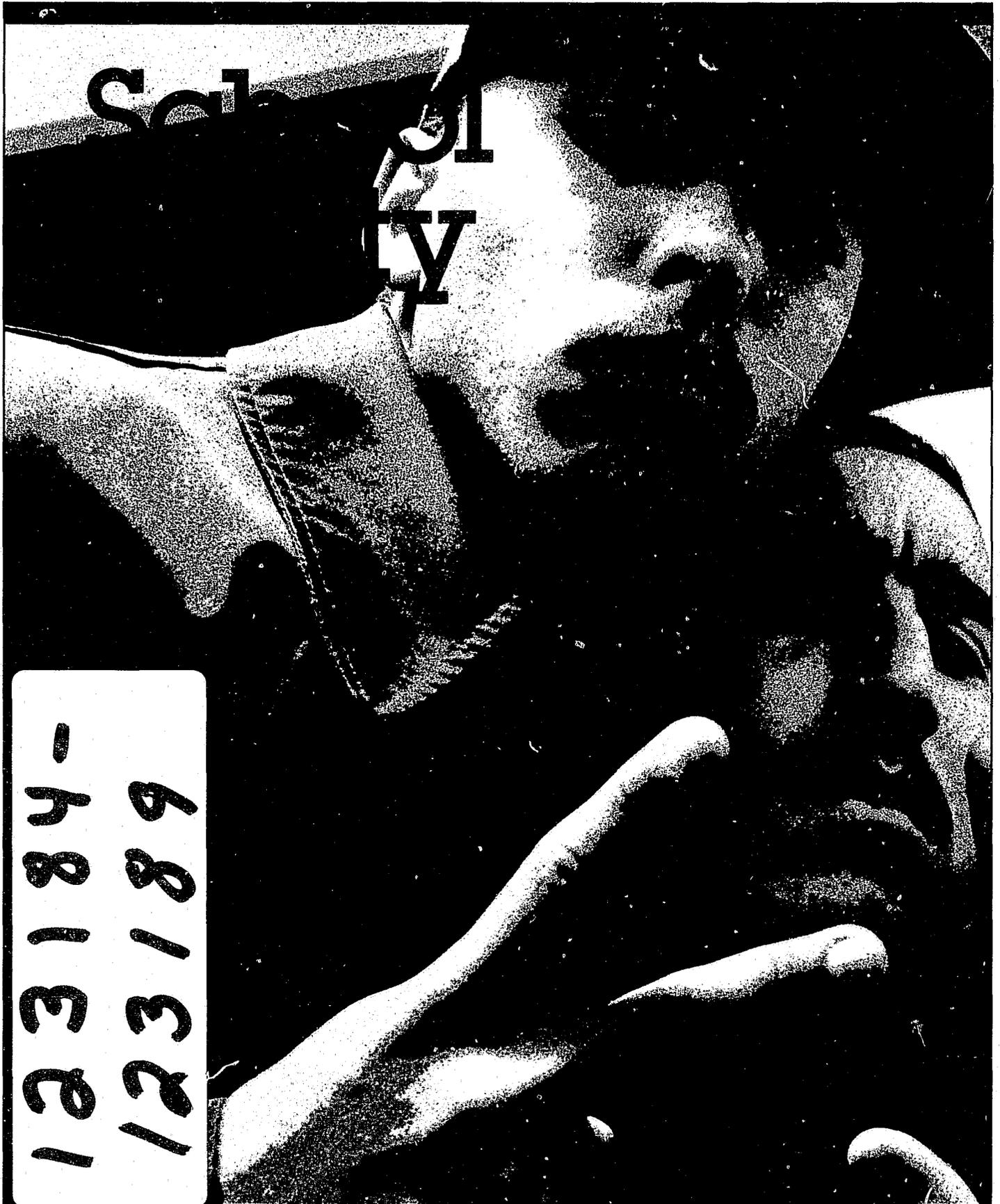


*Young gangsters distort Golden Rule:
Do unto others for what they did to you.*



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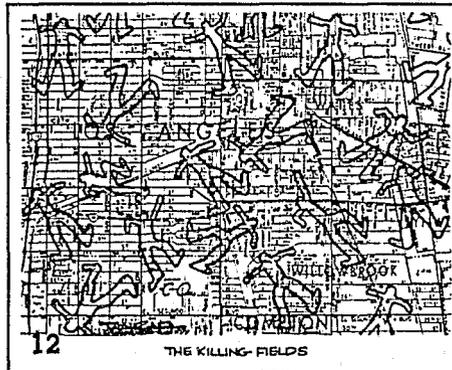
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About the cover:
 Gang "brothers" pose for this portrait, proudly flashing their gang hand sign. Photograph by Merrick Morton.

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 SEP 28 1989
 ACQUISITIONS

BY RONALD D. STEPHENS

Now better organized, still brutally violent and motivated by drug money, young gangsters are terrorizing neighborhood street corners and schoolyards.

Gangs, guns and drugs

Although youth gangs have been a part of American life since the early 18th century, today's gangs pose a greater threat to public safety and order than at any time in recent history. Youth gangs, which at one time had primarily a social basis for their organization and existence, now are motivated by violence, extortion, intimidation, and the illegal trafficking of drugs and weapons.

In Los Angeles alone, more than 450 gang-related killings occurred in 1988 and preliminary figures for 1989 indicate an upswing in those statistics. As the killings increase, so does the membership of the gangs. New York has 50 gangs and about 5,000 members. Los Angeles has more than 600 gangs with about 70,000 members. Chicago has 120 gangs with 15,000 members. Miami has had a 1,000 percent increase in gangs and gang membership over the past five years; the total now stands at 64 gangs and 3,500 members. And youth gangs are not simply a big city or inner-city problem — they are spreading rapidly to a host of mid-size and even smaller communities.

However, educators, law enforcers, legislators, judges, prosecutors, community leaders and others are in a unique position to stem this treacherous trend that is spreading across America.

Ronald D. Stephens is executive director for NSSC.

School involvement with youth gangs

In 1988, the National School Safety Center brought together superintendents and their representatives from 17 of the nation's largest and most prominent school districts. They were asked: What are your most significant school safety problems? Their answer: Drugs, gangs, and weapons in schools, in that order. Each issue is intricately related, since gangs market drugs and routinely use guns as the tools of their trade.

Schools get involved with youth gangs for several reasons. First, many gang members and potential gang members attend school, so schools have become prime recruiting grounds. Second, the gang members who go to school often stake out specific areas as their turf, which can lead to violence on the campus. One gang member even said, "The reason I go to school is to sell drugs."

In one Los Angeles high school, for instance, a local gang claimed a specific public telephone booth as its turf. When a non-gang member used it, the ensuing argument was settled by a gun, resulting in a student's death. After the student was killed, 35 students withdrew from school because of fear.

Gang members also extort fees from other students for the opportunity to use certain school facilities, to walk to and from school, or for the privilege of protection.

Educators' strategies

The issue of gangs in school took on a special significance for the Los Angeles Unified School District in spring 1988, when a 13-year-old boy was confronted by a group of Crips members for wearing a blue baseball cap to school. Since blue is the Crips' color, they told the boy he couldn't wear the hat to school. He wore it anyway. In retaliation, Crips gang members drove by his house and unloaded 26 rounds from an AK-47, killing the boy's father and his 6-year-old sister.

This event spurred school officials to develop an anti-gang curriculum to be used in elementary schools. The program, developed under the leadership of Dr. Lilia "Lulu" Lopez, will be implemented this fall. Called Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT), it focuses on building positive self-esteem, achieving goals and practicing group problem solving. The Los Angeles County Sheriff also has developed an anti-gang curriculum modeled after the Substance Abuse and Narcotics Education (SANE) program.

Schools can do a number of things to reduce the level of gang activity on campus. Most importantly, administrators should establish clear behavior guidelines that specifically prohibit gang activity and that encourage responsible citizenship. Several school districts forbid the wearing of any gang

strong disapproval of gang activities can help protect itself. In addition, private citizens must decide on their community's priorities, a question that can be answered by voting on a particular ballot measure or by getting involved in governmental decision-making.

"Individuals set the tone, not only as to what is acceptable behavior in their community, but what level of enforcement, education and governmental intervention they find acceptable," says LAPD's Parks. "They cannot leave it in the hands of the professionals or the politicians — they must take an active role. As most of us grew up, someone in the neighborhood set the tone about what was acceptable. If you made noise after a certain hour, people in the neighborhood — not the police — came to you and said, 'That's not acceptable conduct.' Now a certain level of apathy has set in and people sit back and say, 'Let the government handle it. My kid's out of line — the police will discipline them, the schools will educate them, the public service agencies will keep track of their health.'"

Parks adds that people often find it comforting to vote for more money for the police department, but ignore the financial needs of judges, courts and holding facilities. He points out that the Los Angeles County Sheriff has only 22,000 beds in his facility; as a result, more than 100,000 prisoners have been released in the last year, simply because there was no place to put them. The message sent to criminals is that even if you get arrested, you won't spend much time in jail.

"I don't believe society felt strongly enough about funding a good portion of these systems because the problem was not acute enough," he says. "Now that the problem is here, everyone wants to develop a strategy or a program to deal with this. But you can't build a jail or a courthouse overnight."

Another way communities can send the message that gangs will not be tolerated is to paint over any graffiti as soon as it appears, an action that is

symbolic as well as cosmetic. "Graffiti is not just vandalism, it's ominous messages to other gangs. It is a way that the gangs take over a neighborhood and establish their dominance, that they're the authority in that neighborhood, and it's an authority that they back up with killing," District Attorney Reiner says. "That has to be taken very seriously."

Although community agencies often are established to fight gangs, there may be gaps or overlaps in the services provided or the community members don't know about the agencies and how they can help. The Community Reclamation Project (CRP) is an organization funded by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in the fall of 1988 to address those issues in Los Angeles.

One of the first things CRP Executive Director Natalie Salazar did was hold a meeting with representatives from each community agency to find out what services were already available, where gang and drug hot spots were, which schools had PTA or parent advisory councils, and which communities had neighborhood or business watches.

After seeing what services are currently offered, she hopes to form a core group of agency representatives which will develop an action plan for what needs to be done, to determine how they can work together, and to share what they are doing.

Such cooperation can be difficult since most agencies compete against one another for funding. "One of the recommendations that I've made over and over to local government is that they give at least a five-year commitment to a community-based agency," Salazar says. "If the funding is at less than a five-year level, you don't give the agency enough time to get off the ground. This isn't law enforcement, where you can go in and do a sweep for three months and see the crime rate drop by 20 percent because you've made a concentrated effort in one area."

The gaps she has seen include a lack of direct gang intervention — going di-

rectly to the streets and talking to youth about quitting their gangs — and a lack of after-school facilities that provide alternative activities for children.

She would also like to see drug and gang prevention programs aimed at older children. Although she thinks the SANE and DARE programs are excellent starting points, she points out, "For one hour a week you're teaching a kid to say no to gangs and drugs and that child may come from an area where both are prevalent and where their older brother or sister or parents may be involved in one if not both. It's a difficult message to give a kid without having some follow-through. The thrust has been that we've got to reach younger kids and focus on primary prevention. Primary prevention is the key to saving a new generation, but we still have the generation that's going to school that I don't think is necessarily lost."

Since CRP started, four neighborhood groups have been established to pinpoint the problems in their communities and how they can be addressed. Two graffiti cleanups have been held and have been successful, in part because people who are scared to make an individual stand against gangs are often willing to work with a group. Finally, a parenting program has been established to teach parenting skills to the fathers and mothers of at-risk children.

Young people join gangs for a number of reasons: protection, acceptance, excitement, monetary gain, peer pressure. Many do not see any alternatives to gang life. By establishing programs that teach them interpersonal skills and self-esteem, by creating recreational and extracurricular activities, by teaching their parents how to help their children live productive lives, and by using law enforcement and the criminal justice system to keep hard-core gang members off the streets, communities throughout the country can fight their gang problems — before they get out of control. The Los Angeles experience reinforces the maxim that the best defense is a timely offense. □

paraphernalia or apparel that identifies a student as a gang member.

Model discipline and dress policies are crucial, as is graffiti removal. San Diego Unified School District has a graffiti removal team that works 24 hours a day to remove immediately any gang symbols or vandalism which may affect the school's positive climate.

Providing adequate support and protection for victims also is a must. If students or staff members do not feel safe in reporting gang crimes, then the situation will only worsen. In-service training and gang counseling services can offer a sense of support. In addition, a vibrant extracurricular program can give bored students other things to do with their time than joining gangs.

Parents' strategies

In areas where gang activity is high, responsible adult supervision is critical. Chicago residents have established parent patrols that escort youngsters to and from school. Parents in Orange County, California, have established a similar program called "Operation Safe Corridors." Many Los Angeles high schools encourage parent volunteers to visit the school and provide extra supervision on playgrounds, hallways, restrooms and other potential trouble areas.

In addition, parents must learn about the early signs of gang involvement and must spend quality time with their children, listening to them and providing good role models.

Law enforcement strategies

Law enforcement strategies include establishing a visible patrol, developing accurate gang intelligence, following up on rumors, cooperating with schools and, most importantly, keeping in touch with the latest information on gangs from around the country.

Gangs like to infiltrate communities where law enforcement officers are not as well trained to work with gangs, where there are "easier pickings," where it is easier to intimidate other drug dealers, and where there is less



Photograph by Merrick Morton

gang rivalry and more potential for profit. For example, Minneapolis' gang detail commander reported that they have several Los Angeles gang members operating there. They call the city "Money-apolis" because they can get \$60,000 to \$65,000 per kilo of crack, rather than the standard \$13,000 they net in Los Angeles — almost five times the profit.

Because of the gangs' expansion across the country, a special need exists for a national gang information network. Profiling and documenting gang members is critical, as is police officer training that includes learning effective gang investigation techniques, how to read graffiti and how to track pending gang conflicts.

Prosecution, probation and parole strategies

Prosecution strategies include vertical prosecution, witness protection plans and information networks. Many jurisdictions are now doing a better job of enforcing existing laws relative to safe school/park zones, national and state drug laws and local curfew laws.

Better record sharing can be a powerful tool in curbing gangs. For this reason, the Presiding Juvenile Court Judge in the Superior Court of the State of California, County of Orange, recently issued a landmark order for addressing the gang issue. He stated that:

WHEREAS, youth gangs clearly imperil the safety of both students and campuses, and;

WHEREAS, the Court has been informed that concerns about "confidentiality" have often hampered or

prevented communication among educators, law enforcement, the District Attorney, and probation personnel; this lack of communication among the various professionals dealing with the same child impedes the solving and prosecution of crimes, as well as the evaluation and placement of juveniles who have committed crimes, depriving educators of information needed to insure safer schools.

THEREFORE IT IS ORDERED, that all school districts in Orange County, all police departments in Orange County, and the Orange County District Attorney may release information to each other regarding any minor when any person employed by such a department, office, or school district indicates that there is a reasonable belief that this minor is a gang member or at significant risk of becoming a gang member.

Probation and parole strategies include enhanced supervision and counseling, and increased surveillance.

A systemic approach

The gang problem is not merely a school problem; it is a community problem — a national challenge. Responding to gangs requires a systemic, comprehensive and collaborative approach that incorporates prevention, intervention and suppression strategies. While each strategy has a specific vision and pressing mandate, the greatest hope is on the prevention side, for only by keeping children from joining gangs in the first place will we be able to halt the rising tide of terror and violence the gangs represent. □