

# **GANGS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT**

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# GANGS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

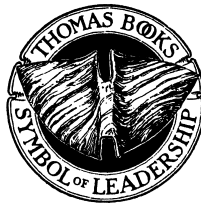
A Guide for Dealing with Gang-Related Violence

*By*

LINDA M. SCHMIDT

*and*

PROFESSOR JAMES T. O'REILLY



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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©2007 by CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.

ISBN 978-0-398-07748-8 (hard)

ISBN 978-0-398-07749-5 (pbk.)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2007007129

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*Printed in the United States of America*

*SR-R-3*

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Schmidt, Linda M.

Gangs and law enforcement : a guide for dealing with gang-related violence / by Linda M. Schmidt and James T. O'Reilly.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-398-07748-8 (hard) -- ISBN 978-0-398-07749-5 (pbk.)

1. Gangs--United States. 2. Law enforcement--United States. 3. Violence--United States.  
4. Crime prevention--United States. 5. Juvenile delinquency--United States. I. O'Reilly,  
James T., 1947- II. Title.

HV 6439.U5S36 2007

364.1'0660973--dc22

2007007129

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## FOREWORD

Reading Linda Schmidt's groundbreaking book, *Gangs and Law Enforcement: A Guide for Dealing with Gang-Related Violence*, brought me back in time, to my days as Special Assistant to Los Angeles Police Chief William Bratton. Several shootings—each gang-related—had occurred over a few short hours. In the darkness of one of those rare Los Angeles mornings cold enough to see your own breath, I surveyed the last crime scene on my list. Shell casings were strewn everywhere—dead soldiers of dull brass. Many were marked with yellow plastic numbers, and still more with index cards, because the detectives had run out of numbers before they had run out of shell casings.

Bloody baby clothes, splintered wood, shattered glass and broken plaster were everywhere. The bullets had passed through the exterior wall into the living room, striking a baby on the couch and the baby's grandfather. Both were critically wounded. An uncle who was standing in the living room was killed. More bullets passed through the kitchen, missing the grandmother, and through a back wall into a bedroom, where the great-grandfather was sleeping. The intended target, a teenaged gang member, was not home at the time.

As I briefed Los Angeles Police Chief William Bratton on the details, he asked the usual questions: Who did we think was behind it? Why did it happen? Why was the family targeted indiscriminately? The answers were unsatisfying. Ultimately, this carnage resulted from a “dis” or over a perceived encroachment on some gang's turf, or even over a pass made at a gang member's girlfriend. In the end, we'd say, “That was it? All that killing over that?”

That morning was not unique—nor was it the lead story on the news. It blended into my memory, along with the woman killed by a stray bullet as she hung lights in her living room on Christmas Eve, and the boys shot off their bikes, and the men slumped over their steering

wheels, and the people killed as they slept in their beds. All this was done by gang members. All this killing was done by boys and men with semi-automatics and a seemingly endless supply of ammunition.

Los Angeles is the birthplace of gangs, but by the 1990s, police in cities like Newark and Chicago, and even communities like Palm Beach and Minot, had begun responding to similar scenes. Like a deadly virus, gangs are mutating and spreading. Today, there are over 30,000 gangs across America and over 800,000 gang members. They are a long way from the Sharks and Jets.

Over the years, the knife has given way to the AK-47, and the rumble has been replaced by the drive-by. And the victims are more diverse and more numerous than just willing gang members. All too often, the ones caught in the crossfire are just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Specialist Linda Schmidt goes deep into gang territory without a badge or gun. She uses a lethal mix of wily street smarts, courage, and determination. She possesses the secret weapons of confidence and caring, and the unnerving manner and moral compass of a grandmother.

There are very few in law enforcement who have gotten so far beneath the surface of gang life. Linda can look at a wall of graffiti and read the hieroglyphics that predict an impending murder. She has leaned over unidentified corpses on the cold steel of the coroner's table and told their life story by interpreting the codes of their tattoos.

Linda's book is a crucial primer for anyone who needs to learn the customs and codes of the gang world. She brings you systematically through the anthropology, psychology and pathology of the gang culture. Ohio is her lab, but the lessons apply to the whole science of this national epidemic.

While her story is part textbook, it is also a collection of human stories of both triumph and tragedy. This book should be a bible for every police chief, social worker, prison official and parent of children at risk. Linda has performed a service few would and even fewer could.

JOHN J. MILLER

## PREFACE

Television, newspapers, magazines, and urban wall graffiti remind us: America *does* have a gang problem.

Denial of the gang problem is definitely *not* a solution. Gangs will not go away; they are a phenomenon of social life among some young people in some cultures. Community leaders and law enforcers can manage, suppress, and educate about gangs, but we cannot credibly claim to eliminate them. City councilmember O'Reilly and FBI gang expert Schmidt are offering ideas in this book that will aid community leaders, police and corrections officials in dealing with the reality of the gang problem.

We need to understand the history of gangs in the modern era, as well as the mentality of gang culture. The gang adherent's choice to join often arises from a series of factors within a different culture than the culture that the elected official, the police chief or the concerned citizens may have known. Crossing that cultural barrier is not easy; understanding the cultural divide is important.

It disserves and misleads the community when public officials announce that all gangs have been eliminated; simply painting over the gang problem in a community is not honest. Claiming success in "eliminating all gangs from our city" is foolish; in practice, it moves the persons who are in the gangs to another area, to a jurisdiction or a neighborhood where someone else doesn't care or doesn't know how to fight them. This book aims to equip the community leaders for action against the gang problem.

This book will help the law enforcement investigator to determine the gang identification, gang education and gang countermeasures that are appropriate to a community. Suppressing the activity of the gangs is the desired outcome. Offering alternate methods of drawing potential members away from gang activity is an essential adjunct for social serv-

ice providers. But the hardened criminal core of a gang is penetrated only with good law enforcement work, and suppressed only with coordinated and sustained enforcement efforts.

The attitude of American law enforcement professionals about gangs has varied over time and over the wide variety of police agencies. The best minds devoted to gang issues have concluded that a coordinated strategy is needed. Police and Federal Bureau of Investigation specialists in gangs have achieved great results by working together. Local police know who the local members of gangs are; where and when they gather; and why the gang problem has arisen in certain conditions within their local communities. Police often lack the resources for an in-depth attack on the problem, and for that role, the FBI provides expert knowledge and the ability to reach across state lines or across the nation to intercept gang movements and illicit activities. It takes longer to set up a major federal prosecution of gang criminal activities because the standards for proof tend to be higher. But the great advantage of coordination is that the federal convictions of a criminal gang will carry heavy sentences to be served in a distant federal prison, with no probation or parole.

This book is a comprehensive guide to problems and solutions. The lessons in this book will allow “train the trainer” programs to be more efficiently conducted. It should be part of the curriculum of training in regions or urban area, as copies of this book are provided to each of the attendees at the training sessions.

L.M.S.  
J.T.O.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Professor O'Reilly wishes to express his sincere thanks to his fellow members of the Gang Initiative Project for the Cincinnati Region. Special thanks are extended to Dr. C. Ronald Huff, University of California–Riverside, the Dean of gang scholarship in America; Dr. Lisa Shoaf, Ohio Department of Public Safety; Vinko Kucinic, Criminal Intelligence Supervisor of the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification & Investigation; and Professor Jeff Monroe of Xavier University, Cincinnati. Excellent research assistance was provided by Don Blair of the University of Cincinnati's Marx Law Library, and student assistants Denise Trauth and Christopher St. Pierre of the College of Law.

Ms. Schmidt wishes to thank the following for their leadership, support, friendship, encouragement, partnership, guidance and mentoring over the years she worked in gang diversion and prevention and into another decade as she returned to the FBI; and they are: Robert Schmidt and our children; Agnes M. Blakeley; Robert "Doc" Enoch; C. Ronald Huff; Alice Palmer; Van A. Harp; Stanley J. Borgia; Mary A. Lentz, Esq.; Anthony M. Delgado; Robert Harris; John McConnaughey; Vinko Kucinic; the members of the Gang Initiative Project; the graduates of the FBI Citizens' Academy program; Joel D. Prantikoff, M.D. and Stephen D. Williger, Esq., Presidents of the FBI Citizens' Academy Alumni Associations of Cincinnati and Cleveland; and, Professor James T. O'Reilly, Co-Author, for his support and guidance on this my first book. And, a special thank you goes to: Mike S., Kim M., Joanne H., Linda K. Cheryl F., Regina S., Doug, Ella F., Fong, Chia, Awatef, Betty-sue, Linda B., Karen M., Margaret and Hans T., Margaret McL., Becky L., and Biff.



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# **GANGS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT**



## Chapter 1

# GANG OVERVIEW: EVOLUTION OF TODAY'S URBAN GANGS

LINDA M. SCHMIDT

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

**I**n this book, we will provide you information on gangs, both statistical and experiential. It is our hope that you will take this information and use it as a starting point in determining your community's actual and potential level of gang activity.

The basic definition of a gang is: a group of three or more persons with a shared goal and sometimes common clothing identifiers and symbols, engaged in criminal activity for the advancement of their gang (criminal enterprise). Over the years this definition has been rewritten and changed many times.

There are gangs throughout the country and internationally. Their presence in a new area, or a newly discovered gang problem, often leads to crippling effects of fear and sometimes to denial. It is denial and fear that are causing problems in our communities. Until each community learns to deal with those effects, we will continue to see a rise in gang violence in our schools, in our communities and in our prisons.

Gangs are about power, prestige, violence, sex, drugs and money. Gangs and drugs are today an inseparable part of each other. Call it whatever you want, but somewhere behind that drug dealer is a gang supplying the product. As we deal with drug problems, we must also be alert to have an active program to deal with gang involvement.

In the chapters that follow there will be discussions on gang cases and best practices used by law enforcement partners in several major cities.

The hope is to expand the use of their best practices so that law enforcement in all 50 states can benefit from their experience.

It is time for law enforcers and elected officials to step out of the box of complacency. It is time to work on making our communities safer through action. We need to work together, at the community level, while we can still manage the gang problem. We cannot stop all of the harmful progression of gangs, but we can bring it down to manageable proportions.

## 1.2 DEFINITIONS

“Gang” is one of the most frightening words in many languages. It alarms elected officials. It may cause law enforcers to stand at the podium and deny the existence of gangs in their own communities. This pattern of denial has been a recurrent theme across the globe for decades. To those of you whose communities are caught in the grip of fearful denial, let us share a reality with you: there are solutions. There are ways to deal more effectively, once we get past the denial and fear stages.

Today gangs are more fluid and more violent than ever. They have gone from the neighborhood, to the region, to the rest of the nation and across national borders. Today we are looking at international gangs. Vancouver receives gang members from Los Angeles; Houston receives gang members from Central American gangs. If we can work internationally with other countries to thwart terrorism, we can certainly do the same with our fight against gangs, both nationally and internationally.

## 1.3 CHANGE AND GANGS

Change is a constant factor in the gang experience. In my work years, I have had the opportunity to meet with gang members, both male and female, from different local and national gangs. When the national gangs moved across the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it wasn't uncommon to see the local gangs representing themselves as “Bloods” for one period of time and then switching and repre-



senting as “Crips,” and back again. The violence level in the streets increased as these national gangs claimed the turf that had once belonged to the neighborhood gangs. Some of the local gangs had been around for decades. Some, due to their own level of criminal activity, age of their leadership, and their intergenerational status, have managed to hold onto their turf. It was also a morphing time for many of the local gangs, as they began partnerships and eventual membership into the national gangs. Law enforcement adapts slowly to change but this aspect of continuous change in gangs is absolutely essential to understand.

#### **1.4 GANGS AND COMMUNITIES**

Many of your community’s residents, taxpayers and voters are raising families in the community without observing the daily signs of the existence of gang activity. The voting-age constituents use your schools, transit, parks and recreation without seeing a gang presence. But their children know about gang activity, because they are the targets of gang recruitment. The children can (and many do) tell their parents about the different gangs, their colors, and the graffiti symbols, that are visible to younger people. Your elected officials respond with alarm to the loss of constituents who move their children out of your cities. Do they leave because they see something you do not, a threat to the future of their children? The reality is that there are gangs in many communities; gangs are fluid and will travel to any community. Their goal is to get as much territory marked as theirs as possible. The best place to do this is in cities that deny the existence of gangs, or simply ignore them.

You don’t have to be in a major urban core to have a gang problem. For example, when the Crips gang came to Ohio in 1992, they didn’t just come into the large cities, but also moved into the small rural areas and suburbs as well, and then spread across the border into the next state. In a rural area, there was one ten-year-old that wanted desperately to be a member of the Crips, so he told the gang leader where he could find a large gun collection, and then he helped them get access to it. He became a Crip, but found himself sentenced to the juvenile detention facility as a result.

On another morning, I received a phone call from the principal of an elementary school in a well-to-do Ohio suburb, asking me to please

come to the school. When I arrived I met three newly initiated and tattooed members of the Crips. They were only nine years old! Denial of the existence of gangs as a threat to local youth is the fertilizer that helps these groups to grow.

### 1.5 GANGS ON THE MOVE

In large cities like Los Angeles, where they have been dealing with the gang problem for a number of decades, some of their gang members are on the run—towards smaller communities such as yours. It is also harder to get rank in a California gang. In the Midwest or in most cities east of California, all that a prospective gang member needs is a tattoo with the Los Angeles area code and you can be a gang leader with a free pass. You won't need to be "jumped into" a gang, you *are* the gang. Members would flock to your gang leadership.

I had the opportunity to interview an arrested member of the Crips in May 2006. He told me that the California gangs were spreading across the country to recruit members, to deal drugs, and to claim new turf. But there was more: these gangs that had begun their heavy push across the U.S. in the early 1990s, were now moving out in order to avoid the harsher penalties in California and the most violent rival California gangs. He stated that California sentencing laws, known as "three strikes and you're out," change the dynamics. He stated that the prison system is run by the gangs, and that it is extremely difficult for an inmate who is not part of one of these gangs to survive. He told me that he was in trouble because family members, especially young males, get pressured by their incarcerated family member to take over their role in the gang while the other member is in jail. This replacement activity makes life easier for the prisoner while he is on the inside; it supposedly provides a free pass for the sibling taking over the duties. While this sounds plausible, this could just be his personal story.

### 1.6 GANG STATISTICS

At this time, it is not possible to define the size of gangs fully in terms of reliable statistics. There is no accurate national count of the number

of gangs or gang members, and estimates vary widely. The reason is simply that many municipalities do not list gang crimes as such. Others do not list the type of identifying tattoo on the arrestees body. And, still others do not note the gang affiliates they were arrested with at the crime scene. Until we have one common reporting instrument for all law enforcement agencies and until it is completed in its entirety, we will not be able to provide a truly accurate data picture of the number of gangs in the country and of the number of gang members.

The current estimates are just that, only estimates. Currently, the FBI Cincinnati Citizens' Academy Alumni Association is spearheading a Gang Initiative Project to include all of Southern Ohio. One of the goals of this project is to work in partnership with law enforcement and universities in the development of a universal statistical gang data collection sheet.

The best indicator of violent crime across the U.S. is the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports. Again, variations in data collection skew the reports. When it comes to collecting gang data, one city will look like it is in the top five for gang violence because they are doing accurate reporting, but that is not a fair assessment. It is skewed because not all cities are collecting or reporting data on gangs. The future will be better as more cities accept the gang reality and begin collecting and reporting the data on a universal gang data collection instrument. Our national ability to manage the gang problem will improve. Statistical website sources are listed in the Appendix.

## **1.7 GANGS AS A PERSONAL AND FAMILY CONCERN**

What do YOU perceive about gangs in your area? A parent and child could walk through their neighborhood for an after dinner walk, and each could have a different experience. The child might experience fear at what he sees; the parent might experience annoyance at the noise or the property damage of the shops they pass with spray-painted walls, the broken beer bottles on the curb and lawn of an elderly resident, or the loud foul language of the group on the corner making unusual hand gestures at the passing cars. If parent and child return home and neither talk about what they saw, one remains ignorant of what is happening in their neighborhood, and the other remains fearful.

Let's say that in this case the parent is so concerned that he or she begins to talk with the child about their walk. "I am concerned about what I saw tonight. What do you think about it?" The child now has an open door. He can either say "nothing" or he can tell the parent what he really saw. For example, the child could say, "Well, that gang on the corner was selling drugs to people in the cars, and the broken 40-ounce beer bottles on the curb were a sign of respect to one of their gang members that was killed last week in a drive-by shooting across town." The parent listens and is shocked. The child waits. The parent says, "...and...?" "Well" says the child, "the spray paint has gotten worse since the shooting. The gang on the corner's graffiti was crossed out and the guys that shot their friend must have put up their graffiti while these guys were sleeping. The guys you saw tonight were throwing up their own gang signs and shouting out their disrespect terms for the other gang. It didn't stop them from selling their drugs though, did it? You know, it's going to get real bad here now. Let's not go for any more walks after dinner." The parent hugs the child, gets up and locks and bolts the doors; closes the curtains and goes to the phone. Who does the parent call?

## 1.8 EVOLUTION OF TODAY'S URBAN GANGS

Frederic Thrasher was one of the first academic researchers to examine this topic, with his landmark 1927 book on the sociology of Chicago's gangs. The more recent scholars including C. Ronald Huff, Jody Miller, and Diego Vigil have added extensive insights, and their research will cite to the work done by other researchers as well. This will help you compare the changes in gangs as experienced by several ethnic groups, including Jewish, Russian, Irish, Italian and other ethnic groups. To summarize, the studies show that before the 1927 study, the immigrant gangs grouped together for protection. They still do today, as when Hispanic/Latino gangs join forces with each other where possible. Sometimes they become bitter enemies and rivals of each other; rival gangs include Mara Salvatrucha 13 and Eighteenth Street, both from Los Angeles. These two gangs only work together if they have no choice, such as against a shared rival.

Understanding how and why the gangs grew to their present form is an interesting study but most law enforcers have too much immediate

work to do an in-depth study of how these basic factors of gang evolution interact with their local gang problem. There is a resource of national and international information readily available to local law enforcement. The FBI can provide extensive training on these gangs to law enforcement at no charge to the law enforcement agencies. The FBI can also provide training on the Safe Streets Initiative, which also offers a law enforcement concerted approach against gangs that includes local, state and federal agencies as partners.

### **1.9 GANGS AS A COMMUNITY CONCERN**

It's hard to ignore gangs and to continue to deny their presence in the community, after the news media starts publicizing the number of young shooting victims. When the morning and evening news lead off with the number of shootings that occurred overnight, and the violence was a drive-by shooting, the victim had been in a drug deal gone bad, or the victim was the victim of an aggravated assault, then this probably involves gang activity. If the neighborhood where the shooting happened is one that is frequently in the news for its high level of youth violence, then that is another indicator that a gang problem exists. If the television reporter is shown interviewing a group of young men about the shooting, and they are all dressed alike with tattoos of their gang visible on television, then that is an excellent indication that this had been a gang shooting.

When there is graffiti up on the walls of buildings in the community, and one gang has crossed out the other gang's graffiti and replaced it with their own graffiti symbols and colors, then that is an indicator that violence could escalate. It is an act of extreme disrespect to cross out another gang's graffiti—and these acts will result in a high level of violence. The violence, depending on which gang is involved, could result in drive-by or other shootings. But, if you do not have an increase in violence that corresponds to the graffiti message, then look at other factors. What movies, documentaries, news stories, and books, have recently been released? Did the graffiti come from one of these? Keep watch that the non-member gang "wannabes" aren't starting something that will draw the real gang to attack them. Remove the graffiti after you photograph, date and log it.