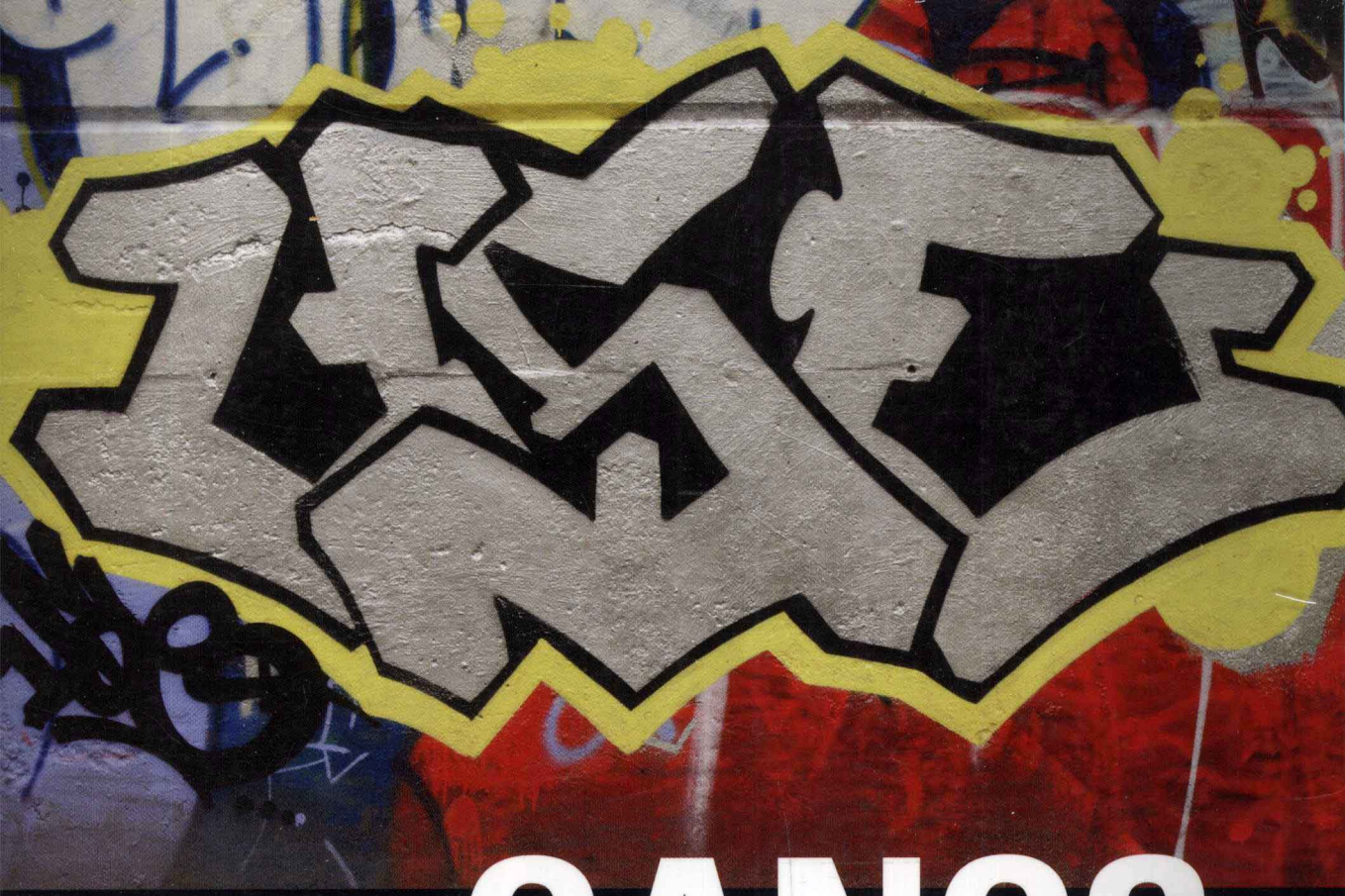

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Preface

Street gangs are at times perplexing to everyone and fighting them often is considered a futile exercise. The two main purposes of this book are, first, to demonstrate that the essential features of street gangs can be understood despite their highly varied and sometimes enigmatic public presence, and second, that some gang prevention, control strategies, and programs are effective, in contradiction of widespread proclamations that nothing works.

Street gangs are not well understood largely because they are at once shrouded in myths (some of which they create themselves), folklore, urban legends, media exaggerations, popular misconceptions, and international intrigue often associated with them. Taking a historical approach to the emergence of gangs in the United States, the book uncovers their origins and traces their development, first, in the Northeast region of the United States; next, in the Midwest; then in the West region; and last, in the Southern region. The author analyzes the key historical events that produced waves of gang growth in the respective regions. These trends are brought up to date with 14 years of annual national survey data showing a marked increase in gang activity since the beginning of the new millennium. The book also examines gang trends along the U.S.–Mexico border, and in Central America, Canada, and Europe, along with an assessment of the threat of such highly publicized gangs as Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), 18th Street gangs, and prison gangs such as the Mexican Mafia.

American gang history also serves as an excellent backdrop for reviews of myths about gangs, theories of gang formation, and various ways of defining and classifying gangs. Gangs emerged in the United States in a rainbow of colors, beginning with White ones, that reflect both outside immigration and internal migration patterns. Understanding the history of evolving gangs in America also engenders a stark realization that gang joining is often a logical choice for marginalized youth who have been relegated to the fringes of society, where powerlessness is commonly felt. Social and economic conditions in inner-city areas, organized crime, and deviancy centers foster widespread criminal activity where ganging together for safety is an understandable response.

The text explains how youngsters who are making the transition from childhood to adolescence form new gangs. These *starter gangs* often form somewhat spontaneously by authority-rejecting children and adolescents who have been alienated from families and schools. Finding themselves spending a great deal of time on the street, they may form gangs with other socially marginalized youths and look to each other for protection and street socialization. Although most youths who join are on average

in a gang for less than 1 year, some of these gangs increase their criminal activity, especially when conflict with other street groups solidifies them, becoming a formidable force in the streets. Girls often are active participants in youth gangs, and they commit very similar crimes to boys. Interestingly, research on younger gangs shows that the most criminally active ones tend to be gender balanced.

To be sure, there is a harsh, cold reality about street gangs in major cities that we ignore at our own peril. Many of the gangs incubated in the most poverty-stricken zones of very large American cities begin as the youngest cliques or sets of well-established gangs, in systematic age-graded succession. These gangs can dominate inner-city streets and create a feudal-like territory that often leads to ongoing gang wars for turf, dominance, and physical prowess—typically in very small gang *set spaces.*

Cities with populations in excess of 100,000 persons are home to the overwhelming majority of dangerous gangs representing the bulk of gang members in the entire country, particularly older, more violent gangs with mainly young adult participants. Two-thirds of these cities consistently experience large numbers of gang-related homicides and other gang-related violence, mayhem, intimidation, and pervasive fear. Case studies illustrate that cities have gang-problem histories much like individuals' careers in crime. The author and colleagues have identified common gang-history patterns among groups of cities as these unfolded across 14 years of annual national survey data. Very large cities with long histories of gang problems tend to display relatively stable patterns of serious gang activity; in contrast, small cities, towns, and counties fluctuate in seriousness and gangs may actually dissolve in many of these places.

Preventing gangs from forming and eliminating established gangs altogether is virtually impossible, when they are rooted in the cracks of our society. But the exceedingly good news is that gang crime can be reduced—even among some of the worst gangs—and communities can be made safe from the social destruction that often follows in their wake. Although there is no quick fix, no magic bullet, several steps can be taken to bring measurable relief. But to expect dramatic results would be naïve, given the community conditions in which gangs thrive and that well-established street gangs place unusual demands on their members including an oath of loyalty, a code of secrecy, penalties for violating gang behavioral codes, and unequivocal promises of protection.

The main implication is that communities must organize themselves better than the gangs and present a more formidable front. Once communities make a commitment to this end, they are in an excellent position to undertake strategic planning toward overcoming the gangs. Each community needs to assess its own gang activity, prepare a strategic plan that fits its specific gang problem, and develop a continuum of programs and activities that parallels youths' gang involvement over time. *Prevention* programs are needed to target children and early adolescents at risk of gang involvement, in order to reduce the number of youths that join gangs. *Intervention* programs and strategies are needed to provide necessary sanctions and services for slightly older youth who are actively involved in gangs in order to separate them from gangs. And law enforcement *suppression* strategies are needed to target the most violent gangs and older, criminally active gang members. Each of these components

helps make the others more effective, provided that evidence-based services and strategies are incorporated in the continuum. The final chapters provide ample examples of these and link readers to online resources for more detailed information. Students and community stakeholders should then have the capacity to use these electronic resources to assess gang problems and actively assist or guide the mapping of a strategic plan in a given neighborhood or community.

Acknowledgments

My journey in gang research began in earnest 15 years ago, when I was privileged to begin working at the newly created National Youth Gang Center (recently renamed the National Gang Center). This center was created by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in 1994 at the Institute for Intergovernmental Research (IIR) in Tallahassee, Florida, with three main goals in mind. First, this center was expected to standardize and conduct annual measurements of gang activity across the United States and undertake a program of research. Second, it would review and identify research-based programs that work to prevent gang involvement, reduce gang crime, and control gangs. Third, it would provide training and technical assistance on what works. This book draws upon much of the work in which I have been involved at the National Gang Center.[1]

First and foremost, I must express deep appreciation to Emory Williams for hiring me, and along with him, Doug Bodrero, Bruce Buckley, Gina Hartsfield, Clay Jester, John P. Moore, and other Institute for Intergovernmental Research officials for creating a stellar organization in which gang research, program development, and training could thrive. Colonel (Ret.) John P. Moore inspired my work with his extraordinary knowledge of gangs and gang intelligence. Most important, he has masterfully directed the National Gang Center from the beginning and the recent expansion in achieving its goals and other equally notable accomplishments; he also has been a valuable collaborator on many survey and research products, and an invaluable critic of my work.

Walter Miller first stimulated my attention to youth gangs, beginning in 1974, when I first went to work at the U.S. Department of Justice. His pioneering research prompted the U.S. Congress to create a program of gang research and program development at the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and to authorize the establishment of a national gang center. It was he who envisioned the potential value of a National Youth Gang Survey. I also am deeply indebted to several other eminent gang researchers. Joan Moore and Diego Vigil educated me about Chicano gangs and the history of Mexican American gangs. Finn Esbensen's pioneering student surveys have provided me and the gang field extraordinary insights into youth gangs. Irving Spergel, Jim Short, and Ron Huff constantly tutored me on gang research and important research questions. I also acknowledge Rolf Loeber (Pittsburgh), Terry Thornberry (Rochester), and David Huizinga (Denver) as the directors of the three major U.S. longitudinal studies of delinquency. The OJJDP launched these studies 23 years ago in its Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency. A few years later, OJJDP embedded studies of

gang members in these large representative samples, and more than 20 research reports have been published on gang members in these three landmark studies. I draw on a number of them in this book. Researchers in a fourth longitudinal study, the Seattle Social Development Project, undertook a similar line of research under the leadership of Karl Hill, which also has produced very noteworthy findings (see Further Reading in Chapter 5 for a listing of reports on each of these four projects).

I have benefited from both short- and long-term relationships with a number of colleagues that enriched this book, including Dave Barciz, Becky and Richard Block, Beth Bjerregaard, Jim Burch, Dave Curry, Scott Decker, Arlen Egley Jr., Finn Esbensen, David Farrington, Victor Gonzalez, Rachel Gordon, Karl Hill, Ron Huff, Lorine Hughes, David Huizinga, Chuck Katz, Marion Kelly, Mac Klein, Marv Krohn, Mark Lipsey, Alan Lizotte, Rolf and Magda Loeber, Jim Lynch, Rebecca Petersen, Jim Short, Irv Spergel, Terry Thornberry, Deborah Weisel, and Susan Whitten. I must give special recognition to John J. Wilson, with whom I coauthored *A Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent and Chronic Juvenile Offenders* in 1993. This collaboration broadened my perspective of solutions to juvenile delinquency and gang problems that could encompass counties, cities, states, and counties.

The following colleagues and SAGE reviewers kindly provided valuable comments on draft chapters: Beth Bjerregaard, Brenda Chaney, Dave Curry, Scott Decker, Finn Esbensen, Adrianne Freng, Erika Gebo, Camille Gibson, Rachel Gordon, Laura Hansen, Megan Howell, Ron Huff, Lorine Hughes, Robert B. Jenkot, Soraya Kawucha, John Moore, Joan Moore, Robert Lombardo, Dan Okada, Dana Peterson, Becky Petersen, Andrew Papachristos, Pamela Preston-Black, David Pyrooz, Irving Spergel, Diego Vigil, and Elvira M. White.

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I am indebted to several close colleagues for invaluable contributions to this book. George Tita, Beth Griffiths, and Arlen Egley performed the innovative analyses for our publication, *U.S. Gang Problem Trends and Seriousness, 1996–2009*, which I summarize in Chapters 7 and 8. John P. Moore collaborated with me on the initial report on *History of Street Gangs in the United States*, which I expanded in Chapter 1. Arlen Egley Jr., extraordinary administrator of the National Youth Gang Survey, also prepared all of the figures and data tables on the NYGS that appear throughout this book. Dave Curry also played an instrumental role in developing the NYGS and analyses; however, the author is responsible for any errors in presentations of the survey results. He and I also collaborated on a comprehensive review of risk factors for gang membership, annual NYGS fact sheets, other survey reports, and numerous American Society of Criminology presentations, several of which are referenced herein. Finn Esbensen

generously provided tables and research reports from his two pioneering GREAT studies. Colleagues at the U.S. Department of Justice have constantly supported my work including Jim Burch, James Chavis, Catherine Doyle, Barbara Kelley, Dennis Mondoro, Stephanie Rapp, Jeff Slowikowski, and Phelan Wyrick.

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Suzanne Sinclair, librarian at the Health Sciences Library, First Health of the Carolinas, in Pinehurst, North Carolina, greatly facilitated my research by obtaining articles and chapters promptly from other sources.

Dr. Walter B. Miller passed away in 2004 without seeing the publication of his monumental gang book. It centered on a long-term study of 21 street gangs in Boston and a successful program to address them that he largely developed in the early 1950s and meticulously evaluated, the Midcity Project. His renowned scholarship is now available in book form. Unfortunately, the publication of Dr. Miller's book was not completed in time for inclusion in this book. Fortunately for readers, however, it is online and accessible free of charge thanks to the largess of Scott Decker, Foundation Professor and Director, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Arizona State University. Dr. Decker masterfully organized Miller's epic work for publication and it can be accessed at http://gangresearch.asu.edu/walter_miller_library/walter-b.-miller-book. Dr. Miller is widely recognized as one of the six most distinguished early gang scholars, along with Malcolm Klein, Joan Moore, Jim Short, Irving Spergel, and Diego Vigil.

I would be inexcusably remiss if I did not recognize important collaborators and supporters in the preparation of this book at SAGE. Jerry Westby, acquisitions editor, envisioned what this book could become. Erim Sarbuland, editorial assistant, constantly provided support. Karen Wiley, production editor, brought the project to fruition. Megan Koraly worked hard to secure permissions. The copy editor Gretchen Treadwell masterfully reorganized disjointed sections and often magically turned my ordinary prose into clarity. Readers are indebted to her.

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1

History of Gangs in the United States

Introduction

A widely respected chronicler of British crime, Luke Pike (1873), reported the first active gangs in Western civilization. While Pike documented the existence of gangs of highway robbers in England during the 17th century, it does not appear that these gangs had the features of modern-day, serious street gangs. Later in the 1600s, London was "terrorized by a series of organized gangs calling themselves the Mims, Hectors, Bugles, Dead Boys [and they] fought pitched battles among themselves dressed with colored ribbons to distinguish the different factions" (Pearson, 1983, p. 188). According to Sante (1991), the history of street gangs in the United States began with their emergence on the East Coast around 1783, as the American Revolution ended. These gangs emerged in rapidly growing eastern U.S. cities, out of the conditions created in large part by multiple waves of large-scale immigration and urban overcrowding.

This chapter examines the emergence of gang activity in four major U.S. regions, as classified by the U.S. Census Bureau: the Northeast, Midwest, West, and South. The purpose of this regional focus is to develop a better understanding of the origins of gang activity and to examine regional migration and cultural influences on gangs themselves. Unlike the South, in the Northeast, Midwest, and West regions, major phases characterize gang emergence. Table 1.1 displays these phases.