

*Young gangsters distort Golden Rule:
Do unto others for what they did to you.*



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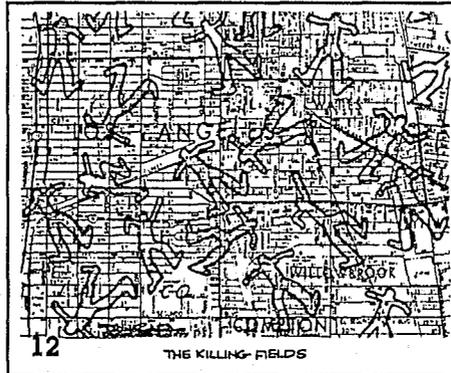
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About the cover:
 Gang "brothers" pose for this portrait, proudly flashing their gang hand sign. Photograph by Merrick Morton.

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 ACQUISITIONS

Be a "fly on the wall" at an unusually civilized meeting between members of LA's most notorious rival gangs — the Crips and the Bloods. Get ready for an education.

When you're a Crip (or a Blood)

The drive-by killing is the sometime sport and occasional initiation rite of city gangs. From the comfort of a passing car, the itinerant killer simply shoots down a member of a rival gang or an innocent bystander. Especially common among LA's Bloods and Crips, the drive-by killing is the parable around which every telling of the gang story revolves. Beyond that lies a haze of images: million-dollar drug deals, ominous graffiti, and colorfully dressed marauders armed with Uzis. The sociologists tell us that gang culture is the flower on the vine of single-parent life in the ghetto, the logical result of society's indifference. It would be hard to write a morality play more likely to strike terror into the hearts of the middle class.

Many questions, though, go unasked. Who, really, are these people? What urges them to join gangs? What are their days like? To answer these questions, *Harper's Magazine* recently asked Leon Bing, a journalist who has established relations with the gangs, to convene a meeting between two Bloods and two Crips and to talk with them about the world in which the drive-by killing is an admirable act.

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The following forum is based on a discussion held at the Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center in south-central Los Angeles. Parole Officer Velma V. Stevens assisted in the arrangements. Leon Bing served as moderator.

LEON BING is a Los Angeles-based journalist. She is currently writing a book about teenage life in Los Angeles.

L'L MONSTER was a member of the Eight-Trey Gangsters set of the Crips. He is twenty-three years old and currently on probation; he has served time for first-degree murder, four counts of attempted murder, and two counts of armed robbery.

RAT-NECK was a member of the 107-Hoover Crips. He is twenty-eight years old and currently on probation after serving time for attempted murder, robbery with intent to commit grave bodily harm, assault and battery, burglary, and carrying concealed weapons.

TEE RODGERS founded the first Los Angeles chapter of the Chicago-based Blackstone Rangers, affiliated with the Bloods. He is currently the resident "gangologist" and conflict specialist at Survival Education for Life and Family, Inc., and an actor and lecturer.

B-DOG is a pseudonym for a twenty-three-year-old member of the Van Ness Gangsters set of the Bloods. After this forum was held, his telephone was disconnected, and he could not be located to supply biographical information.

Getting jumped in

LEON BING: Imagine that I'm a thirteen-year-old guy, and I want to get into a gang. How do I go about it? Am I the right age?

L'L MONSTER: There's no age limit. It depends on your status coming into it. It's like, some people get jumped in, some people don't.

BING: Jumped in?

L'L MONSTER: Beat up.

B-DOG: Either beat up or put some work in.

RAT-NECK: Put some work in, that's mandatory, you know, a little mis [misdemeanor] — small type of thing, you know. It's like this: say I get this guy comin' up and he says, "Hey, Cuz, I wanna be from the set." Then I'm like, "Well, what you *about*, man? I don't know you — you might be a punk." So I might send him somewhere, let him go and manipulate, send him out on a burg' or —

BING: — is that a burglary?

L'L MONSTER: Yeah. But then, you might know some person who's got a little juice, and, like, I might say, "You don't got to go through that, come on

with me. You *from* the set."

TEE RODGERS: If you click with somebody that's already from a set, then you clicked up, or under his wing, you his protege, and you get a ride in. Now, even though you get a ride in, there's gonna come a time when you got to stand alone and hold your own.

BING: Stand alone and hold your own? Does that mean I might have to steal a car or beat up somebody or commit a burglary?

RAT-NECK: Right.

BING: Is there another way?

RAT-NECK: You can be good from the shoulders.

LI'L MONSTER: Yeah. Fighting.

TEE: That's one of *the* best ways. A homeboy says:
I'm young and mean and my mind's more keen
And I've earned a rep with my hands
And I'm eager to compete with the bangers on the street
'Cause I've got ambitious plans.

LI'L MONSTER: See, when Tee was comin' up — he's *first* generation and we *second* generation. Now, if he saw me, he wouldn't be comin' from the pants pocket with a gat or a knife, he'd be comin' from his shoulders like a fighter. That's what it was established on. Then, later on, come a whole bunch of cowards that *can't* come from the shoulders, so they come from the pocket —

RAT-NECK: — he unloads!

BING: What's the most popular weaponry?

B-DOG: Whatever you get your hands on.

TEE: Keep in mind we don't have no target ranges where we get prolific with these guns.

B-DOG: Shoot 'til you out of bullets, then back up.

RAT-NECK: Bullet ain't got no name, hit whatever it hit.

TEE: Wait a minute! That was a hell of a question, 'cause the mentality of the people that gonna read this be thinkin' —

LI'L MONSTER: — every gang member walks around with that type of gun —

TEE: — and I can hear the police chief saying, "That's why we need bazookas!" Look, put it on the record that everybody ain't got a bazooka — or an Uzi. Okay?

BING: It's all on the record.

B-DOG: There *are* some people still believe in .22s.

TEE: Or ice picks. And don't forget the bat.

RAT-NECK: And the lock in the sock!

BING: Are there little peewees, say, nine- to ten-year-olds, in the sets?

RAT-NECK: Yeah, but we say "Li'l Loc" or "Li'l Homie" or "Baby Homie." We never use "peewee" because then people think you're a Mexican. Mexicans say "peewee."

TEE: If it's a Blood set, they use a *k* instead of a *c*. Li'l lok with a *k*. See, Bloods don't say *c*'s and Crips don't say *b*'s. To a Blood, a cigarette is a "bigarette." And Crips don't say "because," they say "cecause."

BING: What prompted you to join, Li'l Monster?

LI'L MONSTER: Say we're white and

we're rich. We're in high school and we been buddies since grammar school. And we all decide to go to the same *college*. Well, *we* all on the same street, all those years, and we all just decide to —

RAT-NECK: — join the gang.

TEE: What I think is formulating here is that human nature wants to be accepted. A human being gives less of a damn what he is accepted into. At that age — eleven to seventeen — all kids want to belong. They are un-people.

BING: If you move — can you join another set?

LI'L MONSTER: A couple weeks ago I was talking to a friend 'bout this guy — I'll call him "Iceman." He used to be from Eight-Trey, but he moved to Watts. Now he's a Bounty Hunter.

B-DOG: Boy, that stinks, you know?

BING: He went from the Crips to the Bloods?

LI'L MONSTER: Yeah. And he almost lost his life.

TEE: When you switch sets, when you go from Cuz to Blood, or Blood to Cuz, there's a jacket on you, and you are really pushed to prove yourself for that set. Sometimes the set approves it, and other times they cast you out. If you don't have loyalty to the *first* set you belong to, what makes you think that you gonna be loyal to us? That's just too much *information*. We kickin' it, we hangin', bargin', and slangin'. But who are you, and where are you *really* at? Where your *heart* at?

B-DOG: Perpetrated is what he is!

BING: What does that mean?

TEE: A perpetrator is a fraud, a bullshitter.

CRIPS AND BLOODS

BING: How can someone prove himself?

L'I'L MONSTER: All right, like the cat Icedman. They might say, "To prove yourself as a Bounty Hunter you go hit somebody from Eight-Trey."

B-DOG: If you got that much love.

BING: Hit somebody from the very set he was in?

RAT-NECK: Yeah. Then his loyalty is there.

BING: But is it really? Wouldn't someone say, "Hey, he hit his homeboy, what's to say he won't hit us if he changes his mind again?"

TEE: Look, when he changes sets, he's already got a jacket. And when he goes back and takes somebody else out, that cuts all ties, all love.

B-DOG: Can't go to no 'hood. Can't go nowhere.

RAT-NECK: There it is.

TEE: The highest honor you can give for your set is death. When you die, when you go out in a blaze of glory, you are respected. When you kill for your set, you earn your stripes — you put work in.

RAT-NECK: But once you a Crip — no matter what — you can't get out. No matter what, woo-wah-wham, you still there. I can leave here for five years. Then I gets out of jail, I gets a new haircut, new everything. Then, "Hey, there goes Rat-Neck!" You can't hide your face. You can't hide nothin'! All that immunity stuff — that's trash. Nobody forgets you.

TEE: That's how it goes. Just like LAPD — once he retire, that fool still the police! He's still strapped, carrying a gun. He's *always* a cop. Same with

us. If you know the words, sing along: "When you're a Jet, you're a Jet all the way, from your first cigarette to your last dying day."

L'I'L MONSTER: There you go.

Hangin', Bangin', Slangin'

BING: Once you're a Blood or a Crip, do you dress differently? We hear about guys with their jeans riding low, their underwear showing up top, wearing colors, and having a certain attitude.

TEE: A brother will get up, take his time, spray his hair, put his French braids in, fold his rag, press his Pendleton or his khaki top, put creases in his pants, lace his shoes, and hit the streets.

L'I'L MONSTER: He's dressed to go get busy!

TEE: He's dressed, pressed, he's down!

BING: Is that the way you dress after you're in?

TEE: The reason a lot of brothers wear khaki and house slippers is because it's cheap and comfortable.

B-DOG: Ain't no dress code nowadays.

L'I'L MONSTER: Look, Rat-Neck got on a blue hat, I got on this hat, we Crips. B-Dog's a Blood: he got red stripes on his shoes, and *that* is that. Now I can be in the mall, look at his shoes, and know he's a Blood. He can look at *my* shoes — these B-K's I got on — and say, "He's a Crip."

RAT-NECK: But then again, might be none of that. Might just be ordinary guys.

BING: I've always thought that B-K stands for "Blood Killers" and that's why Crips wear them.

L'I'L MONSTER: It stands for British

Knights. I don't buy my clothes because they blue. My jacket and my car is red and white. I wear the colors I want to wear. I don't have no blue rag in my pocket. I don't have no blue rubber bands in my hair. But I can be walking down the street and, nine times out of ten, the police gonna hem me up, label me a gangbanger —

RAT-NECK: — or a dope dealer.

L'I'L MONSTER: There's only one look that you got to have. Especially to the police. You got to look black. *That's* the look. Now B-Dog here's a Blood, and he doesn't even have to be gangbanging because if I'm in a mall with some of my homeboys, nine times out of ten we gonna look at him *crazy*. That's how you know. He don't have to have no red on, we gonna look at him *crazy*. *That's* the mentality.

TEE: Let me give up this, and you correct me if I'm wrong: police officers can recognize police officers, athletes can recognize athletes, gay people can recognize gay people. Well, we can recognize each other. It's simple.

BING: When someone insults you, what happens?

L'I'L MONSTER: Depends on what he saying.

BING: Say he calls you "crab" or "E-ricket." Or, if you're a Blood, he calls you a "slob." These are fighting words, aren't they?

RAT-NECK: It's really just words. Words anybody use. But really, a lot of that word stuff don't get people going nowadays.

L'I'L MONSTER: That's right.

TEE: There was a time when you could say something about somebody's mama, and you got to fight. Not so anymore.

L'I'L MONSTER: Now just ignore the fool.

TEE: But if somebody say, "---- your dead homeboys," oh, *now* we got a problem.

L'I'L MONSTER: Yeah, that's right.

TEE: Somebody call me "oo-lah" or "slob," my rebuttal to that is "I'm a super lok-ed out Blood." There's always a cap back, see what I'm saying? But when you get down to the basics, like, "---- your dead homeboy," and you *name* the homeboy, that is death. Oh man, we got to take *this* to the grave.

BING: Well, let's say you're with your homeboys and someone does say, "---- your dead homeboys." What happens then?

B-DOG: That's it. The question of the matter is on, right there, *wherever* you at.

L'I'L MONSTER: He's dead. And if he's not, he's gonna —

B-DOG: — wish he was.

BING: What does that mean?

TEE: I cannot believe the readers of this magazine are that naive. The point of the matter is, if he disrespects the dead homeboys, he is gonna get got. Period. Now let your imagination run free; Steven Spielberg does it.

BING: Why this intensity?

TEE: Because there's something called dedication that we got to get into — dedication to the gang mentality — and understanding where it's coming from. It's like this: there's this barrel, okay? All of us are in it together, and we all want the same thing. But some of us are not so highly motivated to be educated. So we have to get ours from the blood, the sweat, and the tears of

the street. And if a homeboy rises up — and it is not so much jealousy as it is the fear of him *leaving* me — I want to come up *with* him, but when he reaches the top of the barrel, I grab him by the pants leg and I —

TEE and L'I'L MONSTER: — pull him back down.

TEE: It's not that I don't want to see you go home, but *take me with you!* As a man, I'm standing alone as an individual. But I can't say that to him! I got that manly pride that won't let me break down and say, "Man, I'm scared! Take me with you — I want to go with you!" Now, inside this barrel, we are in there so tight that every time we turn around we are smelling somebody's stinky breath. There's so many people, I got to leave my community to change my mind!

RAT-NECK: Yeah!

TEE: That's how strong peer pressure is! It's that crab-in-the-barrel syndrome. We are just packed in, but I want to feel good. So how? By bustin' a nut. So I ---- my broad, she get pregnant, and now I got *another* baby. So we in there even tighter. I here, in this room, we can relax, we can kick it, we can laugh, we can say, "Well, homeboy from Hoover's all right." Because we in a setting now, and nobody's saying, "I DON'T LIKE HIM!" You know what I'm saying? We can't just sit down and enjoy each other and say, "Are you a man? Do you cut? Do you bleed? Do you cry? Do you die?" There's nowhere where we can go and just experience each other as people. And then, when we *do* do that, everybody's strapped.

RAT-NECK: Seems like nothin' else...

BING: You make it sound inescapable. What would you tell someone coming along? What would you tell a younger brother?

RAT-NECK: I had a younger brother, fourteen years old. He's dead now, but we never did talk about it. He was a Blood and I am a Crip, and I *know* what time it is. I couldn't socialize with him on what he do. All he could do is ask me certain things, like, "Hey, bro, do you think I'm doing the right thing?" And, well, all I could say is, "Hey, man, choose what you wanna be. What can I do? I love you, but what do I look like, goin' to my mama, tellin' her I *smoked* you, *smoked* my brother? What I look like? But why should I neglect you because you from there? Can't do that. You my love." And if I don't care about my love, and I don't care about my brother, then I don't care about my mama. And then you're out, when you don't care about your mama.

Like some people say, "I don't give a ----, I'll *smoke* my mama!" Well, you know, that's stupidity.

BING: I realize that loyalty is paramount. But what I want to know is, if a rival set has it out for someone, does it always mean death?

L'I'L MONSTER: Before anybody go shooting, it's going to be, "What is the problem?" Then we are going to find the root of the problem. "Do you personally have something against Eight-Trey?" You say, "No, I just don't like what one of your homeboys did." Then you all beat him up.

B-DOG: Beat him up, yeah.

L'I'L MONSTER: Just head it up. Ain't nobody else going to get in this.

BING: Head it up?

L'I'L MONSTER: Fight. One on one. You know, head up. And then it's over.

BING: Are you friends after that?

L'I'L MONSTER: Well, you not sending each other Christmas cards.

CRIPS AND BLOODS

BING: What if you just drive through another gang's turf? Are you in danger?

L'L MONSTER: Yeah. I mean, I could be sitting at a light, and somebody say, "That's that fool, Li'l Monster," and they start shooting. That could be anywhere. Bam! Bam! Bam!

BING: Are you targeted by reputation?

L'L MONSTER: Yeah. That's my worst fear, to be sitting at a light.

B-DOG: That's one of mine, too.

L'L MONSTER: So I don't stop. I don't pull up right behind a car. And I am always looking around.

B-DOG: Always looking.

L'L MONSTER: That's my worst fear because *we* did so much of it. You know, you pull up, man, block him in, and —

B-DOG: — that was it.

L'L MONSTER: They put in work. That is my worst fear. And if you ever ride with me, you notice I always position myself where there is a curb. That middle lane is no-man's-land.

B-DOG: That's dangerous.

L'L MONSTER: You know how they say, "Look out for the other guy"? Well, I *am* the other guy. Get out of my way. Give me the starting position. You know, because I can — phew! Claustrophobia. I don't *never* want that to happen to me, just to be sitting at the light and they take your whole head off.

BING: Say everybody's fired up to get somebody from an enemy set, but there's this young kid who says, "I can't do that. I don't feel right about it — this is a friend of mine." What's going to happen?

L'L MONSTER: There's many ways that it can be dealt with. Everybody can disown him, or everybody can just say, "Okay, *fine*, but you gotta do something else." See what I'm saying?

B-DOG: But he's gonna be disciplined one way or the other.

RAT-NECK: 'Cause he know everything, man, and he think he gonna ride on up outta here?

L'L MONSTER: So you go home and say, "Yeah, mama. I got out, mama. Everything's cool." And mama looking at *you* like — "Son, are you sure?" 'Cause she knows damn well they ain't gonna let you go that easy.

TEE: Now that's the flip side to those who say, "I smoke *anybody* — I'll smoke my mama!" We, as homeboys, look at him and say, "Your mama carried you nine months and if you'll kill your mama, I know you don't give two shakes of a rat's rectum about me!"

RAT-NECK: He'll kill me. He'll smoke me.

BING: What's going to happen in 1989? Los Angeles has the highest body count ever. More deaths than in Ireland.

RAT-NECK: Not more than New York. In New York they kill you for just a penny. I took a trip to New York one time. This guy wanted me to see what it was like.

BING: You mean gang life in New York City?

RAT-NECK: No, to see how people live — gang life, the whole environment, the whole everything. I was there for two days, right? He took us to Queens, Harlem, the Bronx — everywhere. We talked about going out strapped. He said, "You can't go out there strapped! What's wrong with you?" But I say I gotta let 'em know what time it is and

carry *something*, you know, 'cause we don't really know what's going on in New York. But we hear so *much* about New York, how they operate, how rough it's supposed to be. So, okay, we decide we gonna carry a buck knife — something. So we kickin', walkin', cruisin' the street, everything. And then I see a homeboy standin' right here next to me.

And he come up to us and he take three pennies, shake 'em, and throw 'em down in front of his shoe. We, like, what is this? Is it, you got a beef? Like, he knew we weren't from there. So we not lookin' at him, but, like, why he throw three pennies down there? Like, was it, "Get off our turf"? But we didn't understand his language. Out here, it's like, "What's happenin'? What's up, Cuz? What's up, Blood?" But in New York, you lookin' at the damn pennies, and maybe he come back and hit you. Maybe if you pick up the pennies, then you got a beef with him. Maybe if you don't pick 'em up, then you supposed to walk off. So we walks off and leaves the Bronx and goes to Harlem.

Oh, man — *that's* what you call a gutter. You get to lookin' around there and thinking, "These my people? Livin' like *this*? Livin' in a cardboard box?" I mean, Skid Row got it goin' *on* next to Harlem. Skid Row look like *Hollywood* to them.

Kickin' it

BING: Did you vote in the last election?

TEE: Yeah, I voted. But look at the choice I had.

BING: Why didn't you vote for Jesse in the primary?

TEE: Everybody I know voted for Jesse, but —

B-DOG: — Jesse was out.

RAT-NECK: It's different for us. Like,

what's that guy's name shot President Reagan? What happened to that guy?
Nothin'!

BING: He's in prison.

L'L MONSTER: Oh no he's not. He's in a *hospital*.

TEE: They're *studyin'* him.

RAT-NECK: See, they did that to cover him. They say he retarded or something.

B-DOG: See, if I had shot Reagan, would they have put *me* in a mental facility?

RAT-NECK: They would have put you away right there where you shot him. Bam — judge, jury, executioner.

TEE: Why is it they always study white folks when they do heinous crimes, but they never study us? *We* got black psychiatrists.

BING: What about all this killing, then?

TEE: I'm gonna shut up now, because the way the questions are coming, you portray us as animals. Gangbanging is a way of life. You got to touch it, smell it, feel it. Hearing the anger, the frustration, and the desperation of all of us only adds to what the media's been saying — and it's worse, coming out of *our* mouths. There has to be questions directed with an understanding of our point of view. Sorry.

BING: All right. Ask one.

TEE: It's not my interview.

BING: I'm trying to understand your motives. Let me ask a different question: If a homeboy is killed, how is the funeral conducted?

TEE: You got four different sets here in this room, and each set has its own

rules and regulations.

RAT-NECK: Okay, like, my little brother just got killed. You talkin' funeralwise, right? At this funeral, Bloods *and* Crips was there. But didn't nobody wear nothin', just suits. *Every* funeral you go to is not really colors.

TEE: Thank you! Yeah!

RAT-NECK: You just going to give your last respect. Like my little brother, it really tripped me out, the way I seen a big "*B*" of flowers with red roses in it, and one tiny *blue* thing they brought. And these were *Bloods!* — Like one of my homeboys asked me, "What's happenin', Rat?" and I said, "Hey, man — you tell *me*." And I looked around, saw some other guys there, you know? They ain't *us*, but they came and showed respect, so — move back. Couple of them walked by us, looked at us, and said, "That's our homeboy, that's Rat-Neck's brother."

When he got killed, you know, I had a whole lot of animosity. I'd smoke any one of 'em, but one thing — one thing about it — *it wasn't black people who did it*. That's the one thing that didn't make me click too much. Now, if a black person woulda did it, ain't no tellin' where I'd be right now, or what I'd do, or how I'd feel. I'd be so confused I might just straight out --- my job, my wife, my kid, whatever, and say, "I don't give a --- about you — bro got killed!"

BING: How did he get killed?

RAT-NECK: I don't really know the whole rundown.

TEE: What Rat-Neck's saying is the respect. We buried three of our own yesterday, and for each one we went to the mother to see how *she* wanted it --

L'L MONSTER: — how she wanted it! That's it!

TEE: 'Cause the mother carried that baby for nine months — that's her *child*. It's *her* family, and we're the extended family. She got the first rights on what goes on there. It's the respect factor that lies there, and if the mother says there's no colors, you better believe ain't no colors!

RAT-NECK: And no cartridges in the coffin.

TEE: If he went out in a blaze of glory, and his mama say, "You all bury him like you want to bury him" — oh, then we *do* it.

BING: How would that be?

TEE: If he was a baller — you know what I'm saying — then everybody get suited and booted.

BING: Do you mean a sea of colors?

EVERYONE: NO! Suits and ties! Shined shoes!

L'L MONSTER: Jump in the silk!

TEE: We own suits, you know! Brooks Brothers, C and R Clothiers! And some of the shit is tailored!

BING: You mention your mothers a lot, and I sense a love that's very real. If you do love your moms so much and you kill each other, then it has to be the mothers who ultimately suffer the worst pain. How do you justify that?

B-DOG: Your mother gonna suffer while you living, anyway. While you out there gangbanging, she's suffering. My mother's suffering right now. All my brothers in jail.

RAT-NECK: My mother's sufferin', sittin' in her living room, and maybe there's a bullet comin' in the window.

BING: What do you say to your mother when she says, "All your brothers are in jail, and you're out there in danger"?

CRIPS AND BLOODS

B-DOG: We don't even get *into* that no more.

RAT-NECK: She probably don't think about that at all — just so she can cope with it.

B-DOG: Me and my mother don't discuss that no more, because I been into this for so long, you know. When me and my mother be together, we try to be happy. We don't talk about the gang situation.

L'L MONSTER: Me and my mother are real tight, you know? We talk like sister and brother. I don't try to justify myself to her — any more than she tries to justify *her* work or how she makes her money to me. What I do *may* come back to hurt her, but what *she* does may also come back to hurt me. Say I'm thirteen and I'm staying with my mother, and she goes off on her boss and loses her job — how does she justify that to *me*?

BING: Well, the loss of a job is not quite the same as an actively dangerous lifestyle in the streets, wouldn't you agree?

TEE: "An actively dangerous lifestyle" — okay, here we go. "Woman" is a term that means "of man." *Wo-man*. My mother raised me, true enough. Okay? And she was married. There was a male figure in the house. But I never accepted him as my father. My mother can only teach me so much 'bout being a man-child in the Promised Land. If, after that, there is nothing for me to take pride in, then I enter into manhood backwards, and I stand there, a warrior strong and proud. But there is no outlet for that energy, for me or my brothers, so *we turn on each other*.

So, Mom sends us to the show, and all we get is Clint Eastwood, *Superfly*, and *Sweet Sweet Bad Ass*. Now what goes up on the silver screen come down into the streets, and now you got a homeboy. And mama says, "I don't

want you to go to your grave as a slave for the minimum wage." So you say, "I am going to go get us something, make this better, pay the rent."

The first thing a successful athlete does — and you can check me out — is buy his mama a big house. That's what we want. And if we have to get it from the streets, that's where we go.

BING: Why?

TEE: It's the same *everywhere*. A sorority, a fraternity, the Girl Scouts, camping club, hiking club, LAPD, the Los Angeles Raiders are all the same. Everything that you find in those groups and institutions you find in a gang.

BING: So are you saying there's no difference between the motives of you guys joining a gang and, say, a young WASP joining a fraternity?

RAT-NECK: You got a lot of gangbangers out there who are smart. They want it. They *got* what it takes. But the difference is they got no money.

TEE: I know a homie who had a scholarship to USC. But he left school because he found prejudice *alive* in America, and it cut him out. He said, "I don't have to stand here and take this. As a matter of fact, you owe my great-grandfather forty acres and a mule."

L'L MONSTER: Forget the mule, just give me the forty acres.

TEE: So he took to the streets. He got a Ph.D. from SWU. That's a Pimp and Hustler Degree from Sidewalk University.

BING: If it went the other way, what would your life be like?

RAT-NECK: I'm really a hard working man. I make bed mattresses now, but I would like to straight out be an engineer, or give me a day-care center with little kids coming through, and get me

away as far as I can. All I want to do is be myself and not perpetrate myself, try not to perpetrate my black people. Just give me a job, give me a nice house — everybody dream of a nice home — and let me deal with it.

BING: And how do drugs figure into this?

L'L MONSTER: Wait a minute. I just want to slide in for a minute. I want to set the record straight. People think gangs and drugs go hand in hand, but they don't. If I sell drugs, does that make me a gangbanger? No. If I gangbang, does that make me sell drugs? No. See, for white people — and I am not saying for all white people, just like what I say about black people is not for all black people — they go for college, the steppingstone to what they want to get. And some black people look to drugs as a steppingstone to get the same thing.

B-DOG: They want to live better. To buy what they want. To get a house.

RAT-NECK: Not worry about where the next meal come from.

TEE: To live comfortable and get a slice of American Pie, the American Dream.

B-DOG: There it is.

TEE: The Army came out with a slogan: "Be all you can be." And that's it.

We all want the same thing. We've been taught by television, the silver screen, to grow up and have a chicken in every pot, two Chevys, 2.3 kids in the family. So we have been taught the same thing that you have been taught, but there is certain things that we can hold on to and other things that — we see them, but we just cannot reach them. Most of us are dealing with the reality of surviving as opposed to, "Well, my dad will take care of it."

BING: Are you saying that gangbanging

is just another version of the American Dream?

LPL MONSTER: It's like this. You got the American Dream over there, and you reaching for it. But you can't get it. And you got dope right here, real close. You can grab it easy. Dealing with the closer one, you might possibly make enough money to grab the other one. Then you throw away the dope. That's a big *if* now.

BING: Seriously, does anybody ever stop dealing?

B-DOG: If you was making a million dollars off of drugs, you know what I'm saying, are you gonna give that up for a legitimate business?

TEE: This goes back to it. You started out for need, and now you stuck in it because of greed. That's when you play your life away. There comes a time when you have to stop playing, but as far as the streets go, you are a *street player*. Now there may come a time when you say, all right, I've played, I've had time in the gang, now I got to raise up. But if you is so greedy that you cannot smell the coffee, then you're cooked.

BING: But if you do get out, do you always have to come back when your homeboys call?

LPL MONSTER: It ain't like you gonna be called upon every month.

B-DOG: But if you gets called, then you must be needed, and you must come.

LPL MONSTER: It's like this — and I don't care who you are, where you started, or how far you got — you *never* forget where you come from.

TEE: That's it.

B-DOG: You *never* forget where you come from. □

Gangster's slang glossary

Baller: a gangbanger who is making money; also *high roller*

Cap: a retort

Click up: to get along well with a homeboy

Crab: insulting term for a Crip; also *E-ricket*

Cuz: alternative name for a Crip; often used in a greeting, e.g., "What's up, Cuz?"

Down: to do right by your homeboys; to live up to expectations; to protect your turf, e.g., "It's the job of the homeboys to be down for the 'hood.'"

Gangbanging: the activities of a gang

Gar: gun

Give it up: to admit to something

Hangin', bangin', and slangin': to be out with the homeboys, talking the talk, walking the walk; slangin' comes from "slinging" or selling dope

Head up: to fight someone one-on-one

Hemmed up: to be hassled or arrested by the police

'Hood: neighborhood; turf

Homeboy: anyone from the same neighborhood or gang; a friend or an accepted person; in a larger sense, a person from the inner city; also *homie*

Jacket: a record or a reputation, both within the gang and at the police station

Jumped in: initiated into a gang; getting jumped in typically entails being beaten up by the set members

Kickin' it: kicking back, relaxing with your homeboys

Loc-ed out: also *lok-ed out*; from "loco," meaning ready and willing to do anything

Make a move: commit a crime; also manipulate

Mark: someone afraid to commit a crime; also punk

O.G.: an abbreviation for Original Gangster; i.e., a gang member who has been in the set for a long time and has made his name

Oo-lah: insulting term for a Blood; also *slob*

Perpetrate: betray your homeboys; bring shame on yourself and your set

Put in work: any perilous activity from fighting to murder that benefits the set or the gang

Set: any of the various neighborhood gangs that fit within the larger framework of Bloods and Crips

Smoke: to kill someone

Top it off: to get along well with someone; reach an understanding