

**STREET GANGS
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD**

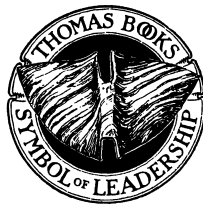
Second Edition

STREET GANGS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

By

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CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.

2600 South First Street

Springfield, Illinois 62704

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ISBN 978-0-398-07905-5 (hard)

ISBN 978-0-398-07906-2 (paper)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2009029431

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Printed in the United States of America

CR-R-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Covey, Herbert C.

Street gangs throughout the world / by Herbert C. Covey. -- 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-398-07905-5 (hard) -- ISBN 978-0-398-07906-2 (pbk.)

1. Gangs--Cross-cultural studies. I. Title.

HV6437.C68 2010

364.106'6--dc22

2009029431

To my family, Chris, Kelly, Cramer, and Marty Covey

INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of the first edition of this book 6 years ago, it is evident that street gangs continue to flourish and expand in many areas of the world. During this short span, the amount of research on and thought about street gangs has grown substantially but remains inadequate. Even with the growth of research and information, academic studies and statistics on street gangs in countries outside of the United States and Europe continue to be scarce. This book provides an update on some of the information we have gained about street gangs throughout the world since the last edition. It summarizes some of the major works on street gang phenomena outside the United States but does not claim to represent all of the information, data, studies, or ideas we have about the world's street gangs.

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 (1998) prepared an excellent book titled *Gangs and Youth Subcultures: International Explorations* that focused on organized crime that occasionally references gangs. Malcolm Klein and his colleagues have written extensively about street gangs in Europe. His *Gangs in the United States and Europe* (2001) studied street gangs in Europe. Since the publication of this landmark book, Klein and his Eurogang colleagues have published two newer collections that further cover the subject matter (Decker & Weerman, 2005; van Gemert, Peterson, & Lien, 2008).

Chapter 1 provides an introduction for the reader on the topic of the world's street gangs. The chapter addresses why the study of street gangs is important and how world demographic changes will promote the development of more street gangs. The chapter presents detailed information about the social conditions of the world and what they

mean to gangs. Common themes in the world literature on gangs include poverty, the retreat of the state, increasing income inequality, urbanization, population growth, exploitation, marginalization, underground economies, racism, and ethnocentrism.

The chapter addresses important topics on the various definitions of gangs and youth subcultures. The issue of how to define a street gang and whether it is important to have a standard definition characterizes much of the discourse in gang literature (Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001). Some even wonder whether it is possible to define gangs given the varieties of gang phenomena. It also 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, 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 a brief overview of street gangs in the United States. Although it would be impossible to provide adequate coverage of all 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. Recent works on street gangs have been added as well as elaboration on the changing character of American street gangs (see Coughlin & Venkatesh, 2003). Sections on Asian American, female, Hispanic/Latino, and other general groupings of people have been expanded.

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, Spain, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany are discussed. 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, Mexico, El Salvador, Jamaica, Brazil, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Trinidad, Ecuador, Tobago, and other countries are covered. The important role that the American deportation of people and gang members has had on Central American counties is highlighted.

Chapter 5 describes street gangs in Russia and eastern European countries. Our knowledge about gangs in Russia, although limited, has expanded in recent years. Gangs appear to be on the rise in Russia and some of its bordering eastern European countries.

Chapter 6 covers examples of gangs in Asian countries, including India, China, Hong Kong (postreunification), Japan, and other's. Studies of Asian gangs, with a few exceptions, remain rare.

Chapter 7 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, Egypt, Australia, New Zealand, and other Pacific Islands.

Chapter 8 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 patterns for street gangs. It also postulates what the future holds for street gangs throughout the world.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	vii
<i>Chapter</i>	
1. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON STREET GANGS	3
2. STREET GANGS IN THE UNITED STATES	38
3. STREET GANGS IN EUROPE	73
4. STREET GANGS IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE: CANADA, AND CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA	122
5. STREET GANGS IN RUSSIA AND EASTERN EUROPE ...	165
6. STREET GANGS IN ASIA	186
7. STREET GANGS IN AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST, AUSTRALIA, AND THE PACIFIC ISLANDS	212
8. CLOSING OBSERVATIONS ON STREET GANGS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD	256
<i>References</i>	267
<i>Author Index</i>	301
<i>Subject Index</i>	308

**STREET GANGS
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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 two decades ago that street gangs were a transcultural phenomenon present with different manifestations in a diverse range of countries.

Although there are exceptions for some countries, there continues to be a lack of research on street gangs in areas other than the United States (Hazlehurst & Hazlehurst, 1998). We face considerable gaps in information for South America, Russia, the Middle East, 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 THAT 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, although there is considerable evidence that, in Hagedorn's (2008) terms, many gangs are becoming "permanent fixtures" in the world's slums. In addition, many other more important worldwide issues demand our attention, such as civil wars, terrorism, and economic crises. However, although street gangs currently do not appear to be a worldwide pressing issue, indications show that they are in some countries. Current gang research indicates that gangs are expanding throughout the world. John Hagedorn (2008: xxiii) recently wrote what many of us in the field know: "Gangs today play a significant role in all kinds of violence, from ethnic riots to drug market conflicts, even to working for local tyrants in enforcing law and order."

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 are living in a world where street gangs are 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. A 2006 World Bank report estimated that there were 1.5 billion people between ages 12 and 24, of whom 1.3 billion were living in developing countries (World Bank, 2006). Almost three decades ago, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated that there were 40 million street children in the world, of whom 25 million lived in Latin America (Tacon, 1982). The numbers of street children throughout the world are growing at an alarming rate. Reports estimate the number to be as many as 100 million youth liv-

ing 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, although the urban population of developed countries 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. One billion people now live in urban slums (Hagedorn, 2008). 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. Pinheiro (2006) noted that impoverished street children are globally recognized as being especially at risk for violence.

An avenue open to some urban youth is the street gang, which can provide some level of personal and financial security. For decades, scholars have observed that street gangs are more predominant in urban settings. Street gangs are attractive options for youth lacking opportunity and facing impoverished futures. Street gangs provide some, albeit modest, level of support, as well as social associations and security that many impoverished urban youth need.

In a similar vein, much of the world operates with informal or underground economies. Street gang members, as well as others in impoverished neighborhoods, spend much of their time involved with the underground economies, such as doing "hustles." Hustles are ways to make money through the underground economy. Street hustles include selling drugs, bartering goods, gambling, extorting, selling stolen goods, pimping, stealing cars, and otherwise earning money. 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 (Jankowski, 1991; Venkatesh, 2000). The world's growing youth population is expanding without corresponding increases in the demand for their labor. Improved health care and