

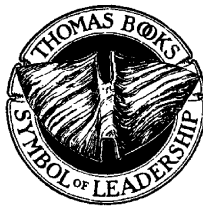
**STREET GANGS THROUGHOUT
THE WORLD**

STREET GANGS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

By

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*To my family, friends, teachers, and colleagues—Bob Hunter, Scott Menard,
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Paul Lockman, Robert Franzese, Mark Rousseau, Wayne Wheeler,
and
Chris, Kelly, and Marty Covey*

INTRODUCTION

This book is about street gangs throughout the world. Although a substantial amount of research on street gangs has been conducted over recent decades, research on street gangs in countries outside of the United States remains scarce. While research is scarce, no single volume can encompass and report on all that is known about street gangs throughout the world. However, it is important to gather what we know about street gangs together. My intent has been to discover what we know about street gangs throughout the world. This book summarizes some of the major works on street gang phenomena outside of the United States.

Over the years we have witnessed the development of street gangs in countries that historically did not have gangs. Officials in these countries are increasingly asking questions about street gangs and how to respond. Previous scholars have addressed the topic of the world's street gangs. For example, Hazlehurst and Hazlehurst (Eds.) prepared an excellent book titled *Gangs and Youth Subcultures: International Explorations* that focused on organized crime that occasionally references gangs. Malcolm Klein has written extensively about street gangs in Europe. His *The Eurogang Paradox: Street Gangs and Youth Groups in the U.S. and Europe* (2001) studies street gangs in countries outside of the United States, but the focus is on Europe and not the remainder of the world. Most of the literature on street gangs is in the form of chapters to edited collections, such as Malcolm Klein's, "Street Gangs: A Cross-national Perspective," in C.R. Huff's *Gangs in America III* (2002). Finally, Chapter 6 "Comparative Perspectives on Juvenile Gangs," of our book on *Juvenile Gangs* (Covey et al., 1997) continues to draw attention from scholars. While much has been written about organized crime in several countries, street gangs remain an unexplored topic begging attention. The topic of street gangs, with the exception of the United States and Europe, has not been adequately covered and sum-

marized in a single work. While research on street gangs is being conducted in many countries, no one has taken stock about what is currently known.

This text is an effort to summarize some of the research on street gangs. The first chapter provides an introduction for the reader on the topic of street gangs throughout the world. The chapter addresses why the study of street gangs is important and the world demographic changes that will promote the development of street gangs. The chapter addresses important topics on the various definitions of gangs and youth subcultures. It addresses methodological issues, such as measuring the extent of street gang activity in different countries. The chapter also compares and contrasts street gangs with skinheads, mobs, cauals, taggers, hooligans, and organized crime. The chapter makes basic observations about gang structures and Klein's dimensions and five structural patterns of street gangs. Finally, the chapter closes with a brief description of the roles of the community and mass media relative to street gangs.

Chapter 2 reviews some of the basic research on street gangs in the United States. This chapter provides only an overview of street gangs in the United States and does not provide much detail. While it would be impossible to provide adequate coverage of all of the literature on street gangs in a single volume, it is possible to highlight some of the main studies and recent findings regarding American street gangs.

Chapter 3 covers what is known about street gangs in Europe. Because street gangs have been present in some European countries for centuries, a special section is devoted to historical references to European gangs. Street gangs in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Scotland, France, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Eastern European countries are covered. Most of the materials in the chapter focus on street gangs in Great Britain.

Chapter 4 covers street gangs in the Western Hemisphere excluding the United States. The assumption is made that the United States warranted a separate chapter from its neighboring countries, although it has major influence on street gangs in the region. Street gangs in Canada, Jamaica, Brazil, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Trinidad, Ecuador, Tobago, and other countries are covered.

Chapter 5 addresses street gangs in Russia, India, China, Hong Kong (post-reunification), Japan, and other Asian countries. Russia was included in this chapter on Asian gangs to add balance to the chapter length. In addition, there is considerable information on street

gangs in Russia that warrants special attention that would be lost if included in the chapter on street gangs in Europe.

Chapter 6 covers the immense continents of Africa and Australia and island countries in the Pacific Ocean. These countries and continents share little in common but for most a Southern Hemisphere orientation. The chapter includes sections on street gangs in South Africa and Papua New Guinea, and shorter sections on Kenya, Australia, New Zealand, and other Pacific Islands.

Chapter 7 is devoted to summarizing the main findings presented in the previous chapters. It compares information on what we know about street gangs throughout the world. The chapter covers trends and universals for all street gangs. When enough information is available, it uses Malcolm Klein's street gang dimensions to compare and contrast street gangs in different countries.

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**STREET GANGS THROUGHOUT
THE WORLD**

Chapter 1

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON STREET GANGS

When scholars think about street gangs, there is a tendency to view them as principally an American phenomenon. After all, researchers have conducted most of the world's research on street gangs and these gangs are known throughout the world. In addition, mass media images of street gangs are for the most part American based. Gang authorities Campbell and Muncer (1989) once characterized American gang research as taking a parochial view of gangs. Yet, we live in a world where some suggested decades ago that street gangs are an adolescent phenomenon in all cultures (Hardman, 1967). Irving Spergel (1990) concluded over a decade ago that street gangs were a trans-cultural phenomenon present with different manifestations in a diverse range of countries.

Although present in some countries, currently there is a void of research on street gangs in areas other than the United States (Hazlehurst & Hazlehurst, 1998). We face considerable gaps in information for South America, Africa, India, China, Japan, and other regions of the world. In addition, the research that has been translated into English about street gangs in other countries is often limited and outdated. Because street gangs have not garnered much attention, it is easy to conclude that street gangs are nonexistent or are effectively controlled in other countries. It also follows that the United States must be different from other countries because of its relative abundance of street gangs and corresponding research.

REASONS WHY STREET GANGS SHOULD BE OF WORLDWIDE INTEREST

One might question whether street gangs should be of any concern because so many of them do not persist for any great length of time. In addition, there are many other more important worldwide issues demanding our attention, such as civil wars, terrorism, and economic crises. However, although street gangs currently do not appear to be a worldwide pressing issue, there are many indications that they may become so in several countries.

Writing about the social ecology of gangs, Schneider (1999: 33) concluded, "The tipping point is an epidemiological term that explains how diseases must reach a certain threshold level, or a critical mass to spread epidemically. Before reaching that point they can be managed, but once the threshold is achieved, they become difficult to contain." Societies and communities may have "tipping points" at which street gangs are so numerous that they become a permanent fixture in the society. We may be witnessing a world where street gangs are becoming a permanent feature of the social landscape.

Some evidence for this may be found in changes in the world's demographic trends. Most street gangs are predominantly comprised of youth and young adults. Therefore, it is important to understand what is occurring to the world's population of youth. The increasing number of impoverished street children in the world is a major social problem that has definite ramifications for the spread and development of street gangs. Two decades ago, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated that there were 40 million street children in the world, of which 25 million lived in Latin America (Tacon, 1982). The numbers of street children throughout the world are growing at an alarming rate. More recent reports estimate the number to be as many as 100 million youth living on the streets (United Nations, 1999). These homeless street children are the least likely to be employed or able to support themselves through legitimate means. Street gangs and law-violating youth groups provide options for many of these destitute youth. It is from this growing population of impoverished youth that street gangs across the world potentially find willing and eager recruits who have few socioeconomic options in life.

The United Nations (1999) reported that while the urban population of developed countries has doubled from 448 million in 1950 to 875

million in 1990, the urban population of developing countries quintupled over the same period from 285 million to 1.6 billion. A large portion of this urban population explosion is youth, who were the least equipped to cope with the stresses of urban areas. Many of these urban areas lack the infrastructures to meet the needs of youth, especially for those needing services. The result is that many youth fall prey to criminal exploitation and turn to crime for protection and survival. An avenue open to some urban youth is the street gang, which can provide some level of personal and financial security. Scholars have for decades observed that street gangs are more predominant in urban settings. Street gangs are and will become attractive options for youth lacking opportunity and facing impoverished futures. Street gangs will not only provide some, albeit modest, level of support, but also the social associations and security that many impoverished urban youth need.

In a similar vein, the world is developing an informal or underground economy. Several scholars have acknowledged and described informal economies in the United States and other countries that serve as alternatives to the formal economic structures that lack entry-level jobs for disadvantaged people. The world's growing youth population is expanding without corresponding increases in the demand for their labor. Improved health care and decreasing death rates are resulting in an increasing pool of unemployed and marginalized youth. Concentrations of these youth will diminish capital formation and economic modernization because they are economically dependent and less productive than their adult counterparts. Opportunities in some areas of the world for legitimate gainful employment have all but disappeared, leaving people, including youth, to rely on informal economies for survival. Informal economies are usually a combination of legitimate, such as cottage industries and open markets, and illegitimate activities, such as drug sales, prostitution, and crime. Street gangs participate in some of these illegitimate economic endeavors. For example, street gangs have increasingly become involved with illegal drug sales as part of the informal economy in the United States (Hagedorn, 2002) and other less developed countries (Portes et al., 1989; Rogerson, 2000).

Besides a growing worldwide population of youth at risk of joining street gangs, there are several other reasons why we should be interested in other countries. First, making cross-cultural comparisons has