the path, some youth cross the line from doing childhood good, to doing gangster evil. And once committed, a potent and coercive force takes control. Gangsters bask in perversions of love, happiness and well-being, thriving in a world built on aberrations of power, glory and respect, killing and dying over these as though they were renowned badges of honor. Though there are different kinds of violent youth and the groups they belong to the outcome is the same: the elimination of young people and the slow internal death of the remaining combatants. As children consider the gang lifestyle, there is little thought given to the invisible chains of slavery implicit in the gang contract and its accompanying grief. The gangster road is tough and one that a person would not seem to willingly choose. So why do so many children get to this place? Is it by nature? Is it by nurture? And just how many youth are involved? And to what degree? Where do they all come from? But always, why?

**Gang models, patterns and confusion:**

There are different kinds of gangs. However, most of our attention is directed at the so-called *Traditional* gang: the urban, minority gang. In this classic gang paradigm, youthful gangsters keep it simple: they

murder their own kind. In the broader gang paradigm, youth from all walks engage in deadly violence adding to the plethora of labels as it progresses: school shootings, freeway shootings, race-related, drug-related, turf-related, gang-related, rage-related or simply random acts of violence. But it is all children eliminating other children.

Confusion reigns over this destructive part of our society. Defining and tabulating who makes up violent youth, the groups they belong to and the number of youth on this path is highly subjective and at best, imprecise. Descriptions and methods of tabulation can be confusing. In 1997, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Prevention's James C. Howell, Ph. D., observed that, "There is no single, accepted definition. State and local jurisdictions tend to develop their own. Nevertheless, a youth gang is commonly thought of as a self-formed association of peers having the following characteristics: a gang name and recognizable symbols, identifiable leadership, a geographic territory, a regular meeting pattern, and collective actions to carry out illegal activities" (Howell, 1997). "Finn-Aage Esbensen adds to our concern when he states: "As a general observation, gang research in the United States suffers from definitional shortcomings and calls into question its ability to inform policy makers and expand criminological knowledge. There is little, if any, consensus as to what constitutes a gang and who is a gang member, let alone what gangs do, either inside or outside the law..." (Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001).

The Department of Justice's National Gang Center (NGC), (formerly National Youth Gang Center, NYGC) annual survey of law enforcement agencies has been modified to allow flexibility in this area as reporting agencies made it clear they use a wide variety of characteristics to define youth gangs. Since 1996, the NGC has used the following definition: "a group of youths or young adults in your jurisdiction that you or other responsible persons in your agency or community are willing to classify as a 'gang.'" Here, the NGC is allowing the broadest of definitions without guidelines. In order of priority, the top six law enforcement criteria are: *commits crimes together; has a name; hangs out together; claims a turf or territory of some sort; displays/wears common colors or other insignia, and; has a leader or several leaders* (Howell, James C & Arlen Egley, Jr, 2010). There is need for caution in endorsing such a protocol.

Leaving the classification of a gang and gang member to “responsible persons in your agency or community” invites bias and adoption of measures that may conflict with civil rights and cause irreparable damage to lives and futures. Many cities have adopted a “zero-tolerance” to anything that appears gang related which, is open to interpretation except that it applies to minority youth and commonly held beliefs.

In Bonita Springs, Florida a 22 year-old Latino college student with a photo of himself wearing a baseball cap and mimicking a gang member sent via the Internet was arrested with several others for “electronically promoting gangs” over the Internet, a third degree felony (Naples News, 2008). Cities are adopting gang registries using various determinants. Santa Fe, New Mexico outlawed the Virgin Mary on clothing. Atlanta is considering banning baggy pants, now a fashion mode begun originally as a need in poor families for children to wear hand me downs that would last through growth spurts (NPR 2007)

The RICO statutes (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act) originally intended for use against the Mafia are now being loosely applied to impetuous minority youth playing out a modern version of James Dean-like rebellion or fantasy “dress-up” as the local bad guys and collecting felony records in the process. These desperate reactions occur when true understanding of what causes gangs and violence remain unknown.

In contrast to over-reaction is under-reaction. Several cases of hate gang activity have occurred in recent years where the gang element was ignored as well as other criminal aspects of the events. To wit: *“Prosecutors called the beating death of an illegal immigrant from Mexico a hate crime, and they urged an all-white jury in Pennsylvania coal country to punish two white teenagers for their roles in the attack. Instead, the jury found the teens innocent of all serious charges, a decision that elicited cheers and claps from the defendants' families and friends — and cries of outrage from the victim's, (The Associated Press, 2009)”* and this one by Chicago Tribune correspondent Howard Witt Tribune on June 5, 2005 from Linden, Texas: *“They picked up Billy Ray Johnson outside a convenience store in this East Texas bayou town, a place where Confederate flags fly in some front yards and a mural of barefoot slaves picking cotton greets patrons inside the local post office. On a cool September night in 2003, they drove the 42-year-old mentally*

*retarded black man to a cow pasture where a crowd of white youths was having a party. They got Johnson drunk, they made him dance, they jeered at him with racial epithets. Then, according to court testimony, one of Johnson's assailants punched him in the face, knocking him out cold. They tossed his unconscious body into the back of a pickup and dumped him by the side of a dirt road, on top of a mound of stinging fire ants. Johnson, who family members say functioned at the level of a 12-year-old before the attack, was in a coma for a week. He suffered a brain hemorrhage that slurred his speech, weakened his legs and deprived him of his ability to take care of himself. His body was covered with hundreds of painful ant bites. Today he lives on public assistance, confined to a nursing home in nearby Texarkana, where his family fears he will have to remain for the rest of his life (Witt 2005)."*

Four young white men convicted in the case were given a light sentences with three receiving 30 days and a fourth 60 days in jail. A judge sentenced three of the four to terms of 30 days in jail, and the fourth to 60 days. It was only later that Johnson got any justice when the Southern Poverty Law Center took the case to civil court and won a \$9 million verdict on Billy Ray's behalf (Southern Poverty Law Center 2007).

These and many others like them are hard-core crimes committed by gangs of youth. They fit a category of terrorism as they are aimed at a people with the intent and effect of creating generalized terror among that population but ignored as such. Such bias encourages additional violence against targeted groups, all of which generates rage and the potential for reactionary violence.

### **Tracking vs. *real research***

Law enforcement generally relies on gang researchers for guidance. Most research is after the fact and follows changes rather than searching for causes. Therefore, this type of "research" is not concerned with investigation as much as explanation. Malcolm Klein, noted career gang researcher of over thirty-five years, unveiled a six-tier model that classifies gangs across the nation by number and longevity (Klein & Maxson, 1996). This information illustrates how serious our gang

problem has become over time. *But which gangs are included and which are excluded? And why did they form? What brought them into being?*

According to Klein, Howell, Spergel and other noted gang researchers, gang members have been primarily young adult males from homogeneous lower class, inner-city, ghetto or barrio neighborhoods (Klein, 1995; Miller, 1992; Moore, 1990, 1991; Spergel, 1995) that are racially/ethnically segregated. They have been actively involved in a variety of criminal activities, including drug trafficking (Howell, Egley Jr, & Gleason, 2002) (Howell, Egley, Gleason, OJJDP Bulletin June, 2002). Research, definitions and thus perceptions agree that street gangs are distinctive to minority populations. Gang research tracks activity and does little beyond that. Thus, gang research acquiesces if not supports the monitoring and arrests of youthful minority male groupings that “responsible persons” determine is a gang. This profile could logically include a group of minority youngsters hanging out in a park, at a theater, on a street corner or in front of a private residence, and oftentimes does.

Other violent groups are not tracked at all by the National Gang Center (then, NYGC) of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the Department of Justice of the United States of America. As of 2006, the NGC surveys continued to exclude motorcycle gangs; hate and ideology groups e. g. white-hate, anarchists, Satanists, neo-Nazi, skinheads, punkers, rockers, etc. from their gang compilations. Law enforcement agencies are not asked for information on these groups although law enforcement reports that Caucasian/white youth are the fastest growing group of gang members (NYGC 2005). An obvious bias and disconnect are evident.

In barrios and ghettos, the terms, *youth gang* and *street gang* are used interchangeably. Gang cops keep a close eye and are quick to identify and collect data on potential members and emerging gangs. Here, the gang definition relating to “longevity” applies to any targeted population (minority, ghetto, barrio, reservation). The “has longevity” aspect excludes white youth by research definition as their violence is considered transitory and thus avoids criminalization of the group or members thereof. Consequently, the Columbine bunch would not be classified as a violent youth gang - new, emerging or otherwise. The

same is true for racist white gangs. By contrast, any newly observed grouping of youthful African-American, Native American, Asian and Latino youth may be considered suspect by “responsible persons” and oftentimes is. This has the effect of reinforcing *mental criminalization* in the minds of all persons *but exacting harm on minority children*.

In research parlance, *other violent groups* refers to motorcycle gangs, prison gangs, hate and ideology groups and exclusively adult gangs (NYGC, 2005). Motorcycle, prison and exclusively adult gangs fit an *organized crime* definition. *Hate* and *Ideology* are primarily non-ethnic white. *Hate* includes neo-Nazis which *are* “violent, have uniforms, graffiti, identifiable enemies, leaders, commit crimes together, have longevity and territory” (the territory they defend is white America) yet are not classified as violent gangs. *Ideology* includes so-called anarchists and environmental terrorists. It would seem that a violent group classification should include *any* grouping that does violence to others. Exploring the *reasons* that youth engage in violence would be meaningful and productive. Current practice separates groups along racial and ethnic lines in perception, belief, theory and practice. Thus the “gang problem” is not perceived as a societal issue but *an unsolvable minority problem* that society is helpless to stop.

From the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Juvenile Justice Bulletin, June 2002, Modern-Day Youth Gangs, discussing the increase of non-ethnic white youth gangs in small cities and in rural areas: “*The spread of gangs beyond central cities in the 1980s and 1990s (Miller, 2001; NYGC, 1999a, 1999b, 2000) raises the question of whether the newer gangs forming in cities, small towns, and suburban and rural areas are different from the traditional inner-city gangs, as has been suggested by Curry (1999); Howell and Gleason (1999), Howell, Moore and Egley (2001); and Starbuck, Howell, and Lindquist (2001)*”. The bulletin concludes that “*Gangs in the late-onset jurisdictions had younger members, slightly more females, and more of a racial/ethnic mixture; were less involved in drug trafficking; and were less involved in violent crimes, including homicides.*” The report continues: “*Although Caucasians were the predominant racial/ethnic group in (these) later onset (1991 or later) localities, racial/ethnic mixing may be a defining characteristic of such gangs*”.



This research explains that although there are gangs and white youth are the predominant members, racial/ethnic mixing is a “*defining characteristic*”. This can be interpreted as assigning responsibility for the emergence and spread of youth gangs from the inner-city to these other parts of the nation to “racial/ethnic mixing”. If taken literally, this is an *argument to maintain separation of groups*. It also puts off investigation into reasons (other than race and ethnicity) for violent group creation.

The report states that gender mixing was also common (Esbensen and colleagues 1999), “*92 percent of eighth grade gang members said that both boys and girls belonged to their gangs*”. The actions of the youth were tracked to determine if they were “*different from the traditional inner-city gangs*”. Again, we are directed to *the perceived nucleus of gang violence: inner-city youth* which precipitates alarm and demands for action. The starting point however, continues to be the barrio and ghetto youngster. Such unilateral blaming may be a reason that systemic solutions are not on front-burners except for enforcement and imprisonment enhancements. “Progress” moves, or doesn’t move depending on the group involved. The larger questions of *why* there are violent youth groups/gangs in the first place, why so many of them and why they are spreading remain unasked and therefore unexplored, except to return to the ghetto and barrio paradigm. The true origin(s) of gangs, inner-city or otherwise remain unexamined. We *do* know enough to ask if they are spreading and race/ethnic and gender mixing. The results of the report tend to support a contention of relief, if you will that *these* groups are not *as* dangerous as where the minority youth presumably came from. The issue of race/ethnic mixing would seem to be raised as a cautionary note for parents and as explanation for gang-trending of these non-minority youth. We will examine such Hybrids in the broader context of gang formation.

Like society, the universe of youth violence (and violence in general) is ever changing. It is not simply single race, turf related killings. “The gangster mystique is attracting young people from all walks” (Howell, Egley and Gleason, 2002). Perhaps current beliefs about this “gangster mystique” are why some confusion persists. Youth violence can be as diverse as a society and dynamics within it. *To gather a more complete societal violence picture, the current practice of limiting (and directing)*

*gang definitions, questions, numbers, perceptions and research by race/ethnicity, location and longevity should be abandoned.*

This is serious stuff. Whether we label it youth rebellion, another lost generation, urban terrorism or simply a gang state-of-mind matters little to those who believe in their souls that they have nothing else to live for. The perception that one must belong to a street gang is no longer a prerequisite to youth violence. Incidents of peer murder among seemingly disassociated young people are more common. Some are even acting as if they were in a gang of one. It is the *why* of such violence we must examine in all its varied aspects and possibilities.

In the meantime, something has changed. Many of the *traditional* players in this deadly game are not behaving as predictably as before. Many have come to believe that their community's gang violence is a result of a nasty game being played on them and are laying down their arms and ending their anger release against their own people. Where rage previously could be counted on to be inward directed, there is transition in belief and action, some positive and some not. And white youth *are* involved. They may act from a different circumstance reflecting a different viewpoint and environment *but they group and murder others.*

Today's youth violence is not a modern version of the Hatfields and McCoys or *West Side Story*. Contemporary gangs range from mild to wild. Some are here today and gone tomorrow. But many are more brutal and have phenomenal growth and staying power. For many young people who end up at Gangdom's door, it is the wholesale acceptance of dying hopes and dreams, pasts and futures, with no stake in any of it. Believing they have only "the moment" to live for, they are maxing it out. They have reached the point of giving up on their futures and themselves, burying budding spirits in alcohol, drugs and nasty habits. For others, it is a way to express their people's outrage at another group.

For America's minority youth, belonging to a violent group is convenient and even expected. They serve in their neighborhood militias, ready to defend their opaque homeland against their latest deadly enemies - going on daily search and destroy missions in winless battles against their own images. These children are driven to kill and be

killed in their simple but bloody orgy of socially defiant behavior. They have found a greater cause to live and die for than their own worthless selves. These youth are ready and willing to die a quicker death than the walking ghosts around them. To this end they believe they have found a just cause – one in which they can shine as bright as a falling star and go down in a blaze of glory.

For gang groupies and wannabes, it is carrying the gangster fantasy dangerously far. Their rebellion and anti-hero worship can turn deadly with a flash of gunfire, making them the latest lemming to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. They push their luck with clothing, attitude and associations. They are toying on deadly ground, coming perilously close to submerging their identities, values and dreams to become part of this extended but violent family. For all new entrants into the world of gang violence, the door is there as it has always been, left ajar for the curious, the wandering and the lost. They venture in but may never make it back from this cold and deadly managed care program intended for the unwanted.

As devastating as it is, forming or belonging to any violent group is probably the least understood activity that youth engage in. They share common ground. Others have gone before them. Their rage is not new. They are all human and they react within understandable human parameters. It is not as mysterious or as hopeless as it would seem. But we have to move beyond stereotypes, erroneous and biased assumptions and antiquated research methods.

### 3

#### **Who's on First?**

*The method of keeping track of violent youth reminds one of the pre-9/11 chaos where numerous governmental agencies were responsible for our national security but were not in the same book let alone the same page. There are plenty of people hired, but the work product does not reflect progress. As the 9/11 Commission indicated, the problem was not that information was not available or that not enough people were employed, we just did not understand the dynamics of what we were looking at (Kean et al. 2004).*

In America, violent youth gangs were *recognized* during the 19th Century (English, 1991; Ungar, 1995; Fried, 1993; Repetto, 2004). Then they were mainly Irish, Polish, Jewish and Italian. Others evolved or arrived during the 20th Century, but we did not keep official government tabs on them until a few years ago. In recent years the expansion and seeming intractability of our latest gangs had given the matter significance. As earlier noted, the National Gang Center (NGC) under the Department of Justice is the national repository for gang information.

According to the NGC, the first ever national gang survey was completed in 1982. It compared 1967 to 1980 but counted known major gang cities only (Miller, 2001). That survey indicated that in 1967, gangs numbered in the low one-hundreds, and there were 181 gang deaths; and in 1980 there were 2,000 gangs in 286 jurisdictions representing 100,000 gang members, and gang deaths numbered 633.

More than fifteen years later in 1997, NGC released the results of *their* first survey conducted in 1995. The respondents were a sampling of law enforcement agencies from around the country. That year's data revealed phenomenal growth: 24,000 gangs in 2,000 cities including Alaska and Hawaii with membership of 664,000. Their 1996 report

showed an increase to 31,000 gangs in 4,824 jurisdictions with membership exceeding 846,000. As earlier noted, these numbers did not include white gangs, motorcycle gangs, militia, anarchists, Satanists, skinheads or neo-Nazis. Mafia-like groups in Chicago and Los Angeles were not included nor were prison gangs or Native Americans. Those tallied under this heading were *traditional* inner-city minority gangs with particular clothing, hairstyles and tattoos and identifiable territories with some history (National Youth Gang Center 1999).

In 1996, reports from law enforcement indicated the face of gangs was changing. From the 1996 survey (released in 1999), *“The race and ethnicity of gang members appear to be changing compared with earlier national surveys.”* The report stated that *“the proportions of Caucasian/white gang members in rural counties (32%) and small cities (31%) was more than twice the national average and was now the fastest-growing segment of violent youth groups”*. Respondents in that 1996 survey reported the following percentages nationally for gang members: Hispanic/Latino — 44%; African-American — 35%; Caucasian/White — 14%; Asian — 5%; other — 2%. The report also stated, *“...in self-reporting surveys, students often report much higher numbers, especially Caucasian/white”*. However, according to 2001 law enforcement respondents, *nearly half (49 percent) of all gang members were Hispanic/Latino, 34 percent African American/black, 10 percent Caucasian/white, 6 percent Asian, and the remainder of another race/ethnicity* (Egley Jr and Ritz 2006). *A decreasing trend in white youth involvement is noted while all others are increasing* (Howell and Egley 2005).

How delinquent behavior and gang involvement of white youth is handled is of interest. As reports of increasing white youth involvement came in, the depth of research expanded to explain this disturbing aspect. *According to NGC, Caucasian/white participation would now be considered “transitory”, that they leave the local violent group behind when they graduate high school and move on to their futures* (Howell and Egley 2005). And that changing demographics may be a reason for concern. From the bulletin: *“The fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States is Latinos. This ethnic group has grown to be the second-largest group in the country, to approximately 40 million in 2003 (The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2004). Latinos are now the largest ethnic*

*minority in nearly half of the states, and their numbers are growing fastest in the South, although the largest Latino concentrations are in the West, South Florida, and a few large cities.”* The report dismisses white youth for gang-like misbehavior explaining the “emergence or escalation of gang problems” is due to “changing demographics”. In 2010, according to the National Gang Center FAQ, Caucasian white now make up only 7% of gangs (Howell and Egley, Jr 2010). *There has been a decided change in how Caucasian white youth gang involvement is viewed and therefore counted.*

According to the National Gang Center (FAQ, Pt.2), one noted gang researcher has outlined four community conditions that often precede the transition from typical adolescent groupings to established youth gangs (Moore, 1998). The first is that families and schools are ineffective and alienating and conventional adult supervision is for the most part, absent. Secondly, adolescents have a great deal of free time that is consumed by unhealthy social development roles. Third, gangs take hold when youth have limited access to appealing conventional career lines and finally, young people must have a place to gather. This generally fits the definition of a “***disorganized community***”.

As earlier noted, gang research seems to attribute white youth gang involvement on "racial and ethnic mixing". Indeed, the conditions where gangs emerge noted previously seems to confirm this view by identifying fundamental differences between communities where permanent gangs thrive and where they do not, (***disorganized communities***) thus allaying fears of gang permanence among white youth. Our experience at CYGS confirms Moore's observations, especially as relates to under-performing schools and the lack of career opportunities. However, it would seem logical that education and employment precedes the breakdown of family and community. Nevertheless, the discussion brings into focus where society might invest resources *if* society were serious about ending the bloody carnage in minority (disorganized) communities: quality education which then enhances employment and career opportunities; parks and healthy recreation outlets; and an honest and realistic program that instills and promotes hope for a future based on the preceding being done. Instead, “solutions” for this socially rooted problem have been led by law enforcement and the massive prison system, the enforcement and prison

industrial complex and the hundreds of millions of dollars invested through them. This institutional complex has experienced massive growth (US Bureau of Justice Statistics 2010). This over-reliance on enforcement and imprisonment has little to nothing to do with structural underpinnings of gangs and related community violence. However, these agencies were placed in this position and are simply doing their best to keep the violence down.

Ultimately, the FBI oversees national anti-gang efforts, including data gathering and analysis. In a 1997 statement before the US Senate, Steven R. Wiley, the chief of the FBI's Violent Crimes and Major Offenders Section stated the following: *"Two of the basic obstacles in addressing gang activity in communities around the nation is the absence of a universal definition for gangs, and the difficulty in documenting the nature and extent of gang related criminal activity. While some communities acknowledged difficulties in dealing with the problem, they failed to concede that they have a gang problem until the gangs become firmly entrenched"*. The FBI chief then gave the official overview for contemporary street gang violence: *"While street gangs may specialize in entrepreneurial activities like drug dealing, their gang related lethal violence is more likely to grow out of turf conflicts than from the entrepreneurial activity. Drug markets indirectly influenced violence by bringing rival gang members into proximity with one another, as most street gang violence involves inter-gang conflicts"*. He continued, *"By far the most visible and frightening of gang crimes is murder. Contrary to popular belief, most murders committed by gang members are not random shootings nor are they direct disputes over drugs or some other crime. While these types of gang homicides do occur, most are **the products of old-fashioned fights over turf, status and revenge**. Drive-by shootings and other confrontations of this kind typically involve small sets of gang members acting more or less on their own, not large groups representing the entire gang. But each attack creates a chain reaction of complicity, vengeance and commitment (Wiley, S, 1997)."*

The FBI Chief pointed out a few major points that guide the thoughts about street gangs: 1. the reluctance or outright failure of communities to recognize local gang problems until they were firmly entrenched; 2. that gangs are composed of ethnic persons that mainly kill each other over

*turf, status and revenge*; and 3. that once a group becomes involved, an ongoing chain reaction is put into place that commits the gang to further violence. This is the so-called gang *cycle of violence* that is the basis of modern gang understanding. Researchers are identifying mixed or hybrid groups as noted earlier. However, the *turf, status and revenge* rationale has been and continues to be the litmus test for mainline, or what are commonly referred to as *Traditional gangs*, meaning by definition: minority youth in disorganized communities. A closer look at Hybrid gangs reveals they are throwing everyone a curve.

From the Institute for Governmental Research: "*Question: Are today's youth gangs different from gangs in the past? Answer: Some of the gangs that have emerged in the past decade are noticeably different from those that emerged before the mid-1980's (Howell, Egley, and Gleason, 2002; Howell, Moore, and Egley, 2002). These gangs are commonly described as having a "hybrid gang culture", meaning they do not follow the same rules or methods of operation, making documentation and categorization difficult, they may have several of the following characteristics: a mixture of racial/ethnic groups, a mixture of symbols and graffiti associated with different gangs, wearing colors traditionally associated with a rival gang, less concern over turf or territory, and members who sometimes switch from one gang to another. Members of contemporary gangs often 'cut and paste' bits of Hollywood images and big-city gang lore into their local versions of gangs*" (Starbuck, Howell, and Lindquist, 2001). So-called Hybrid gangs have in their number youth wanting to engage in illegal economic activities. They also attract young people who are more rebellious than committed to dying over graffiti or turf, including groupies and trend followers. Hybrid groupings are also a haven for disaffected youth of a new generation, some of whom may eventuate to committing violence. ***But all of this was also true at the early evolutionary stages of the Traditional gangs.*** The emergence of Hybrids should shake up researchers who remain stuck on a racial and ethnic track and dismiss early warning signs of white youth's participation in violence and other antisocial behavior. Race-mixing is not the culprit, any more than African-Americans or Latino Americans are responsible for evolving Crips and barrio homeboys. ***Hybrids would seem to be an overlooked indicator of the growing acceptance of the gang culture as a viable vehicle for increasing numbers of disaffected youth, a sort of a reverse***



***funnel of disgruntled youth.*** Hybrid gangs also belie previously accepted definitions that gangs can be identified by turf, uniform or colors or even race and ethnicity.

In a fast moving and changing youth violence environment, various researchers including the former NYGC (NGC) of the Justice Department are attempting to keep track of and explain groups of youthful killers. Following trends and counting numbers while surreptitiously finding reasons to exclude white youth do not help explain *why* youth in any community engage in violence. One violent child is too many. Eight hundred thousand or so (ethnic gang count only) is a societal nightmare that requires a studied look that ignores politics of race or ethnicity.

The 1996 NYGC report stated, and affirmed by the FBI chief, that for various reasons, some jurisdictions do not want to classify violent youth activity as such or refuse to track them at all (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 1999). And some jurisdictions state that their youth groups only participate in “gang-like” behavior. Many cities and towns want to place blame for their violent youth anywhere but home. Popularly, Los Angeles and South of the border are the places most blamed for the explosion of gang problems: that they physically exported their reign of terror to unsuspecting cities small and large all over the USA. And between the Bloods and Crips and South of the border gangsters, gangs were out of local control, but through no fault of the locals. But a 1992 gang migration study of 1,100 targeted cities found that “most cities had local gangs before the onset of migration, and many respondents felt that their city would have a gang problem regardless of migration” (Maxson et al., 1996, p. 29). *There has been what amounts to a collective resistance to admitting that gang members or violent youth are growing in our own backyards, in our own soils and from our own seed.*

In addition, confusion in classifying violent youth activity remains to this day as to what constitutes gang related vs. gang motivated criminal activity (Langston, 2003). For example, in Los Angeles and other cities, if gang members kill someone while hijacking their car, raping a family member or robbing a home, it is not considered a gang murder. If a gang member kills another gang member over a drug deal gone bad or over drug sales territory, it is not a gang murder but is instead “drug related”.

If a child is killed while playing on the sidewalk or while sleeping in his bed in a botched gang drive-by shooting it is not a gang murder. However, if the perpetrator(s) and victim(s) are both members of gangs and the motive for a murder can be proven to be over *turf*, *status* or *revenge*, only then is it counted as a gang murder regardless of other factors. E.g. a gang member is killed on home turf in a drive-by shooting (*turf*); a gang member disrespects another gang member by word or deed and is killed for the act (*status*); a payback killing over an earlier gang-related murder (*revenge*). This paradigm applies to *Traditional* gangs only and does not apply to violent activities other groups engage in. For example: a skinhead gang that formed in Nebraska could do a drive-by shooting that kills a Latino child in a stroller and it would not be considered a gang killing. In fact, there is no gang definition for it. By the government's official definition of being motivated by *turf*, *status* and *revenge*, only ethnic minority youth fit the classification of street gangs. The others remain uncounated as "gang activity", regardless of other factors. Thus the non-ethnic gangster escapes prosecution and enhancements that apply to Traditional gang members and those who look like them.

These attempts to classify and define may be honest efforts to understand and deal more effectively with the groups involved in criminality. However, a de-facto separation along racial and ethnic lines is dangerous for all. When the Columbine incident occurred, all manner of research and discovery was directed at the malady presented. Whereas, homicides among black and brown youth are accepted without hardly a notice. All youth violence should be considered on an equal basis with resources directed at structural reasons for the outcomes without regard to race and ethnicity. We cannot get to the bottom line issues if we are content to allocate the problem according to group and their outward appearance, which are changeable.

The NGC is the first government agency to attempt to gather information, qualify and quantify the gang violence phenomenon in America. They accumulate and disseminate research and report what law enforcement officers observe in various parts of the country. As noted earlier, such reporting is subject to interpretation, local politics and personal bias. In addition, they are trailing indicators, in some cases delayed from two to five years. This is not a pure science. The question

must be asked, "Is this the best we can do?" As indicated by the FBI spokesman, tallying gang statistics can be difficult and imprecise. The National Gang Center began surveys and collecting research in 1985. As of 2008 and multi-millions of dollars later, unsettling problems remain with analysis and data gathering with respect to youthful violent groups. Defining and tallying numbers already trails reality by years and counts some and ignores others.

All indications are that this nation continues to experience a sustained gang membership drive. It is the author's educated opinion that if *all* violent groups were counted, the one-millionth gangster is already born and preparing for their role in society. There are untold numbers engaged in drive-bys, drug murders, carjacking, home invasions, race-murders, robberies, rapes, school shootings, park shootings and whatever new mayhem and terminology comes into vogue, and of course over *turf*, *status* and *revenge*.

How the numbers and appearances change is not as important as understanding why they exist at all. Do we continue to accept and promote that minority youth are somehow intrinsically, even genetically prone to violence and continue to profile, count, analyze and intercept them at ever younger ages? Or do we ask why is it that this death process is allowed to germinate and flourish in some communities and not in others?

There is no way to be sure of actual numbers of all youth lost to overall violent gang/group activity (NYGC, 1999b). According to the FBI Uniform Crime Report, updated 02/17/2006, total numbers of gang homicides from 2000 to 2004 were 718; 958; 986; 933 and 899 respectively. These account for approximately seven percent of total homicides for each year during the period. At an annual rate of 900 gang deaths per year, by the end of the first quarter of the new millennium, as many as 22,500 more youth will have died at the hands of other children. There are 22,500 more good reasons to get to the bottom of why gangs exist and thrive.

Over my twenty-five year career, I have found that gangs and the youth that comprise them are not dissimilar in various parts of the country. In fact, they are very much the same, regardless of group or location. What *is* highly variable is the degree of knowledge and belief about an area's violent youth, especially how and why they came into being. Many simply accept that such violence is endemic to minority groups. Thus, containment, isolation and force remain their solutions.

*Turf, status and revenge* have stood as the official reasons for gang violence. Acts of youth violence are screened via this tri-causal interpretation applying to ethnic and racial minority persons. This is actually a false screen. *In point of fact, not one gang member ever killed another person with turf, status or revenge as cause. These are merely "triggers" to violent actions and have nothing to do with what causes them.* These triggers are end-stage results of very real fundamental reasons for violence and for the development of gangs in the first place. The *turf, status and revenge* rationale is at best a tragic grand oversimplification with serious implications inasmuch as it impedes knowledge and thereby delays and even subverts permanent, structural solution. Successful intervention relies on understanding the source, stages and effects of youth violence and getting at root causes effectively and efficiently. Reacting to events is not only inaccurate, it is not proactive nor is it cost-effective.

It is obvious that 'triggering events' are being confused with causes. The biggest surprise of all may be that the youth involved in such violence do not understand the issue of youth violence either. When triggered they simply fire away! They also need answers to the same timeless questions. They do not delve beneath the obvious blood and guts level to see the complexities of their group's existence in a social schematic or their part in it.

Despite appearances to the contrary, I have witnessed that many hardened gang members are not comfortable in their high-risk lifestyle. They do not understand why they are in a violent group or why they do what they do. Nor do they understand why they are willing in many cases, to lay down their lives supposedly over *turf, status or revenge*. As they themselves will tell you, "That's just the way it is, man".

In moments of honesty, a hardened gangster will often acknowledge that he does not like the gangster life. His involvement seems almost involuntary. The most telling evidence of this is that he will do almost anything to keep his younger relatives from following in his footsteps. He cites feelings of being trapped, or being in too far to get out or that it's too late for him and his life is over even though he may only be in his 20s. But he will beg from a tattered heart to please, *please* concentrate on his siblings and/or his children to keep them out. This negative response to his practiced behavior belies what he has accepted as his place in life. Yet he continues to play the hand dealt as if

programmed to do so, behaving as if he is a hopeless case. No one has told him any different...on the contrary.

There must be logic applied to such a devastating phenomenon. Sometimes the efforts to save young people appear as doing more harm than good. In a large metropolitan county, a Probation Department "prevention program" had youth never convicted of a crime but "acting out" while living in gang areas placed on Probation caseloads as a preventative measure. They were *contractually obligated* to go to the Probation Department for prevention counseling where they and a parent sat in the same waiting room as hard-core convicted felons. To complete their negative conditioning and preparation for their future these impressionable youngsters would go on field trips in county jail buses sitting on seats where blood, urine and feces may have been earlier in the day and peered out of barred windows. The plan was to "save" a few of what was assumed to otherwise become violent "hard-core" killers using counseling and field trips but seemed more like a bad version of "scared straight".

Euphemisms such as "school violence" are coined for the spread of youth violence beyond traditional arenas in an effort to separate away and contain what is actuality a new strain of an old disease. Schools, our children's learning centers, have long been scenes of violence in so-called "disorganized communities". As non-traditional areas become affected, schools increasingly spend limited funds to transform into makeshift prisons. We continue to engage in classic overreactions to events, rather than working to understand and ameliorate the fundamental causes of youth violence anywhere.

As we attack the perception, the reality has escaped and moved on. The youth are not where we thought they were or are targeting. We are shocked and surprised at the new directions that youth are going and wonder why we always seem to be behind the youth violence curve trying desperately to catch up. We wonder why we just cannot seem to stop the inflow of youngsters into this death-defying lifestyle. In spite of multi-layered fixes, tougher sentences, tighter monitoring and expensive jail time, we appear impotent. Most researchers, practitioners as well as the youth involved have not a clue as to the real reasons youth are eliminating each other. Yet this is the basic question *not* being addressed at its core.



## 4

### Universal Pain in the Gang Universe

*America has endured many a plight, troubles and plagues. When faced with such, we move quickly to eradicate them at the source. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) and the Surgeon General of the United States have proclaimed youth violence to be a public health issue affecting the lives and well being of millions of American families (CDCP, Factsheet, 2005; DHHS 2001) This marks the first time agencies of the US government made a connection between youth violence and public health. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) has also entered this arena but in a way that should raise some concerns...*

With respect to America's longstanding youth violence problem, cops and prisons had become the de-facto answer to a problem promulgated as particular to racial and ethnic minorities. "Gang leaders" and "gang infrastructure" were some of the first targets, as though a monolithic gang brain-trust were breeding super gangsters who led legions of havoc-producing minions forth against society. But as fast as we locked them up or they died, other, often younger replacements competed for position. The solutions were then directed at the home, so parent classes and parental punishments were promoted as the solution to our gang problem. Still the violence continued. Then came the roundups, photo indexing children and their domains...

The CDCP and NIMH are pointing at research, prevention and treatment. The Justice Department remains concerned, as they must, with going after perpetrators. However, some of the NIMH research involves genetic predispositions to violence. This raises concern due to statements on the NIMH website: *"Tragic events like the shootings at Columbine High School capture public attention and concern, but are not typical of youth violence. Most adolescent homicides are committed in inner-cities outside of school. They most frequently involve an interpersonal dispute and a single victim. On average, six or seven youths are murdered in this*

country each day. Most of these are inner-city minority youths. Such acts of violence are tragic and contribute to a climate of fear in schools and communities.” Whew! And further down the page, “...research on differences in the magnitude of genetic and environmental influences on different kinds of conduct problems is providing a key to understanding the developmental origins of antisocial behavior. Many twin and adoption studies indicate that child and adolescent antisocial behavior is influenced by both genetic and environmental factors, suggesting that genetic factors directly influence cognitive and temperamental predispositions to antisocial behavior. These predisposing child factors and socializing environments, in turn, influence antisocial behavior. Research suggests that for some youth with early onset behavior problems, genetic factors strongly influence temperamental predisposition, particularly oppositional temperament, which can affect experiences negatively. When antisocial behavior emerges later in childhood or adolescence, it is suspected that genetic factors contribute less, and such youths tend to engage in delinquent behavior primarily because of peer influences and lapses in parenting. The nature of the child’s social environment regulates the degree to which heritable early predisposition results in later antisocial behavior.” [www.nimh.nih.gov/02/2006](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/02/2006)). Science is again following a pre-established belief structure about minorities. It should not surprise anyone that human beings are capable of violence in given situations. Violence is a human defensive mechanism as well as an offensive tool to secure human existence through natural and manmade turmoil. Would it not be more productive to deal with the manmade turmoil?

Comments at NGC, by the FBI and gang researchers already lean gang violence and its’ spread to minority groups. Now the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) accepts “*heritable predisposing violence influences*” that can be connected to biological common denominators that relate to a group(s), and that such violence occurs mostly with “*inner-city minority youth*”. The latest “discovery” of all of this is the so-called “warrior gene” mentioned earlier and as asserted by Florida State’s Kevin Beaver, “*Beaver’s study shows a direct link between boys who have the specific variant of the MAOA gene, called the “low-activity 3-repeat allele,” to gang membership and participation in gun violence. What this means, is that scientists finding the warrior gene in boys can predict gang membership, based on the existence of the*



*gene variant alone*". [www.physorg.com/news163419590.html](http://www.physorg.com/news163419590.html) This is really scary stuff.

The FBI, the National Institute of Mental Health, the Department of Homeland Security and the NGC appear to engage in overt and covert blame targeting against already put-upon minority communities. NIMH research further supports the Department of Justice model whereby barrios, ghettos and reservations *reproduce* gangsters. On its' face, this is reminiscent of the widely accepted belief structure and subsequent science and research supported **eugenics** movement and that period's set of inhumane beliefs, policies and practices. *A better research question would ask what societal factors contribute to local conditions that bring out the violence in people.*

If this logic is to be followed then the original Colonists and the heroes of the Boston Tea Party must be included in this study as they were seen by many as angry, violent anarchists, traitors and murderers who rioted and fought their legal government. These community reactionaries (terrorists?) perceived their English governors as oppressors. Were those who engaged in this behavior genetically predisposed to violence that "peer influences", "disorganized communities" and "lapses in parenting" then helped trigger? And of the Civil War patriots on both sides...were they triggered into the most violent national confrontation in our history due to a genetic variant...or are we searching for an outcome to fit a notion?

And what about the Poles, Irish, Jews and Italians that had gangs but their gangs disappeared? NIMH may be engaged in a search for neurobiological violence markers among *currently* high-violence individuals within certain groups that is no doubt inherent in the human animal, and which the triggering thereof has more to do with negative social, political, economic and environmental realities than a predisposing violence gene. The Irish, Italians, Poles, Jews, and other immigrant groups experienced similar negative experiences when relocating here albeit not as severe as Native Americans, African Americans, Asians and Latinos. All except Italians and Asians formed gangs *after* arriving. However, Italians and Asians had similar experiences in their native country. They too must be included in these studies. These factors should raise fundamental questions about the nature and relationship of community violence and/or peace within a societal structure, especially if there were common experiences of the

aforementioned groups (including the Colonists) relative to the levels and types of violent reaction. Are there genetic similarities? Or is it more logical that the human animal is predisposed with an ability to become violent should he face extermination or otherwise be pushed hard enough to explode? Groups can become violent when they feel threatened whether the threat is real or perceived.

The hundreds of thousands of violent white Neo-Nazis, KKK members and Skinheads must also be included. They purport to be at risk of loss. *These are probably the most advanced and well-organized violent "gangs" in US history yet not classified by NGC as violent gangs.* Law enforcement reports that the fastest growing numbers of gang members are Caucasian/white. Aren't they then eligible to be included not only in the genetic research but finally in the NGC gang count?

There will probably always be those who attempt to prove an inherent one-upmanship of one group over others. *The eugenics movement of last century sought to "prove" a scientific and biological superiority of the Anglo-Saxon white "race" over Latinos, blacks, Jews, Eastern Europeans, American Indians, etc.* Believers then used the powers within their grasp to advance eugenics in science, politics and academia with tragic results. It does appear that "race" is a remnant of the divisive superiority/inferiority viewpoint that still remains in our and other cultures. Isn't it time to stop using the term "race" at all?

As the latest genetic violence marker theory advances there will be those attempting to lend credibility to a "science" purporting to prove inbred tendencies towards violence according to group(s). *This will underpin the NIMH argument that "peer influences" and "lapses in parenting" help trigger genetically predisposed youth to their violent calling.* If resorting to violence is thus "proven", one could assume such a natural or inbred social failing of a group(s). If the "cause of violence" question is answered by genetics, peers and parents as source, *new genetic "research" could further formalize cradle to grave management and oppression and conceivably lead to "breakthrough" anti-gang medication for a Gang Deficit Disorder (GDD) to be administered to populations of minority young people fitting a particular "well-researched" profile and residing in a "known gang breeding area".* Such scientific "validations" also bolster social conditioning that gives the minority person a false sense of inferiority and the majority child a false sense of superiority, and worse: The KKK uses such "science" in

their arguments to “send them back to Africa” and to Mexico, thus “cleansing” America of foreign influences and now, inbred violence disorders “proven” to be peculiar to minorities and according to “race”.

Resorting to violence can simply indicate an overload of anger and rage build-up as happened with the Colonists and indeed other groups in similar situations throughout the world history.

We can agree that violence is not a healthy activity as it causes harm. However, violence does not just happen. To do any kind of violence to another indicates that deeper issues are involved, be it at the level of the individual, the group or a society. And violence begets violence. To want to kill your likeness for any reason should be considered a sign of psychological damage and illness. To want to destroy another human or an entire group is a major abnormality. As Dr. Phil might say, GET REAL!

***When the source or cause of a malady is unknown we are left to treat the symptoms.***

If we use a standard medical *disease* model, we might follow a different protocol. To wit: *A pathological condition of a system resulting from various causes and characterized by an identifiable group of signs or symptoms.*

This model allows one to follow the evolution of community violence from contact with original pathogen through stages and to present day. This model encompasses processes of identification, analysis and interpretation, prescription and treatment and follows the results and outcomes of those prescriptions and treatments. The protocol allows the possibility of full examination of relationships between and among violent communities and a host society.

If we consider that pathological violence is a disease, then we must look at the *host system* and any *sub-systems*, the possible *causes* and *sources* as well as *signs* and *symptoms*. Each of these must be seen as a distinct but dynamic part of the disease process that, in this case, educes chronic pathological violence.

## 5

**Social history and violence**

*Countless reports, studies and lawsuits provide ample evidence of dehumanizing actions, cultural destruction and even ethnic cleansing aimed at the same groups that exhibited community and gang violence soon after the moment of introduction.*

The term, “minority” is a derogatory term. It began its American travels as a value indicator, e.g., a “good, hardworking” non-white person in his prime might be valued at 2/3 personhood. In contemporary times, the term carries with it bias and as a way of placing a lesser value of dependence with violent tendencies. So be it.

Historical evidence connects acts and policies detrimental to minority groups by government, private institutions and citizens. These included violating basic freedoms beginning with the right to life. A fundamentally flawed belief system laid the foundation.

Lynching, indiscriminate murders and rapes were not and are not legal but perpetrated by citizens against minorities due to “differences”. Lawful, properly ordered policies and laws were enacted to the detriment of the same groups. *The effect was to begin and sustain a process of physical and emotional damage to groups of Americans that would impact entire populations for generations.*

These acts and policies *preceded* the emergence of a community’s gangs. It would seem logical that an elevated percentage of persons from any group subjected to systematic negative experiences would become violent given similar circumstances as minorities have endured in America, and other societies with similar social histories, e.g. Australia, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, South Africa... The difficulty in testing this theory would be establishing “similar circumstances” and then finding persons from the majority populations crazy enough to subject themselves to such an ordeal.

The model would be up to discussion but to begin with, we could segregate test subjects into small groups then begin to punch, kick, then rape, shoot and lynch random members and rob and steal from them with impunity, dehumanize and openly disrespect them, decimate their heritage, religions, cultures and leaders; randomly deport and forcibly relocate them and take their lands, resources, homes and businesses; deride how they look, who they are and how they live using every medium at our disposal and continue to do these over several generations and watch if and how they respond. If this test is not possible then hold everything until an equitable comparison can be devised.

\*

The term “Race” as a social construct was developed in Germany in the 1700’s. It established an elevated level of the white person over non-white persons. It has been used to the detriment of peoples to separate and denigrate, to discount history, achievements...and culture, the ancestral soul of a people. Culture is rich, vibrant and alive and critical to a people. When a group is relegated to a descending classification system (race) and then reduced to a “racial minority”, the minimizing of personhood is complete. Race reduces select others by popular demeaning, mistreatment and restrictive laws, policies and freedoms.

### **The Circle of Science, Racism and Violence**

The “science” of *eugenics* of the early 1900’s evolved methods to enhance the breeding of “fit” white persons and restrict breeding of “unfit” non-white persons, including forced sterilization. From 1910 to the 1940’s, this belief system was especially strong in the United States, England and Germany where *eugenics* had leaders and followers in the scientific community, the political and religious establishments and academia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugenics>.

At a point, Nazi Germany attempted to take this belief system to its logical end with disastrous results. At about the same time, in America, 24 states passed sterilization laws and 30 states had laws aimed at social “misfits” of color along with the retarded, criminal and insane. Many states passed laws prohibiting mixed-race marriages and the federal 1924 Immigration Act (termed National Origins Act) severely limited those who could come to this country for fear of polluting the Anglo-Saxon population.

Scientific evidence now shows *no such genetic racial distinction exists among humans*, and in fact, the opposite is true: when following genetic origins of persons of different “races”, there have been found closer genetic relationships between some black and white persons than of those that were the same color. Recent findings in genetic research indicate there is no scientific support for “race” as a biological determiner or trait; that there may be at most genetic variants that distinguish skin color, eye or hair color (Adelman, Larry, *Race - The Power of an Illusion*, PBS, 2003). “Race” as a biological basis of human distinction is specious. “Race” is nothing more than a human construct - a concept and nothing else. As true genetic research unfolds, similarities will likely replace differences.

The “science” of *eugenics* is now in disrepute but the belief system that brought it into being stubbornly remains. According to Adelman, “*a belief in biological race also obscures the very salient consequences of race as learned experience. Race may be a biological myth, a social construction, but it nonetheless remains very real. It can even have biological effects. African-Americans have among the highest rates of hypertension in the world. This was long assumed to be genetic, a “marker” of their nature. But then it was found that West Africans have among the world’s lowest hypertension rates. A focus of race, as innate biology, as genetic difference, would lead health professionals and policymakers to overlook social factors that might contribute to African American hypertension and heart disease, including the added stressor of living in a racist society.* Adelman continued...

*Race is terribly relevant to life outcomes. The likelihood that toxic waste has been dumped in your neighborhood, your ability to get a home loan, the quality of your kids education, connections to job opportunities, whether or not you are likely to be followed in a department store or pulled over by police, are all influenced by your race. Race does matter. Not race as genetics, but what sociologists call “social” race. Social race is an important variable for health researchers and epidemiologists.”* (Adelman, Larry, *Race - The Power of an Illusion*, PBS, 2003).

Race as currently defined, is not an indicator of success or failure, achievement, violence or anything else. However, race has been used when setting up groups *for* achievement, success or hopelessness and failure. “Race” is *not* used for purposes of achieving parity or recovering lost freedoms or benefits never meant for people of color. It is used to

monitor failures and to illustrate that some “races” continue to “underperform” vs. other “races”. This usage supports a false belief of group superiority and group inferiority...especially to children on both sides of a made-up scale. The term “race” must continue to refer to and be associated with its intended use: unjustified marginalization, discrimination, dehumanization, bias and exclusion.

Popular belief has guided research which helped establish guidelines that became policies and laws carried out by institutions which continued to guide and reinforce popular belief...for each new generation. *And children adapt to them.* Members of non-white, ethnic and cultural groups will often nod to each other in acknowledgment of their common placement in society and all that it means. Science must be mindful not to allow bad assumptions lay groundwork for further separation, containment, control and manipulation of easily identifiable groups, *based on popular belief.*

We can never know all there is to know about the enslaving, raping and murdering of African-Americans, Asians, Mexican Americans and Native Americans but we do know that these groups have these as shared experiences. During this nation’s history, the abuse and killing of these groups for sport or practiced belief was allowed; as were destruction of cultural and religious icons, illegal deportations and imprisonment; and the rounding up and placing of native-born people on desolate reservations by various means including forced death marches were government policy. Along with these acts of social, economic and political violence was the violent uprooting of non-white families from homes, businesses and traditional ways of life. These actions and more were designed to benefit the majority group in the original version of “affirmative action”, and had an impact on both sides: one elevated in wealth and position and the other decimated.

### **Government lays community development groundwork**

Property redlining began in the 1930’s when the federal government created subsidized low-cost home loans to spur home ownership and growth. The United States Bureau of the Census in partnership with the Federal Housing Administration established a national appraisal system that mapped where minority families lived. Restrictive lending policies for such mixed neighborhoods were established while granting favorable loan treatment and generous redevelopment grants to all-white

neighborhoods. MARC SEITLES, THE PERPETUATION OF RESIDENTIAL RACIAL SEGREGATION IN AMERICA: HISTORICAL DISCRIMINATION, MODERN FORMS OF EXCLUSION, AND INCLUSIONARY REMEDIES © 1996

Journal of Land Use & Environmental Law.

The U.S. Census thus directed where taxpayer supported funding would flow for community infrastructure development *including favorable financing for homes, schools, libraries, parks and playgrounds.*

These policies also established a favorable institutional framework for banking, insurance and retail investment for decades to come. This extended to awarding of jobs, educational grants, government contracts and more and better jobs. Imagine this nation today if all groups and communities benefitted from such favorable treatment...such “*affirmative action*”. If all communities had shared equally beginning back then, “disorganized communities” would not have begun to emerge and would not exist today. Multi-\$Billions of everyone’s tax dollars have been dedicated to the improvement, health and wealth of the majority group in various government giveaways and white “affirmative action” as a matter of course.

The 1790 Naturalization Act permitted “free white persons” only to become naturalized citizens, further restricting non-white access to citizenship and government largess; the landmark Social Security Act of 1935 excluded agricultural and domestic workers who were mostly Asian, American of Mexican descent and African-American; the 1935 Wagner Act allowed persons to unionize but allowed unions to exclude non-whites; the Supreme Court rulings of 1857 and 1896 respectively, affirmed slavery and the constitutionality of racial segregation. In the decade from 1929 to 1940, close to one-half million *American citizens* of Mexican descent were deported to Mexico losing their homes, lands and businesses. U.S. Immigration with local law enforcement burst into homes with guns drawn and did not let them take anything, including birth certificates that would prove citizenship. During World War II, Asians were lawfully interned and lost their homes, lands and businesses. A century earlier the 1830 Indian Removal Act allowed for the forcible relocation of tribes to make way for white settlers who were then given the land free under the 1862 Homestead Act.

Entire populations were systematically excluded from participation in these acts of selective distribution except as financial donors through taxes or as former owners of lands, homes and businesses without compensation or recourse and at some cost of lives and liberties. *These acts and policies helped white families accumulate the wealth, position*



*and power they enjoy today.* There were no public outcries of the unconstitutionality of it, the unfairness of selecting people by color or nationality to benefit from all of our tax dollars going to purchase homes, improve education, health, wealth and welfare. Or when property was “obtained” after being “abandoned” by those deported or placed on reservations and to an uncertain fate. There is more, so much more.

Lawsuits and legislation that attempt to put in place even a modicum of similar benefits or to help groups that were left out of the government munificence have found difficult going. These efforts are termed “favoritism”, “preferential treatment”, “socialism” and even communism and have been used to denigrate simply by their mention. Affirmative Action, parity and set-asides for minority individuals and businesses are policies that have been given a negative connotation in messages generated by biased politicians and spokespersons and carried by a compliant media. These policies are referred to in a ways that further demean those who attempt to make use of them by making them feel “less than” for even considering such assistance. Today, such quota and parity programs are almost non-existent, victims of white backlash. The full story is not told so cannot be factored in to people’s thinking. We are left to conclude that some groups are inferior and need government help in order to compete with the “superior” white “race”. *In actuality, all the affirmative action programs ever imagined would not match the government benefits given the white population to ensure their success.* And whether by force or by edict, ***the entire process amounts to violence done against particular groups to benefit a select group.*** How these deeds are labeled by leaders and presented by media shapes the way the general population accepts or rejects them. The battle still rages between those who would continue to subvert fair and equal opportunity and withhold well earned prosperity and those who would even the playing field.

As we enter our third century, education funding is still woefully unequal. We continue to uncover acts, policies and patterns of bias in housing, employment, lending and judicial processes. When one becomes familiar with the vast breadth and scope of the favoritism/discrimination paradigm, *one cannot help but reach the conclusion that part of this nation’s successful 225 year march entailed resource deprivation, economic and social segregation, overt and covert violence and exclusion of some of us to attain success for others.*

Biased acts and policies *continue to be upheld and preserved by God-fearing American citizens – those elected, appointed and employed.* Perhaps human nature must sometimes be protected from itself.

There are over six-hundred white terrorist hate “groups” under the headings of Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazi, Neo-Confederate, Racist Skinhead, Christian Identity and others now active throughout the United States. They have names like Aryan Nations, National Alliance, Creativity Movement and World Church of the Creator. The tens of thousands of Americans active in these hate “groups” actively support the same racist belief structure.

For more than three centuries Native Americans, African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Jews, Irish, Poles, Italians and others have had to overcome hate crimes, discriminatory practices, laws, policies and terrorist acts and behaviors in the United States of America and many of these groups evolved gangs and some rioted. ***But a causative connection to gangs and other community violence among those excluded, terrorized, murdered and oppressed was never made.***

## 6

**A tradition of violence – the rise of the Reservation Community:**

*The Native American experience is one that is rarely highlighted in commentaries about American racism. A stunning action by the United States Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs provides a dramatic and instructive object lesson:*

At the ceremony honoring the Bureau's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary, held September 8, 2000, Kevin Gover, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs issued a formal apology to Native Americans for acts against these first Americans. He said in part: "this agency at various times profoundly harmed the communities it was meant to serve...it was an instrument...to execute the removal of...tribal nations." That, "this agency participated in ethnic cleansing that befell the western tribes"; engaged in "death marches" and "the deliberate spread of disease, the decimation of herds, the use of the poison alcohol to destroy mind and body, and the cowardly killing of women and children (that) made for a tragedy on a scale so ghastly that cannot be dismissed".

He spoke of the "destructive efforts to annihilate Indian cultures" and the "devastation of Tribal economies" and "forced dependence on this agency". He also pointed out how "thefts of land" and how the government agency "forbade Indian languages, religious activities, governments and made Indian people ashamed of who they were" were activities that required an apology. And "worst of all," he stated, "the Bureau...committed these acts against the children entrusted to its boarding schools, brutalizing them emotionally, psychologically, physically and spiritually." He added, "The trauma of shame, fear and anger has passed from one generation to the next, and manifests itself in rampant alcoholism, suicides and violent deaths at the hands of one another".

He also spoke of “dehumanization and purposeful stereotyping them as sub-human, leading American people to shallow and ignorant beliefs about Indians.” And who “in the past has committed acts so terrible that they affect, diminish, and destroy the lives of Indian people decades later, generations later.” Alas, there it is: dehumanization, ethnic cleansing and genocide, cultural destruction: *terrorism*...and the multi-generational consequences thereof.

It was a bold first step toward acknowledging blame for past practices that reverberates today. As it turns out this first step was short-lived. Even so, in the same year the Catholic Church made a similar gesture of apology to indigenous peoples in the Americas. And on June 4, 2005 a memorial to the Navajo Long Walk was dedicated in New Mexico. The Lieutenant Governor stated that it is a dark chapter in our nation’s history, referring to the reservation as a brutal prison camp.

These statements emanating from the United States government, the Catholic Church and one state in the union are profound. I encourage you to read the preceding paragraphs again as they exemplify how and why an otherwise healthy and vibrant people can devolve to become unstable and eventually self-destructive, all resulting from a society’s beliefs, policies, laws and behaviors.

Native American nations have been brutally contained and horrifically managed. The results of such societal “management” are clearly connected in a cause and effect design that continues to have deleterious effects mentally, physically and emotionally. And as crime rates rise and fall in other parts of this country, reservations continue to become more dangerous for native youth. According to a Department of Justice study, of the 550 recognized tribes, their youth ages 12-20 are 58% more likely to be crime victims than whites and blacks; those under 15 are murdered at twice the rate of white teenagers, commit suicide at more than twice the rate of non-Native American youth, suffer from alcohol related deaths at more than 10 times and are arrested for alcohol related crimes at twice the national average. The study also found that school failure rates are much higher than those found in the rest of society.

It is appropriate to view the Native American experience as applicable to thousands of minority communities in cities and towns across this great nation where minority families have had to overcome similar adversity. There are glaring similarities between communities on urban “reservations” and those of the Native American and regardless of

geography the outcomes are too similar to dismiss as ethnic or genetic peculiarities.

In the wake of such *social history* are Native American reservations and *urban “reservation communities” spread out across America. Young people in each “reservation”, regardless of location, culture or ethnicity, inherit the experiences of those gone before, and is where a people, now subdued, end up under government control and supervision. Many learn fear and distrust of white persons and institutions. Many feel hopeless and some become self-destructive. In an ironic twist we now refer to youth in this self-destruct mode as “terrorists”. However, and make no mistake – original violence against a people is the primary source of community violence.*

A society can manipulate social, economic and political elements into a dual purpose dynamic: to support, enhance and maintain one segment - to the detriment of other segments. Over time, the process becomes tradition and entails a system of violence and violations of human and civil rights resulting in a seemingly unsolvable societal manifestation: the “reservation community”. These are communities where groups are cut off from social and government munificence and survive straddling third-world conditions. Before they became “reservation communities” they suffered societal violence (physical, economic, political, social, religious) be it slavery, land theft, illegal deportation, segregation and redlining of all sorts, prison camps and other forms of rounding up, withholding voting, outlawing religions, etc. The more visible activities read like psychopaths run amok: shooting galleries using live targets, mass murder, dragging to death, dismembering and skinning alive, lynching, burning, raping, tarring and feathering and more. If terrorism is defined as acts designed to place fear in the hearts and minds of a population, then these indeed rank with the worst acts of terrorism.

Every minority group has suffered some of these. They ingested the societal violence and turned frustration, grief and anger on themselves and each other rather than attack a country they want desperately to be part of.

Over time, parts of the affected community adopt negative social modifications that become entrenched and drive negative beliefs among the general population *and* among their own. These result in increasing group isolation and control *and* subjection to localized negative structural processes (violence cycles) that together thwart emergence out

of those circumstances while further exacerbating local conditions. In turn, this negative status justifies added controls and containment. Once the process becomes institutionalized, the violence “root causes” are easily manipulated or ignored completely.

*An analogy would be like placing a group on an island, planting a harmful bacterium among them and watching from afar as increasing numbers become ill and even die. If and when the elevated levels of illness and death are noticed, explain to all that this deadly “disease” phenomenon is one that these people brought upon themselves; they created it and/or it is endemic to their population.*

*Forces are sent to the island with a “treatment” program of resource and economic deprivation, brutality, group containment, popular negation, blame targeting and negative belief management and reinforcement, punishment and confinement. And when they don’t respond but get worse, multiply the number of forces assigned, add media to the messaging arsenal and expand “treatment”. After a time, claim the “islanders” are unresponsive in spite of Herculean efforts stating, “We have to give up on this generation and concentrate on the next”. However, by now the same “treatment” modality has expanded to include parents and newborns - the next generations.*

*Specialists and researchers ignore the bacteria-disease connection but go to great pains to count the dead and dying, noting how many different ways they go and creating economic enterprises around these. Thus, “treatment” is actually a symbiotic maintenance program perversely becoming an external avenue for additional economic benefit while guaranteeing future infection and destruction of the community. Simple cures for the original and once uncomplicated bacterial infection are never tried as identifying it would reveal the original malevolent act. It would also create a drought for those financial ventures.*

*Meanwhile, the bacteria mutate and escape, creating concern for public safety in non-infected locales, necessitating increasingly desperate “treatments” directed not at the infecting bacteria but at the infected group, all the while insisting that the origin and intransigence of the disease is with that group; they are the problem and must be dealt with accordingly. This core belief becomes tradition as a result of popular and strategic belief reinforcement throughout the society.*

*With regard to elevated violence in “reservation communities”, or, “disorganized communities” if you like, the original infecting bacterium has not been described accurately to this day - not the source, evolution*

*or the varied and devastating manifestations. The infecting bacterium or pathogens include: attempted extermination (genocide), slavery, murder, access deprivation, land theft and forced removal, spiritual devastation, traumatic events, racism and bias emanating from a society that has ignored these aspects as they have not been part of the violence discussion.*

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The concept that persons in certain barrios, ghettos and indeed Native American reservations share a “reservation community” history, set of experiences and negative outcomes that passes from generation to generation has support as earlier pointed out. There is an area of study undergoing intellectual development that helps explain the process of intergenerational transmission of shared group trauma. Massive group trauma, Historical Trauma (HT), multi-generational trauma and intergenerational trauma are terms that help describe the process which is not dissimilar to what survivors of the Holocaust and their descendants have experienced.

Columnists Roberto Rodriguez and Patrisia Gonzales have long addressed humanitarian issues in their Column of the Americas (XColumn@gmail.com). In one such column, Patrisia writes about Dr. Karina Walters, A noted Choctaw scholar who points out that the trauma is targeted at the collective and to the collective experience and is held personally and transmitted over generations. Thus, she states, even family members who have not directly experienced the trauma can feel the effects of the event(s) generations later, as proffered in the BIA apology. Patrisia also writes of Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, who has written extensively of the concept of Historical Trauma (HT).

This work illuminates the way in which some indigenous scholars are approaching the idea in their community. This research is useful and critical to understanding how violence eventuates within a community of people from the outside in *before* it becomes manifest as what we know as community violence. The extensive apology made by the BIA helps establish that part of the link in the Native American chain of violence we describe. Moreover, the experience is similar for other “reservation communities” past and present e.g. African-Americans, Latino/ Hispanic Americans, Asian-Americans and other minorities in this country and certainly in other countries.

A more recent exploration of genetics and behavior seems to validate the theory of multigenerational or Historical Trauma. “*A genome is the*

*complete set of deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA, in a cell. DNA carries the instructions for building all of the proteins that make each living creature unique. Derived from the Greek, epigenome means "above" the genome. The epigenome consists of chemical compounds that modify, or mark, the genome in a way that tells it what to do, where to do it and when to do it. The marks, which are not part of the DNA itself, can be passed on from cell to cell as cells divide, and from one generation to the next.*" (<http://www.genome.gov/27532724>)

Epigenetic tagging actually "guides" the human genome in behavior and other aspects that help shape the person. This new research illustrates how Epigenetic tags may be activated by responding to environmental conditions such as stress, behavior and even toxins. Thus, Epigenetics makes identical twins not identical even though they have the same genetic make-up. Research is mainly concerned with relevance to diseases at this point. However, in the search for causes and solutions to violence, research must expand to include relevant social histories and the degree or severity of social, physical, emotional, and even economic impact on a people and/or group. Apparently, past can and does impact the future but not due to genetic abnormalities as some propose but rather social and physical experiences and the level of impact over time.

The following excerpts are from a special report entitled, "Psychological Treatment of Ethnic Minority Persons" by the Council of National Psychological Associations for the Advancement of Ethnic Minority Interests. The group consists of The Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA), The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi), The National Latina/o Psychological Association (NLPA) and The Society of Indian Psychologists (SIP) and published by the Association of Black Psychologists, Washington, D.C., 11/2003. The report discusses psychological well-being and treatment considerations as seen by treating professionals from each group. It is interesting that common concerns, experiences and outcomes are evident throughout the report to the point that the groups are almost interchangeable.

From the report:

**As re: Asian Americans:** *"Historically, racism and sexism toward Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States have been prevalent. Whether mandated by U.S. Government (e. g., Gentleman's Agreement of 1860, anti-miscegenation laws, and unconstitutional internment of Japanese Americans during World War II) or acted upon*



*by individuals via hate crimes, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders continue to face oppression and racism in the United States. For any Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, the sense of collectivism and group identity results in a shared experience of discrimination, even when such events are experienced by other Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.*

*Psychological researchers have documented the effects of trans generational psychological trauma among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. For example, children of Japanese Americans interned during WW II experienced negative psychological sequelae from the internment. The concept of trans generational trauma also is particularly important given the large number of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who have immigrated to the United States from countries ravaged by war, famine, and economic and political upheaval. Although their progeny may not have personally been tortured, raped, or beaten, their parents who did experience those atrocities may pass down the psychological trauma to them. Many Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are regularly bombarded with messages to assimilate and that their culture and heritage are not valued. A specific example is the English-only initiative. Rather than valuing multilingual individuals as an important resource, several states have had English-only initiatives that could be interpreted as intolerance and non-acceptance for individuals who speak languages other than English. These initiatives are typically generated by European Americans who lack the ability to speak other languages as well as knowledge of the future potential economic growth and resources of the population they purport to represent. An interesting irony is that a century ago, European Americans prevented non-English speaking minorities from learning English for fear they would become educated and compete economically. Although the most frequently spoken languages in the world are Asian, the U.S. education system places more value on European-based languages over Asian languages, creating yet another barrier. This is most readily observed by examining the foreign language offerings in most middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities. This results in fewer individuals having the capability to communicate with Asian American/Pacific Islander immigrants whose first language is Asian, which, in turn, affects the number of treatment providers who can provide services in clients' first language. When employed, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders continue to experience the glass-ceiling effect. Although trained and competent, in many*

*companies, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders find it difficult to move beyond mid level positions. Stereotypes of Asian American/Pacific Islander employees of being smart, hardworking, and reliable, yet passive and quiet, result in many individuals being passed over for much-deserved promotions and recognition. Implications for negative effects on self-worth are clear. Negative stereotypes of Asian American/Pacific Islander men being undesirable, while stereotypes of Asian American/Pacific Islander women as exotic and sexualized are also psychologically damaging.*

*A damaging result of the model minority myth is that many Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders are invisible minorities. This is particularly the case when discussions of diversity focus only on “Black/White” issues...”* By Gayle Y. Iwamasa, PhD, Asian American Psychological Association.

**As re: African-Americans**, the implications are similar to other group’s experiences: *“For example, a history of enslavement, colonization, and neocolonialism is the foundation for current state of affairs throughout the African world. This state of affairs can impact symptom formation in a number of critical ways. One of the most common is the adoption of the beliefs and values of the dominant group to the detriment of one’s own self and collective group, below are three examples.*

- *Identification with the aggressor—taking on the beliefs, values and behaviors of the oppressor, trying to be “more like” the oppressor, than the oppressor, manifesting in a anti-self disorder in which “the other” and his/her characteristics are perceived more desirable than one’s own and there is no knowledge of one’s own outside of the interpretation and context of “the other”*

- *Internalized oppression--anger, rage, and sense of inferiority and self-loathing turned inward, manifest in anti-self and alien-self disorders in which one acts in way detrimental to self and one’s group of origin ( e. g., willingness to play role of “overseer,” or gatekeeper to block progress of member’s of one’s own group)*

- *Attempts to escape the perpetual mini assaults and major life traumas of racism and white supremacy through psychotic escape, substance abuse, black-on-black crime, and suicidal behavior or homicide...”*

*And continuing: "...Starting with African Americans whose immigration to America was forced, and whose labor netted this nation – and most of Western European nation s – the economic dominance they have enjoyed for centuries, the group is unique by virtue of the nature, quality, and degree of socially sanctioned violence, hostility, and aggression practiced by the dominant culture towards them generation after generation. At the same time, it is imperative to understand that their "beingness" is not limited to a reactionary navigation through foreign inhumane circumstances and conditions forced upon them. The resilience of this cultural group is astounding in the face of the non-stop negating onslaught from the dominant culture. As the formal mechanisms of cultural transmission remain under attack, disruption of the group's own indigenous strengths continue to be apparent. Those given opportunity typically flourish and often excel, according to the dominant cultural standards. Those most disenfranchised economically and educationally, may also experience the "good life," a life of peace, joy, and well-being, depending on their relationship to traditional African values and beliefs. Those who seek access, whether or not they may "get in" to the non-merit based system of material rewards offered by the dominant culture, also suffer, as they often internalize oppression and succumb to psychological incarceration..."* By Linda James Myers, PhD; Anthony Young, PsyD; Ezemenari Obasi, MA, Suzette Speight, PhD, Association of Black Psychologists.

**As re: Latino/Hispanics:** *"The underutilization of mental health services by Hispanics in the United States is deeply rooted in White America's refusal to recognize and value the central role of Hispanics in the past, present, and future of this country. The educational, political, and economic development of Hispanics has been characterized by a history of neglect, oppression, and long periods of passive if not deliberate denial of opportunity. While overt racism is no longer acceptable in many areas of modern American society, subtle and more overt vestiges of oppression and racism continue linguistically, educationally, and economically:*

*Language: A young child who speaks English as well as a second language such as German, French, or Italian is viewed as precocious. In contrast, many children who speak English and Spanish are considered deficient.*

*Education: Not only are a disproportionate number of Latino students placed into special education programs but districts with higher proportions of White teachers enroll minorities in special education at a higher rate.*

*Economic: Many Hispanics earn very low wages because of low levels of educational attainment. However, Latino high school and college graduates earn less than their White and African American counterparts. In addition, undocumented immigrants often live in extreme density conditions and may be exploited, working at the most difficult and undesirable jobs for less than minimum wage and at times not paid for their labor by unscrupulous contractors.”* By Andres Barona, PhD; Maryann Santos de Barona, PhD, National Latina/o Psychological Association

**And as re: Native Americans:** *“The history of the Native American includes the invasion of European immigrants, loss of the war effort to keep their land, forced removal of Native people of the eastern United States to the Oklahoma area, confinement of Native people to reservations, decimation of the population by diseases such as smallpox, disruption of Native culture by constant fighting and moving, religious persecution, and introduction of alcohol. In the early 1800s, the policy of the U.S. government was to kill or remove Native people from their historic homelands in the eastern United States to accommodate the growing need for land by European settlers. The Native people were cheated, tricked, and forced to move, and many died of cold, disease, and starvation during these moves. This Indian removal effort is known to Natives as the “trails of tears” because of the deep sorrow experienced by the Native people who lost their land and loved ones. During this 400-year period in their history, numerous Native people died, and traditional Native culture was severely disrupted. The 1900s were a period of recovery, with tribes seeking to maintain their traditional ways under the constant pressure of acculturation stressors and the need to survive and thrive in the “modern” world.*

*Two major cultural genocide efforts further disrupted and complicated the recovery of Native people during the 1900s, Indian boarding schools and the Indian Relocation Program. The boarding schools were a forced education and Christianizing effort by the U.S. government and various churches to change the “heathen” and uneducated Native people into “civilized” and Christian citizens.*

*Children were forcibly taken from their homes and placed in government or church boarding schools, their hair was cut, they were put in uniforms, beaten if caught speaking their language or practicing their own ways, and they were not allowed visits from their families or visits to their homes. An entire generation of Native people was subjected to this treatment, and the extent and severity of the abuse suffered by these children is still being uncovered and still affecting their offspring.*

*The effects of the boarding schools have been far reaching and intergenerational in their impact on American Indian people. The generation of Native people who were subjected to this atrocity experienced a loss of their culture and a loss of the opportunity to learn parenting skills.*

*Because of the severe physical and sexual abuse perpetrated upon these unprotected and captive Native children, as adults, they have experienced depression, anxiety, and post traumatic stress disorders, as well as some of them becoming perpetrators of abuse themselves. In addition, many of these Native people turned to drugs and alcohol to cope with the pain they were experiencing.*

*The Indian Relocation Program was part of an effort in the 1960s to do away with American Indian reservations. Native people on the reservation were offered travel assistance and funding support to leave the reservations and move to large cities (Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver, and others) to find a job and settle there. These large cities still have large populations of American Indian people who have remained there and are now “urban Indians” as opposed to “reservation Indians.” The effect of the Indian Relocation Program was not to abolish reservations but to create Indian ghettos in large cities and to further disrupt the culture. Many of these Native people became “marginalized,” meaning that they no longer fit into their own cultural group nor were they part of the majority population. Thus, they were, basically, without a culture. Their children grew up distanced from their extended family and their culture, perhaps visiting only during the summers and likely not speaking their native language, while simultaneously experiencing discrimination from the majority culture.*

*American Indians are the only minority group in the United States that has a legal definition of their race (.25blood quantum). This method is used to determine eligibility for services. Not all Native people recognize the federal government definition, and asking, “How much Indian are you?” would be an inappropriate and insensitive question to*

*ask a Native person. Over 150 Indian languages are still used, and there are elders who still speak only their own language. Native tradition is an oral one, with history and stories passed down orally. Only within the 1900s did most Native tribes begin to try to develop a written language. Because of this, very few Native people can read or write in their own language.*

*Unemployment on American Indian reservations is consistently high, ranging from 80% in some plains states to 20% in more prosperous tribes. The poverty rate is quite high and similar to those of African American and Hispanic people. It is reported that nearly one third of all American Indian adults are functionally illiterate, and those 25 years and older have an average of 9.6 years of formal education. This is below the 10.9 year national mean and is the lowest of any ethnic minority group in the nation. On a more encouraging note, in the fall of 1996, 134,000 American Indians were enrolled in the nation's colleges and universities, up from 84,000 in the fall of 1980. During the 1995-1996 school year, about 15,000 of the nation's American Indians and Alaska Natives received college degrees.*

*In the face of very difficult times, American Indian people have demonstrated extraordinary strength, and many have found healthy ways of coping with the stress of forced acculturation, attempted genocide, loss of land and culture, and the death of loved ones. They have coped by practicing Native spirituality, valuing connections with families and communities, and initiating a grassroots movement toward healthier life styles. Unfortunately, all these stressors have taken their toll on American Indian and Alaskan Native people. Depression and adjustment reactions are the most prevalent mental health problems, with suicide among adults more than twice as high as rates in the majority culture, and in school-age children 3 times greater than that of White Americans. A congressional hearing on Native juvenile alcoholism and drug abuse reported that 52% of urban Indian adolescents and 80% of reservation Indian adolescents engaged in heavy alcohol or drug use compared to 23% of their urban, non-Indian counterparts. Delinquency and arrest rates are the highest of any ethnic minority group. Because of alcohol problems and family disruption, child abuse is also a problem in some tribes." By Carolyn Barcus, EdD Society of Indian Psychologists*

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*African-American, Latino and Native American communities exhibit higher rates of self-destructive behavior than the norm. However,*

incidents of self-destructive behavior for Native Americans are higher than other groups. Native Americans, African-Americans, Asian Americans and Latino/Mexican Americans all suffered extraordinary multi-generational trauma and the BIA apology relating to Native Americans could easily fit the other groups. Each suffered indiscriminate murders and had land and property stolen from them. The Native American's higher rates may indicate an earlier onset and longer duration of trauma(s); an elevated level of trauma (more concentrated and comprehensive); and a continuing relatively lower social, economic and political standing; or all three and more that directed research would help uncover.

Although there may be minor differences as to how particular groups respond to similar trauma, the evidence suggests that conditions and influences underlie each. The violent and self-destructive actions exhibited by all affected groups are too similar to dismiss as behavior typical of minorities without investigating the society as common denominator. Or, we would have to accept the existence of another common denominator such as a gene peculiar to ethnic/minority people capable of producing gangs and the like or at least a predisposing heritable trait as the NIMH research seems to want to suggest. If this were the case, NIMH should also search for a genetic predisposition among all groups for propensity to engage in slavery, murder, rape, land theft, dehumanization and attempted genocide. The experience of each minority group that has evolved violent youth groups has been the same. "Reservation communities" are created by the same forces regardless of society or group, and with time and experience, people living in those "reservations" will follow similar patterns.

### **Maintaining national innocence or acknowledging national disgrace**

On the PBS television show, Bill Moyers Journal, Dr. James Cone, an accomplished author and religious theologian was the guest. In their conversation Dr. Cone and Bill Moyers reflect on the concept of "national innocence" and the impact of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, whose 20th century work related theology to modern society and politics. In 2005, famed historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. lamented the disappearance of Niebuhr from modern discourse:

"...maybe Niebuhr has fallen out of fashion because 9/11 has revived the myth of our national innocence. Lamentations about "the end of

innocence" became favorite clichés at the time. Niebuhr was a critic of national innocence, which he regarded as a delusion. After all, whites coming to these shores were reared in the Calvinist doctrine of sinful humanity, and they killed red men, enslaved black men and later on imported yellow men for peon labor - not much of a background for national innocence. Nations, as individuals, who are completely innocent in their own esteem," Niebuhr wrote, "are insufferable in their human contacts." The self-righteous delusion of innocence encouraged a kind of Manichaeism dividing the world between good (us) and evil (our critics)."

And later on the same show, a revelation of collective violent behavior:

"The work of historian and photographer [Ken Gonzales-Day](#) documents the lost history of lynching and reminds Americans that not all lynching took place in the South and that Native Americans, Chinese immigrants, and Latinos were also victims of the (white) lynch mob. His photograph of a "Hang Tree" in California begins the slideshow." ([www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/11232007/profile.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/11232007/profile.html); downloaded 11-25-07)

"In fact, Gonzales-Day was able to document 350 lynchings in the State of California between 1850 and 1935. The majority were perpetrated against Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans; more Latinos were lynched in California than were persons of any other race or ethnicity." ([www.dukeupress.edu/books.php3?isbn=978-0-8223-3794-2](http://www.dukeupress.edu/books.php3?isbn=978-0-8223-3794-2) downloaded 11-25-07)

Alabama's Tuskegee Institute maintained statistics on lynching in America from 1882 - 1968. Their total: 4,749. Lynching peaked in the U.S. in the 1890s but some of the most highly publicized lynching occurred in the 1930s - 1950s. Anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells-Barnett lobbied for decades to make lynching a federal crime.

In 2005 the Senate formally apologized for failing to act on some 200 anti-lynching bills. The resolution states that the Senate "expresses the deepest sympathies and most solemn regrets of the Senate to the descendants of victims of lynching, the ancestors of whom were deprived of life, human dignity and the Constitutional protections accorded all citizens of the United States."

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Although empirically it would appear that the connection of destructive youth to a particular minority group would be obvious, such



is not the case. Causative aspects are actually *external to the group*. The true *gang infrastructure* is not within the gang itself or the gang community, but is more directly related to externally generated acts, their duration and severity *and the resulting processes* or cycle(s) then initiated within the affected community. For within these populations that have such aberrant treatment and conditions in common, a common pattern emerges, one that churns out multi-generations of self-destructive youth seemingly from nowhere and everywhere. And, as began with the US Cavalry generations earlier, we simply continue to declare war on them rather than attempt to understand and then ameliorate the source processes to violence.

For some groups such as Poles, Irish, Jews and Italians, a point was reached where violence retreated. One must study the entire dynamic for how, why and under what conditions some became violent and it ended... *while others remain violent*. Determining which groups were and are subjected to the worst treatment in America is not the point. Determining that relationship with the kinds, levels and durations of community violence *is* the point, regardless of which group and where located.

The current methods for treating gangs and violence currently involve science in that solutions follow what are referred to as “best practices”. What would science reveal about historical violence perpetrated against groups that evolved “reservation communities”? And about processes and outcomes of multi-generational trauma, racism, dehumanization, marginalization, slavery, lynching, murder and rape? Damage is still being perpetrated on next generations.

How can science help us to understand the violent reactions beyond “peers and bad parents” or the “turf, status and revenge” paradigm? Can we move beyond a biased search for a “warrior gene”, and the assumption of an inherited, cultural or probable genetic predisposition to violence from Aztec and Zulu Warrior ancestors as fundamental bases for gangs?

The objective should be to deconstruct the entire violence and peace dynamic from outcome to source and back again. We certainly have the means if we can find the will. Proper research can test correlations between self-destructive behaviors and the types, duration and severity of shared traumas among affected groups over generations...past, present and future.



## **Part 2**

### ***It Takes a Nation to Raise a Gangster***

## 7

**Enter the Soldiers**

*Youth gang members romantically view themselves as the defenders of their territory, their people and/or their way of life, much as a citizen militia. Such meritorious action should be rewarded if actually true. Their distorted aim is to defend against and exact revenge upon their perceived enemies, whoever and wherever they may be, even if they must be created.*

In so doing, they support the popular view that youth gangs are insatiable killers engaged in an endless cycle of murder and revenge. Sort of a Hatfield and McCoy and Old Testament justice rolled into urban America under the official heading, *cycle of violence*.

If you inquire of a gang member why he murders, maims, robs and rapes, primarily his own people, he will respond with seemingly nonsensical reasons and rationale relating to *turf, status and revenge*. We in all our wisdom accept his explanations as gospel. These responses get us nowhere in understanding the true nature except to add fuel to that rationale. They certainly fall short of providing a legitimate reason to do harm up to and including eliminating another person, forever.

He may relate his actions to his gang's power. Here at least there is a relationship drawn between the powerlessness of a people and the power-seeking gang member. However, his actions are without logical direction or purpose. In this pursuit, he seeks power from the powerless. Frankly, he is confused and does not know why he does what he does. In actuality, he is reacting to stimuli much greater than any gang.

The idea of a Gang Leader is myth. No person can lead a group if no one is already primed to move in that direction. Gangs are not "lead" to mayhem. New leaders do not emerge to *lead* new generations to murder and riot. In "reservation communities" negative emotions are *never* far from exploding into violence – individually and collectively.

*Cumulative negative actions can result in negative reactionary behaviors. When sufficient numbers of a group suffer insult, the stage is set for the emergence of group reactive behavior. Such insults involve social, economic, physical, emotional and spiritual upsets. People, having in common real and/or perceived collective suffering at the hands of others can be pushed over the edge. It is a universal response.*

Political and anti-war demonstrations are examples as are civil rights marches, worker actions and student walkouts. As mentioned earlier, the Boston Tea Party was triggered by negative treatment against a group: the Colonists. This was a particularly difficult relationship that turned out not to be possible. The intolerable and oppressive treatment eventually reached a high enough scale to begin a collective violent reaction by local groups that became The Revolutionary War.

Responses that are common in type can be triggered among similar groups, even though in different locations. The most extreme example is all-out rioting. In times past, this level of violence would occur in separate and distinct locations without necessarily disturbing other areas. However, since the advent of mass communication, it is possible to trigger riots in several locations by a single event such as happened in the so-called Rodney King riots. The verdict released anger that had built to explosive levels among similar groups although in different locations. The fact that several communities were primed and ready to erupt is the main point here: *Similar groups in different locations that experience similar (negative) treatment can reach a violence tipping point at the same time.*

A similar triggering dynamic is at work at lesser levels of community violence. As violence critical mass evolves with time and negative experiences, increasingly serious reactions occur, *e.g. gang formation and activity* in disparate locations that is not necessarily known to other areas. This was verified in the earlier referenced 1992 study by Maxon, et al. showing gang onset had little or nothing to do with gang migration. Gangs may evolve in several areas among the same or similar groups with no connection to each other *except having experienced the same social history with the same host society*. They would have in common type, level and duration of negative interactions and experiences with the host society and then manifest similarly.

Violence may be triggered by similar events and circumstances but manifest at different intensities. The *outcomes* may be variable but within a range of intensities. For example, a riot will not occur among a

group new to experiencing negative interactions and events. Maybe a meeting with their local representatives would be more in keeping. But a group well versed in historical adverse experiences is capable of a wide range of reactions from screaming at a cop to breaking a window, to hitting his spouse or peer to joining with others feeling the same rage and going on a riotous rampage. The range will be indicative of level, type and duration of experienced trauma and turmoil by *that group* in common with others or not and regardless of location. In the last 100 years, African Americans crossed a threshold or critical mass to the point of all of these including rioting on more occasions than other groups. At the same time, other groups were at lower critical mass points crossing a lower intensity threshold passed long ago by African Americans. The cause and effect relationship is according to group experience level. *The community violence dynamic is a progressive multi-level reactive process initiated by negative external stimuli directed at particular groups. The levels of reaction generally reflect the degree or intensity of stress build-up in a community at critical points and the graduated mechanisms employed to obtain release when no other relief is available or sufficient. As levels of community stresses intensify, various processes, devices and vessels are progressively employed in efforts to obtain sufficient release. These will range in scope and severity as per release need.*

It is important to know that the affected community is wrought with confusion, bewilderment and denial at the *unjustified* negative acts directed at their group – *even as they readily accept responsibility for the forms of violence that members of their group engage in.*

Resentment, anger and rage develop within an affected group over generations in an external-to-internal dynamic. The effects of internalized negative pressures *are first turned inward against self, loved ones, peers and then community* and even transferred to next generations. Negative forces reach a point where the targeted community is made ready to be “triggered” into negative reactionary behavior - *the reactive internal-to-external response* that expands its release targeting according to release need.

### **What comes around, goes around...**

The “triggering” process can be to both release and to react. The impetus to the triggering process can be a reaction to a real or an

imagined event. A person can be physically harmed or otherwise offended to the point of violent reaction. And by the same token, a person can react based on the *belief* that he or she was or will be harmed.

A group is better able to absorb anger, rage, disappointment, sadness, grief, etc. than is an individual. A release “spigot” if you will, eventually forms made up of those with the most battered and imperiled psyches. *It is at this stage that their individual and/or family circumstances may place them as more or less likely to engage in violent, anti-social behaviors per so-called risk-factors within associated domains.*

Release events can vary according to relationship with a host society. *Early stage releases are directed inward and may include physical abuse, family strife, substance abuse and suicide.* These initial stages reflect a childlike acceptance of blame for the group’s status and condition. Eventually, cumulative negative pressures require more release than just those aimed at self and at those closest to the person. Releases then direct outward and beyond the immediate family and out to the community. These release mechanisms can range from verbal and physical bullying to fisticuffs and other peer violence and then inter-group warfare. *Eventually they can and do proceed to all out rioting.*

Violence is not accepted as normal. Violence is involuntary and even resisted. That chronic violence remains in a community over generations is indicative of serious long-term damage - sufficient to initiate and sustain highly destructive pathways to find release. *Incidents of community violence are final stage responses to longstanding negative stimuli.*

Obscuring honest and productive discussion that would lead to greater understanding is the shared belief that society bares no blame, that there is something inherently wrong from within. This is like a sick person *being blamed and accepting blame for his illness.* This self-blame aspect has been programmed in and is at the source of critical mass build-up.

Typically, some within an affected group understand the relationship between unresolved societal conflict and community turmoil. They point to such things as high unemployment, substandard schools and sub-par health care. Some understand the gang response as part of that unresolved societal conflict. However, many simply accept the behavior of their violent youth as intrinsic. *Should an affected group come to believe that their society bears a fundamental share of responsibility for the violence emergence, they might reason more clearly that their role is*

*reactive and come to reject it, seeking instead to insist on improvements. But, we have been here before...many times before. Each group so affected has at one time or another attempted to implore leaders toward correction and has demonstrated and formed movements and political parties over these fundamental issues but to no avail. The society has essentially continued to legislate and fund basic services like education and knowledge resources unfairly, redline entire communities and “sell” a lie that the group is at fault for not overcoming such adversity more often. When rioting occurs, the changes will be just enough to reduce the level of reaction to what we have accepted as “reasonable”. We then go back to counting victims in relation to recent past. “Gang killings are down eight percent over last year” and pat ourselves on the back for making remarkable “progress”. The at fault reasoning we have accepted are related to blame and numbers: “We have to give up on this generation and concentrate on the next” is classic evidence of this. That youth and family are to blame as three of the four domains targets them is further evidence; and we are all doing better as “only” 900 souls were lost last year to gang violence...down from an all-time high so don’t complain. What this means is that the leaders of the host society behave as though no permanent solutions are possible or desired.*

In another country the entire reactive process may well have been reduced to acts of violent civil terrorism. *The lack of such terrorist response indicates belief in the system and determination to work toward inclusion and acceptance...and that will never change no matter how harsh the conditions.* However, until such time that inclusion and acceptance overrides bias and exclusion, negative pressure will continue to be released in violent form...and as long as each affected group *internalizes blame and responsibility* for such turmoil, violence will remain *primarily* internally directed but with occasional outward explosions.

A society that operates in this way is socially dysfunctional. Dysfunction is difficult to recognize while you are in and a part of it.

In a dysfunctional family, we are familiar with the ‘black sheep’ syndrome: a child that chronically acts out or misbehaves. Beneath the surface, the behavior can be found to be reactive due to basic problems affecting the family that are “unseen” outside the family. The ‘black sheep’ serves as repository for family issues *and* as release mechanism



for the family's dysfunction. The 'black sheep' cannot exist without a supporting cast.

Figuratively speaking, violent youth perform a similar function for a "reservation community" *and ultimately the society*. In the community and the society, negative societal pressures build "unseen" but eventually require a release mechanism. As critical mass is reached, youthful 'black sheep' emerge, join with like-others and form into 'support groups' to facilitate the need for anger-management. At this near end-stage, anger has already turned to rage and the groups are then engaged in rage-release acts that over time form patterns of violence against themselves and similar others (cycles of violence), thus adding fuel to the internally raging fires...and to the dysfunction. *In this community archetype, same-group infighting indicates the self-blame belief has fully morphed to fiery self-hatred.*

As is the case with the dysfunctional family, the community "black sheep" is also hyper-sensitive and reactive, especially due to his artificially created hatred for himself and his brethren. Of course this is not a logical reaction as there is *no logical way* to deal with an *unjustified* abusive environment.

Youth violence is an indicator of social dysfunction within a system of groups in a society. The more dysfunction, the more gangs - the more gangs, the more dysfunction, and so on.

In America, youth violence is the embodiment of the unresolved conflict between our stated constitutional goals and our successful efforts against full inclusion and participation by all groups. In this, the relatively large number of groups that engage in such violence indicate failure (or at best, an incomplete) as a society. Their continued existence reflects the high level of social, political and economic issues yet unresolved. The center of this systemic dysfunction is at a much higher level than the streets, but it ends there, with each group's soldiers programmed, primed and ready to do battle with each other.

## **The Violence Crucible**

Violence types and levels reflect the duration, form and degree of harm done and subsequent rage build-up in that community *at that point*. If the build-up is of a sustained nature, necessarily alternative methods of coping, including social modifications emerge to satisfy basic needs. To achieve social and personal success in this abnormal milieu means to

have *overcome adversity*. In this aberrant environment, a crucible forms that modifies persons to fit in with the conditions, with the most at-risk persons fitting the most aberrant conditions, sort of having round pegs to fit round holes. This crucible replicates persons able to then negotiate the various patterns for basic needs attainment and for release. Rules are established, patterns are formed, “triggers” to release are employed e.g., *turf*, *status* and *revenge*, and become repetitive or cyclic as long as the aberrant conditions remain, even over generations. Peer infighting, bullying, family abuse and other deviant versions of normative relating are introduced and sustained. In each case the dynamic takes on a self-generating form that continues and escalates in that milieu – *unless and until the pressure underpinning the practice abates*.

Substance use and abuse becomes a reliable mechanism for coping, a salve. The fact that life does not improve with continued substance use takes a back seat to needs of the here and now and so continues.

At a point, levels reach gang critical mass and issues of *turf*, *status* and *revenge* are the “triggers” that facilitate release – *and continuity*. A violence crucible fitting the need to respond at that level has formed and fulfills its intended function. Gangs are the release vehicle using a broad range of “triggers” that includes: colors, turf, gang names, baseball caps, tennis shoes, graffiti, sports jackets, playground territories, landmarks, name-calling, disrespect, etc., and revenge acts for earlier misdeeds. “Turf” can be a region, a city or a few blocks, again, depending on the rage level requiring release. If rage levels are low, turf areas may remain less important. As rage becomes more concentrated affecting more of the population, “turf” can become tighter thus facilitating conflict / release opportunities. These are *not* the real causation issues. *Once the violence crucible(s) forms, any number of violent possibilities are possible*. The situational *triggers* can and do set off the explosions that are already waiting to happen and indeed need to occur. These can become cyclic per levels of severity. The ease of finding an excuse or triggering device relates to the amount of tension requiring release. And this begins with violence done to a group or people whether by act(s) of violence, acts of omission or commission that then must emerge in some easy to way that is easy to facilitate and sustainable.

The level of response is variable, as the pressures on a community and those affected are variable. The individual and his group of fellow reactionaries function partly as rage-release vehicles, or pressure release valves if you will, in a socio-economic and political struggle that his

larger group population is losing or is suffering under, whether real or imagined. He is usually unaware of his political role. Although not viewed as such, each violent death points directly to a state of extreme societal dysfunction. The high degree of this type of self-destructive behavior does not occur in most other societies or in nature. Yet significant segments of this society are involved either in practice or in response to the entrenched activity.

Community violence is not increased by relative population increases or the periodic release from prisons of (ethnic) persons as is currently subscribed. *These merely exacerbate an already tenuous community situation.* In other words, the rage release intra-community violence process is already well established. Over time, the rage-release events ebb and flow with the level of a group's standing and interaction with the host society. *The more severe and long-standing a group's negative relationship with the host society, the more violent the youth gang.* Removing wholesale numbers of youth and incarcerating them longer may be a temporary fix, but does nothing to address the long-term issue of societal conflict at its core. *As long as rage-release is demanded, enough youth will come forward to fill that need for release.* And if not addressed while incarcerated, he or another of his standing will pick up where he left off upon release from confinement.

In communities where gangs have thrived for decades, outrage, fury and disorder are familiar themes. They stand in common with pent-up resentment, hostility, anger and rage - all seeking release. This radical form of emission is no less a disorganized response to the systematic and incessant wounding of a people, a collective response to collective wounding, left unattended and without relief that remained open to fester, infect and to spread.

In "reservation communities", gang violence is one sub-category of community violence. They grow from the same seed manifesting as stages of violent outbursts up to and including rioting. Statistically, these areas are hotbeds of all types of violence aimed at self and others. Family abuse and substance abuse are more prevalent. Homicide and suicide fit comfortably in and around them. They are inexorably attached by victimization, individual and group destruction, negative attitudes and antisocial behaviors. Beliefs and actions borne of racism, intolerance and greed form their intra-community experience, creating relatively high numbers of 'black sheep' primed to act on behalf of an already distressed community.



## 8

**The community family under pressure**

*Youth gang violence is a phenomenon seemingly linked to the primary causes of turf, status and revenge. In actuality, it is one aspect of a set of responses to negative societal interaction and stimuli in common with fellow groups and other groups of similar circumstance, history and status.*

Racism, dehumanization and marginalization are atypical to majority members of a society but typical in “reservation communities”. As these are abnormal pressures, so are the reactions. Artificial reasons are created to accommodate the extraordinary need for reaction and release, e.g. ‘colors’ and ‘turf’, which are so common they can accommodate an elevated rage release need among a large population simply by separating along *more colors, more streets, more landmarks, etc.* The entire process can become cyclic and includes other violence formats including the rioting dynamic. As earlier stated, Rodney King was not the *cause* of the 1992 riots, but merely a *trigger* to release a large amount of built-up community pressure that existed in various parts of the country among the same group at about the same time. The televised beating may have brought some areas to levels in line with other areas already at explosive stages. The subsequent courthouse acquittal *triggered* what was by then *primed to occur*.

However, when the community is successfully contained, the process remains internal, within the aggrieved community.

*We wonder rhetorically what could possible bring an adolescent to the point of becoming ready to kill and be killed by fellow children. Thus the conclusions are reached that he or she must have inherited a genetic predisposition to violence and/or “gets it” from his friends, family and culture. Or simply, “it’s in their blood”.*

A young mind must go through stages before reaching a level of killer-readiness. Here a child becomes gang-ready first and then becomes trigger-ready later.

The process to gang readiness began with a negative *introduction* of his group to a host or majority society. This is followed by pejorative *social conditioning* mainly through institutions, and eventual aberrant *adaptation* to his increasingly hostile environment. Once this is achieved he is a vessel at the ready for destructive activity.

He is usually a child from a community where many suffer from symptoms of clinical depression:

- Trouble sleeping or excessive sleeping
- A dramatic change in appetite, often with weight gain or loss
- Fatigue and lack of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness, self-hate, and inappropriate guilt
- Extreme difficulty concentrating
- Agitation, restlessness, and irritability
- Inactivity and withdrawal from usual activities
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide

Indeed, a survey of inner-city students in Los Angeles, California revealed many were suffering from various forms of clinical depression, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/26/local/me-survey26>.

Symptoms observed in violent youth include feelings of worthlessness, self-doubt, hopelessness, sadness, guilt and self-hate. They also exhibit repressed anger to the point of being “trigger-ready” for explosion. These represent outcomes of negative social conditioning and environmental adaptation. Aspects of his/her home and family life complete the picture.

The violent child has formed a negative self-image and is full of anger and rage. He is at the fringe of his community (the black sheep) acting out the rage and frustration of the community “family”. He is engaged in a desperate search for release and hooks up with others seeking the same release. In this, most violent gangs are the same. Youth are anger-based although the bases for such anger are not usually understood. He effectively misdirects his anger. Anger is not contained, nor is it limited to him and his cohorts but is generalized community

anger that, over generations has reached critical mass and tipping point stages. In “reservation communities”, anger, rage and violence are symptomatic of the negative social positioning. To be sure, other groups such as Irish, Poles, Jews and Italians have been successfully integrated and their anger producing dynamics have declined as has violent behavior. Groups with elevated levels of violence have greater numbers of individuals looking for an immediate release of pent-up anger - they need to explode.

What is correct about the government’s entire ethnic street gang analysis is the final stage of violence readiness, the triggering stratagem based on issues of *turf, status and revenge*.

Non-ethnic violent youth may also finally explode over *what appear* to be issues of *turf, status and revenge*, but as seen *from their own perspective and experience*. They adopt what they perceive to be a traditional gang model, but with their own variations sufficient to differentiate one group from another in order to identify an “enemy”. Their violence is labeled differently however, less dangerous even though engaging in the same kinds of activities - their behaviors less onerous and their issues solvable. As example, the Columbine incident will never be referred to as a gang shooting involving *turf, status or revenge*, although under the current (ethnic) gang violence paradigm, *status* and *revenge* were clearly involved as triggers. In this instance as with others involving non-minority youth, causal relationships are well researched *without regard to gang motives*. The *causes* of the Columbine massacre were looked at sans the triggering stratagem stage and treated as an anomaly but one that *can* be understood and therefore mitigated. *As a result, valuable lessons of how violence can emerge among a broader universe of disaffected youth are lost.*

We see gang formations among many groups: male and female, Bloods and Crips, barrio warriors, tribal warriors, white power (Nazis, skinheads), rebels, stoners, other skinheads, cycle gangs, gays and straight, surfers, skateboarders and bicycle riders. We see them among immigrants as well as homegrown, ethnic and non-ethnic, by culture and race, geography and ideology - all out to protect their group or defend a “territory.”

Youth gang formation and subsequent activities are a generic response by groups that are, or believe they are becoming marginalized as a group, family, community or a people. This social response is no

longer limited to racial and ethnic minorities. It is a force that can emerge anywhere and anytime, especially among those newly marginalized or in danger of becoming a so-called “minority group.”

While members of some groups believe it their duty or fate to join a gang, others default into it by believing that they are at the margins of society, or that the dominant groupings in their society will change at their expense and they seek protection via a countering force. It is indeed telling that any group should *fear* being labeled a minority group in this country. This fear may be reason to form protective gangs, or ersatz citizen militias. Gangs rise up as soldiers out of desert sand, ready to defend their group from alien forces.



## One Nation Under God....

*Each week in America about 18 people are erased forever by gang violence. Someone's son, daughter, mother or father had a past, present and future until a few moments ago and another is getting ready to die...each time of death frozen forever in the hearts of loved ones. By definitions and explanations we have ignored external social forces affecting violence among young people, instead seeing the color of gangs and blaming that. There is too much evidence slamming our sensibilities to dismiss this phenomenon as a minority problem that only touches kids from the other side of the tracks. The tracks have disappeared. Something is changing. Some groups are wising up and others are getting caught in the whirlpool. However one looks at it, the shift is on and the machinery is straining to adjust. Something is changing right before us, but we don't see it until the explosions rip our hearts out. Violent and enraged youth is still the prolific by-product; haters of other youth plain and simple, but always, why?*

Growing up can be a hazardous experience. Increasing numbers of everyone's children are being sideswiped as they try to live and let live. Friends are getting hurt and hurt bad and their other friends are doing it. For growing numbers of America's children, missing one's childhood is tough luck; to witness a crime a rite of passage; to be a victim means you weren't paying attention. Anywhere can be the wrong place and anytime can be the wrong time. Angry encounters on the roads and highways can in a blinding flash, become deadly. Merely taking a walk or making a verbal misstep can have lethal repercussions. The end may be just around the corner, down the street, at a party or on the schoolyard. Youth are learning that they better get tough or get out of the way. Parents see their children dressing down for the occasion instead of dressing up for their futures. Young people know the new playground rules. It's tough luck if they don't like them.

These scenarios have been standard in traditional gang areas for generations, but explained and accepted as something intrinsic to their people and communities. But what about newer variations? Some youth are mixing where unspoken boundaries were tradition; others are holding on to racial rivalries we struggle to get behind us; still others make it up as they go. Skyrocketing numbers of disconnected youth are connecting to the violence scene.

As earlier stated, there are many possible reasons American youth are opting onto this path. But why in America do young people feel a need to hate – to “do in” other youth? What is it about our society that pits us against each other seemingly to the death, even as we stand together one nation, under God, as the epitome of democracy? Why are we known as much for our gangs as we are for our freedoms? What is affecting our youth this way? Even new arrivals seem to know the rules and how to play. But just what game is this? We state high ideals and fairness and strive to maintain a national moral compass. At the same time, we are driven to win at any cost.

### **King of the mountain**

America is a highly competitive place, even predatory. Competition is fierce and any advantage is a fair one. Survival and success is often at the expense of others. In the grand social scheme, youth may be players in a contest that we as a society have put in place. Youth seem to be following a timeworn pattern of categorizing themselves and others into a hierarchal subsystem of groups relating to social positioning in an ongoing quest for *power* - getting it, adding to it, holding onto it and passing it down. Some get pummeled in a burgeoning struggle over social and economic survival and one-upmanship.

The Founding Fathers set the wheels in motion by adopting a caste system to power their personal wealth. They adopted national rules of conduct contained in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights intended however, for European white males. As a result, America’s pledges of freedom, democracy, equal rights and opportunity have not been delivered on as promised...nor were they intended to.

The American Dream is caught in a Utopian conundrum: How does a nation deliver on its stated guarantees of freedom and equality to all when it was meant for the benefit of a few men who arrived on the Mayflower and their sons? From our nation’s beginning and to this day,

this dilemma persists. And we, as a nation struggle to assure that justice is indeed for all, and that rules are applied evenly.

How can some profess to be part of one nation under an all-loving God and hate some of his children? Our history reveals an America that dehumanized groups, enslaved them, attacked them and eliminated their leaders, religions, cultures and histories, removed them and feasted on their resources. It is what it is. How do we now reconcile the promise of freedom, equality and equal opportunity against an unfair, unjust and undemocratic foundational backdrop? If we are to fully understand in order to resolve the “reservation community” violence dynamic, we must include the entire violence backdrop including that yet to be reconciled.

The gang member does not have a clue as to the tremendous efforts undertaken to render his people inert; to keep them out of the competition; of how his forebears had to fight against overwhelming odds for every bit of access to resources; to “overcome adversity” in every aspect of daily life. Yet you will not see “reservation” terrorist groups against this country even as their youth destroy themselves and each other. You *will* continue to see them fight and die in our nation’s wars to protect all of our freedoms and their veterans come back to neighbors who discriminate against them on sight rather than help them achieve *their* American Dream.

Some may view the American Dream as not meant to be shared...as a zero-sum game - that for one to succeed another must lose. They may perceive that should members of some groups move up in economic and social stature, theirs would necessarily move down, that their group would be in danger of becoming marginalized.

Family disruption and economic deterioration spreads as the gap between rich and poor widens. As families under stress join, or fear joining, the foreign ranks of the lower classes, they feel increasingly threatened. They fear their children may experience the dark world of street survival that all know is lurking. Some are already there. As their values adjust to those previously observed from a safer distance, they choose their allies and enemies from a growing list of players also seeking safety and strength through numbers. They latch on to seemingly proven methods of the street survivalist’s world, thinking they’ll come out whole on the other end but miscalculate the costs of their involvement. This second world is not where many would choose to be.

Such fears and insecurity bolster rules of separation and favoritism for those who would exploit them to maintain an unjust status-quo.

Some try to ensure the wrong people do not fall into this chasm not meant for them. Individually, they act to preserve a traditional social alignment be it lending at a bank, teaching in a school or serving on a jury. They may be members of congress or the local service club. Some families are guided to success and others off a cliff. Their children get with the program and join ongoing and well-established contests of group exclusion and one-upmanship. They qualify and quantify groups and learn to place them in a social and economic pecking order. Next generations of employers, teachers, CEO's and political leaders carry these beliefs to their institutional placement.

The process leading to such social violence cannot be traced and is impossible to track, as it resides in the belief structure of a people. It justifies social harm and economic impairment against peoples based on differences. It inhibits friendly interaction and instead reinforces longstanding "natural enemies" lists. Negative belief is a *source* factor as it sets up and reinforces institutional rage build-up, group conflict and societal disharmony.

In spite of such daunting odds and adversity, individuals and eventually groups do fight their way into the social mainstream. As a group becomes increasingly included, their rage dissipates, but usually followed by another group that takes its former place, receiving the wrath of dehumanization and control in turn. For this is the system we have set up. This manner of "competition" extends from the highest levels of business and government to the streets where we see the results as youth violence. Is this the American Way, and is it God's way?

### **A necessary evil?**

For this discussion, accept the following for a moment: *Groups have been conquered or enslaved to build the nation while benefitting certain segments of the population; anger, resentment and violent reaction are logical consequences; Ergo, gangs and community violence are part of a larger preferential economic and social system and as such, costs of doing America's business and a necessary evil.*

If this were not so, would we remain so easily confused over the process and remain deaf, dumb and blind where minority violence is concerned? If this were not so, wouldn't we do whatever it takes to cut off recruitment as soon as the first sign of a cycle reared its head? If this were not so, would we resist efforts to end the racial and ethnic

exclusion and preferential treatment that is the foundation of such violent outcomes? After all, gangs form among groups that have *the same negative societal positioning* in common even though having *nothing in common related to their cultures, upbringing, histories or genetic pool*. What does seem too obvious is our continuing to find surreptitious ways of maintaining their presence without allowing them to get too out of (our) control?

It would appear that winning and losing are impersonal, generalized and undirected. Survival of the fittest is the mantra. The weakest or those with the fewest supports fall first, disposable as so much fodder. Those with the fewest supports *are by design*, minority groups.

Each process is a function of power and predatory behavior. Consolidating power within one's group is essential to remaining in control. This country began out of social, economic, political and armed physical violence over injustice, unfairness and greed. The stresses became violent eruptions among similar groups suffering in the same way although in disparate locations and voila, the Revolutionary War.

America is really no different than any other nation in history except in its precepts, but it is these precepts that make all the difference. The American promise of equal opportunity, justice and democracy is the light of Freedom for the world. It is this American promise that we have struggled with from the beginning.

Gangs were not here when this country was founded, although groups that are now active were. But gangs were not a part of their reality. At some point gang violence came into being and has expanded exponentially *within this society* and over similar issues. So where are we? How far have we come? How much further do we need to go?



## The Rise of the Urban Soldier

*Even as youth continue to form into violent groups, a larger question is one that has been of prime concern in minority communities for decades: How did it come about that their youth could believe it necessary to act out against each other in such deadly fashion?*

No one inherits a predisposition to kill or a desire to die bravely for a gang name. Young people are not natural born killers, raised and bred to form groups that only exist to murder each other. That some appear to end up as such would seem to indicate that something is amiss, especially within specific groups, that there is something in their genes, their home environment, their family and/or culture. Indeed, this is where research and practice are entrenched.

As earlier stated, the process goes *from the outside in*, affecting the collective psyche of each new generation long before such impact becomes manifest. Our culture and institutions affect learning and subsequent behavior of children by group. Lessons are positive for some and negative for others and deeply ingrained in American thought and action. *Whether a young person decides to join a gang or go to college is a logical consequence of purposeful learning and socialization.*

In America, ethnic and racial minority groups have necessarily developed coping mechanisms for survival *at home* even as they enlist in worldwide life and death struggles against hate, intolerance and persecution. They continue to represent this country in all areas of social, economic and political arenas, winning gold medals, Nobel's and Pulitzers, inventing gadgets, running companies; building highways, skyscrapers and railroads; fighting fires, washing cars, cleaning windows, healing the sick and raising our children. But they labor under a love-hate relationship that places them back on "reservations" at the end of the day.

Even though they saluted the flag and wore their love of this country proudly, positive accomplishments remained largely hidden from public

view and negative aspects constantly promoted. History ignored achievements and media used them for villain fodder and cheap laughs. Minority groups have been under attack and diminished in everyone's eyes, but especially in the eyes of children starving for heroes and a place in this country besides gangs and prisons.

The demeaning of peoples has been so commonplace we often miss it or minimize its impact. And most have learned to swallow hard but keep trying. *But once upon a time in each group's history, the jobs became too much to lose, the sanctioned violence too much to bear, the shoddy education too blatant to dismiss, and laws, written and unwritten, too uneven to follow.* At certain points, members of each group reacted. As was inevitable, irresistible forces met immovable objects and everything changed forever. While each targeted community struggled to live and let live, a dual activist response began to take shape regardless of "reservation" or geography. One response was armed with truth and justice; the other response was just armed.

The first to respond were those who took up the mantle of civil and human rights, wanting to stop the unbridled and rampant hatred and violence and social injustice connected to it and to raise the level of self-love and pride in heritage, history and culture that had suffered for decades. There emerged the civil rights warriors of all colors, faiths and walks. They are the activists marchers, bus riders, farm workers, political party and community organizers and educators promoting African-American pride, Raza Movimientos and Native American emergence; and writers, attorneys, students, moms and dads that, sometimes on shaking ground, stood up to armed forces, mayors, governors, and even friends and neighbors. They dug in, fought back and fought hard in a struggle for decency, respect and honest treatment. They were labeled radicals, militants, communists, rabble-rousers, anarchists and... a threat to America. And a compliant media carried these messages forth. They and their families were trampled under horse's hooves, jailed and murdered for refusing to knuckle under, stand idly by and let the blood flow.

They were and are America's unsung heroes. These modern pioneers represent every group never wanting to see another human being suffer even one more injustice due to their belonging to the wrong group in the wrong place at the wrong time. Activists still struggle to save futures and to save America from further division, warfare and embarrassment in the



eyes of the world and in the eyes of God. Their numbers seem fewer now and the lines blurred, but the work still goes on.

However, even as these warriors engaged in battles over the Constitution and Bill of Rights, battlegrounds of another type emerged in a new war that was lost from the very first casualty. This war was being waged on the very streets activists were seeking to save, and these good persons were at a loss to stop it. Youthful casualties were becoming increasingly evident, *but by their own hand*.

This next phase was inevitable: the rise of the contemporary urban soldier. These were also activists, but of a different cloth. They initially believed leaders who asked them to enlist in a new revolution, one that would fight peacefully for justice and for an end to inequality and discrimination. They witnessed and felt the trouncing, beating, jailing and slaughter of citizens who united, organized and marched for equal justice, equal opportunity and fair play. Youth witnessing these events wondered how they would fit in a world not meant for them, and some concluded that they did not. Societal separation by group was now all but cemented.

And for generations that followed, adults and their children, from toddlers to teens continued to be bombarded in all aspects of daily life: at work and play, on TV and in movies, in stories and lore, in hiring, promotions and in school lessons. And even while fighting this nation's wars, they got the message, often and loud, as to who the real Americans were, and to them especially, who they were not. Some would learn to take society's rejection as displeasure at their ever being born.

Increasing numbers of non-white Americans began to accept society's rejection, determining that they were somehow unfit, unworthy and indeed, un-American; that they deserved nothing more than the contemptuous treatment their groups were being subjected to. To them the struggle was useless and to fight no longer necessary. Theirs was a desperate but hopeless response to the indignities of a second-class existence. And once again, the anger floor was raised for next generations to inherit - and a new crucible was forged.

As the unrelenting bombardment continued, it had a destabilizing effect that would facilitate communities passing a critical tipping point. And many did the unexpected: *under the heavy burden of oppression and rejection, they caved in on themselves*. And true to typical dysfunctional family form, the "black sheep" emerged, took on the blame and acted out in self-destructive behavior, mixing uncontainable

rage with a growing dislike and rejection of self and those like him. The seeds of violence planted and nourished over generations were beginning to bear fruit.

These “black sheep” began to act out the anger and frustration of the community household in a classic form of misdirected rage. Even as others continued to brave the overwhelming elements in acts of civil disobedience, still hoping for a civilized solution, the “black sheep” eventually took it to streets and alleys. They were no longer hoping for a civilized solution that to them no longer mattered. They took on a new role in a classic American play acted out in theaters of war throughout the country. *For what was never imagined was that the targeted populations would so internalize the loathing and ill will of the dominant society that they would actually incorporate their own demise into their way of life and social structure.*

These youth took on the task of completing society’s desire to control, subjugate and eliminate. *They began to do exactly the same things to each other as society does to their racial and ethnic groups.* They employed their own final solution for society’s problem children and did the unthinkable: *they engaged in sociopath ethnic cleansing and began to kill each other off.*

This form of youth violence is learned genocide: adopted self-hatred and self-loathing sufficient to destroy one’s mirror image on sight, and feeling righteous in the process; making excuses and reasons without logic beyond that which helps accomplish the task of elimination. *These are programmed acts of genocide, but by one’s own hand.* And thus the seeds of modern gang violence were sown. Although no one knew it at the time, the first began to graduate from bats and chains to knives and guns. The next soldiers would carry on. Their true parents were racism and prejudice that bore children who eventually hated themselves to death.

As each new generation is confronted with the realities of prejudice and discrimination and all that these mean, some come to believe that this nation is not for them. They become disconnected from everything and everyone and instead *engage in an artificial quest to raise their collective value – through violence.* This lemming-like lifestyle belies their preset existence as society’s fodder and prey. They become predator and prey on each other, programmed to an empty existence in jails, prison camps and graveyards. Their gang activity is no less than civil upheaval: rioting, as they know how to riot. In the meantime, and

through the same institutional machinations, the rest of society is programmed not only to accept it, but to help it along and even profit from it. They benefit by dereliction and default. It's all the same program and received as meant. We program the population with ideas of hate and disrespect for themselves and each other *by groups*. Our children then go out and execute the program.

Dehumanization and the mechanisms employed to achieve it are powerful and destructive forces especially when used en masse. After a time, combined forces, both overt and subtle, can crush the spirit of a people beginning with the most vulnerable.

A subtle example is *Newsweek's* Education Program. In 1998, *Newsweek* began distributing their World Migration Map and education guide to elementary classrooms throughout the nation. The map shows migration within the various continents labeled Asia, Europe, etc. The United States is labeled "Anglo-America". Besides being historically misleading, this label sends a subtle but clear message to all children, Anglo and non-Anglo, still figuring out their place and future in this great country. The wars against indigenous cultures still rage as a result. Imagine being told after thousands of years of your people's existence that your ancestral homeland is no longer your homeland. The *Newsweek* map attempts to make such an argument acceptable. Each group receives the message as intended: one as a support to American apartheid and the other as a message to GET OUT!



## War, what is it good for?

*Throughout history extraordinary efforts have been made to avoid conflicts and find peaceful solutions wherever and whenever possible, the sanctity of life being the overriding concern. However, conflict can occur over governance or when resources are at stake. Conflict is sometimes necessary for social change. Some of our social bastions are indefensible but will not topple until the full connection is made between civil conflict and social inequities.*

The accepted explanations for relative high numbers of violent minority youth are remarkably similar even though groups are separated by geography, ethnicity, culture and other fundamental aspects. A possible relationship between a society's negative interaction with a group and that group's youth violence has not been factored into the violence discussion. We have simply concluded that there are high numbers of killer-youth among certain definable groups that murder one another for no apparent reason save for *turf, status and revenge*, and can only be stopped by armed force and imprisonment. Hence the "War on Gangs" has become part of the American lexicon.

*War is a result of failed social, economic and political policies as they affect a populace.* War is declared in situations that do not respond to peaceful efforts and solutions. It is politics by other means. War is targeted, purposeful destruction of an enemy. War should always be the theater of last resort. In this case, we have opted to embrace war, even though the best posture is to never go to war in the first place.

Declaring war on groups already suffering under economic, political and social violence is *not* searching for peaceful and humane solutions. It is exacerbating the conditions that create more recruits. To continue the warlike posture is folly as it has no (positive) end game. As currently pursued, the "War on Gangs" guarantees more conflict, massive imprisonment, more injuries and more deaths. It would have been like trying to win WWII by killing or imprisoning Nazi soldiers (violent

gangs) then going after Hitler Youth (at-risk youth) at earlier ages and trying to “change” them through treatment and punishment (parenting, probation caseloads, injunctions) and *ignoring Adolph, Mein Kampf, the German government and the economic and political environment that ushered in such behaviors in the first place*, from the beginning through its evolution. If this had been the plan, we might still be fighting a losing battle there, too.

Gang violence is our war matrix extended to the civilian populace. This radical form of civil unrest and upheaval is a people’s response to society’s failed policies. *Political, social, economic and corporeal war had long been declared on sectors of the population, who then declared war on each other, and we declared war on the combatants - a true cycle of violence with no end.*

Once war has been declared, the goal is to win by any and all means necessary. In the process we place the civil rights of entire communities at risk and use up financial resources that not only might bring the conflict to an end, but may have prevented war in the first place.

In the absence of a coherent understanding of community violence processes, disagreement reigns. And whether disagreement is over reasons for conflict, how best to fight the war, the fair use of resources or the political power that would direct such resources, peaceful discussions and therefore solutions are on hold “until the land is secure” or until such time that peace becomes more beneficial than continued conflict. *This can only occur if and when we see a benefit to connecting real causes with real solutions.* In the meantime the confusion persists in all areas involved with the war - which is all areas of society. Misdirection and confusion effectively trump true understanding and therefore, peaceful discussion and therefore, solutions and the end to war.

A war model leads to a system of analysis and actions that fits the war context: enemy logistics, war strategies and prisoner counts. This is where we remain stuck – a war between the gangs and the armed forces, and society remains strangely detached through tens of thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of injuries and imprisonments.

There is a definite societal process at work that gets us to and keeps us at this point. And at each stage there are psychological and physical elements that usher in next stages. And once the process begins, a child is not left with a decision to join or not to join a gang. It is not that simple. He or she is making the best of the circumstances and had no say as to the acceptance or rejection of *the elements* that ushered in the warlike positioning he and his people are caught in. He is instead left to

make an artificial decision between society (good) and his family, peers, culture, history, heritage and genetic pool (bad). At this stage his decision is at a deeper more profound level. It resides at the level of the *self* and the process of how an identity is constructed. This secondary part of the process is inside-out rather than outside-in. It is however, guided by external elements that should have no place in his decision-making process.

While warfare rages, the population is in increased danger as collateral damage occurs from both sides generating casualties by armed forces *as well as* the local combatants. Gangs target by appearance and some law enforcement officers have made the same judgments. Thus the community truly resembles a battleground as casualties of the two wars mount: the “gang war” and the “War on Gangs”.

Both may view the ‘villagers’ as potential enemies in the war environment, that they are guilty by association. The belief that residents are dangerous and warlike to begin with is a consequence of what we have designed into our system of beliefs about groups. And gangs see a victim as legit as long as they reside in enemy territory. The potential for devastation and human suffering has been and continues to be too great to be left to the armed combatants on all sides to solve. Calm and reason must prevail.

The “War on Gangs” is not winnable by trying to identify combatants among civilians in a combat zone. Added firepower will not win a war where each soldier is immediately replaced due to systemic forces beyond the street gang milieu. These soldiers are created by social influences that simply do not respond to armies or imprisonment. *We had quietly declared an enemy and then we publicly declared war.* The criminal justice system cannot hope to contain the numbers generated from these circumstances. And taken to its logical end, if each of the over one million gang members were arrested today, the criminal justice system would collapse under the weight, *yet we continue in that direction.*

One consequence of attacking community violence militarily is to permanently set in place the mindset and the means to wage war and escalate as necessary. Information flow regarding violent youth continues to come primarily from those armed forces charged with solving it *and* those who would benefit. Their explanations describe war efforts, numbers and stratagem. Law enforcement now uses the term, “terrorist” to describe real and perceived minority gang youth.

Vietnam should have taught us that going to war requires an understanding of the dynamics of war beyond bombs and bullets, or run the very real risk of losing in the long run. Vietnam was thought to be going well as long as the numbers were in our favor. We then learned that numbers can be manipulated and do not tell the entire story. Oftentimes the numbers game is merely that: a high “body count” and “prisoner count” that lets us know how the war is “progressing”.

War involves people in the worst ways and carries a heavy cost. War has no positive impact on underlying problems and ignores the people. We continue to “sweep” areas, lock up more minority males (potential fathers of intact families) for longer periods than any time in history, yet this “war” continues unabated and without logic or strategy.

Vietnam also taught us that ‘enemies’ are not always as advertized. Propaganda is as much a part of a war effort as guns, bombs and fighter pilots. For public consumption, media provides glimpses into the gang world limited to the violent act and our response to such acts. Popular media exploits them in TV dramas and movies, then covers the killing fields on the evening news. Historically, America’s minorities have been profiled by popular media as violent criminals...or not at all.

*A second world is set in place and we battle with its soldiers. If you are going to start a war, you must have a strategy. The absence of a strategy invites chaos. We are left with a strategy of chaos, which may indeed be the strategy.*

### **Chaos as logic...from behind the scenes**

Gangs and other community violence are most prevalent in areas that have been held back politically, economically and socially. Gangs evolved to fill gaps but with deviant replacement versions, exacerbating the conditions. Added police, jails and other justice agencies are needed to deal with the results. Resources are thus diverted from classrooms, libraries, sports and recreation and other family-friendly supports. Under the ‘War on Gangs’ as solution scenario, decisions to direct resources toward warfare and prisons rather than peaceful pursuits are easily made.

Rather than solving fundamental problems that would lead to solutions, a hyper-expensive *cycle of maintenance* has evolved using a stove-pipe or silo approach. This is when an outcome is separated and targeted by “specialists” without regard to other influences or manifestations. In this cycle, police, jails, prisons, injunctions, welfare and unemployment centers become locked in place around now formally



targeted communities. The criminal justice system grows tentacles around a community, their readily identifiable ‘wayward’ youth and their families. Management is now as complete as is possible in a free society.

Cops and bangers engage in a synergistic dance of defiance as the rest of us hang on to empty promises of a military victory over a socially manufactured enemy. The prison-industrial complex built up around various group’s violent youth is appallingly expensive both in dollars and human costs. As in all wars, some profit from various aspects of war’s misery. It will always cost more to house a prisoner than to give him/her an Ivy League education, but apparently worth every cent.

In verbiage, we mimic true war efforts with casualty numbers, glib explanations, war footage and sure-fire approaches. We hear pat rhetoric in unrealistic efforts to stop the murder and mayhem. “More police, more prisons, longer terms, fewer breaks, no chances, three strikes” goes the appeal to a whipped up audience. At community meetings we hear of giving up on children, *in advance*: “They are wannabe gang members or already full-blown gangsters. We have to give up on this generation and concentrate on the next”. This message has been delivered by justice personnel to minority parents throughout the country for decades, year in and year out.

The nonsensical “cause” misdirection is well established in popular media and in the minds of Americans. “Just say no” and “the more you know” campaigns that try to end youthful murder on airwaves and in schools are laughable if not so tragic in wasted opportunity. They will never replace genuine solutions of which part is messaging but borne of true understanding. It would be absurd to use these simplistic campaigns and slogans in Middle East conflicts, for example. The world would wonder what we are on. Yet Americans swallow the reasoning whole when it comes to minority children doing in each other.

In this war the machinery is clogged with minority youngsters – *the hope and future of a people*. Jails, prisons and graveyards are full of once colorful children somehow responsible for all this mayhem and seemingly out to bring society down. Think about it: *The entire debacle is much more than any community could possibly dream up.*

This is all the result of a mistaken identity of the true reasons for youth violence. The proffered guise of an unstoppable *cycle of violence* remains strangely serviceable. However, as time marches on and youth continue to eliminate each other, young soldiers get stuck in the *effects* part of the *cause and effect scheme* and dead bodies mount. The origins of their group anger are lost or were never understood in the first place.

Youth who are angry at the world do not consider that their people are in a constant state of civil unrest and upheaval - as recipients and as perpetrators. Nor do they consider that the first “riots” were in the hearts and minds of their forebears who suffered from much more severe acts and attitudes against them as a people. The pain and anger accumulates with each generation then transfers to newborns the hopelessness, resentment and rage as it passes to next generations.

As youth gangs entrench and evolve, newer participants are further removed from their true cultural identity and even from gang predecessors. They are less forgiving and bereft of emotion. A lack of social feeling becomes pronounced with each new group. They are quick to react rather than reflect. The question of how and why the anger originated is far removed from the urge to act immediately and violently. If we don't get it, that's our problem. He knows just enough about his world to die for it. We do not know the basics of his world nor his thinking. However, when conditions for a gang identity to be formed exist, all of our futures are less secure.

Although racial dynamics are constantly changing, the process remains intact. The faces and nomenclature may change but the beat goes on. Racial animosity is the next big thing with Hybrids close behind. Lines will continue to be crossed.

As white youth forge into the homeboy world, their neighborhoods are less safe. These newest soldiers are coming from communities where this was not supposed to happen. Angry enough to do something or feeling pushed to participate in this all-American pastime, white youth struggle on the same slippery slope never intended to reach their homes or insulated learning centers. Some are bolstering their weakening spirits around skinhead movements and Gothic dances with the devil. Others are emulating the more established homeboy gangster movement, seeking the already invented and perfected wheel and rolling with it.

We are all in the same gang. However, even as false and simplistic reasoning and acceptance of ethnic youth violence persists, white players are being separated away with their anger and rage issues being addressed in a holistic manner. Their parents are not told that we must give up on their generation of babies and concentrate on the next. No one would dare and hope to keep their government job. To go part of the way with only some of our youth will not end this American problem.

As long as basic issues are not addressed, the gang-game will change even as it remains the same. It will continue to be deadly serious but with new and different players. Some will no longer aim only at each

other's tribes. Almost every group has a militia that is armed and dangerous. This is another century, but still the continuation of our own modern day civil war.

## **The Cycle of Violence Fallacy** (if not a “war”, what is it?)

*The classic cycle of violence definition and explanation for youth killing youth is described as an endless and reciprocal series of local battles to the death over turf, status, colors, graffiti and the consequent taking revenge for earlier killings. It limits the gang problem to issues of cultural idiosyncrasies, family upbringing and historical rivalries. Explaining it this way creates and reinforces a mindset in the society in which it operates which all parties come to accept: that some groups are by nature violent, malevolent and self-destructive. Such misdirection and misunderstanding hampers solution...*

Some offer “solutions” that reflect their frustration, “We have to give up on this generation and concentrate on the next”. And some add their bias, “put them all in a coliseum and let them kill each other off”. They take the assumption of innate self-destructive behavior at face value. However, there is no historical evidence of such self-destructive behavior over such intangibles as colors, graffiti and non-owned land (turf) that continues without end in the history of *any* of the warring groups. That we accept a gang *cycle of violence* reflects a belief construct that goes against human history and behavior.

Real wars are fought over real land, real resources and real power. There is an eventual end to the conflict based on some *tangible* objective being reached, or by negotiated settlement over those tangibles.

The gang war dynamic bears no relationship to such “real” wars. There is no “objective” nor can there ever be. This war goes nowhere, has no logic and in all its destructive madness has no tangible benefit. Therefore, under this paradigm, there is no possible end. The only thing this war accomplishes is subjugation and elimination, a strategy learned and adopted over time and experience.

There is one type of gang that does gain benefit from their operations: Predators or Mafia type gangs which still come from a place of denied access. These are not the same as gangs that kill over turf, colors or revenge...the Traditional gangs.

### **If not a “war” what is it?**

Gangs evolve from a process of hate, denied access, unjustified violence and enslavement. The groups that evolved gangs entered what is now America with some difficulty, e.g., African slaves, Native Americans, some Asian and Pacific Islander and some Latino groups (from the Mexican-American and Spanish-American Wars). A clash of cultures would be an understatement. These introductions were fraught with conflict and upheaval. Other groups such as Irish, Italians, Poles and Jews had cultural issues but not near the violence and upheaval. They also experienced barriers but with the passage of time these groups have by and large overcome disadvantages and adversity.

The groups that have evolved such gangs have experienced heavy doses of *directed violence, marginalization, exploitation and dehumanization* in their interactions with society as a matter of course. This combination would logically lead some to violent expression. Gangs would not exist otherwise. And they could not keep going without this “support”. Gangs cannot form or continue without such fundamental social abnormalities being a constant source of friction that only a host society can initiate, control and maintain. A “cycle of violence” can be ended anytime we wish to end it. We just have to want to end it.

Professionals generally agree that multi-generational patterns must be interrupted to stop a “cycle of violence”. However, anti-violence efforts are after the fact - *after the formation of a cycle(s)*. Prevention programs as we know them are not preventative but react to outcomes of systemic processes. *By definition, a “prevention” program that responds to outcomes is not preventative.*

In the “war against gangs”, professionals engage profiling, indexing of a community’s youth, limiting freedom of movement and association, disallowing symbols used (including religious), specialized policing, gang-sweeps based on appearance and location, developing rating systems and biological measures for violence potential, penalty enhancements requiring expanding jails and prisons and so on.

Most if not all of these acknowledge continued negative activity (cycles) by default. That is, they target outcomes and as such reinforce the outcome while doing things that exacerbate the behavior. Prisons and jails are violence and crime learning centers. Other targeting actions add to the underlying belief that the behaviors are innate and permanent. And all of it makes people uneasy and feeling as they are “outsiders”.

These methods and the supportive “research” have evolved an industry dedicated to what has become a symbiotic maintenance program. *This maintenance of effort does not go to the source or evolution of community violence.* When these “war” efforts inevitably fail, more of the same is added. Or we hear the hopeless refrain to “give up on this generation and concentrate on the next”. The classic and revealing call that exposes the actual process involved - *a process that effectively condemns each new group of young people to traditional patterns that generate intolerable amounts of rage that leads to **their** destruction, containment and removal, whereby the community continues to be targeted for high-cost occupation, enforcement and concentrated suppression tactics.* Targeted communities fall victim not only to the local, rage-generated violence but to the efforts to suppress the violence in a true *societal cycle of violence* that guarantees structural adversity to overcome and many forms of violence for “reservation community” residents to fall victim to.

There is a dramatic difference in how “reservation communities” are treated in relation to White Supremacists Nazis, KKK and other ersatz hate-groups for example. A strict, Zero Tolerance policy has been adopted by the FBI and local law enforcement to catch, prosecute and lock-up youthful minority criminals-to-be when “caught” making a gang hand-sign or wearing a cap or color of clothing (including on the Internet). Meanwhile, the Nazis and KKK groups have uniforms, an advertised hate and elimination policy toward identified groups, hand and arm signals and a proven record of murder and mayhem yet *are not targeted in any form of Zero Tolerance or other such punitive policy.* The authoritative agency that monitors these groups is the Southern Poverty Law Center, Intelligence Project which has no enforcement authority.

All youth violence demands action. If taken to a logical end, current policies combined with street violence would eventually result in all youth in a “reservation community” eventually being eliminated by premature death, long-term incarceration, injury and/or illness. Research tells us that morbidity and mortality rates are already consistently higher

in “reservation communities” due to other social modifications that have become usual. To the extent that we have created conditions that induce violence and early death and the manner we have prosecuted this “war” we have to honestly ask what it is we truly desire as the end-game.

In order for such an appalling process to remain in place there must be significant benefit to someone or it would not exist. Since it is so atrocious a process, it must remain mysterious or be disguised in order to remain acceptable at all. The people destroyed by it must be made to believe that all of it is their own doing. On the other, those who allow and even benefit from it would also need to believe the same in order to remain distanced and blameless from the process. These objectives are seeded in the *Social Conditioning* and the *Adaptation* phases where beliefs are the underlying force; where negative acts and propaganda reinforce multi-generational bias and hatred of self and others.

Belief is a source of action. Some beliefs promote positive action and others negative. Children learn and form beliefs about themselves and others based on what they see, hear and experience. Negative beliefs and reasoning for violent outcomes in “reservation communities” have been created and passed along as folklore and tradition requiring no validation or confirmation. Some come to believe that a group’s negative outcomes are a function of a people’s existence and is as permanent as their existence. This includes gang folklore, the “once upon a time” stories of which persons started what gangs.

Such a belief system is a form of violence. Children are *positively* guided about the majority group and *negatively* guided about minority groups, assuring the generational continuity of positive and negative outcomes according to group. As belief become tradition, groups act from a subconscious and constantly reinforced belief indoctrination, unless such indoctrination is changed. An ignored but substantial aspect of such a destructive social conditioning is the damage done to children.

## Civil Unrest and Civil Upheaval - Gangs to Riots

*A social system cannot divorce itself from its parts. There is no “them and us”. We are all a part of a socio-ecosystem where each part is affected by the other. When one part is sick, we all feel the symptoms, sooner or later.*

### Defining Civil Unrest and Civil Upheaval

Riots are a community’s ultimate expression of widespread anger and rage and overwhelming dissatisfaction with the status quo. And all efforts at keeping the two worlds hermetically separated have failed. Containment and control are no longer possible and the lid has been blown off. Rioting, like gangs, is a misunderstood aspect of community violence. Gangs are often blamed for riots even though post-riot commissions point to social, economic and political issues as *underlying causes* of such uprisings. Riots and gangs *are* connected... *but as effects not as causes.*

The 1992 riots seemed to be out of context with modern-day America. The size and scope of the riots brought home the realization that America was out of touch with its minority communities. The average American seemed surprised that at this day and age such a conflagration was even possible. However, it became dreadfully apparent that some communities were powder kegs, ready to explode with simmering rage as palpable as ever.

The shock of such an event invites all manner of reasoning, speculation and *justification* that, like gangs, runs the gamut. Biases and racist beliefs become blatantly interspersed with social realities. As is the case with gangs and other violent sub-cycles, those in power tend to look at the event and not the context of the event. Disagreement, misunderstanding and confusion hamper solutions that could mitigate



gangs and riots, especially since *they occur in the same communities*. One classic way this occurs is reflected in terminology.

A **Riot** is described as a unique event whereby community members are moved to set fires, vandalize and loot property and businesses, assault and murder persons of another race and ethnic group. **Civil unrest** and **civil upheaval** are both used to describe such rioting.

A **cycle of violence** is also described as a unique community condition whereby youth kill other youth without end or justification. There exists a perceived distinction between local **cycles of violence**, e.g. **gangs**, and widespread community uprisings, e.g. **riots**, *when in fact there is no such separation. Nor is there a separation with other forms of community violence, e.g. elevated levels of family abuse, substance abuse, suicides, etc.* Violent community uprisings (riots, revolts, insurrections, rebellions) share the same dynamics as other kinds of community violence including gang violence. *All are relative states of community unease, agitation, turmoil and disorder.* The differences and variances are a matter of degree existing on the same plane and on the same continuum. The point must be made to contextualize terms within a community violence continuum.

The terms, **unrest** and **upheaval** invoke similar responses leading to the same closed-end conclusions...just as gang cycles of violence. Each must be better delineated for context and relationships in a volatile environment. A more definitive categorization based on source, evolution and magnitude is proposed:

### **Civil Unrest:**

*Civil Unrest* is the chronic state of elevated disturbance and unease negatively affecting a community that remains *within that community*. Its sources and manifestations may be external to the community and internal within the community as overt and covert forms of violence.

### **Two Phases of Civil Unrest:**

1. **Societal violence:** That which emanates from societal beliefs, self-interests, traditions and practices; are overt and covert, i.e. *directed violence, marginalization, exploitation and dehumanization* and directed at a group(s).

*Societal Violence* includes social, economic, environmental and political acts, laws and policies that have direct negative impacts on

targeted communities in areas such as education, employment, housing and lending, equal representation, etc. This form of *unrest* initiates and then reinforces multigenerational cycles of resentment, frustration, anger and violence. Its effect is structural *community disorder*.

**2. *Community Violence*:** This is a group's corresponding internal (negative) response(s) to *societal violence* practices, mores, traditions and practices. *Community violence* as a response is localized destruction done to self, within families, among peers and to community. These eventually become institutionalized as *cycles of violence* that *stay within the community*. Unlike a riot, these *cycles* generate little external interest even though occurring daily and over generations. *Cycles* include gang and other elevated delinquent activity including vandalism, drug and alcohol abuse; elevated family violence, school drop-out, unemployment, welfare rates and forms of dependency. This phase of *civil unrest* is a *community imploding*. Ergo, societal institutions engage in directed *societal violence* against particular communities whose response is *community violence* that eventuate to patterns and then cycles. The process is managed outside the community with effects remaining inside the community.

*Both feed inter-community violence.* The *former* emanates from the society, outside a community and may begin as overt but becomes covert and institutionalizes over time. The *latter* is the local response in the form of damage done to the community and those living there.

The initiating elements emanate from societal beliefs and self-interests that drive policies, laws, acts and behaviors. Counter programming efforts miss this *source* aspect and instead engage in a response mode directed at the effects or symptoms of underlying forces. This has the effect of maintaining the status-quo. Both types of *unrest* are cumulative and destructive to the fabric of a community and ultimately the society. **Patterns of community violence do not end until societal violence is ended.** As societal *unrest* becomes institutionalized, community *unrest* eventuates to a permanent ebb and flow dynamic, (*cycles of violence*) bounding dangerously close to explosion.

This origin and evolutionary process becomes visually evident on a Peace and Violence Continuum. Points on the chart illustrate how a community trends to Peace or Violence...and occasional explosion.

## **Civil Upheaval:**

*Civil Upheaval* is that explosion, *the riots*. However, it is also the violent introduction and conquering process by a society against a people

### **Two phases of Civil Upheaval:**

1. *Societal Calamity*
2. *Community Upheaval*.

*Societal Calamity* is a calamitous, physical attack(s), usually from socially sanctioned forces and against a group, community or person. It can also be a violent event directed at a minority person, family or small group. *Societal Calamity* is violence that is socially and/or government led, driven, sanctioned or dismissed that includes violent attack(s) such as lynching, massacres, mass deportation or relocation; attacks or raids that involve burning, beating, rape and murder; chronic abuse by authorities, and targeted beatings of individuals. These are visible, violent surges of destruction affecting the core of a community. Sources are external and can combine with continuing and severely escalating internal actions and forces (*Civil Unrest*) to create riotous explosions.

These actions and events inflict fear and terror in individuals, groups and communities as some are indeed acts of terrorism. Socially driven calamitous acts sear the souls of minority people and become a part of their unwritten social history. Over time, these invite formation of reactive *cycles of violence* first directed inward and then outward against peers, family and community that can become continuous. The government response then becomes a form of perpetual community maintenance, some of which adds to structural *unrest*. The entire process will be repetitive and cyclic as long as the initiating or source formats remain in place. *Societal Calamity* generates internal community anger, frustration, rage and *unrest* (gangs, etc.) and occasional *upheaval* (riots).

*Community Upheaval* in the form of riots occurs when that community experiences elevated and prolonged *societal violence, disorder and calamity* that finally explodes into rioting. A level of tolerance has been breached and the community is literally exploding in fires, looting and gunfire. This is a massive release of rage, usually

triggered by an event usual to the *calamity* stage (beating, shooting, arrest) seen as unjust and *unjustified* that occurs at the apex of tolerance.

Following *community upheaval* (riot) and *lacking societal modifications to improve underlying conditions*, community unease will eventually retreat to previous levels, albeit still relatively elevated. Localized activity resumes reactions to conditions that generated the explosions and moving slowly and inexorably to another state of upheaval. And since this dynamic is internal, within the affected community, the society ceases its concern. Left intact, the volatile process will again become re-energized to riot level, as a cycle of societal violence.

On the Peace and Violence Continuum, *Civil Unrest* and *Civil Upheaval* are interrelated social phenomenon.

Two incidents occurred recently in Texas. One to a Latino youth who was attacked by white supremacists. “...*they beat the student, shoved a piece of PVC pipe into the young man’s rectum, and then plowed it deep into his organs by kicking it. One attacker wore a steel-toed boot. They also tried to carve on his chest, stomped on his head and poured bleach over him, yelling Hispanic slurs throughout the attack. He lay in the yard for 10 hours.*” (Kansas City Star; May 09, 2006). This occurred a few years after an African-American man was tied behind a pick-up truck and dragged to death, also by a gang of white youths. The Latino youth later committed suicide. These were done by civilians and in the case of the Latino male, the attackers were teenagers. These kinds of incidents still occur and are universally minimized by prosecutors, juries and by local media.

There may no longer be massacres like a Wounded Knee, the East St. Louis, Ill. Massacre (July 2, 1917), a Circleville Massacre (July, 1866) or the many similar events. But many incidents of overt violent acts of terrorism have been directed at targeted communities in many places but not paid attention to outside those communities. Persons living there know that this kind of extreme violence is indiscriminately directed at their population. While these incidents are occasional, they are still overt, *source* forms of violence that illicit the *community unrest* and potentially *upheaval* response. They also indicate a state of simmering *unrest* exists among populations.

A state of *unrest* is the “natural” state for a “reservation community”, is acceptable and ignored. *Upheaval* is always noticeable outside the community so must be explained, played down and then ignored.

Both *unrest* and *upheaval* are levels of violence on a continuum and are connected as through an umbilical cord. These are connected to the “body” as elements of a grander, *societal cycle of violence*. *Unrest* and *upheaval* are only separated by level and degree but connected as a reactionary process to externally initiated or sourced antagonisms.

Traditionally, *unrest and upheaval* have been presented as gang activity and riots wholly peculiar to a group and community. Gang violence and rioting are physically and expressly violent levels of *unrest and upheaval*. So are massacres, lynch mobs, raids, forced removal and sanctioned (and excused) murder. Both are contained within a larger process of societal violence.

“Reservation communities” are, by the nature of their existence, in a perpetual state of *unrest* with occasional periods of *upheaval* – both from without and within. Civil *unrest and upheaval* must include the *source and evolutionary* processes from the society as these are also forms of violence. Therefore, when a city council, school board, county board or even a Supreme Court approves and/or upholds unequal education, relegated community amenities (schools, parks, libraries, open space) for example, they are engaging in *unrest*; When members of minorities are illegitimately denied home loans or employment, the lending institution and the employer are engaging in *unrest*; when a group of minority children are profiled as gang members due to skin color and where they live, the law is engaging in *unrest*; when a vigilante group of citizens prevents a minority adult from registering to vote or a child from attending a school they are engaging in *unrest*; and when young people then begin to act out community anger and frustration, they are engaging in *unrest*. One can go down a history of laws, policies, acts and behaviors – including traditional beliefs, where institutions or representatives of institutions engaged in and are engaging in *unrest* – a process leading to community violence and *upheaval*.

A much dismissed facet of *unrest and upheaval* is again, white youth involvement. This is the racist skinhead and KKK member who attacks non-white persons. They (male and female) are not classified as a violent gang member, nor their gang actions classified as gang activity, and therefore not subjected to active profiling and other “reservation

community” monitoring and enforcement tactics. Their actions are considered “transitory” by NGC and some gang researchers. However, their existence is evidence that a state of societal *unrest* continues to exist (and to grow) relative to negative belief indoctrination. They act on behalf of what *they believe* the larger population desires.

Actions, policies and behaviors by institutions of the greater host society to the detriment of particular groups and communities are those *sources of unrest and upheaval*. These are a critical part of a socially engineered and overarching societal cycle of violence - a cycle of selective social violence that is at the foundation of all *civil unrest* and *upheaval*. The social positioning of a group will determine if they will prosper in society or become entangled in ongoing *unrest* and *upheaval*.

## **Part 3**

### ***Life on the “reservation”***

*...they exist in an upside-down world where perversions of love, power, honor and respect are there to bask in until it is their turn to die...*





## A Violence Beyond Gangs

*Throughout this book we discuss the many kinds of violence, its many paths, consequences and outcomes. Community violence is likely to emerge where identifiable groups have been subjected to targeted political, economic and social policies and acts that do harm to the individual, family, community or group in a physical, psychological or social sense. These acts can be active or passive or do harm simply by the act of withholding. Violence in all cases ends as a blow to the individual.*

An important consideration in our analysis of violence is the necessity for an individual to be able to satisfy a set of basic needs. Abraham Maslow observed that there are four sets of goals which we may call basic needs: physiological, safety/security, love and belongingness, and esteem. Moreover, we are motivated by the desire to achieve or maintain the various conditions upon which these basic satisfactions rest. He stated, “Any thwarting or possibility of thwarting of these basic human goals, or danger to the defenses which protect them, or to the conditions upon which they rest, is considered to be a psychological threat. With a few exceptions, all psychopathology may be partially traced to such threats. A basically thwarted man may actually be defined as a ‘sick’ man, if we wish. It is such basic threats which bring about the general emergency reactions.” (Maslow, 1943)

A major point made by Maslow is that if basic needs are not met, pathology (a deviation from normal) can result. It is for this reason he calls his lower level needs deficiency needs or D-needs, (survival, safety, love/belonging, self-esteem). *Institutional policies and practices that thwart or otherwise do harm to the person's basic needs increase potential of pathological outcomes among persons in those groups.* The four areas that describe the “reservation community” experience and existence: Directed Violence, Marginalization, Exploitation and Dehumanization threaten these most basic of human needs.

We do not mean to suggest that everyone in the communities we are concerned with is ill, but they certainly are extraordinarily stressed in critical areas of daily life which can weaken the person spiritually, emotionally and physically and lead to illness. Additionally, structural deficiencies negatively impact esteem and success, or self-actualization.

In these communities, as Albert Bandura has rightly pointed out, we must take into account how *personal, environmental* and *behavioral* factors interact. Moreover, any solution that is proposed must address these areas. It is not enough to deal with the personal conflicts of the violent person without reference to his environment. There are unseen environmental factors that contribute to the conditions that make for violence. (Bandura, 1999) These include the institutional policies, acts and practices both inside and outside a community that affect persons *within* the community. Solutions must involve the youth of course, but also political, business and social leaders, residents, law enforcement and the judicial system as solutions exist among all of these domains.

### **Dueling diapers**

Laws, regulations and social policy favoring the white Anglo-Saxon have been in use since before the birth of this nation. Children born into this group find for the most part nurturing, acceptance, empathy, cohesion, better education, social acceptance and cultural reinforcement via visual media, books, folklore and historical account. Consequently, these persons enjoy increased probability of developing their potential and becoming contributing members of their community and of society.

Other groups have been clustered onto “reservation communities” and their children born into a less healthy environment where their basic needs are met with greater difficulty. Their children emerge into a world of destructive and violent sub-cycles, discouragement and hopelessness.

Each generation “inherits” the cumulative trauma as well as dealing with contemporary traumatic treatment and events. The emotional and psychological resources available to a child to deal with environmental stressors are for the most part, inadequate or nonexistent. Hence, their ability to fully develop their potential is limited.

Despite deficient resources the children in these environments do as best they can to mitigate their effects upon them. Some of these children turn to athletics, some go to work, some dedicate themselves to learning but still others turn to gangs to “succeed”. Regardless of the strategy

chosen, the row they have to hoe is a much more difficult one. Youth that emerge successfully are said to have “overcome adversity”. *But the adversity is artificially created and maintained by the very society that claims to want to “solve” the violence problem.* Their group has been violated. Their rights, their potential, their opportunities, their health and environment, their educational attainment, their hope and potential have all suffered major body blows. *Violence has already been done to the community before the community becomes violent.* A society that does not tend well to the problems of its under-classes will suffer violence within those untended individuals and communities. To the extent that a society does not help its children meet their basic needs and fails to correct inadequacies repeatedly and over generations, *that society can expect that increasing numbers of these children will engage in negative behaviors.*

We must understand that violence goes both ways and violence, regardless of form will always beget violence. Some of the violent results are visible and some are not, as they are internalized and absorbed deeply within the individual and the community. The societal systems are the problem and the solution. To rely on the justice system for solution to community violence is to continue to have no solution.

As a sad consequence of social misdeeds and miscalculations, the tragic reality is that there are youth that live almost everywhere ready to kill and be killed. Yes, they must be removed from society. However, even in the most severely impacted areas, it is well known by law enforcement that approximately five percent of a gang population can be considered hard-core.



## The Crimson Flow

*Violence on a people whether by gun, economic, social or political racism is still violence regardless of weapons used. All violence is potentially traumatic and has consequences not adequately taken into account as origins of community violence. These foundational elements may not be seen as such but their consequences are deeply felt. The primary response is internal, affecting esteem and outlook on life. Violence also affects the health of the individual. Once subjected to a negative event or series of events, an individual, family, community and a people can experience an alteration in their psyches and well-being. Such trauma can manifest in many ways. Being aware of this connection can help in understanding how a child can move away from being a loving human being. At some point a local cycle of violence kicks in with its own set of life altering events. The combination can be devastating.*

At an elementary school in a Los Angeles suburb, I was leading a classroom discussion on the impact on family members when one belongs to a gang. While other children raised their hands and joined in the discussion one child kept looking out the window and down at his desk. His name was William. During a break I eased over, sat on the floor and asked him how he was doing? He did not reply but stared down or at the corner of his desk. After a minute he looked at me for a split second. With watery eyes he began to speak very softly of how much he missed his brother. He told of watching his brother die sitting a few feet from him during dinner. At times almost imperceptibly, he described how bullets burst through the kitchen wall and with his hand moving to his face, pointed to where a bullet entered his brother's mouth and how the whole back of his brother's head exploded and splattered the refrigerator. He said the house is always dark and that his mother cries all the time. He said he did not cry like his mother. I touched his shoulder but I don't think he felt it. He had said what was on his mind, what was troubling him. There was nothing that his teacher or I could

do. It was early but William was done, and like many that I met in my work, his childhood was over.

Another day, I attended a graduation of our Star-Kids program at another elementary school in Los Angeles. This was to be a special event because one youngster, Rebecca, was returning to the school for the graduation and was to be honored by her classmates. She had been shot in the abdomen while walking to class and would wear a plastic bag on the side of her body for the rest of her shortened life. Although her mother had since moved the family to another area, she brought her to school to graduate the success oriented anti-gang program.

As her name and story were recounted, I noticed the tears in some of the student's eyes as well as the teachers. I also noticed hardness on some children's faces. As she received a standing ovation I felt a familiar sadness. Though Rebecca had triumphed, it was over an unrelenting violence that was and is central to the lives of many of America's youth. It was not a triumph understood or appreciated by the other America heretofore secure that their children would not experience such horror. But that was another time.

There are hundreds of thousands of Williams and Rebecca's in this great nation. Their stories reflect the life experience of many of our children who grow up in the war-torn parts of this nation. And warfare affects all directly or indirectly.

### **Children and war related trauma**

Children do not learn well with bullets whizzing by, at least not the right lessons. As violence shatters their emotional well being, desired channels of learning are blasted shut by the bloody explosions going off daily in their young faces. Eventually they close their eyes and cover their ears. These young people live different lives than youth in non-violent areas. While even one taste of brutality can mar a person for life, entire populations of young Americans are regularly exposed to mind-numbing violence. Many suffer a lifetime of crippling physical and psychological effects from encountering concentrated and repeated acts of extreme violence.

Young people raised in chronically high violence environments are subjected to several common negative experiences including sudden and violent deaths, physical and emotional injuries to family members and peers; self-destructive habits and behaviors; deaths due to suicide

including ‘accidental’ suicides; and injury and deaths due to reckless behavior such as gun play. This is not a complete list. At a different level they experience emotionally jolting grief, guilt, anger, despair, fear, loathing and hopelessness.

These young people are reacting to similar stimuli as children in war-torn third-world countries. Their young bodies live on but their souls are aged far beyond their years. They are at risk of deleterious side effects such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, Anxiety, Depression, Shock and Panic Disorder. They may also develop inferiority and other destructive complexes.

These children may report sleep disturbances, ‘night sweats’, insomnia, flashbacks to horrible events, thoughts of suicide and revenge. Some blame themselves for events. Some exhibit a lack of emotional responsiveness. Sometimes it comes across as inhibited learning ability. They may likely and logically begin to believe they are different from everyone else and rather than experience and blossom, begin to withdraw and shut down.

When these violent experiences are combined and mixed over time with images of war and destruction too close to home, it becomes possible to imagine creating a monster, a perpetual victim, or both. The children get the message that this is their lot. They and the rest of America receive a constant barrage of reinforcing negative propaganda declaring all of this is as it should be. A process of mutual estrangement is in place as the society and the child each adjust to this aspect of marginalization. But only the child of color and culture becomes ill.

Stressful incidents and conditions inhibit mental processes and intellectual development and contribute significantly to serious health problems. Violence causes stress. However, there are many forms of violence as we have pointed out. Racism is violence, and evidence is pointing to racism as causing stress and contributing to diseases, physical as well as psychological (“How Racism Hurts-Literally”; Madeline Drexler; Boston Globe; 7/15/07).

Stress is a fight or flight response that sets chemical changes in motion. Stress alters healthy levels of triglycerides, adrenal hormones, blood pressure, cholesterol and other biological measures and has been linked to cardiovascular (heart) disease, diabetes, intestinal disorders, allergies, hives, insomnia, ulcers, skin disorders, sexual dysfunction and some cancers.

People under constant stress may seek unhealthy ways to escape it and are thereby at risk of alcohol or drug abuse, overeating, smoking and other self-destructive behavior, including suicide. During the late 1950's, Dr. Hans Selye, a pioneer in the study of stress stated, "No organism can exist continuously in a state of alarm". The body is not designed to live in constant fear, danger and related stress. There may be a link between the higher than normal rates of heart, liver and other diseases among minority populations and stresses from *external* forces as well as inter-community forces.

Stress and aggression may be linked as well. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), stress and aggression reinforce each other at the biological level, creating a vicious cycle. (APAONLINE Oct. 10, 2004) Reporting on an article titled, "Fast Positive Feedback Between the Adrenocortical Stress Response and a Brain Mechanism Involved in Aggressive Behavior" (Behavioral Neuroscience, Vol. 118, No. 5, Kruk, Meelis, Halasz, Haller, Oct. 2004), "There appears to be a fast, mutual, positive feedback loop between stress hormones and a brain-based aggression-control center in rats, whose neurophysiology is similar to ours". "It may explain why, under stress, humans are so quick to lash out and find it hard to cool down". The lead author states, "It is well known that stress hormones, in part by mobilizing energy reserves, prepare the physiology of the body to fight or flee during stress. Now it appears the very same hormones 'talk back' to the brain in order to facilitate fighting". The article stated that, "in rapid order, stimulating the hypothalamic attack area led to higher stress hormones and higher stress hormones led to aggression, evidence of the feedback loop within a single conflict". Write the authors, "Such a mutual facilitation may contribute to the precipitation and escalation of violent behavior under stressful conditions". They add that the resulting vicious cycle "would explain why aggressive behavior escalates so easily and is difficult to stop once it has started, especially because corticosteroids rapidly pass through the brain barrier". The findings suggest that even when stress hormones spike for reasons not related to fighting, they may lower attack thresholds enough to precipitate violent behavior. If this is found to be validated by additional research, it would help explain aggressive behavior in youth and others living in high-stress environments, even when in seemingly harmless settings.

Another study reported by the American Psychological Association, (APAONLINE, August 2003), reveals that a high number of American



youth are exhibiting signs of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, (PTSD) and other stress related disorders. Reporting on an article titled, "Violence and Risk of PTSD, Major Depression, Substance Abuse/Dependence, and Comorbidity: Results From the National Survey of Adolescents," (Kilpatrick, Ruggiero, Acierno, Saunders, Resnick, Best in the Journal Of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, Vol. 71, No. 4.) "The study, involving 4,023 youth (ages 12-17)... finds that roughly 16% of boys and 19% of girls met the criteria for at least one of the following diagnosis: PTSD, major depressive episode, and substance abuse/dependence". "Interpersonal violence (i.e., sexual and physical assault, witnessed violence) increased the risk of PTSD, major depressive episode, and substance abuse/dependence after controlling for demographic factors and family substance abuse problems, according to the study. This finding adds to the growing body of research establishing a link between interpersonal violence and mental health outcomes". It is becoming increasingly clear that stress, mental health and violence are linked. The results of repeated exposure to horrific physical violence in civilian settings in combination with social violence have yet to be linked and evaluated. However, it appears that stress and violence have a deleterious effect on growing numbers of young people. *Allowing any kind of violence to exist let alone thrive is unhealthy and escalates the probability of successive and spread violence.*

These are critical issues that help determine a person's emotional and physical ability to cope with the rigors of daily routine, the demands of interpersonal relationships as well as clarity and esteem required for future goal setting and accomplishment.

An act of violence impacts the victim's sphere of influence, i.e. family, friends and community. As violence increases in an area, violence affected spheres overlap and permeate the environment until seemingly everyone living there has been touched by violence in some way. And children are pretty much on their own to deal with it.

Adding to the perception the area has become a war zone is society's military response and declarations of war. Causes and triggering dynamics become more complicated as original violence issues mutate with added incidents, exacerbating negative dynamics. Even so, the extent of these experiences and the damage they cause is not nearly understood, appreciated and therefore dealt with holistically in communities experiencing constant and extreme violence.

The popular view of youth violence being cyclical and related to breeding, culture and family and peer ties extends to cycles of welfare, substance abuse, family breakdown, unemployment, school failure, etc. *Again, outcomes are symptoms but accepted as causes.* Common habits and ways of life are examined rather than negative causative elements in-common. We employ ways to measure a child's ability to deal with a make-believe reality, a "norm" that applies to another world.

Current solution models treat negative behavior by attempting to address "risk" and "protective factors" in and around the child's immediate environment. This model assumes that the problem and the solution are located within the child's ability to correct, and his domains: his family, his peers, his school and his community. *There is no demonstrated appreciation for the severity and the kinds of violence experiences, both overt and covert, or any understanding of the true sources of violence that are beyond these domains or the evolution that are having profound effects on the child since birth.* Researchers simply look at who is aggressive, angry and violent and from that posit that the cause and solution lie within the child and his immediate sphere of influence. In addition, others types of damage to the community reach critical mass and tipping points such as with learning and future employment. Many members of his community have become functionally illiterate due to the same forces that make determinations on resources and supports such as and especially education. The low self-esteem and hopelessness are not signs of emotional health and well being and they portend future failure as a group.

Meanwhile, science seeks to prove that biology and culture are somehow related to aggressive behaviors, thus the unrelenting search for genetic and other predisposing factors. This approach may seem like progress but is it? Research may be better served looking beyond the outcomes and into possible causes and related evolutions. The American experience is not a one size fits all suit. Applying one group's set of experiences to other groups is unrealistic and even dangerous. This allows the mayhem to continue while taking children through a guilt maze that at the end of the day still says loud and clear, "this is all your people's doing".

To be sure, youth are severely harmed by the "reservation" experience and must be supported. Counseling and medication are being employed *to treat symptoms* but lack a view to external causative elements of community violence.

Some research relates frustration to anger to aggression and violence. One model posits that some individuals cannot or will not manage frustration, and at some cumulative point, frustration leads to feelings of anger, then aggression and a greater potential to violence. Another model links frustration to real or perceived underlying reasons for an adverse reaction. While these do not even pretend to delve into the harsh “reservation community” environment, they are more on track with reality.

In one model, aggression is variably related to *justified* and *unjustified* frustration (Berkowitz, Miller, Dollard, et al); i.e. if the reason for the frustration is seen by the individual as *justified*, aggressive behavior is reduced. If the reason is seen as *unjustified*, frustration is increased. This theory’s application has been limited to everyday occurrences that have a direct cause and effect relationship, such as getting fired for constantly being late to work. One can (perhaps grudgingly) accept the logic of being fired as being *justified* and thus frustration is reduced. However, being fired or passed over because of skin color is *unjustified* and not acceptable and so leads to frustration, anger and then aggression. But the research does not address the “reservation community” experience. This may be due to the ignorance of this second world experience, especially as society takes no responsibility for its existence and does not acknowledge it as an aspect of the society. One has to extrapolate.

Finding *justification* for everyday occurrences in “reservation communities” is less possible as a *logical* basis for many frustrations is lacking: e.g. *racism, marginalization, exploitation* and *dehumanization*. Besides being passed over or fired due to bias or favoritism, these may also include lacking books or computers in schools; inability to purchase homes or obtain insurance at usual rates or at all; inadequate access to health services, and other resource deficiencies.

But much more serious and terrifying actions that defy logic and *justification* have occurred: a family member being hanged by a mob, dragged until dead, gang-raped, burned alive, shot, skinned alive, run out of town, burned out of a home, wrongly convicted of a crime, beaten up by mobs, etc. The victim group logically perceives these as *unjustified*.

*Unjustified* social, economic, political and even murderous violence have been the norm over generations. This level of *unjustified* treatment and the frustrations and anger are immeasurable by current standards. And the failure to reconcile the outcome with the reality has profound implications for treatment. Youth are confused at best, and feel

*unjustified* guilt and responsibility for sets of feelings they had no control over attaining. Societal machinations have presented and reinforced society as blameless and as the injured party. Thus, the current state of affairs appears *justified*. The relentless dehumanization of a people is accepted as necessary, relatively harmless and manageable when in reality it is damaging to being *off the charts*, and per Berkowitz' model, leads to higher levels of frustration, anger, aggressiveness and greater potential to violence.

A true victim group's frustration – aggression level is more difficult to salve when actions are *unjustified*. In a “reservation community” these occurrences are historical and incessant. If we apply the same equation to modern “reservation community” experiences, then frustration, anger and aggressiveness should logically remain and increase. Over time, one may seek a third party to “take it out on” and release pressure.

The linkage of aberrant gang models and behaviors can be logically associated with the aberrant logic illustrated here. That is, in order for a group to continue to function under such abnormal conditions, they must modify their social mores accordingly. Thus, gangs and other violent sub-cycles are logical outcomes of *unjustified* societal patterns and behaviors. They form *unjustifiable* rules and policies in response to *unjustifiable* realities.

A secondary result of continued *unjustified* frustration is that over time, the negative response pattern becomes foundational to next generations. Each new generation experiences elevated “baseline levels”, if you will, of fear, frustration, anger, aggression, rage, etc., inherited from the cumulative past.

The shared everyday negative experiences become the usual and accepted as part of an aberrant social existence. More simply, they go to sleep angry and wake up angry (and/or frustrated or other negative emotion), knowing by day's end they will likely be insulted, disrespected, dishonored, disfavored, shown disdain or even harmed physically by someone representing society or the local products of such societal machinations. And they are powerless to stop or prevent it. Be it at school, work, while driving, boarding a plane, being in the “wrong” neighborhood, eating, applying for a job or a loan, renting an apartment, or watching a movie or TV show, their “baseline level” of fear, discomfort, frustration and anger is constantly being raised. Eventually

internalized stress reaches danger levels. The person's mind, body and spirit have reached "overload" and are left raw and threadbare. The violent response may be a self-preserving rejection of additional insult. This also helps explain the "chip on the shoulder", "short fuse" and "always angry and ready to fight" clichés often given to minority groups to explain their *seeming* lower threshold to violent behavior when in actuality they have exceeded normal toleration levels throughout.

At the same time in another part of town, youth are advancing, are learning more and accumulating more comforts, enjoying better lifestyles and succeeding in turn. And wondering what in the world is wrong with "those people"?

It might be enlightening to test how "reservation" residents respond to "normal" frustration as being *justified* or *unjustified*. The author suggests the "reservation" experience is unique in composition, severity and duration that traditional research does not adequately account for, e.g., the researcher describes events within a traditional frustration field; the "reservation" subject gives a response indicating how insignificant they perceive the frustration (their response relative to their non-traditional and more intense experience) that places the "test" level frustrations in a relatively harmless category. The researcher mistakenly concludes that "traditional" frustrations tested for are therefore within that class of individual's ability to handle, and asks, 'so why are your people so angry and violent?' The test subject would explain to the well-meaning but uninformed researcher that he would happily live in this other world of "traditional" frustrations...that in his world, frustrations are much more severe, beyond his control and absolutely *unjustified*. The researcher is at a loss to accept or explain such response as the area is not accounted for in experience, research or literature and is therefore, scientifically invalid. The fundamental disconnect is missed.

Research goes on without true understanding of the level and kinds of frustration or day to day realities experienced by the violence surrounded individual: violence from society and his own community. The two are related and hit like a one-two punch. Regardless, the reality is that the anger and violence are prevalent, longstanding and as permanent as that which causes it. Until then, we have a socially acceptable rationale that has been adopted to force the reconciling of opposite realities...a socially acceptable rationale that places blame and responsibility solely *on the group and their youth*.

As stated, “disorganized community” is the term used by the professional violence researcher, trainer and intervener to describe communities that experience youth violence as a norm as well as high rates of poverty, crime, welfare, unemployment, school drop-outs, substance abuse, single parent households, unkempt neighborhoods, etc. ([www.sugeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence/chapter4/sec3.html](http://www.sugeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence/chapter4/sec3.html)).

This term describes *symptoms* and does nothing to enlighten as to *how a community became “disorganized” or why it remains that way*. A clear explanation and understanding of the entire progression and the devastating emotional and physical impacts beginning at the *source* stage would help greatly in solution design.

As a beginning, the author maintains that a primary, formative relationship exists between the type, degree and duration of stresses on a people and some classic violent behaviors as well as serious mental and physical illnesses. However, we reiterate that such stresses emanate first from outside the community *and manifest* from inside.

How one reacts to stress in general has much to do with how much or little control a person has over critical areas such as wherewithal to secure the basic life needs for self and family. Individuals living in affected communities have little or no control here as these are directly related to quality of education and access to resources (employment, housing) governed by the many aspects of *unjustified* social racism and bias. Nor do they have control over the consequent response dynamics such as gangs and the unrelenting “war on gangs”, which contributes to their collective stress and frustration experience.

Revisit William, standing in his kitchen as shots burst through the wall ending his brother’s life. Imagine for one moment the unimaginable – the horror he witnessed as his brother’s life was horrifically minced before his eyes; the sights and sounds of his brother’s smiling face suddenly exploding, splattering blood, bone and brains, mixed with his mother’s unholy screams as her worst fears are realized. His young mind shuts off in self-defense. Minimally, the trauma of this event has certainly shaped his outlook on life. He now knows from personal experience what millions of children in “reservation communities” have learned in much the same way: how cheap life is and how easily it can be taken away. He would necessarily adopt coping mechanisms set to the most primal common denominator: basic human survival which, as he painfully learned, he has little control over. Living day-to-day, fearful of the violent present there is little room for thoughts of the future. He

begins to lose social feeling. He needs to focus on his own survival - others will have to fend for themselves.

His experience is shared by many others in his neighborhood. They have this as their unholy bond rather than camping, sports triumphs or educational achievements. Society says this is “normal” for his people... it’s cultural, familial, even genetic. It is society’s illogical *justification* that he is forced to accept. Without real understanding there is little hope for the future of his neighborhood, and for the next William. And without serious professional help, the future is uncertain for this William and the too many like him, now, and in the future.

### **Yours, mine and ours**

Violence anywhere will always have far reaching consequences. In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, youth violence, like drug abuse, has spread to the once tranquil halls of that *other* America. We have buried white children in Paducah, Kentucky; Springfield, Oregon; Littleton, Colorado, San Diego, California, and where next? These may be new, unusual and still rare but they are here. There remains the *other* world where William and Rebecca, and Carlos and Littlefeather, routinely live and die much too young, mentally, physically and spiritually.

Even if structural societal changes do not occur, *mental health research and counseling must be directed at this continuing nightmare some children routinely endure*. Increasing numbers of individuals, families and peoples experience psyche altering trauma that makes people sick and engenders reactionary ‘black sheep’ ready to release built-up and highly charged emotions left undiagnosed and untreated, some over decades and generations.

### **Black sheep and White sheep**

Incidents such as Columbine catch us off-guard in more ways than one. Yes, they brutally remind us of the frailty of human life. But they also illustrate how we as a nation have come to subconsciously accept youth violence among some groups as “normal” while being stunned out of our socks by others. This was made evident by the enormity of national outrage and shock, quickly followed by positive action that was astounding in its breadth and scope when the Columbine innocents were gunned down in gang fashion. All at once the entire nation was focused

on the horror of youth violence and ready to invest whatever it takes to end it, there anyway. As these difficult days passed, the entire nation formed an ocean of compassion and flowing resources to the extent that a national double standard became painfully obvious.

The President of the United States, the First Lady, the vice-president, major media networks, it seemed the whole world rushed to shore up this community. President Clinton declared “We do not accept this. We will move heaven and earth to prevent it from occurring again.” The decision to arrest it in its tracks was made. The children and families were immediately cradled in the country’s arms and assured that everything would be OK. For them, America’s Safety Net was forming, as strong as steel and as soft as a mother’s breast.

Meanwhile, back on America’s “reservation communities”, millions of beautiful children of color struggle to cope with the knowledge that America plans no such safety net for them. The silence over their traumatic existence is deafening.

It was pointed out that dozens of minority children are gunned down every week, year in and year out and for decades in the schools, parks, on the streets and even in the homes of some neighborhoods throughout this nation, with hardly a nod from leaders and local media. These communities hold neighborhood car washes and bake sales to help defray burial expenses. And mothers of previous murder victims sell their homemade foods to replenish their burial kitty that will assist other mothers, names yet unknown, to bury their to-be murdered children. These communities have adjusted to the unnatural reality of their children dying at the hands of other children over time and for the long haul and with no end in sight. Discussions of when and where it began are not entered in to. Only that it got that way a long time ago and we can’t seem to stop it. We give ridiculous explanation for it with justifying rationalizations (as “Tookie” Williams starting the Crips).

Columbine-like incidents developed over time although no one saw them coming. However, there will be no oversimplified explanations here such as Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold being credited with initiating White School Shootings or White Group Murder and this accepted as a *cycle of (white) violence*. Each and every incident affecting the majority population is guaranteed to be analyzed and solved if it takes going back to Adam and Eve.

All at once, white America experienced the horror and sadness that only the untimely and violent death of a child can generate. However,



the response for each America was and is very different. And unless one looks at the entire picture objectively they miss the differences. One is a military response and the other an army of friendly resources.

Now revisit San Diego, Paducah, Springfield and even Littleton, Colorado - and next maybe your community? What would happen if childhood murders were accepted as “normal for your kind” and allowed to be a daily event with hardly a nod elsewhere? And how would the children fare in their own lifetimes and over generations?

Columbine-type attacks will be slowed if not stopped due to the massive efforts directed at *this* youth violence. Still, trauma from related kinds of violence will affect white families in other ways. Children are into gangs and hate is constantly being promoted so violence volatility remains high. International terrorism brings home similar feelings of helplessness and vulnerability but not nearly on the scale as in barrios and ghettos. Those in our Armed Forces are feeling the effects of a similar kind of war much as these children do. They will show the same signs of trauma and stress related illness. These feelings may be new to mainstream America but are usual to her “reservation” children. If it hits your family or community, welcome to my world.

America will continue to invest friendly resources in safety nets for the Columbines of the one world. But unless we stop the causes of youth violence everywhere there will be more of them. Trying to maintain two different worlds in one orbit is not really possible and the effort takes extraordinary time and resources and yet, we keep trying. For children in our “reservation communities”, our response continues to be police gang units, jails and prisons, welfare offices, unemployment centers and so on. These will never stop the carnage.

America’s minority groups live with violence everyday and they know the death of their children will not bring a President to declare an emergency or a call to action. There will be no official cries for safety nets heard here, only of slamming prison doors and the silent wringing of hands.

Any critical analysis of American history cannot escape concluding America is a land of two societies: one with the American Dream intact, the other living a daily nightmare; one a teeming river and the other a crimson flow. America’s separate and unequal track record reflects an unconscionable waste of youthful humanity.

## 16

**Growing Gangsters or Creating Soldiers?**

*They see themselves as soldiers while we see them as gangsters. We do not need either and yet they are mass produced. Gangs exist in a contradictory world. Their patterns of behavior and rules of conduct are opposite of normal but disguised in all aspects to allow their goal of self-elimination to proceed. In order to exist in it each participant must be modified as well. Whether a gang chooses as their enemy members of another race, ethnicity or culture, or those who are in fact their own mirror image, there is an experiential process to reaching the requisite emotional level for entry into the gang world with all its absurdities. As a child grows in this caustic environment he or she is put through the same ugly paces as generations before them, turning everything upside-down and backwards. Families strive to live normal lives while their children struggle to stay alive in a war zone.*

In the classic gang, or “reservation community”, sources of community discontent and rage emanate from outside a community and exist as long as a society allows. While in place, they damage all they touch. They confuse and frustrate as they are *unjustified*. Their tragic impact is evidenced by relatively high numbers of residents of all ages that engage in self-destructive behaviors.

Not all residents will be affected in the same ways. Some experience anger and hostility that for the most part, stays bottled up. Others reach the apex of their personal tipping point and quietly succumb to feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness and lack of life purpose and meaning.

The adoption of such a negative self-belief does not necessarily relate to age. *However, this negative dynamic is cumulative, progressive and has greater impact on younger ages.*

A child might express anxious and outwardly aggressive feelings and behaviors beyond where we might expect. Such expression will have

some relationship to personal experiences and how he views and experiences his world in relation to the outside world.

At a point, some youth join with other like-minded youth. Some will bully, destroy property and commit violent offenses. And some will become willing to kill and be killed for their respective adopted “causes”, be they colors, turf, ethnicity, money or whatever. It is all self-destructive *but on their terms and using their power*. The entire exercise is based on artificial conflict in a made-up war to fill very real needs and has devolved to fulfill a subconscious desire to end their existence.

For a young person contemplating suicide, even subconsciously, homicide is not such a big deal. The line between the two can become blurred if not disappear altogether. And anything less becomes petty. Once fully matured in this patterned lifestyle, they are devoid of emotional attachments and feelings - seemingly mechanical beings that can disassociate action from human emotion.

## **Reflections of home**

In the classic gang community, homeboys and homegirls are born into common geographical locations that reflect the nation’s disinvestment scheme – disinvestment in education, health and resources. They and their groups are multi-generational targets of social violence, exclusion and purposely diminished access to resources and supports. They do receive negative attention such as profiling in media, welfare and unemployment centers, government housing, political footballing, economic gerrymandering, etc. Not one of these is a small thing. Each area of disinvestment and unfavorable treatment has serious and far reaching consequences that affect the individual and their people in fundamental ways...and they are *unjustified*.

In these communities, a quality education is the exception, not the rule. Graduates are less likely to do well on college entrance exams or employment tests. At the beginning of adulthood and establishing the foundation for the next generation, young adults are essentially cut off from higher education and valuable career opportunities. Many cannot complete a work application or read work instructions. Worthwhile and rewarding employment is secured by those better qualified – from outside the community. From the beginning, disinvestment and unfavorable treatment have become structural, *thus setting in place the cornerstone for another “disorganized community”*.

The results are marginalized people living in destabilized communities that manifest as multi-generational cycles of hopelessness, welfare dependence, unemployment, school drop-outs, chronic ill health, substandard living conditions...and an escalating baseline of shared anger and resentment, ready for the next phase...

These communities may be left behind when it comes to progress. They are however, given highest priority with unlimited manpower and state of the art resources when it comes to *negative* attention (law enforcement, prisons). The scope of a society's self-interest becomes apparent: Expend resources sufficient to concentrate social, political and economic power and influence among a select group at the expense of less favored groups; and once achieved, expend sufficient resources to maintain that scheme.

Societal expenditures are thus guided by self-interests. If a society's interest is to be fair, even-handed and democratic with all of its citizens, expenditures will reflect that interest as will the outcomes. If expenditures reflect a pattern of targeted imbalance, outcomes will reflect that too, as we are witness. These determine *relative* community stabilization – one to another. Thus the society influences outcomes by how it uses power, influence and resources...including outcomes of peaceful and violent behaviors.

Each group has a universe of resources at its disposal and persons can choose them or not. For favored groups this universe is positive and enhancing and many avail themselves.

It is quite the opposite for non-favored groups as positive options are fewer and deficient regardless of a person's dreams, desires and goals. Negative options are abundant, however. In this scheme, positive and negative behavior is thus structurally guided by external societal decisions and machinations and not nearly within the scope of the home or community. Therefore, some groups experience social success in higher numbers than other groups while others end up in jails, prisons, ill and prematurely dead in higher numbers than other groups. While costs to maintain this imbalance are massive, society presents itself as passive, blameless, helpless and even "put upon" in paying for these pre-determined outcomes.



## 17

**Gangs are made...not born**

*For most families, attachment to home and community are revered. In a “reservation community” these attachments have been altered to reflect the traumatic and caustic environment. It is within this unnatural setting that we find the birthplace of the original, the Traditional gang.*

Home and community are foundational. There is strength and rejuvenation there needed to face an unforgiving world. However, in a “reservation community”, youth experience home and community as fragile, vulnerable and without hope. Rather than powerful and robust, frustration and anger mix with hopelessness and despair. In worst cases, family and peers pummel each other mentally and physically, take with little give. At home, children are loved but treated as if hated; are given condescending nicknames and riddled with put-downs, their actions ridiculed. In fits of rage, they are screamed at, told they are stupid, worthless and will never amount to anything. In this negative environment they are transferring their own low self-esteem and high self-contempt to the next generation. They are preparing the youngster for the failures (they believe) life holds for him, lowering expectations and curbing goals. Regardless of motive, this is the deepest cut of all.

The cutting words and actions are also intended to mentally toughen a child for what is believed to be an empty and violent future. However, they have the effect of helping to destroy the youngster's self-esteem, inner strength and confidence.

A person's internal dialog constantly reviews and updates view of self, relevance, perspective on life and plans for today and potential for a lifetime. How it unfolds is critical to the person's future, his community *and ultimately the society*. In a “reservation community” his dialog strains to emerge positive under a deluge of negatives.

All of this confirms messages from the outside world that it is all true and adds to and reinforces a blossoming belief in failure, setting in place an internal dialog that will guide him away from success at every opportunity. The child learns that traditional achievement is not for him; that being different from those around him is threatening to others; that sameness, failure, meanness and false bravado are imprints for future reference; that physical toughness is “strength” and niceness and minor foibles “weakness”, and that home and neighborhood may not be the foundation on which to rely or to build from.

As *source* elements are directed at the collective, so the effects emerge *from* the collective. Malformed “strength” substitutes take center stage, allowing release under an illusion of power.

A gang can form when a number of like-minded persons engage in replacing their “weak” home and community with an artificially “empowered” version. They are attempting to create and sustain a “strength” replacement (gang turf) on which they believe they *can* build from and rely on. Home is deemphasized and the substitute “empowered” version magnified to extreme importance. In this classic replacement scheme, the gang hangout is now “home” with “homeboys” and “homegirls” as the replacement “family”. They do this without understanding the dynamics of the exchange of personhood for a destructive, man-made elimination device. The glorified “turf” makes up for a multitude of deficiencies be they community, familial or personal. *It is via these substitutes that some very basic needs are met.*

Once done, they are ready for a triggering event such as violence over *turf* or *status* to christen it as an official ‘gang turf’ - to be followed by an act of *revenge*...a new gang is then born and a new *cycle of violence* can begin.

“Turf” is the church of gangland. Each turf is given a formal gang name. The gang can now serve as the “Superstar” stand-in for all that is missing and wrong in their environment. Individual power and strength are vested in the omnipotent GANG as it is all-powerful. The gang is almost mythical and cannot be destroyed by man, even if it or the gang member is moved or destroyed. Its boundaries may be fixed physically or merely set within the person, but, whether fixed or not, they are always shadowy to the outside world.

These youth become desperately invested in the creation, promotion and survival of their nebulous but all-powerful gang that must be defended at all costs...even as it destroys them. Although this alliance is

artificial and dangerous, this aberrant replacement mechanism has become a socially modified part of a community's coping strategy.

A neighborhood usually consists of families with a common concern for the welfare of their youth and their community. In most places this is so, until gang critical mass is reached at which time some youth become vehicles of self-destruction and move beyond community control. They also abandon the local community identity much as they have abandoned their home identity and created their own replacement "turf" version. This turf "overlay" supplants community, even in cases where the group adopts the local community name or a landmark as part of their gang name. The community too is "weak" and at the whim of forces beyond its control. But now there is "strength" that must be maintained and built upon. The gang will not let anyone else "have" their community. It is theirs to do with as they see fit, even to destroy.

The gang is his "club", his pals. As youth try to spread their wings, make a mark and begin to conquer their world, good options are few and bad options plentiful. Sort of like a bad option candy store followed by a bad option merry-go-round. So trouble and punishment are everywhere, waiting patiently. Many find themselves on society's extension of the "reservation", prison, where "gang" is again all he has to hold on to – and hold on he does. He takes his "strength" with him and he will defend it in this, his alternate community against others in the exact same situation and as equally dedicated.

Their "gang turf" is their relegated slice of an ownerless and powerless environment. This "reservation" is where we have placed them and forced them to make do, and they do what's necessary. It is a very different world from that of the greater society, but it is *their* world and sufficient unto itself. Their substitute world exists within but not at the same place and time as the *other* world, except when common points of interaction play out as when cops and bangers take center stage in confrontation. This newsworthy event brings the gang member to the *other* world but limited to the negative pole, so each can see and interact but not connect, except negatively. The gang member is nonetheless noticed and acknowledged by a compliant and uncaring society.

The two worlds exist in parallel but at different speeds. One proceeds as if propelled forward, which it is. The other moves as if weighed down, injured and even crippled, which it is. These worlds are as different as night and day. Residents of each learn early that one cannot easily cross to the other nor is one supposed to.



Some in the community, especially critical thinkers, see the gang as filling unmet needs that society leaves. The community struggles with these social by-products as well as the ongoing negative external forces that create and maintain them.

In their schools and neighborhoods these youth meet similar others and co-learn their lessons on how to survive violent local conditions... *conditions that have no basis in human survival*. They learn rules of governance, behaviors and beliefs. These rules are a subconscious effort to instill and defend an alternate home and community structure and base of power, albeit an overblown perversion of each. Through tough street games and rough dialog they begin to get toughened up by peers in preparation for later challenges in this manufactured milieu of survival - challenges that *will* allow some form of “success”. In the classic local *cycle of violence*, war, imprisonment and personal loss including death are the survival issues that they know will have to be faced to maintain such status. And they spend their days preparing for them.

The oldest and/or most radical of their number are veterans of earlier wars and/or overall gang life. They are called Veteranos (veterans) and OG’s (original gangsters) and are already long disconnected. They pass down rules and lessons to the new recruits and then disappear one by one. Their numbers are constantly replenished by new blood, also willing to risk all as prerequisite. Newbies begin to practice behaviors that will suit their eventual needs. God given talents are wasted and misused to further the goals and to protect and to serve their “turf”. Each holds on to it for dear life, often reflecting the land they occupy, forgotten and abused. Two different worlds, yet we are all neighbors of each other.

### **Modifications and contradictions**

A gang *seems* to be a cohesive group of persons who will die for one another. It is anything but. In fact it is a group of weakened spirits clinging to a life raft they know is slowly sinking. Their cohesion is to the last ditch “strength replacement”: their gang, their turf, their ‘hood... still standing in their socially destroyed community.

Some of their neighborhood games are extensions of a negative indoctrination and separation process. One classic example is a game called “the dozens”. This game is an ongoing contest of put-downs usually having the universal mother as butt: e.g., “Your momma is so

\_\_\_ that she \_\_\_\_\_.” (You are to fill in the blanks as outrageously as your imagination permits). Although the put-downs are extreme negative exaggerations of physical and mental traits of one's beloved mother, *the dozens* and similar neighborhood activities reinforce in young ones the relative low value of their own life situation. *The dozens* puts down their (normally) closest personal support (mother) and by circular extension their home, family and themselves (their/your birth).

How *the dozens* puts down the mother may also be reflective of the low value placed on females. *However, it is primarily a step in a forced, unnatural separation process by distancing him emotionally from his real life mother in preparation for long term separation or even his early demise.* It is also a means to toughen-up for future gang-turf needs while making him feel closer to a distorted version of manhood, albeit again exaggerated to extremes, by shutting down his connection to a perceived weak part of the community family, his mother, and all done in a joking format. Jokes disguise fear and offer commonality. Laughter reduces stress and is an emotional release.

*Daddy* is rarely if ever joked about. This may be partly due to the unspoken understanding that what has happened to daddy is the male child's own eventual sad fate. Young males have already learned that their adult lot is already deeply damaged. They put down each other almost relentlessly, consciously and subconsciously in readiness for that eventual fate.

The negative barrage may seem to raise their own stature *but at the expense of his own group*; test one's mettle for future reference *but is based on weakening his foundational supports*; prepare each other for battle *but by weakening his already thin skin*. It may be all these and more, but it is always a reflection of low self-worth and a subconscious drive to self-destruct. This all amounts to a constant wounding of the psyche as the child readies to go out into his two worlds. He is ready to battle to the death in one but ill-equipped for the other.

In one, he has a romanticized vision of localized greatness. He can “win” in patented battles of self-elimination. In this process he gains a mutated form of power and respect from others on this same life path. The other world is foreign as it is meant to be. For that world he has been readied for disillusion and letdown. He lacks the education, vocabulary and social network to enter and succeed. That world gives constant reminders that it has no place for him. The gang however, stands waiting to provide value, validation and security from all of it

including from fellow rivals who labor under the same weight...but always *at the cost of self*. He is not prepared to survive *either* of the two worlds that surround him - a condition that guarantees failure up to and including his elimination.

Friendships are different in the 'hood'. Emotional jarring starts early. As children will do, they initially expect that their youthful relationships will last forever, through thick and thin - until they begin to die off. Sooner or later one *will* die a horrible and violent death. And so the child learns he has deadly enemies close by but it escapes him that they are his mirror image. The incident provides a reason to come together, to bond, to feel as one, to not only believe they need one another but reinforces their decision to create their band of soldiers – their gang.

This last aspect is only one part of the response process but is the basis of what we understand to be the local *cycle of violence*. He learns early that life is tenuous and even cheap, a critical step toward increased gang acceptance. He begins to accept that he too will meet with some version of gang tragedy, for by now he believes that this is his lot in life.

While the tragic back and forth gangland events reinforce the constant need for back-up, already developing is a forced emotional distancing from self, loved ones and each other. Early injury and death become the expected so they deaden the nerves to survive, as the death and heartache surrounding their lifestyle is not possible to survive emotionally unless the person has been so modified. However, this and other modifications represent various types and levels of neuroses, psychoses, social and physical illnesses as part of the deterioration process. This person is typically between 5 and 15 years old.

The gang must be able to go on, even without him. Their protection of the gang/turf/'hood is paramount as it must remain intact for them and for the next youngster also being made ready to replace him. The brutal process thereby becomes *justified* unto itself. This is the artificially created social modification that evolved for youngsters to, if not be able to make sense of the *unjustified* targeting of their group within the society, to exist within it in some form, even temporarily. They in turn *unjustifiably* hate self and those exactly like them and self-destruct using their now "real" and *justifying* war as the medium.

In war there is a form of honesty – you kill an enemy or he kills you. However, in this milieu his reasons for engaging in war are as illogical and *unjustified* as the society's reasoning for the gang's existence. He

targets himself as society has done and his causes are also as *unjustifiable* as society's...and as illogical. His life is governed by the wars his group engages in.

Life-cycles begin and end within a *cycle of violence* for the gangster homeboy and for those that follow. On the surface they are mutually dedicated to "the cause" of their gang and espouse a deep sense of commitment to the 'hood/turf/gang and to each other, even as their original number succumb and are replaced. Wars and battles raise the mythical gang name high. Below the surface each is quietly dying.

The entire process is debilitating. In early years youth are deeply affected by the violence and other forms of localized dehumanization. Most don't want any part of it and never join in. Others join but become willing to leave it. Their commitment weakens as they experience brutality, loss and pain. *At this juncture, successful intervention is very possible.* This is when the youth is still building toward his personal critical mass. He is at a tipping point where he will decide how he will deal with the various hurts, pressures and his increasingly easy rising anger that is slowly becoming permanent in spite of his best efforts.

Youth at early stages of gang involvement are more likely to question their situation and accept that something is missing in this back and forth murder/revenge equation. It is important to correctly recognize this stage as an opportunity to intervene but it must be done correctly to be effective. This is where we miss a key opportunity to be effective even though our timing may be correct. But it must be done honestly.

*The child must not be placed on the defensive by attacking his culture, race, family, friends, etc. or labeling him and his home situation in some way(s) deficient and to blame. This actually exacerbates the situation.*

It is not possible to intervene at all if the intervener is convinced that the only explanations for gang behavior are *turf, status and revenge* contained within an *endless and unstoppable cycle of violence* and if not saved now has to be *given up on* as is currently subscribed. And therefore, should the intervener's efforts fail, it is not the system's "best practices" that fail but is the fault of the parents or the youth or the peers or culture or genes or all of the above. The failed interveners is then forced to confirm the need to "give up on this generation and concentrate on the next" and wait for some future imaginary child that "best practices" and his/her efforts will work on.

For the young person wanting help, his friends, parents, community, ethnicity, culture and even bloodline are hammered in as being to blame

for his inexorable march to destruction. The subtle message here is to go it alone – to abandon his friends, home, family and culture in order to survive let alone succeed – that he will still has his ancestry and genealogy to overcome (this detachment model was tried with the Native American that resulted in generations of their children being cut off from both worlds and did not lead to reconciling one world with the other). Instead, his distrust and confusion increases. His faith in the system and in the society is already seriously in doubt. His trust must be gained by a different and honest tact or he will not be open to alternatives and to question the gang lifestyle. *For as long as he believes that his gang is the honest and true way and all there is for him there is little chance he will abandon it.*

*It is not in a sectarian society's interest to eliminate the gang sub-cycle or other destructive processes. Whether by design or default, the officially accepted but incorrect explanations for gang's existence, continuity and behavior actually preempt a road to recovery. The gang is the basis of a false sense of humanity that we guided him toward and that he clings to. As with other destructive sub-cycles pervasive in the "reservation", the gang is fulfilling a function left to it by design.*

For youth that continue to mature in the gang, the "logic" for their behavior matters less and less. Over time and in stages they voluntarily surrender their individuality to the gang. In exchange, the gang promises power, respect and adventure. It dictates everything from behaviors to relationships. In this world there is little *conscious* thought given to the fact that they are committing to a premature demise. That it actually all emanates from a made-up war escapes them *and us*.

The foundation of their gang strength is false but their war is real. *It is not about colors or turf or status or revenge in spite of appearances and official explanations.* Consciously, the banger appears to act on these. Subconsciously, there is a much more fundamental human process at work here as he searches for his place in the world and more importantly, for whom he is in truth. He has to do mental battle with contrived representations of his true lineage, his culture and his character. The intervener and the youngster must be made to understand the foundation his gang stands on is not really *turf, status and revenge which, like the gang itself, are based on lies.*

There are stages to community violence. Each stage is so entrenched as to be institutional, repeating relentlessly and uncompromisingly, changing only in minor ways by the locals and by the society. In too

many cases, rather than improve an area economically, politically and socially, a community is allowed to deteriorate, commanding increasing attention from the criminal justice system and unhealthy reliance on undirected social programs trying desperately to patch holes big enough for a city to fall into. The community becomes increasingly non-productive while the criminal justice system is challenged to expand and increase productivity to meet the growing menace.

This nation's socialization processes have evolved two components: one that is strong and resilient where some groups are structurally cocooned within and where their basic needs and wants are fulfilled; and the other that is structurally deficient and that leaves youth to singly overcome a world of adversity. The former involves a process of support that brings with it relative high levels of achievement and success. The latter entails a process of selective social violence that has a much less desirable result. This latter process is a multi-step violence progression that serves no purpose other than the destruction of a community's youth, the future of a people.

**Discussion:** The American system as originally designed is simple and pure. Its tenets of equality, freedom, justice and the pursuit of happiness for every one of its citizens is a model for a peaceful and vibrant social order for governments everywhere. How does such a model evolve so many excessively violent persons, especially considering that their groups were not any more or less violent than other groups? Where is the disconnect? What was missed? How has society dealt with the excessive violence among particular groups? Does improper attention allow the process to remain intact?

The subject community becomes violent and the society adjusts to the violent outcomes that show up in stages. Over time, a sort of institutional co-dependency between the society and the injured community emerges and takes on a life of its own. In this deviant symbiotic relationship, both come to accept that justice system management and oversight is natural and normal. Is this the most effective method a society can come up with? How can we end this deviant co-dependency?

The community's right to self-determination has been effectively usurped. Vernacular such as "multi-generational gang cycles", "disorganized communities" and "weed and seed" come and go as determined by outside "experts" as if playing a game of checkers *but with human lives*. Such inattention has resulted in involving youth that were not supposed to form or join gangs or use killer drugs, thus adding untenable social and economic costs to society. Where can we go from here? Is there a better way?

## **The Gang-active Process: Sadists, Masochists but Not Warriors**

*The gang-active process is well oiled and slippery, perfected to an imperfect science. One of its first manifestations is masochism - in preparation for the animal barbarism to come.*

Gang life consists of the seemingly random violent acts done to self and others under the *cycle of violence* heading. However, these acts are *induced behaviors* and fit within a definable and observable set of behaviors that conform to two related but distinct pathological patterns: masochism and sadism. The gang member believes he must be punished - and so must others like him. Aside from the sexual connotation usually applied to this pathology, an active gang member is participating in a sadomasochistic behavior mode. Each plays at both parts at different times depending on circumstances. But he is playing at one of them all of the time in support of the *cycle of violence* process.

### **Socially Effected Sadomasochism**

The Theory of Masochism (Wilhelm Reich) states: *Masochism is the result of a state of continued negative stimulation and inadequate discharge resulting in a need to explode, be pierced, beaten, etc., in order to release feelings that have been pent up.*

This seems to support the theory that continuous negative societal interaction (negative stimulation) has a cumulative negative impact on individuals within an affected group creating a release need (need to explode). The need grows due to continued stimulation and inadequate discharge until it becomes *a need to "be pierced, beaten, etc."* The "feelings" that must be released are those of rage on the one hand and

guilt and self-hate on the other. Rage is released through sadistic acts and the guilt and self-hate through masochistic subjection and abuse. This is a sadomasochistic practice and behavior that may help define, in psychological terms, the destructive activities he engages in that belie the true nature of the violence within the gang lifestyle.

He has experienced enough to pass his personal critical mass build-up and tipping point. He remains confused however, by the *unjustified* aspects but has nevertheless accepted and internalized society's negative belief structure built on rejection and hatred for him and his people. His fundamental beliefs and consequent actions are now structured around rejection and hatred for self and by extension, his peer mirror images. Punishment up to and including elimination of self and similar others is psychologically directed. He is thus subconsciously driven to act out against himself and his peers.

The child learns from the elders and other local adults lessons of the (gang) neighborhood, how to act and how to respond within a sadomasochistic action/reaction framework. The need for release is the fuel and the artificial excuses (colors, turf, names, etc.) are the triggers. In this way, this horrific state of blossoming and reciprocal meanness is psychologically and emotionally handed down from generation to generation. Over time and due to the primarily negative experiences the children observe and engage in, they continue to sink gradually deeper into destructive sadistic and masochistic behaviors. They practice their versions repeatedly with siblings and peers in a dehumanizing honing process that becomes part of community life.

The continuity of this reactive phase through generations can be partially explained as an on-going learning and re-learning response to recurring externally generated negative stimuli that creates internal pressure to explode, be beaten, pierced, etc. Other manifestations of multi-generational trauma support the pressure build-up, his continuing confusion and heightening frustration which he has inherited directly and indirectly through his group, family and peers. The recent entrance of the Epigenome effect on DNA adds support to multigenerational transfer based on strong emotional forces and impacts of past occurrences.

**Socially effected sadomasochism** is by no means limited to gangs and gang violence. It is the same dynamic involved with other



destructive sub-cycles including substance abuse, family abuse, dropping-out, suicide, etc.

Within each local *cycle of violence* process, each affected person is both sadist and masochist to varying degrees, according to amount of exposure, involvement and practice combined with personal strengths and weaknesses. This is adopted common behavior among his peer group handed down on the streets as various gang rituals by the older homies (Veteranos and O.G.'s) as part of the aberrant gang sub-culture. Each child will adopt the level and behavior to the degree he is prepared, by personal and environmental conditioning to undertake.

Once the child reaches a level of understanding and comfort, so to speak, of his role as gang member, he will engage in a relatively standard pattern and series of negative acts and behaviors and will escalate or deescalate those acts and behaviors based on experiential dynamics (how he is affected). He may become more prone to masochistic behavior or sadistic acts or, as is usually the case, attempt to handle both. He may also want to retreat. However, his retreat has been effectively prevented by a social modification that replaced real "manhood" (honesty, bravery, uprightness, strength) with the gang's destructive imitation that he has invested his personage as a crutch, that he must also overcome.

### **The Gang-Active Process**

Those in the gang are in constant turmoil and unease. They are subject to forces that can lead to movement in any direction, bouncing against each other as atoms that can change as they interact. The active and reciprocal honing of this accepted and reliable but absolutely destructive behavior is the *gang-active process*. This process of build-up and release through negative exchanges can become individually and collectively familiar and even relatively comfortable. Even so, it is toxic, harmful and deadly. The involvement and indeed reliance on substances assists the process to self-destruct and as a salve along the way.

Even though they know the process is deadly, many children have developed the overwhelming need to engage in street versions of sadomasochistic behaviors. This aberrant need, while being fed, is what ultimately endures and withstands the test of time and place. The children believe they must be constantly (negatively) engaged; they also believe they must invest all in a protective and strong alternative to their

individual selves; and they accept the tests and aberrant conditions as substitutions for accessing real basic needs, purpose and ways to achieve. As a consequence, human emotions and feelings are trampled underfoot while in the gang universe, as they must for the emotional and physical survival of the child. He survives but as a human punching bag.

Sadomasochistic behaviors are learned, practiced and mastered by degree, type and form. They are recognizable and identifiable. The key is to stop feeding them.

*The rules that gangs operate under are extreme versions of sadistic and masochistic behaviors, with gang-murder being the most sadistic, and gang-suicide, or suicide by gang, the most masochistic. These two poles form an axis that surrounds their behavior that they adopt and adapt to.*

Beginning with the external *source* dynamic, the subject youth become indoctrinated and accept their negative social status. They engage in a pattern of sadomasochistic behaviors *not only with each other but with societal authorities and institutions*. From these latter entities they seek punishment for their and their people's existence. They act out various levels of rebellious "black sheep" behavior and feel complete when they are punished – *by each other and by society*.

Youth gang/group violence is a progressive behavioral malady that affects a community mentally before it appears physically. That is, it works its way into a community *head first*. The negative belief must be accepted by the minds before acted on by the bodies.

The underlying reasons for actions and events that result in the youth's evolving negative existence and view of self have to do with negative societal programming and treatment manifesting as community tensions leading to acts of violence. *They began as reactions to external stimuli rather than preemptive acts of violence on fellow residents, or retaliation for earlier acts as those who study him claim is the case*. And gang members do not know intellectually who or what is to blame for their unhappy situation. They really do not know why they do what they do.

The indicators surrounding gang/group activity fit within identifiable parameters of known human behaviors. They are not a mystery or mysterious. Once this is realized, intervention is indeed possible. Their individual and collective actions can be charted and even projected with some degree of certainty. These also have preventative implications in a

*Forces...*

*Valdivia/Hernandez*

seemingly random universe and can help to bring cure and wellness to persons and communities so involved.



### Love in the fast lane...

*In spite of the forces of dehumanization surrounding them, the majority of young men and women in even the worst neighborhoods grow up to be good, law abiding citizens. They fight against mighty forces to get there and remain. Extremes dominate - one very difficult to attain and the other too easy. A healthy middle ground is sadly missing.*

All young people residing in “reservation communities” are affected to some extent by artificially imposed “adversity” they must struggle to overcome in order to succeed. They are overwhelmed by society’s *unjustified* and psychologically destructive negative characterizations of their people and some feel shame. While most ultimately follow traditional paths of family life, some will run towards the flame and others will run as far away as possible. A sad consequence of this set of bad choices is the rejection of one’s group.

Some females accept the notion that the males in their community have no future and little possibility for power and success. They accept the (imposed) inferior status of the males and reject them. By the same token, some males believe that partnering with a local female will hurt his chances for a successful life. Or their children will suffer if they look “too ethnic”. Some members of both sexes just want to get out and want nothing to do with their neighborhood or the people in them.

Often the price paid for this choice is the surrender of identity, culture, language, tradition and to some extent their connection to family. They accept the stereotyped versions of their culture and heritage and choose a life partner outside their group or remain alone. This extension of the self-hate dogma affects romance, courting, marriage and reproduction. At the other extreme are the dedicated homeboy and homegirl.

### **The homegirl's place...**

A young female who chooses her mate from the local gang population must deal with the fact that her life partner is not viewed by society as a contributing member but rather as a pariah, a born loser – a criminal waiting to happen; and that successful partnering with him is improbable as his absence is almost guaranteed by incarceration or early death. She sees failed attempts at family survival all around her but still she tries.

She supports her outcast “brother” - thinks him to be just fine, thank you. She accepts his gang involvement perhaps for survival in the streets, as an act of social rebellion or even believing it to be part of the culture. She may sympathize with his underdog status and identify with it. Her image of him may merely be a romanticized one. There may be a subconscious desire guiding her efforts to climb to a middle ground and she dreams in vain for that day. But there is no natural “middle ground”. *For, the young women in this group are feeling the effects of the same dehumanization as her male counterpart. She also suffers from low self-esteem - her negative self-image mirrors his and she feels the same anger and resentment.* While girls in gangs also eliminate their own mirror images, she can also play a support role as one of replenishment. In this role she may be less an active gangster but hers is nevertheless an essential part of the gang world.

Young females who opt to hang with the gang must adjust to its rules and requirements. When these females choose being a “homegirl”, they are subject to the same negative treatment as their male counterparts. Like them, their tough exterior shields a soft and needy inside. These females may become the males’ support partners, a kind of auxiliary to the male group.

One function is to facilitate the continual partying the gang needs in order to maintain a mental and emotional numbness, often achieved through the use of mind-altering substances, and like their condition, is progressive. *As with the male the female has submerged personal goals and desires for the gang.* The gang, through her gang member boyfriend, feeds her need for status and is confirmation that she is somebody. Even as her association reinforces negative self-worth and is degenerative.

*Although the gang is a rage-release mechanism and a compensation device it is chiefly an elimination system. It does not support individuals, family and community, it destroys them. The gang mainly exists to allow a programmed form of genocide to continue.*

Marriage and family are not compatible with gang life. While in a gang, a young person cannot build and maintain a successful family as his prolonged or even permanent absence is accepted and even expected. Ironically, for those involved, a mutated version of family life can exist, as at the core of each culture the importance of family remains supreme. But this version will still have to contend with the destructive and contradictory aspects of the gang lifestyle.

Male gang members immensely undervalue their female counterparts. They see them as co-losers, only with much less power. Females are viewed as the one thing that is lower than the male in his chauvinistic world - a "whipping girl" so to speak. They are subjected to extremely negative attitudes and abusive acts per the sadomasochistic backdrop but believe they deserve no better. She will serve the gang, even when her boyfriend objects. The female gang associate may be called upon for subservient duties including messenger service and even sexual service to other gang members, thus supplying a basic need, sex, albeit in a deviant way. They may be asked to set up an enemy for execution using sex as a lure. In one classic instance, a female caught gonorrhea from her boyfriend. So as a strategy they called "germ warfare", she was sent to the enemy camp less than three blocks away from her gang turf on a Friday night where she infected several enemy homeboys.

Once enrolled, a female gang member's attitudes, mannerisms and treatment will be similar to those of the males in the gang. However, the gang female has one major redeeming value: she is empowered with the ability to give life to the gang community, to replenish dwindling numbers, to replace the dead, and the walking dead, and to provide a gang male with what may be his only real sense of accomplishment, by birthing his creation. Giving birth may be her main contribution. This infant may be her and her partner's only visible evidence of personal achievement. He is at last triumphant in his efforts to make a mark in this world. The more children, the more macho he is viewed and she is as mother in this mutated replacement world. He and his female partner may share a temporary happiness and normality and a modicum of self-worth even while enmeshed in violence, failure and negativism.

Their permanent successful pairing is improbable. The father's permanent presence is not expected. In fact, his presence may prevent the child from receiving a government subsistence income - a function of structural, multigenerational disruption on the community.

More fundamentally, a successful partnership does not fit in with the gang failure-laden lifestyle. The partnership will most certainly succumb to self-destructive behavior. She will at once love and hate him but still she will service him. Their love will die prematurely; the gang lifestyle and a love partnership are not compatible.

Their offspring cannot be expected to flourish while being brought up in this environment. The child will be groomed to do his or her part to continue the cycle. The gang always needs new soldiers to replace its casualties. If the young mother remains connected to the gang, she will join her gang sisters and raise another child borne out of anger and self-loathing. This child is born-in to a gang. The only viable option is for the parent(s) to leave the gang which can be more easily accomplished if their decision is based on true logic that is still not available, and not the manufactured logic currently at work.

### **An all-female grouping**

A variation of female gang membership is as a separate group where males are absent. In this variant females do not look to the males for their power. While they have also adopted the classic outcast position, they have evolved their own hierarchy and gang structure. The previously described gang auxiliary females will be similar to their male counterparts up to and including the romantic notion of standing up for a 'hood and doing anything for the 'hood. The issues are the same for all-female groups as the male groups as the environment is the same. But they want little or nothing to do with the male gangsters.

A fundamental aspect of racism and oppression is the debasing of the ethnic male. In an emasculating social environment, the ethnic female has often been forced to be the strength of the family and the community while males struggle with artificial gang "strengths" and each suffers a pained existence until death.

In some cases females join with other females in the belief that the male is a failure and/or powerless. She may view his macho bravado as a cover for insecurity and fear and wants no part of his losing battle. In her view there is nothing to be gained by partnering with him. But she is still a homegirl from the 'hood until she dies. Her way of dealing with the unjustified treatment has led her to disregard her natural life partner.

She also operates under the same negative belief structure and within the parameters of local altered versions of power, respect, etc., but from



a female perspective and group association. She may be the victim of abuse and has rejected the male as abuser, or a combination of these and other negative forces. Like the males however, she secures and maintains her associations within the confines of her neighborhood and does battle mainly with her own people.

Regardless of whether the gang is male or female, the dynamics are the same. However, as the ultimate consequence for the female gang member's decision, she is more likely to spend time in jail than be killed, for if there is a difference between the male and female gangs it is that females are less prone to eliminate each other. This may have to do with the concept of motherhood and the role of preserving life, and not feeling as threatened in the classic "macho" sense. Otherwise, they do much the same things as the males in gangs, though not necessarily to the same extent.

They also seem to be more circumspect in their execution. They have their own networks for illegal activities. As a function of indoctrinated self-hate they attempt to do harm to each other, and under more extreme circumstances than required for males, will eliminate their (enemy) counterparts, the female mirror-images of themselves.

A crucible out of which gangs are formed is prison. This can also be a place for reflection. In prison women can talk about their situation without dealing with the male counterpart's issues and insecurities. They can see the world through clearer eyes and through the eyes of other women in similar circumstances. They may see the contradictions and powerlessness of their association with male dominated gangs.

The prison experience may reinforce bonds to the strength replacements that belonging to the gang fulfills, or it can scare the hell out of a person as they are forced to experience the waste of their people in large numbers and caged like animals. Some will decide to leave the gang life entirely. For others the solution is to strike out by themselves. It can be a form of women's liberation, gang style.

As male youth violence in ethnic communities has expanded with few effective interventions, women's participation in this arena has also emerged and evolved, also without a real understanding of the basic causative factors and therefore nothing to prevent such evolution. We should have expected it.

*The conditions that lead to community violence demand a violent facilitator – just as conditions that lead to terrorism demand the terrorist*

*emerge, regardless of sex.* Under current illogical “logic”, we are left to also view the female gang member as a product of her culture, gene pool, family lineage, etc., etc., etc.

For either sex the issues are the same. But the way that each responds is what is different. The decision to seek a mate of the opposite sex or avoid them should be based on something other than who you want as a peer killer. When associations are based on a violent lifestyle they are unhealthy and dangerous, and usually a total opposite to a normal and healthy relationship be it with males or females. Their reasons for forming “groups” are based on *compensating, rage-release and elimination* rather than for healthy purposes. Here we see the aberrant gang model again being successful as a replacement for a healthy, family affirming arrangement. And we adopt the same dogma. When will they ever learn?

## 20

**Life in the Gang Cocoon**

*In spite of the apparent increased acceptance of the street gangster by current social mores, gang members are fearful of new experiences and of so-called 'normal' people. As youth progress in their levels of gang immersion, they increasingly prefer to be in the womb of the world that they understand and are able to function. Much as anyone in a strange or unfamiliar setting would do, they search out others like themselves... recognizable gang members who are also safely ensconced in a servicing "gang cocoon". This cocoon is everywhere gang members go as they carry it with them. It plays host to their sadomasochistic lifestyle. It allows comfortable movement within the other world to conduct gang business or as otherwise needed. Within this amorphous cocoon they are covered completely. They relax in its familiar but rough texture, the fabric toughened with time and events. Outside the cocoon they are fearful and alone, strangers to all except fellow gangsters. The bad-ass appearance, peacock attitude, strut and swagger are actually a facade, a false bravado. It is a defense mechanism designed partly to hide their discomfort while outside the cocoon but also as notice to others in the cocoon. It also ensures being left alone by challenges and people from the other world.*

The **gang cocoon** serves the gang-active process well. While providing comfort through familiarity, it gives a (false) feeling of power through numbers to its disparate membership. It draws in the weak and insecure with a promise of being strong and among their own - then it proceeds to destroy them. The cocoon is their invisible second world where all the action takes place. It is the larger gang turf, covering all members at all times, even as they travel in the other world. In it, other gang warriors can see who is "in play", and know if a gang has achieved

any level of *respect*. All gangs know who the others are or at least where in the *cocoon* they are from.

In the *cocoon* they are ruled by a closed but familiar society, since this is part of the bargain they have cut. They protect it and it protects them. But beware the neophyte who agrees to the terms of coverage. In the *cocoon* they are shooters and targets, victimizer and victim, strong in a world of weakness. They are being all that they can be. But a hard life and easy death is the price of admission.

### **The gangster's Prime Directive**

The matured gangster's *prime directive* is to seek out and destroy other gangsters who are caught within this *gang cocoon*. In daily life they pass through the other world in search of easily recognizable fellow (enemy) gang brothers and sisters. They are oblivious to all else. Upon locating each other, there is a brief instant of relief through recognition and familiarity. This is followed quickly by the appropriate challenges and then behavior dictated by the universal code of gang conduct and rules of engagement: *kill the mother-fucker*.

Consequences for his actions are as immaterial as the danger to innocent bystanders who may be in the wrong place at the wrong time, or wearing trendy gang garb, allowing mistaken entrance to the *cocoon*. Gangsters do not "see" anyone but other soldiers in the *cocoon*, whether on the street, on a freeway, in school or in a crowded restaurant. Anything goes in the gang member's never-ending quest to eliminate one another.

### **Tradition, Veteranos and O.G.'s: I did it my way.**

After a gang has been in the *cocoon* awhile it develops a history and level of respect among fellow gangs and their drunken membership. *However, this is gangland respect and therefore based on an upside-down scale*. Each gang has victims and survivors. Some of the survivors are the veterans of the gang lifestyle mentioned earlier, Veteranos and O.G.'s. These are the few who have made it through the toughest of gang incidents including wars, injuries and prison and are still alive to tell about it. In spite of appearances, they now cling desperately to the *cocoon* as a life raft on a sinking ship. Within traditional gangs, their respect status is usually highest among the younger ones.

**Traditional gangs** are the earliest gang practitioners. They are tribal, have history and rules of sorts. They usually observe a pecking order and revere their gang elders. *Traditional gangs* are the same as one another in every aspect, differing only superficially in aspects such as colors and turf. Here the Veteranos and O.G.'s can be the highest level of governors of what the gang does and how it behaves.

Among *Traditional gangs* the veterans are usually viewed with some respect, as old timers, and allowed to live out their days without being purposely attacked. It mostly depends on how lethal his bite has been and still is. These "war veterans" range in age from the early twenties to the sixties. For obvious reasons older veterans are rare.

This is an interesting time in their life but still a dangerous one. That person may now be *respected* so a lifelong ambition has been reached, but only in the gang milieu. Some young ones look up to him. His surviving the elements makes him a role model in this second world, upside-down environment. If he is still in any way active in the gang, he will be treated as such and be fair game in gang battles. However, most "torpedoes" (shooters) are youngsters and their targets are mostly their age group, even though on many occasions they miss their mark and an unintended person is hit. If they were active in the *cocoon*, it was a good hit.

The O.G.'s and Veterano's emotional situation is also interesting in that what began an eternity ago as an insignificant scab over a small emotional cut has become a hard but brittle protective shell covering a sore and battered psyche. So thick is it that he lives an almost numbed existence and attempts to remain anesthetized against the utter despair of knowing that his entire life existence is, has been and will continue to be limited to acts of sadism and masochism. He must guard and protect his shell, even as he hides safely inside it. For all intents and purposes, he is devoid of positive expectation. At this level the person can be extremely dangerous or soft and vulnerable, or both. He can be volatile one moment and too worn out to give a damn the next, living life at extremes. He may exhibit symptoms of bipolar, post-traumatic stress, depression and other related disorders.

He is, in a way, caught between this Hell and Heaven. He has already completed the vision of his own end and is in wait. At any point he can choose actions that can help assure that end. If he has decided to exit in a gangster blaze of glory each negative act has that end as a subconscious motivation. Or he may have decided to "go to sleep" by being constantly

high on one substance or another. The substance is not important, the state of mental and emotional numbness is. However, some experience a change of heart, become reformed and now want to prevent the younger ones from going where they have been.

**Note:** A “reformed” gangster can be a blessing or a danger, or both, especially if he has not made a major change in his critical thinking processes. His desire to “do good” and “save the homies”, is not enough as his learned gang behavior is too close to the surface and still readily accessible. Many of these persons can be a help in the solution matrix but they have to have slain their own demons and been duly certified as qualified in some relevant and quantifiable way prior to being relied on as vehicles for change. Those who have not been certified as receiving real informed treatment and training can be more clever operators within a structure than others who do not know the streets. Some will do damage with impunity due to their ‘special knowledge’. His ‘special knowledge’ is not much more than that of the active gangster. The difference is that he wants to help, but often this is only as long as it does not interfere with his first attachment – his own gangster relationships. Caution is required here.

In many gangs these *O.G.* and *Veterano* terms are not necessarily thought of with either respect or honor. They are no different than anyone else on the *cocoon* battlefield and thus are *disrespected* without prejudice. Their slowness to fight may even be viewed as weakness; that he is not up to the cold-blooded violence that is called for these days. This belief can even be among those of his group. In some of the newer groups, however, the term *O.G.* or *Veterano* is given loosely to a relatively successful drug dealer or pimp or simply to the toughest guy around for the moment. Pop culture has of course usurped the terms for its own purposes.

Traditional old-timers may not approve of some actions of the younger ones but it doesn’t matter. Even the smallest and youngest punk can blow away the oldest and most respected veteran. What is anyone going to do, kill him? Of that there already is a 50/50 chance and so-fucking what? Remember where you are and who is doing the reasoning.

There are many such generational splits in gangs. As children everywhere, these youth also have issues with elders, only here they are upside-down and potentially lethal. As stated, in some gangs a *Veterano* or *O.G.* would have to be actively as much a part of the gang as anyone else to maintain standing and therefore the safety of the gang. But even if he helps the gang with his wealth of knowledge and experience, his

respect could still be shaky. Often he simply remains numbed by various intoxicants and just waits.

### **Prison life...validation and reinforcement**

Prison is not only an accepted part of the lifestyle it is expected. Next to death-by-gang, it is what the more hardened gangster has subconsciously yearned for as validation, albeit again negative. In the *do evil-punishment-incarceration process* he has completed another social modification and has successfully integrated this containment aspect of his existence into his self-destructive lifestyle. In prison the gang member is subconsciously validated as social loser and that he has (again) received what he always deserved. At the same time his presence on the yard brings power and value to his expanded gang and its second "turf", to which he again readily gives his allegiance, meaning giving everything including his life to this alternate substitute power. He is still in an upside-down world.

In prison he has taken a big step into the victimization abyss. His sadomasochistic self yearns for the dehumanizing experience. His relative low self-worth can now be fed to satiation and he is ready. When he struts on the yard, he is watched and paid attention to. His mostly new homeboys welcome him one way or another as friend or foe, leader or follower, user or another to be used. In any case he is noticed and his life has another piece of validation, even though it is the worst kind. He witnesses atrocities among his peers and may fall victim to one or more abuses at the hands of others. The entire package is a further traumatic assault on his emotional and physical being. He is aware that this is the way things are and fully accepts his role in this extension of the sadomasochistic *gang-active process*.

His group has found ways to glorify the experience in this reverse mirroring of societal success. So he wears his time in prison as a badge of accomplishment of which younger ones are being conditioned to "respect". This is one of the unwritten social rewards in the *cocoon*. He does not see it for its other consequence: the sealing of his fate as social outcast. He doesn't consciously connect that a prison record creates a permanent chasm between him and social acceptance and participation. Or, he uses it as an excuse to no longer fight the tide against him. Either way, he is contained.

**And now, the end is near...**

The final, most extreme outward stages of gang membership manifest as fiery displays of uncontrollable rage, acts of ferocious brutality and murderous violence. He has become the most violent of his group. He is a veteran killer without conscience, the worst of the worst and the hardest of the hard-core - the 5% r's. It is at this stage that the gang life-cycle is nearing completion, for the gang member and for the societal process that needs and feeds him. The person truly believes that he is living on borrowed time and could care less. He is ready to be fodder for the next episode – guaranteeing the future of his gang and a meaning for his existence. For now he will have his days of glory. His actions and those of similar fellow soldiers account for much of the murderous activity in gang areas.

He could be a kingpin but more likely a lieutenant or soldier. He is trigger-happy against others in the *cocoon*. His life involves felonies and prison in a revolving pattern. In a moment of honest reflection he may tell you, "My life is over, save someone else. I am too-far gone. Don't waste your time on me. I've done too much, got too many enemies. I've lived my life and it is over for me", even though he may be in his late teens or twenties. At this end-stage of the disease the person is uncaring and full of easily-triggered rage or as cold and calculating as they come. Early death is a foregone conclusion. You can see it in their eyes. It is truly the look of utter and complete emptiness mixed with repressed anger - life, with one foot in Hell and the other just waiting for an opportunity to drop. In the meantime he is the most dangerous of the gang.

However, it is critical to understand that: They know deep in their hearts that something is terribly wrong with the whole scheme. They know they have been "had" but cannot pinpoint when, by whom or how. They have lived and will die over *turf, status and revenge* as their only truths, knowing deep inside that is a lie. They will plead from a torn and broken heart for someone to please save their younger brother, sister, niece, nephew, son or daughter from the same fate. They vow they would rather die than see them go through the same experiences as they have. But this gang member is a critical part of the cycle: he or she is the guarantor of future survival of the gang even though it is through an elimination process. It could not continue without him. His last act of



*Forces...*

*Valdivia/Hernandez*

violence or as victim of another's rage is the beginning of a new cycle which must be played-out if his gang, his *cocoon*, his world is to survive.



## **Respect, Power and Turf, Status and Revenge**

*Distinctions and subtleties within community peace and violence dynamics are not understood by those who promote the “turf, status and revenge-cycle of violence” theory as an explanation for the self-destruction in which gangs regularly engage. This all-inclusive theory misses the mark for explaining so much destruction and instinctively, everyone knows it, even gang killers. Yet, it goes unchallenged. Gang formation and violence are part of a cycle, a purposeful and larger one, but for the participants it all has an ending, a conclusion, an end game. What we are dealing with are aberrant replacement compensation mechanisms for fundamental human needs, evolved from unjustified treatment and conditions...and turned fatal. None of it is logical, nor is it justified. However, it does reflect the process that got us here...*

**“Respect is what I want, respect is what I need. Got-ta, got-ta have it.” Otis Redding**

*Respect* is the regard that others have for you and you for yourself. Its importance to a healthy and prosperous life cannot be overstated. Respect relates directly to esteem and confidence. Low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence are arguably major barriers to success.

Respect is part of your essence, interpreted and acted upon by peers, significant others and of course, yourself. The amount of respect reflects the relative value one has in a given environment.

In healthy environments respect is nurturing and strengthening. But in “reservation communities” where gangs thrive, *normal* levels of respect are negligible to non-existent, first from the outside world then from within. Here the net loss is in self-respect. But note that we *learn* to respect and disrespect ourselves and each other.

Disrespecting a people because of race, culture and/or ethnicity is dehumanizing and *unjustified*. Minorities are routinely disrespected without justification as a matter of course. Lessons of their relative

unimportance bombard all in society in critical aspects of daily life. This leaves us confused, albeit unknowingly and led to believe the low value of those disrespected is due to something intrinsic to that group.

The observer may wonder at the seeming illogic of the rules and mores of the gang world and try to reconcile it with the rules and mores of the host society - but this cannot be done. "Reservation" youth are simply seeking a logical and *justifiable* model to make sense of their illogical and *unjustifiable* reality – but this cannot be done, either. It is not possible to mix the two: both will be logical or both will be illogical. Both will be *justified* or both will be *unjustified*. ***Local reactionaries are literally following the same upside-down logic established by the host society as regards their group(s)***. Thus they adopt the *illogical* and *unjustified* mutation and the conundrum remains.

In the upside-down world of street gangs, "respect" has become an extreme and perverse version of itself. In the *cocoon* the rule here is: "To gain "respect" for your gang, you must "disrespect" another gang". *Again, this "rule" reflects the unjustified processes and patterns society has established for them as a group.*

Disrespecting self and similar others is common in communities where gangs have evolved. This is personal confirmation of negative self-worth and value, easily ascribed to others actually or perceived to be of similar station.

The lack of legitimate *societal respect* creates a great need in an environment with short supply. This imbalance creates an exaggerated over-reliance on a replacement model that has evolved to meet the basic need but with abnormal rules and conditions. The lack of societal respect is *unjustified* and thus, so are the gang rules for obtaining respect. Gang youth obtain "respect" through their processes using their aberrant replacement model. An analogy is the 'bully' who attempts to gain respect by beating up youngsters physically weaker than he. His fear, anger and self-loathing are thinly disguised but are covered up by his "bold" (and winnable) physical contests. His "wins" do secure a form of "respect", albeit mutated, and only serviceable to himself and other bullies.

The immense need for *respect* has resulted in various extreme forms of homage, exacting a high toll in the process. Attempts at over-compensation for real or perceived under-supply rule the day. "Gangland respect" becomes open to all manner of logic and interpretation. This ill-modified form of *respect* becomes a tool for the gang's use and abuse.

Some ways can seem ridiculous, others can seem extreme and even horrific...to you and me. This modality, much as the society model it follows, is distorted, illogical and *unjustified*.

Therefore, in the gang *cocoon* setting, *disrespect* (diss'n; diss'd) is a legitimate reason to maim and murder: "He diss'd me so I lit him up". This could be a hard "look", a hand-sign or brush on the shoulder. It could be doing almost anything in someone else's neighborhood including writing graffiti or just being there, "He was diss'n my 'hood so I blew him away". These and other perverse methods of obtaining *respect* are universally accepted by all *cocoon* players as justifying harm, up to and including homicide.

Note: The minority person, especially the male, has had it firmly established in his mind not to be where he is not welcome. He is routinely disrespected by society: Police stops, forms of redlining, nasty comments, non-employment, media profiling and hard looks from the host society convey the same message the gang member has adopted for use against his much hated brothers and sisters, only mutated (socially modified) to fit his own goals for group destruction.

## **A child's playground**

Children are amazingly resilient. They can take a licking and keep on ticking, but sometimes not as healthy as before an onslaught began. Relentless attacks on one's character, culture and family can be life affecting, especially when combined with self-destructive attitudes and behaviors in constant operation around them. Up to a point one toughens up and repels such attacks but eventually one may come to question family, culture and character.

Some come to believe the lessons of societal disrespect and cease their fight for positive affirmation, or when offered positive affirmation, are so negatively indoctrinated they reject it. After a while it seems pointless to fight; only frustration and anger remain. Some eventually give in to time-tested behavior patterns and adopt the mutated rules for obtaining respect now honed into defensive and offensive weaponry with the gang as vehicle. The more disrespectful one is to a contemporary, the more "respect" he garners from his homies. This perverse method of achieving "respect" is an accepted mode of localized dehumanization within the *cycle of violence* setting.

The essence of this preoccupation with respect is that the gang member has learned to disrespect his very being. The then fragile nature of his ego is such that it can easily be injured. It is delicate and easily

disturbed. It really can't take the hits of life. It is not strong enough to apologize even when wrong has been done. *Thus the preoccupation with respect grows out of its absence to begin with and the weakness thereby created.* It is a void he searches to fill and the search for it takes on the form of a compulsion. In his search for respect he must constantly be reaffirmed, for his feelings of inferiority need to be overcome constantly. The strong ego on the other hand can take the hits, remain intact and continue to process reality more or less accurately.

The so-called hardened gang member presents to the world a tough exterior. But inside he is extremely fragile, needing to be protected by a hard exterior, the result of dehumanization by the greater society's *and* the gang's adopted version. The easily triggered violence response is due to an already hurting and battered psyche, teetering at once on the brink of collapse and explosion.

In the *gang cocoon*, respect or rather the lack of it is sub-consciously known by all homies to be a soft spot of vulnerability. It is where it hurts. In the hood, playing with respect is like tossing sticks of dynamite, and can be just as fatal. "Disrespect" is the giant club that gang members beat and pound each other to death with.

Gangs use distorted variations of "respect" as a "cause" of warfare and a "reason" for bloodshed that brings on their own destruction under the *turf, status and revenge* paradigm...and we accept this absurd logic. Using respect in this manner disguises the true reasons for community self-destruction. While the perverted connection should now be obvious, we must cease using his rationale and diagnosis as our own.

### **A cycle of losses**

Society has treated certain groups as sub-human. In the *gang cocoon*, the gangster has learned to see his opponent in sub-human terms, he sees them as prey. However, when he kills another human being a small part of his own humanity dies as well. As the violence escalates and more lives become affected, the sphere of dehumanization widens, reaching friends and loved ones who are then victimized again. At this stage peer victimization and other forms of self-destructive behaviors have nothing to do with *respect, turf, status, revenge* or any other obvious triggering mechanism, but *are outcomes of a successfully internalized process of group-dehumanization turned group-elimination.* Dehumanization and elimination processes from external sources have been accepted and

internalized en masse, to the extent they have become manifest as an array of victimization patterns transferred into and now emanating from the affected populace.

Dehumanization is a never-ending road to destruction. But it is a two-way and very bumpy road. As we learned from the tragedy of the Holocaust, dehumanization of targeted groups in the eyes of the general population is a necessary first step in people removal and elimination. But the entire process can be overwhelming to the system *and to those charged with executing a society's program.*

In this way, dehumanization affects the oppressor as well as the oppressed. Those who dehumanize eventually become dehumanized. And the disposal of the end-product is rarely if ever thought out. Ovens, reservations and prisons have at times become overwhelmed by sheer numbers and enormous operational costs, even though various forms of genocide have been employed, overtly and covertly.

Let us assume for the moment that Nazi Germany was able to continue to convince their general population and then the world that theirs was the correct way to deal with undesirable groups. In Nazi Germany, undesirable groups were actually portrayed as different, sub-human and genetically challenged; defined as naturally violent, a drag on social resources, criminally inclined, illegal substance peddlers and abusers, unskilled, uneducated, unemployed and cold-blooded killers. They were kept structurally uneducated and unemployable and placed in ghetto "reservations" and systematically and structurally left out of, or removed from political, social and economic involvement and productive endeavors. It is then conceivable that at some tipping point a representative group would begin to rebel, to behave badly, sufficient to confirm the negative propaganda, thus allowing ever-harsher "management" plans to move forward with acquiescence from a demanding citizenry and an understanding world. And both processes would escalate, *until...*

However, eventually the resources needed to maintain such a containment and disposal process would be overwhelmed.

The leaders in this fictional story decided that a better way to advance depopulation and control of select groups would be to instead, cut back on the spreading of killer-diseases, the massacres, the ovens, imprisonment, starvation, death marches, lynching, dragging to death, murder, robbery, rapes, resource deprivation and deportation and in their place employ mass media and other forms of belief management to

instill a negative belief structure aimed at those within those populations while educating the masses about their undesirability. Once installed, the destructive process would eventually become automatic. Nazis could manage and control groups now effectively corralled into “reservation communities” and make careers and profit on the growing “prison industrial complex”. And rather than public revulsion, enjoy the public’s vehement support. However, those that would work in these environments would suffer their own form of a dehumanized existence. Survivors of dehumanization on both sides would become increasingly wounded and eventually respond as such. Any additional wounding might result in a kind of death of spirit or explosive fury. An added cost of doing business...

### **Power, empower, empowerment...it is indeed a riddle.**

Although the existence of power is unquestioned, many are confused and even repulsed by the term. To many, power is not thought of in terms of success but in negative terms, as something brutal and unfriendly, or as distasteful and undignified to seek or to fight over as a “power play”, being “power hungry” or on a “power trip”. Our need for defining it, for locating it in groups and for constantly paying it so much attention speak to the great confusion we feel about power. Many do not understand that we all need and use it.

Power is the ability to do. It is the material, mental and emotional substance and wherewithal necessary to achieve anything, including a successful life. Power is relative. It can be gained and lost, given and withheld. Power is fought over. Some battles are obvious and some subtle. Social, economic and political power can be gained and lost and is indeed fought over. The degree that these forms of power are held can portend a corresponding level of success and achievement. And to the degree they are absent, a greater likelihood of misery.

Few are taught its true value and its place in all of our lives; its potential for creating balance; how to wield it or how to find its comfort. People make judgments on who deserves power and how much. Newsreel pieces of various groups demanding more come to mind at times raising the ire of other parts of the populace. Those who know and understand its secrets realize that *power is critical to personal and collective success*; that using power is as natural as breathing. This



elusive key to success is ostensibly available to all. *Power needs to be understood by those it affects most, those without it.*

Most require power sufficient to take care of self and loved ones in a positive and constructive way. In “reservation communities”, positive examples of power are not the norm although power is all around them. From the outside, power has been withheld or used to benefit others. From the inside, gangs and criminals try to hold sway over entire areas. Safety and security are at risk in both. Neither is trusted. Being at the mercy of those in power is the reality, nonetheless. Power within the community is often a negative but known quantity. The outside world is mostly unknown except in interaction with government agencies.

Those in “reservation communities” hardly know the experience of being in control - of exercising power over where they can live, property they can own, schools they can attend, banks they can borrow from, education they can acquire, health care they can access, where they can work, who represents their interests and concerns or even how, in some cases, they will live and die. The kinds of power at work in “reservation communities” are for the most part, negative. This reality does not become relevant to a child until real life descends - and descend it will.

In the workplace, employees submit their time and best efforts for the good of the larger organism and to share in wealth produced. There many define power by the career yardstick. However, in a search for efficiency and increased power, individuals and machines can become expendable so that the larger organism can remain powerful.

Gangs are engaged in a similar process. They provide a version of the career yardstick in exchange for shared power, though again a mutated form that is upside-down and backward.

Gang recruitment and continuity are due partly to the realization that one is or feels powerless. They use the gang organism as a means to secure power, albeit in a perverted milieu. And the gang uses them up in the process to retain power for the collective. It is part and parcel of the replacement compensation mechanism that helped birth the gang. Through the gang they ostensibly secure and exercise power over their own lives, their environment and over others. But it is a destructive power and is again gained at the cost of self. This they do voluntarily as it *appears* to accomplish the task of power attainment – but in truth helps secure their demise.

Inasmuch as the gang member’s life experiences are limited and limiting, he submerges all (he thinks) he has to give for the good of the

larger gang organism. It in turn gives him all (he thinks) he needs. But his gang “power” is as amorphous as his powerless world. He has nothing to lose in his game of chicken. Loss of business, land, property values or even life is not an issue. He knows where he stands and there is nothing under him. He is not invested in our world only in his own.

In his world, fear of the gang is the greatest understood power. He fears the wrath of other gangs *and* he fears the loss of protection and strength from his own gang. His fear, insecurity and perceived inability to achieve personal power as well as his need to react violently against other gang’s power are constant sources of friction and conflict. This dynamic also helps maintain the *cycle of violence...and his elimination*.

Power is the commodity and ground fought over, but by created soldiers who fight over a perversion of real power. The warfare is real, however. The key to real success is having real and adequate power. *All other forms are artificial attempts at overcompensating for a very real power under-supply.*

The processes described throughout these books involve power in one way or another. Described are mental and psychological battles among various groups as well as battles over resources; wars over territory both real and illusory; and the elimination or withholding of power from entire groups. All are fights over power of a people to survive and thrive. Gangs and other sub-cycles form and remain in place partly because they are grounded on serviceable replacement mechanisms for fundamentals for success and survival that includes various aspects of power. *The absence of and struggle for real power combined with its misapplication and abuse underpins civil unrest and upheaval.*

When entire peoples are without power or are victims of its unfair use and abuse, the formation of an organized reactionary force and power replacement process can result. Violence is part of that process to release built up anger and rage to be sure. *But a gang’s source or genesis is tied also to a community’s unmet need for real and healthy social, political and economic power.*

### **A battle over “turf”?**

*They do not fight over “turf” that they don’t even own. They fight due to the lack of it...the need and desire for it...so they make it up. It is an upside-down version of land “ownership” under the guise of “turf wars”. Like respect and power, this “ownership” element has also*

*mutated and again involves overcompensating for under-supply. There is an exaggerated need for it that has perversely been added to the gang war matrix. And yes, gang soldiers will die for it, too.*

Gangs fight and die over “boundaries” be they fixed, far flung or illusory. This is a reflection of the need to own and control one’s “home”. The fight for turf has become a life and death issue due to this fundamental human need. Circumstances have made him a “reservation” resident, a removable tenant with no permanent claim to a real home and community. The otherwise legitimate need for “title” to property has become an illegitimate and compulsive reason and excuse for warfare. In this case, the fighting is for “legitimacy” via “ownership”, though again within a warped and illegitimate framework.

### **Turf and Graffiti, “Home” and Criminal Enterprise**

While graffiti may be seen simply as vandalism, it is also a call for attention, a declaration of one’s existence and a method of communicating to other gangsters, especially challenging others to a fight. It is also a marking system that declares to the world “I own this wall - this neighborhood - this block - this territory – this land”. The gang member has no real title to anything. He probably has never owned much but he can declare himself in the world, an “owner” and having dominion over a place or thing by marking it in such a way that those that observe the marking understand where it came from. His existence and ownership are thus acknowledged.

When he marks his territory it is his declaration of “title” in an ownerless and powerless existence. This distorted logic is of course very far from reality. Using this “logic” he marks his self-declared title to a particular place and defends it to the death. At a deeper level he is trying to satisfy his need for acknowledgement, power and ownership which is not attainable due to who he is and where he comes from. In his system of logic he is ill equipped to obtain these because he perceives the system as closed to him, which for all intents and purposes, it is. The claim that he kills simply to defend his gang “turf” is woefully simplistic and inaccurate.

As earlier stated, the youth’s real home may not be a place of support and strength. For these youth, *gang turf* has become the desperate last-ditch strength replacement for home and community, a replacement that must be labeled and safeguarded at all costs. In the traditional gang

milieu, “turf” has also taken on exaggerated importance, sufficient to kill and die for.

In regards to economic issues, “turf” is the replacement “place of employment”. It is where he gives his efforts in exchange for money and a form of street power. Entire sub-economies have evolved under “gang turf, inc.”

Their turf or ‘hood is a place that not many would pay attention to except for the fact that it is so violent. It generally lacks the external investment necessary to elevate it to the level of a viable and desirable community. Cops, courts and jails carry the investment burden for these areas in lieu of quality education and community enhancements such as schools, parks and museums.

While the rest of the world sees their world as unimportant, the gang stands as *thee* vehicle to make it important and meaningful. How can anyone deny that their ‘hood is important if they are willing to die for it? And the fact that oftentimes their deaths are newsworthy makes it all the more dramatic and important. They have each become, as gangbangers, the “strength” of a definable part of their world, the part that affords them their value, importance, ownership and power to which they have become mutually dependent. They need it to be strong, important, respected and indeed omnipotent so they devote all in its name to make it so. They then use it for support, importance and meaning...the local *cocoon*. They have become its standard bearers, its warriors and protectors. And it serves as their empire – *and it will destroy them*. All this too, is based on a lie - the lie of not belonging so they created a place to belong.

If they travel or move to other neighborhoods, they take the mythical turf name with them and begin again to create an importance unto it. It is truly a manufactured replacement vehicle as once a gang (and their name) disappears there is no lament or public mourning. The stock market doesn’t fall on the news. On the contrary, property values increase. Its loss only means an unmet need has been finally filled or the persons that needed it are permanently removed.

## Status

*Status* in the gang is achieving manhood. This is also modified as a replacement for real social status. Instead, his manhood is proven when he is jumped in, participates in a gang beating, a gang rape, or kills his

enemy – his brother, in the name of the gang, to show he has what it takes, the “heart” to be a homie. He belongs to an outlaw society and will literally stare death in the face while shouting his gang name as his “enemy” aims at his head and pulls the trigger.

This stands in place of real social status that he perceives is not available to him or those like him. He cannot hold a job, buy a home, support a family or secure retirement. As a function of targeted social destruction, his collective manhood has been successfully attacked and destroyed. But he can prove he is a “man”, nonetheless, courtesy of his gang and the larger gang universe. Challenging his place in his adopted “society” is a reason for battle.

### **Take away the smoke and mirrors and what have we got?**

True *power*, *respect*, *ownership* and *status* are connected in any functional social structure. They are the same basic needs that find expression in healthy persons and communities. These are what are desired but structurally out of reach for each generation in “reservation communities”. *Their mutated replacement versions are fought over in desperate efforts to secure them in some form.* The true version is what they are missing and seeking aimlessly to attain in their battles amongst themselves. These are not available to him nor were they available to his ancestors. In fact, in most cases they were violently wrenched away or otherwise withheld.

For each generation, the attainment of *power*, *respect*, *ownership* and *status* is a fight waged by youthful reactionaries using children’s logic, and exploding with untamed responses which we mistakenly (but readily) accept as explainable under the woefully simplistic *turf*, *status* and *revenge* modalities.

The struggle for *power* grows out of the realization that he is or feels powerless; the struggle for *respect* grows out of the feeling that no one, including himself, respects him; the struggle for *turf* grows out of the fact that he owns nothing and has no foundations. He is not vested. The struggle for *status* grows out of his not having any as a man and head of household. He feels like a “nobody” and believes this cannot change. He has no clue (and would not care even if he had one) as to the social implications of his warlike behavior. He is completely transformed to a reactionary device.

## Revenge

*Revenge* is a more complex part of the compensation system. In its simplest form it is the act of taking eye for an eye vengeance. But it is more than that. *It is a perpetual rage-release mechanism for the injured masses, and tied to the overblown need to strike at something or someone.*

Taking revenge is the cyclic release of bottled up rage from a suffering ego forced to fit in a warlike scenario; it is acting out displaced rage put here by an overwhelming but nebulous force that cannot be seen or touched. It is how unrest remains “under control” yet actively engaged at a lower level of civil upheaval.

The population is hurt - they are injured as a function of their “reservation” existence. The pain turns to rage that overwhelms and masks the hurt. The revenge act fulfills a need to place blame and then punish an earlier “guilty” party. Thus they can recover and continue. And it is more than that...

...revenge is also an overblown expression of self-hate as a “justified” act in an *unjustifiable* setting. If one is to kill similar others one must create a valid “reason” and there truly is none. As society has done, they dehumanize self first in order to hunt the others down as if they were deer or a mountain lion; to convert them all into prey. *Revenge* is an overblown reaction within a distorted reality. It is a variation of extreme response to the *lack of true status and respect*, a response that simultaneously seeks the goals of eliminating their non-respected cohorts and earning a form of “respect” by the act. In the process, however, the gangster’s own humanity is destroyed. *The less humanity, the more he can engage in violence...and vice-versa. A variant sub-cycle of peer destruction has thus formed within the now deviant belief structure of the gang member and those close to him.*

The most violent in a gang are the few who execute revenge contracts on the gang’s behalf. They take the job as a mission of pride. As killing increasingly takes over their existence, their loss of social feeling is advanced. They disconnect from all forms of society. They become dangerous to all - even those inside their group.

*Revenge* has another fundamental function in this milieu. Revenge seals the deal, *it is the closer*. Once a group declares itself a gang it is open for business and sooner or later one will be killed. If and when they

engage in a follow-up act of revenge, that act certifies ganghood and they are now “in play”, in the *cocoon* and part of the *gang universe* and another support for the *cycle of violence* is located.

*Revenge* is an unforgiving response. The weakened psyche cannot afford forgiveness as it may weaken him or at least appear to. He bolsters himself by constantly being overly defensive and continually on the offensive. He is more easily offended and his anger more intense. In the same mode of overcompensating for personal frailties, his acts of revenge will always be more damaging than the original act that initiated it.

By the same token, gangs never forgive. After full entrance into the *gang universe*, gangs may allow someone to live if it is in their immediate interest to do so, but allowing even a normally insignificant slight is seen as doing “harm” through perceived weakness. The credibility of the beloved all-powerful and all-empowering gang/turf must prevail. *Revenge* acts by a gang will also be more damaging than the original precipitating act.

Therefore, we have the *illusion* that gang warfare is based on issues of *turf, status and revenge* when in fact these are mutated replacements for legitimate *power, ownership and respect* and the legitimate *status* these would provide. As such, they can trigger battles *but not be the cause of the war*. The unfilled need creates a huge demand but in a sort of vacuum. A compensating supply process has evolved to fill that vacuum, one that is artificial and exaggerated but that manages to serve large numbers of similarly affected individuals and groups in “reservation communities” throughout the society. *Turf, status and revenge* are only connected as triggers to release the rage that develops when a people lack legitimate *power, ownership and the respect that accompanies them*.

The gang member reacts. While his view of the world is somewhat distorted, there are elements of that distortion that are very much in line with reality. His perception that the system is closed to him is quite accurate. He is without ability to gain an inheritance of land, home and/or business due to multigenerational structural bias. And without equal education leading to wealth and viable institutional networks he will begin the race three laps behind the starting line. The way he compensates for this reality is to construct an alternate reality to fulfill unmet needs...*the same basic needs as in any society, only upside-down and backwards*.





## **Grief - Release or Fuel**

*Life in violent communities includes an overload of horror and sadness. Loved ones are harmed in the daily grind. Young people must rely on their own devices to deal with it all. Within a normal existence, normal behavior and responses would rule. However, in this almost constant grief-filled reality, grieving has taken on a different form and purpose. Under normal circumstances grief is part of the process that helps us cope with loss. When loss is continuous and even expected, grief can never be fully processed, unless modified.*

Most families are able to deal with normal grief episodes, such as the death of an elderly family member. There is a basis of logic and understanding that what has happened is part of a normal existence. In a “reservation community” injury and death are almost constant. Destructive sub-cycles produce grief episodes that involve mostly young people at high rates for which there seemingly is no logical reason save their own violent existence.

One way of gaining insight into the localized *cycle of violence* is to observe how gangs deal with the death of one of their own. When a gang soldier is killed, the expected response should be grief - it should be the pain of loss. But this is not the primary response. In this upside down world more often than not what is felt is insult.

As a consequence of the *replacement process* glorifying the gang/turf/'hood over all else, what is important here is not so much the loss of a life but a violation or a trespass on the 'hood with its perverted and overblown sense of importance - *the 'hood has been “diss'd”*. Thus a revenge act must follow.

Revenge and grief have become connected to accomplish a needed social modification to manage unrelenting grief. However, they are connected in a way that allows the now necessary “wins” to continue in this lose-lose environment. Even as this *death-grief-revenge* dynamic consumes youthful lives, it guarantees that the self-destructive cycle of

violence process will continue. Thus, grief has morphed to insult of the *gang* so it is the *insult* to the gang that must be avenged as much, or more so than the loss of a life. The punishment for attacking all the gang member has as strength and power (the gang turf) is death.

Death is constant here. And death in gang battle is this soldier's honorable way to die. But this is not a real war so modifications are required to allow the *unjustifiable* carnage to continue in an *unjustifiable* paradigm. The gang member disconnects from self and others and connects to the gang for reasons normally reserved for home, family and community, and in subconscious preparation for his own and each other's demise.

Understand that the gang member has transferred his strength, his pride, self-respect, home, etc. to the replacement that is all of their support and all of their downfall – *the gang*. Grief has thus been redirected to that omnipotent power that can absorb it and do whatever is necessary to deal with it. Revenge can be taken based on the accepted rules of the *gang cocoon* and not because of loss of a person(s) as *persons are expendable but the gang is not*.

There is no possible “victory” in this “war”. Adding numbers of dead bodies and POWs will not bring surrender or “armistice” and eventual peace to the land. There is no central government that must surrender. The object here *is to attack each other's “strength” – the 'hood*. So it is that act that is taken most seriously and not the mere death of a soldier. And it only “counts” if done by a fellow combatant.

The insult is aimed at the very core of the individual's and group's perceived foundation and shall be dealt with accordingly. This most grievous of insults absolutely demands the elimination of life. Even as gang deaths weaken a group by attrition, they are necessary to fuel the bloody *cycle of violence* process. Thus, constant recruitment is necessary to maintain “strength”.

### **Modifying Grief for use in “War”**

The gang as stand-in absorbs great amounts of grief on behalf of the combatants. And, similar to Power, Turf, Revenge and Status, *grief* has been incorporated into the *cycle of violence* process to serve as another *trigger* to future violence episodes.

Episodes that cause such grief are not consciously sought. Gang members do not go about their daily routines looking to bring sorrow to themselves or loved ones. And they are not engaged to see how many hundreds and thousands of their brethren they can eliminate per annum. It is nothing personal! They are following a (distorted) program for which they have had to make up (compensating) rules as they go. They are doing what they believe they must do: ensure their artificial “strength” remains intact *and* find reasons and excuses to self-eliminate, a dual process that would seem mutually exclusive. The process may seem to ensure a kind of “strength”, but at the same time guarantees their demise...it is the epitome of a lose-lose proposition. This dynamic has nonetheless been incorporated and institutionalized within the *gang-active process*. The need of incorporating grief at all is due to the *unjustified* nature of the activity as part of a perverted social existence that he has no idea why or how came into being. The violence and death are outcomes of forces that molded the pattern prior to his birth and will continue after he is gone.

The socially accepted *cycle of violence* explanation of being a closed-circuit process hides the real truth, while it protects their actions as being “justified” under a *turf* war or for neighborhood *respect* or as *revenge* for earlier wrongs...these are, after all, manly things to pursue, are they not? By accepting and even endorsing this logic ***we support the gang process.*** They remain engaged in a game that they did not start - a game that society *initiated and now reinforces by acceptance and adoption of this illogical state of being.*

Grief is an unintended but logical consequence that became integrated into the *gang-active process* much as paint is to graffiti and clothing is to colors. In this instance however, they are reacting to the most emotionally charged stimuli (violent death of a comrade) that begins its phase as grief, changes to insult (to the almighty gang) for processing and ends as a new beginning: a triggering devise for continued youthful elimination via *gang cycle of violence* under the *revenge* dynamic.

### **Children at the brink**

*Insult* is another area the youth has had to adjust to. His existence is one insult after another...seemingly without logic (*unjustified*) but with definite purpose. Insults are painful and he is in constant pain.

Insults that are *unjustified* are confusing, frustrating and anger producing. He is consciously maligned under a relentless flow of insults to his people, his history, his community and his powerlessness which are subconsciously deeply felt. He and those around him are first of all clueless as to the real process at the core of his negative situation. Thus he remains powerless to respond directly to these debilitating insults but still must seek release and a settling of scores.

The *gang universe* is again accommodative. Within it they can find a suitable (and willing) “blame-target” as an indirect way to retribution for all of it. *Real relief is not achieved as the true sources of the insult and pain are never attacked.* Instead, he is left to continue his endless and fruitless search for the *unjustifiable*. And the *gang cycle of violence* remains safe.

In the gang world societal insults are nebulous, *unjustified*, potent and extremely damaging to character, psyche and physical health. They are unable to be defended against or responded to. So localized “strength” versions act as “stand-in”. The fragile ego of the gangster is easily insulted and insults ranging from grief to lack of respect *can* be processed and dealt with. As the need to relieve and release from so many kinds of insults increases, and as the individual becomes worn down from it all, the ease of being insulted increases and can never be salvaged. He is triggered to action by what would seem to be harmless insults to you and me but may in fact be this camel’s last straw. The baseline of their shared anger level has been constantly raised and he has reached his personal “tipping point” so achieves relief via the all-accommodating gang/turf/‘hood. To redeem even a modicum of pride, the smallest insult will be dealt with harshly. Retribution is thus directed out to willing members of the *gang cocoon...* and the *cycle of violence* continues.

*Many of the gang member’s actions are traceable to the meeting of needs altered to fit his mutated existence and circumstances. His actions actually fit together in an absurdly logical way that responds to illogical conditions that society has created and the “reservation community” via the gang has modified sufficiently to exist within.*

Insults are effective when a person is susceptible to them. As discussed earlier, the hardening gangster is actually protecting a terrified and weakening shell. His personage has remained under relentless attack in the broader social scheme. And his ‘turf’ foundation is under attack by

other hapless warriors. His anger masks real pain that he experiences deeply.

Grief has mutated to insult and then rage and violent action. If grief were processed normally by gang members it would be so great as to paralyze them. *Therefore, gang members never fully process their grief.* They instead modify it for processing as described above. Or, they repress it using artificial means (substances) as they cannot afford to (consciously) let themselves feel the pain of loss. *But they can go on indefinitely even though they and their community are repeatedly insulted and disrespected if those acts are avenged “appropriately”, i.e. using another gang as stand-in. Their violent actions are thereby “justified” and they experience “relief”, if only for a moment.*

*The grief-to-insult-to-anger-to-revenge process is a product of and the fuel for continuing the cycle of violence. Each link triggers the next incident, and so on. A death is not taken personally but the insult is. Grief related insult is a key ingredient keeping the violence ball rolling.*

## 24

**A Black Epiphany**

*"...but you can't fool all of the people all of the time".*

Abraham Lincoln

*Sometimes the process spins out of control. The lid comes off in a thousand fragments and everyone pays attention. Police say the gangs did it. Civic leaders downplay it. Talking heads are everywhere and analyses flow like a stock market ticker and media has a field day. But for years there were signs and signals. For years the "rioting" was waged at a lower ebb. And it still goes on all around you and me. We just don't realize the true nature of unrest and upheaval. For the dynamics are the same save for degree.*

Gang activity is rioting but at a lower level. It is *unrest* and *upheaval* that catches you coming and going. Once we can accept a process beyond the actual gang incident, the gang world can begin to make some semblance of logic that can then be dealt with, with some sense of purpose and direction.

For purposes of illustration, in a particular area, four gangs of the same ethnic group have engaged in violence against each other for years. However, the same-group violence has recently slowed and cross-group drive-by's, fights, home invasions, carjacking, rapes and firebombing have increased. Drug sales to both are increasing steadily with occasional deaths attributed to sales territory and drug "rip-offs".

In yet another community two different ethnic groups have long engaged in same group as well as predatory violence (drugs, property). Some of their groups have recently discontinued wearing gang garb and are at peace. Yet there has been no change in enforcement procedures or anti-gang program emphasis. Drug cases, family abuse and drop-out numbers are rising precipitously and expanding to other groups and areas. The trend however is toward fewer same-group gang deaths.

Another community endured a riot a few years earlier. In part of another area, former enemies are at peace. And in another, non-ethnic white groups are beginning to exhibit advanced violent behaviors...and two recently arrived ethnic groups are in beginning stages and...

This is where correct analysis of origins, evolution, trends and outcomes can be most effective, otherwise the system can seem to be overwhelmed. Comprehensive and precise historical background and relevant data could produce effective interventions and strategies. Information garnered would be compared with other areas, regionally and nationally.

Generally speaking, violence in "reservation communities" remains at historically moderate levels (although these levels would be unacceptably high if occurring anywhere outside the "reservation", which would *never* be allowed to happen). Triggers are everywhere and implosions are redundant. The illustrations above range from levels III to IV on a Peace and Violence Continuum, and involve all three types of gangs (Self-Hate, Hate and Predator). The 1980's saw historically high violence levels among Self-Hate gangs and the rapid expansion of Predator gang activity.

On occasion, some groups have reached the highest level on the Peace and Violence Continuum as during the 1960's and in 1992 when rioting occurred in Los Angeles and other sections of the nation. The violence process is given major attention when communities move beyond implosion to explosion as in a riot. At the riot level (Level V), community violence touches everyone in one way or another. Barring this, gangs are left to riot among themselves.

### **Case in Point: The Riots Last Time...**

The April, 1992 upheaval in Los Angeles and other cities provides examples of several related dynamics in motion. Some occurred over time and others simultaneously. The riots shouldn't have surprised anyone. Gasoline was on the streets of Los Angeles and places like it. Rodney King was merely the lighted match that triggered *this* explosion.

The rise of anger and rage among a group relies on a constant feed of real and perceived *unjustified* acts being perpetrated against them as a group. The build-up to the Rodney King verdict was given explosive dressing by separate but related factors and unless one looks closely, the obvious is missed.

The incidents leading up to the rioting are fundamentally no different than what occurs in slow and excruciating ways on a daily basis in "reservation communities" across America. However, incidents are spread over time and various locations so go largely uncounted as possibly leading to riotous upheaval. An explosion with the magnitude of a riot serves to overshadow the pertinent incidents that lead up to them. Such incidents have a cumulative impact on a people and result in various types of unrest and upheaval that begin unnoticed and become manifest at lower levels. *However, eventually critical mass is reached and tipping points are breached resulting first in accelerated self destructive modes, then peer annihilation and ultimately all-out conflagration.* During a riot, regardless of the group involved, the action-reaction chain of events is instantaneous in comparison to the decades of slow, painful movement preceding it.

Leading up to 1992 (as was also the case in the 1960's), the steady economic, social and political violence and social exclusion aimed at "reservation communities" were constant. Efforts to gain power and redress were violently put down and leaders dealt with as criminals and anarchists. As the rest of society joked, "he with the most toys wins", in "reservation communities" basic needs were harder to come by. Frustration, anger and rage were palpable. Society ignored the steady up-tick of inwardly directed anger that was most severe in Black "reservations".

The upward spiraling Black-on-Black violence was the most significant clue that an outward explosion of some magnitude was on the horizon as the decade of the 80's had been the deadliest to date. Family abuse, drug use, murder and welfare rates climbed as did unemployment and drop-out rates. In addition to self-destructive behaviors were violent deaths of African-Americans at the hands of non-African-Americans. The shooters were exonerated in courts of white law *but not in the court of Black social history.* These pieces of the pattern all pointed to the upward limits of toleration having been reached in the Black "reservations" across America.

In any weakened community, the takeover of resources is easily accomplished. There began a perceived take-over of the Black community by non-black families and businesses. And the media was unrelenting and nonstop in its depiction of Blacks as society's major predators and

losers responsible for gangs, crime, welfare and drug proliferation, and typical of the day, no one officially gave a damn. And with each upward tick, more lives were ruined. This all occurred leading up to April, 1992.

Lifetimes of rage were ready to be unleashed at the next insult. When the Rodney King verdict came, all hell broke loose. The crack of the camel's back could be heard around the world and the white-hot inferno was on.

As the trial verdict began to seal our fate, the Black response was immediate. The dam had burst and out poured the same water-torture drops but now blasting forth as avenging torrents of violent rage. The flow was caustic as were the containers holding it. Businesses were burning and looting had begun. Civil upheaval was on and for real, straight from the bowels of urban grief now turned to blinding vengeance. During the massive release of the riot, some fundamental group dynamics changed. Unless fully processed and understood, the violence appears as no more than flames of rage for a verdict gone wrong.

### **The Epiphany**

For many Crip and Blood enemy soldiers, their self-hate warfare was transformed in an instant. Angry youth were forced to process their emotions and anger as once avowed adversaries stood side-by-side venting their common wrath. They experienced as an epiphany the realization that their rage was not blue rage or red, not Crip rage or Blood, not Eastside or Westside. There were too many players from both sides and all sides letting loose generations of rage. A new truth was illuminated by these flames of anger. They realized in an instant that they were all victims of a far greater adversary than gang turf or colors or gang war this or that. The *lie* was exposed – and it was thrown down on the burning pyre of rage, fed by the same fuel that up to the day before had sealed many a brother's destruction. Their violent responses were no longer aimed at each other. It now became directed outward and away. However, the sources of rage were still pounding away, harder than ever and the rage was going to continue to be released until those levels receded to a safer point - until next time.

As the flames grew so did the violence. People were pulled from cars and trucks with the same murderous hatred previously saved for the brothers. Borne of unrequited anger and revenge, the rage was electric, blinding all sense of humanitarian judgment. Racial epithets spewed everywhere and on everyone. A white truck driver was beaten senseless; a Latin man was doused with lighter fluid and about to be set on fire but the lighter failed and out of nowhere came an African-American man of God who jumped in the breach saving the Latino's life.

African-Americans, Latino, Anglo and Asian brothers and sisters attacked and counter-attacked. All lost loved ones and livelihoods. Every group seemed to be at war with every other group. Victims were everywhere. Many were killed and injured, nameless to the avenger.

As non-response became law, individuals of different races joined in the looting, violence and mayhem. Chaos and need drove the day. Christmas had come early; enforcement too late. Even white youth made hay, burning LAPD in effigy and some buildings on the grounds of LAPD headquarters. Yet they remained strangely safe from police vengeance. As the rioting progressed, Rodney King was the last person on people's minds. His plea for everyone to please get along fell on deaf ears. His role had ended.



This is a recent example of a community reaching maximum Level V, Civil Upheaval. The primary affected group this time was African-American, which triggered other groups already at various stages of *unrest* verging on *upheaval*. And once again, there were tremendous losses to the community, the region and the nation in lives, resources and pride. Such are the heavy costs of our social order.

Rage can only build so much before it overflows beyond established containers. We should not be surprised when it blows up in our faces as happens in a full-blown conflagration. In the past, the Irish, Jews and Italians raged out of control. This time it was once again African-Americans that were pushed to levels necessary to explode. They had long ago passed beginning stages and hovered at moderate levels for two decades until pieces again fell into place by continuing to fall apart.

### **Riots are cyclical – and as permanent as gangs.**

There is *always* a “riot” going on – in the homes on the streets and in the schools in “reservation communities”. Some groups are at the build-up stage, some at moderate levels and some waiting to ignite. The kind and magnitude are no different from place to place and group to group, whether Latino, Native American, Filipino, Samoan, Vietnamese, Russian, Armenian, or African-American, or Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, Puerto Rican, Cuban or Mexican, or...

To date, we have opted not to delve too deeply into aspects behind such events as long as the “rioting” remains in “reservation communities”. However, it is only a matter of time and circumstance that any group reaches critical mass that ends at explosive aggression, be it an actual riot, a gang drive-by or shooting up a school. *These manifestations are as permanent as the conditions that spawn them and will recur as long as conditions remain to induce such outcomes.* Just as the build-up of gangs is directly related to societal conditions, so are riots. *If conditions are such that a gang(s) forms and ignites, societal conditions will determine the size, type and duration of their presence and activity. The same is true of riots. If conditions do not improve, once a riot has been quelled, the build-up to the next one begins.* We refer to this riot cycle in the overarching cycle of selective social violence.

As will be shown, the critical mass build-up to a riot is the same as the critical mass build-up to gang and other community violence. It is all a matter of degree. A full-blown conflagration (riot) is triggered somewhere beyond gang violence. Riots also have their tipping points that have everything to do with societal elements and relationships between society and a group, and, contrary to popular belief, *have nothing to do with gangs*. Both are outcomes of a similar process. And just as *gangs do not cause more gangs, riots do not cause more riots*. Neither are they intrinsically *multigenerational* nor *part of a people’s culture* or *in their genes*. Neither are they caused by *colors* or *turf* or *status* or *respect* or *revenge* or *graffiti*. And they will not end if *we give up on this generation and concentrate on the next*. Not even if a roomful of scientists continue to follow the eugenics path and somehow “prove” that ethnic youth are genetically “hardwired” for violence. This myopic viewpoint can only lead to medicating and/or locking-up every “reservation community” child who acts out but will not prevent the riot next time. We have to start from scratch and do it all the right way *for a change*. The same issues that create riots create gangs and other violence sub-cycles.

## A “cycle of riots”

Except for the so-called Rodney King riots, rioting had done little to effect change. The lack of positive movement brought more frustration and the gap between Black and White widened.

Since the Watts Riot in 1965, a *riot cycle* began anew for the African-American. Nothing changed to prevent future rage build-up from starting all over again – and to a future explosion. Later in the same decade, Latinos and Native Americans marched and demonstrated against racism and inequality, and were routed by authorities as peaceful demonstrations were violently put down. Their level of unrest took a jump and remains as forms of internal *imploding*. They have not reached critical mass necessary for *explosion* (riot). The violence here lingers at moderate levels but they are “rioting” nonetheless.

The 1980's were extraordinarily tumultuous and in 1992, the build-up again reached a zenith and spilled over to a massive explosion level. This time it left a trail that some learned from, thank God. This time, some basic changes occurred which should delay or even prevent the next conflagration at least in African-American communities. Still, not enough has changed to end lower level “rioting” there or in any other “reservation community”.

## White Youth Rioting?

The feeling of social, political and economic uneasiness is a relatively new experience for growing numbers of the white population. More children than ever are out in that same heartless cold, and in single parent homes and as latchkey children. They feel the effects of seemingly *unjustified* external pressures on their families, albeit not over decades and generations. Children don't understand their new reality. They are beginning to feel powerless, alienated, uncared for, excluded and resentful - *the first stages of marginalization*.

Desperation, paranoia and depression add pressure to the mix. As white youth try to insulate themselves, the same social toxins as have affected “reservation communities” over generations take their toll. Some abuse substances and join with small bands of reactive groups and/or form new ones. This is the *Hybrid Gang* that has joined and in some cases replaced, the *Traditional Gang*, if you will, as host and crucible for this new youth evolution and potential revolution. Social modifications and compensation methods will evolve; susceptibility to relatively minor acts and insults increase; sub-economies form. There will then be those ‘black sheep’ at the margins as in “reservation communities”, who are not necessarily going through a “phase of growing up” as the National Gang Center (NGC) wants us to believe as excuses to dismiss their drug involvement, group violence and property destruction. If they feel under attack (and it need only be a feeling), they will locate a suitable blame-target for reprisal and release.

Youth that are already or believe they are about to become disenfranchised may react with anger and resentment. Anger covers a pained existence that eventually becomes unbearable. At a point a release mechanism comes into play. Thus, involvement of youth not traditionally related to violence or gangs increases. This completion aspect of the overarching *cycle of selective social violence* has the society feeling the effects of youth violence *within the majority population group, directly and painfully* – and they unwittingly join the end-game not meant for them. Thus the *cycle of violence* becomes a *circle of violence*, beginning and ending at everyone's door.

Some youth will join traditional gang movements such as the *Predator Gangs*; others form new groupings with other groups (*Hybrid Gangs*). Still others form their own ersatz version to fill an immediate perceived void (e.g. Columbine incident). The *Hate Gang* also sees a marked increase as injured youth perceive a need to be *race-protective*. Included in this group is the *ad-hoc Hate Gang* that does violence as a group in spur of the moment acts against a minority person. They act on behalf of their larger group's beliefs, and thus get away with murder.

Contemporary *race-protective* groupings believe their larger group is harmed by the American Way: a promise of freedom and opportunity. They may become resentful to the point of race targeting. The victim(s) picked for rage-release will be already tagged as social outcast (a contemporary minority immigrant). In these situations the stage is always set by negative beliefs and biases. Thus, he has "social support" sufficient to justify blame-targeting and act(s) of violence. This helps explain why minorities of all types often bear the brunt of rage-release events such as spur of the moment deadly beatings, gang rapes and dragging to death behind a vehicle. Historically the acts would have included lynching, raping, murdering and other sins against humanity.

Non-ethnic white youth may become violent as a power move - a reaction to a real or perceived threat to the power and standing of their group. They may act as a gang motivated partly by anger but also to control and contain other group(s) by acts designed to bring generalized terror to the population(s) they are targeting - to teach them a lesson. When a white group feels the threat of a minority, a representative set will act as the agent (gang) of the whole. They believe their act represents popularly held beliefs of their community.

Another example occurred in Chicago, 1919. From the Chicago Public Library, "*On the afternoon of July 27, 1919, Eugene Williams, a black youth, drowned off the 29th Street beach. A stone throwing melee between blacks and whites on the beach prevented the boy from coming ashore safely. After clinging to a railroad tie for a lengthy period, he drowned when he no longer had the strength to hold on*". This was the finding of the Cook County Coroner's Office after an inquest was held into the cause of death.

William Tuttle, Jr.'s book, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919*, includes a 1969 interview with an eyewitness. The witness was one of the boys swimming and playing with Eugene Williams in Lake Michigan between 26th Street and the 29th Street Beach who recalled having rocks thrown at them by a single White male standing on a breakwater 75 feet from their raft. Eugene was struck in the forehead and as his friend attempted to aid him, Eugene panicked and drowned. The man on the breakwater left, running toward the 29th Street Beach. By this time rioting had already erupted there precipitated by vocal and physical demonstrations against a group of blacks who wanted to use the beach in defiance of its tacit designation as a "white" beach. The rioting escalated when a white police officer refused to arrest the white man, by now identified as the perpetrator of the separate incident near 26th Street. Instead he arrested a black individual. Anger over this, coupled with rumors and innuendos that spread in both camps regarding Eugene Williams's death led to 5 days of rioting in Chicago that ultimately claimed the lives of 23 blacks and 15 whites, with 291 wounded and maimed. There are similar examples in our history as we know too well.

Our history has included white supremacist gang activity of every kind and degree. Whether white youth get liquored up enough to seek out a person of color, mimic the more traditional gangster mode or retreat under white bed sheets, their trip can turn deadly.

In addition to racial motivations, the “threat” pressure may be general such as when affirmative action, equal housing and employment are advanced. Violence up to and including rioting to control non-white groups may arise as they seek to “put them back in their place” and out of societal competition. This may occur when control mechanisms are suddenly reversed such as court ordered reversal of discriminatory hiring and promotion practices; forced equalized housing and lending practices; forced equalized education such as funding books, computers and educators in minority schools. These circumstances are indeed rare.

In any case, under some circumstances, non-ethnic whites will have fringe or extremist elements of their group (gangs) acting “on behalf” of the group just as the minority gang “black sheep” does within their group. These are wars at the societal level and battles are ongoing in politics and courtrooms. The outcomes can be the beginning to community peace or a portent to future violence.

*The emergence of gangs is due to real and perceived inequities among peoples. They act inversely to unresolved social conflict among and between groups. They act in place of their larger group population. Each “army” is reacting to social forces already in play and that are much larger than the individual and their violent group – they are merely reactive vessels. The political leadership remains seemingly ignorant of the true process and allows simplistic causation reasoning to remain - unless a nerve is struck...*

Violence critical mass including gang activity manifests with types and levels of societal unrest and upheaval. As successful equality and integration occur, community violence dissipates.

The outburst against multiple targets as happened in Columbine, Colorado, was carried out by white youth against a primarily white youth population. In this case they made their own makeshift blame-targeting rules. However, the killers fit the gang prerequisite of first believing and accepting that they were themselves outcasts and marginalized. The need for rage-release produced the same violent result and expressed itself as self-hate turned outward as hate. They adopted a gang model as they separated from society. They even had their own “colors”: black. They then manufactured an enemy from within their midst and bang, bang, you're dead.

We are engaged in a constant tug of war among different groups of Americans. What is only now beginning to become clear is that the problem of youth violence can touch any community. Youth violence is but one form of violence that emerges where people are structurally marginalized and dehumanized within a social system, but its spread to other parts of the system will inevitably occur in some form or fashion. Accepting and promoting inclusion and equality rather than fighting to the death over them is prerequisite to combating youth and other forms of community violence. Understanding this conflictive and uneasy social maladjustment is only important if we wish to foster group inclusion - a process that should be, after all, the story of America.

## 24

**Signs of Our Times**

*There are structural elements responsible for originating this process and that keep it going. We see the violence and watch and worry as pop culture trends seem to support it. But do they support it or are they manifestations of the deeper process? A different view may help place them in context and free up time, energy and concern to better understand the bigger picture.*

We know that wearing a baseball cap backward, and long, baggy and low slung pants are examples of popularized gangster chic. Another is the term “booyah”.

This originated as the mimicked sound of a shotgun going off (BOOyah!) as a taunt and a threat between gangs usually in neutral settings such as school hallways and classrooms or a restaurant or shopping mall. It can now be heard on prime-time broadcasts and in casual conversation. However, the trends that most impress youth are clothing, visual media and music. These are always hot subject matter when it comes to sex and violence. Placing these in context is important.

People have strong feelings about Rap music. Some see it as harmful and others see it as symbolizing the plight of those marginalized and excluded, regardless of other factors. Other genres involve extreme lyrics but do not raise the ire of adults. Nor does sexual verse upset folks like Rap does even as for example, some rock lyrics seem guaranteed to raise the heat level among ready-for-anything young people. Let us view the genre as Rap music vs. gangster chic and how these seem to be playing out.

*Rap is a howl from a burning fire; gangster chic is playing with that fire, popular media is the money hungry whore who sucks it all dry.*

**Rap and other Hard-Edged Music:**

On the softer, calming side, we have, “*Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, to soften rocks or bend a knotted oak.*” (William Congreve). On the harder, provocative side we have “*Music oft that such charm to make bad good and good provoke to harm*”. (William Shakespeare)

Music can soothe and it can provoke. We know that music can help create fantasy - put words and melody to our deepest thoughts and emotions - meaning to our experiences and emphasis to our feelings. It lets us know that we are not alone in our hopes, dreams, successes and our failures. In youthful days, it vanquished parents and other natural enemies of our youth. It forges a common bond with the only people who truly understand us - *other youth*.

Youth-oriented music reflects an emerging generation’s emotions, fantasies, anxieties, fears - and its rebellion. As an indicator of youthful values and mores, music sometimes tells us what

we do not necessarily want to hear and maybe more than we want to know. Does it go too far or do we overreact to youthful anxiety? Maybe we miss the meaning of what is being communicated.

Rap music came from the streets along with breakdancing, slang and clothing. However, Rap music seems to be the lightning rod that angers and provokes. Rap is not alone in its reflections of feelings, beliefs, emotions and youthful angst. There are other forms of hard-edged music such as heavy metal, demonic strata and mosh music that may seem hazardous to one's health.

Hard-edged tunes one listens to may reflect where a young person is at a given point in time and development. It may be a reflection of general teen rebellion, or, a sign of real turmoil in the life of a child. Regardless, the music is hugely successful. Hard-edged music puts anger and frustrations into words not necessarily meant to be decipherable by parents and the like.

Some of this music seems to promote the most negative of behaviors. As an outlet for youthful angst it may fill the bill, but some of it shrieks of murderous hatred and unfathomable purple rage. It conjures up violence, disrespect and sexual animalism. And it is talking to someone, but in ways that we may wish kids would not want to hear. It may be harmless rebellion or an introduction to a world of madness and an under-society gone wet and wild, but they hear it, relate to it and clamor for more.

Some believe that hard-edged music is responsible for turning young people on to killer drugs and gangster habits such as murdering brothers and sisters; losing their mind on drug-induced trips; gang-banging and causing great bodily harm to anyone symbolizing authority. Some music is definitely bone chilling and dramatic testimony to how far out a mind can wander. Young people are driving the rhythm and setting the lyrics on fire. Some might make a parent anxious and uncomfortable. But don't kill the messenger.

We want to make clear that many forms of music do the same as Rap is purported to do: Casual sex and the promoting of women as sex objects are synonymous with Madonna and Britney Spears; some rock and demonic music speaks of murder, maiming and rape; some hate-rock music speaks of killing groups or types and kinds of people.

Apart from sex, some hard-edged music can seem to promote violence. But try to see Rap and other hard-edged music is an outcome, an effect, not a cause. Some is toxic, some is not. Rap and other hard edged music can be either or both. Rap is a consequence, much as gangs are, and like gangs, is being blamed for promoting violence when it is an *outcome* phase of a societal process.

Rap music evolved much as the Blues. Original "Blues Rap" if you will, is an artistic reflection of the pain and suffering "reservation" youth experience. Rap and other group's lament-music give insight into the injustices, rage and hopelessness that exists where they live. The words send a clear message: *all is not well*. Most if not all "reservation communities" have their versions of such "Blues Rap".

Some hard-edged music glorifies a predatory lifestyle. This form is toxic. In it the artists are exploiting hard life experiences with the simple aim of extolling their brand of gangsterism, regardless of color - and making money in the process. Using their talent of rhythm and rhyme they put down women, extol the virtues of getting high and suggest that all that is destructive to another is good. In some cases they use music as a venue to issue put-downs and challenges to their enemies. Their hand-signs, colors and words are well understood by other youth. They are locked in the abyss of self-hate, hate and predator and their music expresses it. This form of music promotes and enhances dehumanization and taps into the destructive possibilities that rage, self-hate and hatred for others allows.

In a strange twist, while some condemn an unfeeling “system”, they partner with it to make money.

Toxic music exemplifies rage that develops when you have had to swallow the hate of others. Women become whores and bitches and the men are taken out by murder, overdoses and suicide. A real problem with toxic music is that, as with other destructive media, it is listened to uncritically by most of those who consume it.

Our educational systems are not designed to produce critical thinkers, at least not at the ages that youth are the most vulnerable to such negative messaging. Youth have no built-in intellectual immune system and they are easily influenced by the toxic messages.

Rap music emanates from within the “reservation community”. And there is a very powerful and useful side to music and art for that matter that emanates from the streets: Rap uncovered one of America's worst kept secrets: that we have our own “second world” in cities and towns across this great nation that we did not want the rest of the world to see or hear from, let alone become a basis of a seemingly unstoppable industry.

But see and hear from them we all did as rap and urban upheaval exploded all over our pretentiousness. Its unrestrained success is reflective of the large numbers of young people of all races who believe that they somehow share the outcast experience – or sympathize with those who do. They may be identifying with the pained but still unbroken under-doggy-dog turned rebel that survived whatever society has thrown at him and then turned back out among us.

In many ways these urban poets have in common battles to survive. They are indeed wounded but are having the last word about whom and what was meant to contain them individually and collectively. Who would have thought that the image of all that America sought to cast aside would re-emerge so explosively and become all that youth thought was “hip”?

Some will object, clinging to the perception that we are strengthening gang members by making them stars, in this way again blaming the effects rather than looking deeper for the causes. From hard-core rappers you will not hear of love and happiness, but of pain and suffering. If there is a birthplace of Rap, it is located next to the birthplace of The Blues. And Rappers emerged from the same streets that brought forth violent gangs as expressions of a people's rage. In a way, some Rap may be a rage-release safety valve reducing the need for violence release. Whether raging monsters or urban poets, they are our creations. They are exposing their pained beings to each other and to the world. It helps and it hurts. If that makes it valuable, it is because someone needed to hear it as much as someone else needed to express it. This is neither good nor bad; it just *is*. The rough and gritty lyrics of Rap reflect the pain, anguish and anger of “reservation” youth everywhere. Their mass identification with these lyrics and rhythms should be easy to understand.

Most youngsters never become true gangsters on or off of the “reservation”. The greater tragedy is that many of those on the “reservation” will never reach their full potential. The rapper's wail is just one more form of a sad but relevant lamentation. What may be more difficult to understand is why non-ethnic suburban white youth are also enthralled by rap tunes. Do they feel some connection to the themes found in rap as well? Are they losing their footing in a world gone wild?

Rap artists reflect the way of evolution and revolution, depending on how we choose to respond. No matter, they control their art and along with it the spoils. It is after all, the American way.

It is up to us to decide if we will look beyond the obvious and seek to make correction or hammer the souls that wail in our presence. Maybe in a hundred years we will not have need for such songs of protest.



## 23

**The End Game**

*It is critical to understand that the first act of such civil violence and every subsequent act are not nor were ever aimed at what caused them and thus can never be satisfied so the violence can never end. Such acts of violence are misdirected acts of anger and rage or the result of such an act. If there were a direct relationship, an end of violence could be predicted based on a final occurrence or some milestone being finally reached – or a leader(s) being finally eliminated. And we would move Heaven and Earth to finally get there.*

Premature and unnatural death is what we have here, as a regular and accepted part of a cycle that identifiable groups of a society historically engage in without outside intervention or interruption. It is the total deterioration of a young person, perversely but cleverly disguised and modified to provide a warped kind of comfort and peace to the dead and dying while allowing society to escape blame for any of it. It is seeded within the person's life before birth and nurtured through the formative years. Beyond that, unless intervened with, he flies on automatic pilot - until he is shot down.

The internalization of feelings of hopelessness, failure, inferiority, being unwanted, unaccepted and unacceptable, etc. is at the root of every gangster's murderous act intended to erase someone else's life that he sees in the exact same way. Each negative action is done in the very real belief that his premature end is likely, inevitable and even desirable. Each negative act and consequence validates this belief.

Increasing the activity brings a perverted sense of accomplishment. That is: in the eyes of those he fights on behalf of, he is a hero, and each additional act defies odds of survival. Much like the Red Baron in another war at another time and place, each new "kill" brings glory, partly because of the added risk with each new "mission".

A gang soldier knows that these risks will result in some predictable fashion. He will: 1) die; 2) be captured (imprisoned); 3) be injured in battle (very likely); and/or 4) live to be a veteran of domestic wars (*O.G.* or *Veterano*). In all cases he will be revered by the relatively few who revere such people: impressionable youngsters.

Upon completion of a cyclic "kill", relief and validation through participation are achieved by *both* the perpetrator *and* victim groups. A familiar (burial) ceremony occurs in the victim gang neighborhood with the full expectation that one will soon be necessary in the offending gang neighborhood.

**Gang pride is an oxymoron...**

When asked the question, "Why do you hate and kill members of your (same) group?" active gang members have no rational response except to say something about his gang being "disrespected" or something called "payback", or fatalistically, "That's just the way it is, man."

An act that had no specifically identifiable genesis validates the ending of a person's life. However, the ending of the life now becomes a new and independent reason for the resultant and inevitable in-kind reciprocation from another gang...and the beat goes on.

Their targeted victims are no more than the mirror image of their own "worthless" selves whose passing is made significant in that he died "for his 'hood". He therefore has worth and value and a reason for existence. He died a soldier for his neighborhood. His death really began generations ago. He just needed to be laid to rest.

I awoke late one night and wrote this in just a few minutes. It is based on an actual incident:

**11:59 P.M.**

*He was Red and now he's dead. Blue took him out - that needed doing. He was one of them after all. But not enough was paid for his sins of existence. He would need more for all to see how hated he was, and he was me.*

*Hated so much for all he had done that we had made him do. Hated so deeply for all we had done that we were supposed to. Hated so much was he but so was I that one of us would have to die. The other would follow, but wait...*

*...On a bloody night in November less than ten and more than six years ago, a man was waiting to be made a MAN. He waited in state for his turn at his Ceremony. The next day his homeboys would bury him in full regalia and with a hero's march in their brightly colored chariots.*

*But not so fast; we were not completely settled with him yet.*

*Here was a former soldier who would be honored in death as he would have never been honored in life. Here was a ghost who wandered the streets aiming aimlessly, waiting for the boomeranging bullet to find its mark. It did, but WAIT!*

*We ghosts in Blue needed to get in a final blow as he was about to be more a MAN than we. He and his gang did more to us than we to him. He needed more killing.*

*We sneaked in the mortuary so quiet and dark. We crawled through the window, stepping on another brother closed in for the duration. His casket would hold the few of us that we needed it to. It was our mission to destroy, so it was cool. One of us found the man we came to honor; in his casket he seemed too calm, the son of a bitch.*

*Each of us cocked our weapons. We had shotguns and pistols and even an M-16 would be used that night. No, they would never say that we did not hate so totally.*

*The first blast took the smile from his head and scattered it everywhere. Then he was mixed with bullets until he was not a body or soul or anything resembling a MAN. He was now and finally a bloody mess showing all the hate we fed and the anger we ate. The only thing recognizable was the knot on what used to be a tie around what used to be a neck on what used to be a man. Let them parade their hero now.*

The next day the casket was closed but the procession went along with an angry twist. The ceremony now included a long and slow ride through Blue's neighborhood with a promise to see another me at the other end...

**Is that all there is?**

*Revenge* from modified *grief* is yet another triggering device. Grief has been modified so they can find release via acts of (now justified) revenge. Each act, of course, sets the cycle in motion again but now moving off in the opposite direction. This ritual goes on simultaneous to the legitimate grieving of family but in another part of the community. Each party deals with the loss according to need. The family needs closure. The gang-active process needs it to complete one cycle and begin the next. Upon successful release via an act of violence, the gang temporarily relaxes but only to their former elevated level prior to the most recent rage implosion, but always primed for the next.

\*

Gang members find their place on the sadomasochistic merry-go-round and then get ready to give and take some down-home hurtin'. The skills that a gang member must master are fundamentally the same whether in Los Angeles, Chicago, Las Vegas, Compton or Philly. If it is a gang neighborhood, he can hang. The *cocoon* is everywhere.

This deadly setting, while familiar to all gang members, is as different from our world as night is to day. And I don't care what you think or may have heard, they are scared in their world but terrified of yours.

Law enforcement, penal and other institutions dominate the gang member's existence. They pick up on his self-destructive behavior and accept it at face value. The American media and corporate America know what underpins this state of affairs in these neighborhoods. So do government officials. No one understands power better than they do. The rules of survival are the same. None of this is by accident.

As long as the turf-status-and-revenge-cycle-of-violence dogma is maintained, true and accurate logic will continue to escape us (and them) and there will not be an end. And since the true reason for violence is not "known" or acknowledged there cannot be an end. There are no targets or known culprits to be vanquished other than more "reservation" youth. The ostensible end would come when every last young person in a "reservation community" is in jail or is eliminated by another and then the last one shoots himself to death - *the end-game*.

Each incident of youth violence is based on an original lie, as are all subsequent acts and everything that emanates from those acts. Legitimate and healthy feelings including a normal love of self and legitimate grief response have no place in this upside-down setting. For the gangster steeped in his local *cycle of violence*, the *unjustified* yet deep hatred of self, his *unjustified* guilt and the periodic death-grief episodes are required, necessarily twisted by *unjustifiable* logic to perpetuate the destructive process.

In the neighborhood experiencing this process, reaching violence "critical mass" is redundant. Each year the newest crop of young individuals already experiencing heightening states of anger and resentment merge with like others and join in the collective rage-release and self-elimination process. The newest members become prepared to go into the vengeance-seeking, sado-masochistic frenzy. Their ever-present hurt pushes them inexorably forward seeking release or at least temporary respite from the pain.

Since no legitimate outlet is present, their rage is modified to be processed and incorporated within a serviceable system (*cycle of violence*). The stage is set to trigger the rage-release lever located within the cycle under the turf, status and revenge modalities.

For this rage-release aspect of the *gang-active process* to continue, an underlying and elevated anger dynamic must remain active. The constant flow of insults, now institutional, whether from external social biases or consequent local incidents feeds the process from the build-up to irrepressible need for retribution and release. The community is increasingly worn down as human and financial resources keep the debilitating process intact but contained.

A gang homicide is nothing less than a community implosion, one outward and visible act of a people caving in on themselves. This induced act is quickly followed by an excited rush to lay *blame*, a necessary step to enable or trigger the release stage. A suitable blame-target is located (not necessarily the person or gang responsible for the offending incident, but any person(s) active in the gang *cocoon* not from his own gang). By agreeing to belong to the *cocoon*, all members willingly participate as blame-targets for other gangs. Blame-targets facilitate the process. Once a blame-target has been found and murdered, the grief induced rage-release need has been satiated, until next time.

Any community can be made to implode and explode given adequate stress build-up. The classic “reservation community” processes it into violence sub-cycles of which gangs are but one vehicle for resolution. The larger cycle is completed when the sub-cycles work their way back as an unmanageable toll on the society that launched it.

And be assured - grief will be part of that toll.

**End of Volume 1**

## **An Open Letter to the President of the United States of America:**

The Honorable President Barack Obama,

The recent gang murder on a Chicago street typifies what has been occurring in ghettos, barrios and on reservations for decades. America was again embarrassed in the eyes of a wondering world: how it is that the mightiest democracy in world history suffers seemingly unstoppable violence among its youngest citizens? We direct military might and the strongest judicial powers at this menace, even declaring war and locking up violent leaders and followers all. Yet it seems two realities persist: one of peace and prosperity - and the other a seeming permanent state of rage and violence. Mr. President, gang violence is not “unsolvable”, nor is it endemic to particular groups or inherently multigenerational or cyclic. We can end it if we endeavor to fully understand the dynamics that began and maintain it. *We put it there and we can remove it.*

America has a history of conflict when it comes to integrating groups. Many have been resolved e.g. Irish, Jewish, Italian, Polish, etc. However, for some groups, unresolved issues and their consequences have become more severe with the passage of time. In each case past and present, anger, rage, resentment and hostility have manifested as violent and destructive behaviors. “Solutions” target youth, peers, “hang-outs”, family, culture, behaviors and even DNA. Violent behaviors and their “*solutions*” have become symbiotic – they grow together forming a feedback loop that is locked in place: from home to caseload to prison and back again. This inward-directed paradigm eludes solution as “targets” are merely *symptoms* of societal dysfunction and *outcomes* of historical estrangement.

The recently announced program in Chicago targets 10,000 “at risk” youth, including potential perpetrator *and* potential victim. This may be seen as a program of containment of groups, innocents and all, based on belonging to a high-risk (violent) group. Children and families may be deeply negatively affected if it is primarily inward-directed without considering external factors, especially the community’s social history. The community appears targeted from within *and* from without. Replication would seem to entail scientifically profiling new generations of children of color and culture in ghettos, barrios and on reservations and exponentially applying this solution matrix. Meanwhile, root causes remain, the violence march continues and the United States still appears powerless to end it. Hope moves further away and the nation continues to suffer. For a moment, consider a different analysis and vision:

If one examines gang research and solution history, an undercurrent of bias, folklore and even guesswork has influenced the process (e.g. Stanley “Tookie” Williams starting the Crips in 1968; Aztec or African bloodlust; existence of a “violence gene”; multigenerational “cycles of violence”). Research and solution protocols separate by ethnic and racial group, age and sex. In this matter of life and thousands of deaths, science has not used basic protocols that trace a malady from *symptoms* to *source* and *evolution*. Instead, “solutions” are offered for an apparent inherent group malady common to minority youth. Black, Latino, Native American and Asian youth do have in common negative social histories only considered pertinent and relational when a full-blown riot occurs, (e.g. The Kerner Commission Report, 1968). Even so, findings relating outbursts to societal causation have yielded few changes or positive results. *Well...*

***all community violence is “rioting” - the type and level is a matter of degree and circumstance.***

“Rioting” is the reaction. It is the array of forced violence response that emerges as negative social elements and conditions worsen over time. The type, level and magnitude will depend on a group’s relationship with the host society over time. Actions can range from bullying to gangs to full-blown conflagration and can be by individual, group or generalized spontaneous outburst. These can be triggered by an incident or accumulation of factors. Gangs and other aspects of such unrest are inter-related from their beginning and as they evolve: gangs in ghettos, in barrios, on Reservations; male gangs, female gangs, predator gangs; drop-outs, substance abuse, family abuse, suicides *and riots* are all expressions of such unrest. *This release dynamic remains in place as long as the condition remains – not the group. As history has shown, the group is changeable.* But where did all of this begin? And how did it evolve into an ebb and flow of such a deadly and destructive assortment of community unrest and upheaval?

In stark contrast to post-Columbine, there has not been a broad sense of urgency to locate and eradicate the sources and evolutionary stages of minority youth violence, but rather to continue to accept that minority groups are somehow prone to such activity, i.e. *their* gang problem. There is yet to emerge logical explanation of the entire process, from start to another child’s finish. “Solutions” remain as so many bridges to nowhere. Thus, we are still where we were fifty years ago: following youth around and shaking our collective heads at their violent course and brutality. Gangs and violence are systemic *outcomes* of systemic societal violence. We systematically got youth there and we can systematically get them back. For the sake of children and their mothers, we must remove youth violence from biased assumptions, racial and economic politics and into the realm of unbiased science and thus valid and workable solution.

Respectfully,

America’s (other) Children

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