

THE MIDWEST STREET GANG:
A RISING ISSUE

Thomas C. Stahl
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For those we lost too soon
Sean Hammons
Jonathan Wilson
And countless others
“East Side Pride”

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Introduction

“A Madison (WI) East High School student charged with three counts of first-degree attempted intentional homicide is back attending classes at the school now that his family has posted bail. Andrew, 16, is one of 12 people charged in an Aug. 9 drive-by shooting that wounded three men in the village of Oregon. He also faces three counts of endangering safety by reckless use of a weapon.”¹

When most people think about gangs, the areas that come to mind are usually larger metropolitan cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis, New York, even Milwaukee, but Madison is rarely mentioned in these discussions. I’ve lived in Madison since 1993 and in these past fifteen years I have encountered a lot of situations involving gangs. The way Madison’s neighborhoods are set up geographically allows for a diverse group of people to attend the same schools. One can easily experience, “the richest life in Madison, and the poorest, street life, in Madison in one day,”² as a childhood friend of mine, Derrick, explained it. Being from Chicago he grew up a member of the Blackstone Rangers, which was a prominent gang in the area along with Gangster Disciples and the Vice Lords. When he moved to Madison he attended a school with a lot of white middle-upper class families, something he did not experience in Chicago. Because of his out-going personality and ability to get along with just about anybody, he quickly became close with many of his peers. Eventually he ended up living with another friend in the Village of Maple Bluff, just a few blocks away from the governor’s mansion, which is one of the wealthiest areas in Madison. There in Maple Bluff and at Sherman Middle School. Derrick became close with Andrew, whose family was very wealthy, his father being a professor at the University of Wisconsin Medical School. As Derrick struggled at times to stay out of the gang life, Andrew began down that same path, hanging out with gang affiliated kids in his late years at

¹ Doug Erickson, “Oregon (WI) Shooting Defendant Back in Classes at East High,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 13, 2005. <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1483713/posts> [accessed August 23, 2011].

² Derrick, interview by author, Madison WI, March 17, 2012.

Sherman and early in his stay at East High School. It was a bizarre situation in August of 2005 when the incident I quoted from the Wisconsin State Journal above occurred. Like Derrick had told me, he lived two lives, one with white kids from school that he had met, and another with his family and friends that were involved with the gangs. People knew that Andrew had begun hanging out with gang members, but no one really knew how serious it had become. It seemed odd that an, “East High School junior who lives in a \$500,000 house in the village of Maple Bluff. His father is a doctor and professor at UW Medical School. His mother is an outreach specialist at the La Follette School of Public Affairs at UW-Madison,”³ could be involved in something so serious. We were sixteen years old, we were just getting our licenses, struggling to ask our crush on a date, playing sports for our high school, worrying about how to get rid of that big zit before the school dance, and one of our friends was off attempting to murder people? Something did not fit there.

In this paper I will look into the history of gangs in the United States and how they have evolved throughout the past century. It seems, just from general observations, that gangs have become more serious over time, evidence being a privileged upper-class white male, Andrew, with everything handed to him on a platter being involved in such a felony because of gang affiliation. For this paper I have analyzed a variety of secondary and primary sources to track the growth and development of gangs of the early 19th Century to those that are more widely recognized, the modern street gangs. After giving a background of gangs in our country I will look into specific influences on gang members and the reasons for them joining and participating in gang activity in the modern era and compare that to reasons members have made the same

³ Doug Erickson, “The Gang Scene in Madison, WI (Coming to a Town Near You!),” *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 17, 2005. <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1486799/posts> [accessed August 23, 2011].

decisions historically. Lastly, I will narrow my focus to the Madison area, where gangs have recently become more of an issue. To do so I will rely on interviews that I conducted with former/current gang members and various newspaper articles regarding gang activity in Madison.

What is a Gang?

“A youth gang is a self-formed association of peers, bound together by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership, well-developed lines of authority, and other organizational features, who act in concert to achieve a specific purpose or purposes which general include the conduct of illegal activity and control over a particular territory, facility, or type of enterprise.”⁴

One important finding I have come across in my research of gangs is just how hard it is to define one. Miller’s definition, above, is a generalized definition that is similar to most the definitions that I came across. The important things that researchers have a habit of emphasizing in their definitions was that they are a social group, that has gang-identified territory or turf and are involved in some variations of criminal activity.⁵

Defining what a real gang is has become tricky in many areas, like Madison for example. I spoke with a childhood friend of mine who was involved with gangs from a very young age and throughout his entire life. He told me about a self-proclaimed gang in Madison, “there was a gang called ‘groove street’ like the game [Grand Theft Auto] they were fake and real gangs shut them down.”⁶ With small self-proclaimed gangs like these popping up in who knows how many cities, and the defining of gangs becoming increasingly difficult, what problems might this

⁴ W.B. Miller, “Gangs, Groups and Serious Youth Crime,” [1980]:121, quoted in Ruth Horowitz, *Sociological Perspectives on Gangs: Conflicting Definitions and Concepts*. 1983: 45, in *Gangs in America*, ed. C. Ronald Huff [Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990], 37-54.

⁵ Finn-Aage Esbensen, *American Youth Gangs at the Millennium*. [Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2004] 3.

⁶ Lucas, interview by author, April 2012

present on research of gangs? Although some researchers may see the lack of a definition as a problem, Ruth Horowitz realizes the importance of not attempting to generalize such a complex term. First off, every group or individual from the police, the media, social scientist, my grandma watching the 9-oclock news, to those reading this paper, has their own experiences and/or assumptions regarding gangs and what they mean to them personally. Second, defining terms like these that are dealing with social issues may often result in narrowing the approach of researchers and the questions they may ask.⁷ Leaving the term open with a broad definition allows for different interpretations and will allow for future researchers to ask new questions that may be more helpful in researching an ever-changing subject. With a narrowed definition, small groups like “Groove Street” would go completely unnoticed because they were suppressed by the larger gangs in the area, but does this mean they are not important enough to note? With any social group it is important to look at the group as a whole when analyzing or attempting to define them, sure “Groove Street” was small and insignificant in a larger context, but there is useful information on the evolution of gangs in their mere existence.

The Early Years

There is some evidence leaning towards the existence of gangs in England during the 17th century, more modern-day gangs did not take notice until the period of immigration during the 19th century. The first two Regions in the United States that experienced an influx of gangs were the Northeast and Midwest with the arrival of immigrants from Europe. In the late 19th century there was a second wave of immigrants which included Poles, Italians, Irish, and Jews. This

⁷ Horowitz, 43.

Figure 1. Cabrini Green, Chicago



Source: Affordable Housing Institute
<http://affordablehousinginstitute.org/blogs/us/2009/07/big-bad-blocks-part-1-blame-the-architects.html>

overwhelming addition to the population in up and coming cities, like Chicago for example, resulted in poor living conditions for areas that were known as “slums” or what are now called “projects,” as seen in Figure 1, which are overpopulated urban areas that usually consisted of poor and under privileged people. The overpopulated areas soon began to experience large problems in crime and soon there was formation of gangs.⁸ Like anyone who comes to a new area where they do not know many

people, groups based on similarities are going to be formed. Coming from an area that involves centuries of conflict, many of these groups being formed were not too fond of each other. That, on top of being housed basically on top of one another, is a situation that had an inevitable outcome of violence.

After the Civil War the Chicago area had a very high demand for laborers. This high demand for workers and the amount of available workers pouring in from other countries created what became known as a “zone in transition.” Once gangs started to form among the overpopulated slums, large Irish gangs began to assert themselves as the powerful group on the streets. The “Dukies” and the “Shielders” would cause chaos, “robbing men leaving work,

⁸ U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance, “History of Street Gangs in the United States, May 2010” under “National Gang Center Bulletin,” <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/History-of-Street-Gangs.pdf> [accessed April 20, 2010].

fighting among themselves, and terrorizing the German, Jewish, and Polish immigrants who settled there from the 1870s to the 1890s”⁹

During this era gangs began relying heavily on political corruption. Al Capone, who has become a household name, was one of the most famous gangsters in Chicago who made a name for himself smuggling illegal alcohol during the Prohibition, and taking out anyone who stood in his way. Unlike many modern day gangsters, Capone seemed to pride himself on his public reputation. Although he was involved in dozens of murders, both ordering and committing, he often treated people with generosity. Capone along with many other gangsters of this time were skilled in avoiding the law, but eventually it caught up to him. In 1931 Capone was indicted for income tax evasion, conspiracy to violate Prohibition laws, and multiple counts of murder. Capone spent time in multiple prisons and correctional facilities, including Alcatraz until his release in 1939. After his release he spent several years in and out of the hospital until his death in 1947.¹⁰

During this era there were multiple factors that went into the emergence and evolution of gangs in the Mid-West. With the arrival of new immigrants and the sub-par accommodations that they were being forced to live in, the government unintentionally created a situation that was not going to have a good outcome. With the rise of industry and the rising tensions among impoverished immigrants the “zone in transition” was quickly becoming known as the “gangland” that Chicago is known as today. With the era of foreign immigrants leading the way as gangsters coming to an end, African Americans from the south began migrating north in effort

⁹ U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance, “History of Street Gangs in the United States, May 2010”

¹⁰ Chicago Historical Society, “Al Capone,” <http://www.chicagohs.org/history/capone/cpn4.html> [accessed April 22, 2010].

to get away from the harsh racist communities they lived in. The whites that had formally inhabited the slums began moving into the suburbs and the African Americans quickly filled the void in the impoverished homes that were about to become a lot worse.¹¹

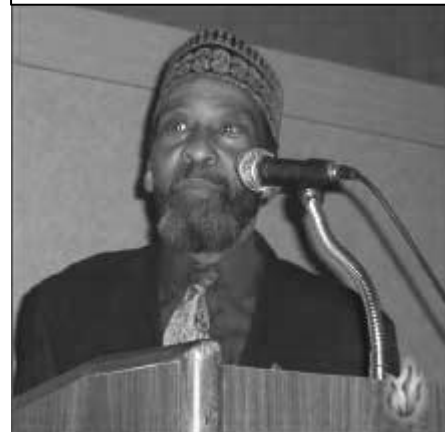
The Arrival of the Modern Gangsters

Wasted human beings, the way it's going right now, it's not going to get any better, I don't see it coming.

-Bobby Gore, *Lord of the Holy City*

The arrival of African Americans from the south brought a new group of people, to an already hostile area that had a chip on its shoulder. The gang that best represents this era of gangsters is the Vice Lords, which would eventually become one of the country's most feared criminal organizations.¹² As mentioned in the previous section, Chicago already had a major problem with over population in "project" areas. City planners did not make this problem any better when they decided to put up 51 high-rise public housing projects on Chicago's west side in attempt to house the large number of African Americans that were coming in. These projects were built very close to one another and police rarely came by due to the amount of violence that took place.¹³ In result, these

Figure 2. Bobby Gore



Source 1: Chicago Flame.
<http://gangresearch.net/cvl/bobbygore/goreuic.html>

¹¹ U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance, "History of Street Gangs in the United States, May 2010"

¹² *Gangland*, "Lords of the Holy City," season 2 episode 8, April 25, 2012 Netflix.

¹³ U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance, "History of Street Gangs in the United States, May 2010"

high rise projects became sanctuaries for the gangs, and the gang that quickly established themselves as the biggest and the most feared was the Vice Lords.

In 1958, at a small juvenile detention center in St. Charles, Illinois, Bobby Gore, seen in figure 2, and his peers formed a group simply to have a sense of loyalty and belonging for once in their lives. When the boys arrived back on their home turf in North Lawnsdale, the social club quickly evolved into what would be classified as a street gang. They began battling other minority groups in the area for rights over turf, which was basically a set of blocks that ‘belonged’ to one gang or another. Once the turf was established the groups needed to make money because there were not a lot of job opportunities for the young African Americans at this time. Money, drugs, and turf became most important to the gang members in the area, the shift from loyalty and brotherhood brought on a great deal of violence that began to tear the group apart. Gore and other members that helped form the gang saw these evolving problems and came together to establish a Constitution for the gang in an effort to bring its members back to what they originally wanted the gang to stand for: brotherhood, loyalty and community.¹⁴ Along with discipline, meetings and fighting, Respect was added to the Code of Conduct for the “Amalgamated Order of Lordism,” it is stated as follows:

“Respect: This is a very essential ingredient of a V/L character. Every V/L will at all times give proper respect to every representative in our organization, and to representatives of other organizations. We will demand by conduct, Character, Demeanor, Actions, Deeds, Respect in return. We will always give respect to persons who are not representatives of any organization also. Disrespect is a very serious violation of the principals of law of our Amalgamated Order, and will judge according. Therefore it will not be tolerated.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Gangland, “Lords of the Holy City,” season 2 episode 8.

¹⁵ George W. Knox, Appendix D in *An Introduction to Gangs*. [Minnesota: Vande Vere Publishing, 1991],

The wording of these “Codes of Conduct” does not seem like something you would see coming from a street gang that had been so violent. At least for a short period of time, the Vice Lords held up to their constitution. Members began helping out around the neighborhoods, attempting to make the area look presentable. The gang became actively involved in the Civil Rights movement, and even participated in marches with Martin Luther King Jr. in downtown Chicago.¹⁶

This brief time of peace and progress on the streets came to an abrupt end on April 4, 1968 when MLK was assassinated in Memphis, TN. The city of Memphis was put under a curfew, the 550,000 people that lived in Memphis, forty-percent being negro, did not comply to the police departments wishes. There was an eruption throughout the city when citizens took part sporadic shootings, fires, bricks and bottles thrown at officers and looting that quickly spread all over the city.¹⁷ When other communities with large African American populations found out about the tragedy, they followed suit. The Chicago area that had been making steps in the right direction almost immediately took a giant leap backwards, falling back into the ways of drugs, robberies, and murder. The older gangsters in the area, like Gore, attempted to gain control by preaching non-violence just as MLK had done before his assassination, but they were preaching to the “deaf ears” of a youth that was lost and angry.¹⁸

The Vice Lords brought a new type of gangster to the Midwest that had not been seen before. In ways it was similar to the era that preceded it, a time that was experiencing a great

¹⁶ Gangland, “Lords of the Holy City”.

¹⁷ Earl Caldwell, “Martin Luther King is Shot to Death in Memphis; White Suspect is Hunted,” *New York Times*, April 5, 1968, <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/topics/MLK/shooting.pdf> [accessed April 25, 2012].

¹⁸ Gangland, “Lords of the Holy City”.

deal of transition and many of the citizens were searching for a sense of belonging. For a young African American male turning to the streets was often the easiest option to find that brotherhood and sense of belonging they were searching for. The drugs, robbery, murdering and violence were just baggage that came along with the lifestyle of these new aged gangsters.

Family and Friend Influences

“My family was the Gang so when they did things I followed without thinking that I was doing it for a gang it was more like I was doing it for my cousin and family.”

-Derrick

To attempt to understand why people choose to join gangs it is important to realize that it deals with more than just historical facts; there are psychological and sociological reasons for why people make those decisions, so as an historian, I try my best to make historical connections in the findings of past research in those fields. In 1995 members of the Gang Resistance and Education Training (GREAT) program sent out a questionnaire to 5,935 eighth-grade public school students in the following cities: Las Cruces (NM), Omaha (NE), Phoenix (AZ), Philadelphia (PA), Kansas City (MO), Milwaukee (WI), Orlando (FL), Will County (IL), Providence (RI), Pocatello (ID), and Torrance (CA). Not all of these cities fall under the parameters that I am examining, but they are important because they provide great insight into different types of communities from large cities with more ethnic diversity to smaller cities that are racially consistent. The study was set up to distinguish a variety of gang involvement from those who used to be involved, are currently involved, involved in delinquent gangs (committing crimes), organized gangs (have some leader or form of hierarchy), to those who are at the core of the gang (potential leadership or connection to leaders). The questions asked were: their sex;

family structure (both parents together, step-parent, or single parent); their race (White, African American, Hispanic, Asian, or other); their age; their parents highest level of schooling completed.¹⁹

From analyzing the graph provided out of the kids questioned 994, or about seventeen percent, of them indicated that they have been in a gang at some point. The trends of this study I am going to focus on are family structure and parents education, because they most likely had some sort of effect on why or why not these eighth graders chose to join a gang. The numbers I am going to compare are those who stated they never have been in a gang and those who are currently in a gang. As far as family structure goes there is a noticeable difference among gang members and non-gang members, those who were never in a gang had the highest percentage of intact households at sixty-four percent while those in a gang were much lower at forty-seven percent. There was also a noticeable difference in the amount that lived in a single parented household, those not involved in gangs being thirty-percent and those involved forty-one percent. These numbers lead me to believe that the kids who experienced a more stable house hold were less likely to join gangs. As I mentioned before, during the late 19th century, Chicago experienced an overwhelming amount of newcomers from Europe. These immigrants did not always have the most stable family life. They often came from societies where alcohol played a central role, poor living conditions and high levels of poverty drove many to abuse alcohol, many saw “alcohol as a leading cause of poverty, family disintegration... they believed, men

¹⁹ Finn-Aage Esbensen et al., *Youth Gangs and Definitional Issues: When is a Gang a Gang, and Why Does it Matter?* Crime and Delinquency, Vol. 47, 105-130 in Finn-Aage Esbensen, Larry Gaines, Stephen G. Tibbetts, *American Youth Gangs at the Millennium*[Illinois: Waveland Press, 2004], 61

squandered their paychecks on strong drink, leaving their families to starve.”²⁰ Although there is no direct evidence linking these families that were affected by the abuse of alcohol and those involved in the gang life, making that connection based on research of gang involvement thus far, which most agree that youth without guidance often turn to gangs to meet the needs they were not receiving in their family life,²¹ is a logical one.

As far as the education of the parents involved in this study goes there are slight differences in those non-gang members and those involved in gangs. Only nine percent of the parents of non-gang members had an education less than high school while sixteen percent of those in a gang had similar education. As for education beyond high school, parents of non-gang members were at sixty-eight percent while gang members were at sixty percent. These numbers, while not immensely different, still do indicate that there is a correlation between gang involvement and the education of the children’s parents, being that the higher the education the less likely their children are to join a gang. Education among immigrants in the 19th century is hard to compare to that of this sample group in 1995, because the education of the parents often occurred in a different country. A lot of families that came to the United States were seen as uneducated and deviant so schools during the time of immigration began implementing assimilation and acculturation into their curriculum. With the parents working hard during a time of great growth for America, their children were learning different values and ideals than they

²⁰ Ruth B.A. Bordin, *Francis Willard: A Biography* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986]. In Drew VandeCreek, “Settlement and Immigration,” 2002, <http://dig.lib.niu.edu/gildedage/settlement.html#3> [accessed April 25, 2012].

²¹ California Attorney General’s Office, Crime and Violence Prevention Center, *Young People are Drawn to Gangs for Multiple Reasons*, 2003 in *Opposing View Points: Gangs*, ed. William Dudley and Louise I. Gerdes [Minnesota: Greenhaven Press, 2005], 102

may have as children or young adults.²² Again, there is no direct connection between these families that may have had parents that received different or lesser educations and those to join gangs, one can make the assumption that parents with lesser education had less influence or control over their children, which could have resulted in them being more likely to join gangs.

Figure 4. Derrick



Source: Facebook

The previous study dealt more with family members having an indirect influence on whether or not their child chose to join a gang. The interviews I conducted with current member of the Black Stone Rangers, Derrick (see Figure 3), and former Crip, Lucas (see Figure 4) show a different type of influence on their decision, or lack thereof, on joining a gang. Derrick was born into the Rangers, both his mom and dad were members and six of his seven uncles were as well. “All the people I looked up to were

gangbangers and in my house every day. As a kid I could remember going back to my dad hood in Chicago and him leaving me there with my cousin and telling me that I didn’t need any money because his Brothers (The Rangers) would take care of me and they always did.”²³ Lucas also was exposed to the gang life-style at a young age, having multiple older cousins, uncles and brothers

Figure 3. Lucas



Source: Facebook

²² Grace Heurta, *Educational Foundations: Diverse Histories, Diverse Perspective*, 2007, http://books.google.com/books?id=J5_jtip3DwC&pg=PA12&lpg=PA12&dq=immigrants+in+1800s+seeking+education&source=bl&ots=XsCNzW2frR&sig=zzkkz00OsMTBBz2nstlYi8uDfal&hl=en&sa=X&ei=hdegT8n9LluE8ATq5e2vCA&ved=0CEkQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=immigrants%20in%201800s%20seeking%20education&f=false [accessed April 26, 2012].

²³ Derrick, interview with author

who were in gangs. Lucas and I attended the same school, Mendota Elementary, which was located next to a neighborhood that had a high amount of residents involved in gangs. We became close friends during this time and lived a fairly typical childhood with a few altercations here and there with kids whose parents and older siblings were involved in gangs, but nothing too serious. It wasn't until middle school that the lure of the gang life brought Lucas in. "The friends I hung out with started hanging out with certain gangs and I didn't want to be excluded. It was cool we wore bandannas and certain colors. So it wasn't the violence or the drugs it was the people and the thought of having friends that would do anything with/for you. Girls like the bad boy that was also a plus."²⁴ Around this time my family moved across town and I attended a different Middle School and lost touch with Lucas for a while as he began the life style that would lead to his two year stay at the Dane County Jail a few years down the road.

The research and interviews I conducted on influences of joining gangs seems to rely heavily on family life. Being someone living in a broken family due to alcohol abuse, a home life that is not suitable because a parent did not make the necessary steps to receive a sufficient job for raising a child, being born into a gang affiliated family, or simply doing it because your friends did it to get the ladies, the influence of family and friends can effect ones involvement and choice to join a gang in various ways. In a society where computers, televisions, the internet, and various forms of communication are so important, gang members and potential gang members alike have to worry about an influence that they might not even realize is affecting them, the media.

²⁴ Lucas, interview with author

The Influence of the Media

Before the age of eighteen, the average American teen will have witnessed eighteen thousand simulated murders on TV. While staggering in number, more disturbing is the effect this steady diet of imaginary violence may have on America's youth.²⁵

-Fanning

Today the media is booming and showing no signs of slowing down, with the emergence of social networking. We can do and have access to just about anything we want on the internet. With social networks like Facebook and Twitter gaining popularity at a tremendous rate gangs have a new source of outreach and abilities to recruit members that were not always available. Any one born in the same generation as myself, late 1980s, or after have seen first-hand how much violence and gangs are relevant in the media. Some of the most glamourized musicians today are known gang members (according to the lyrics in their music), 50-Cent, The Game, Snoop Dogg, Lil Wayne, Rick Ross and even those who are dead that still have an impact today like Tupac and Biggie, who were famous for their West Coast and East Coast battles in the 1990s. The media glamourizing gangsters is not something that just began once the internet and other sources of mass-media were made available. In 1974 one of the leaders of the Vice Lords in Chicago, Willie Loyd, was recognized for his reputation as a hardcore gangster. Multiple cameras and media professionals were present during the "Players Ball" in North Lawndale when Loyd received his award for "Gangster of the Year." An award which he credited to all of his "gangsters, pimps, and lords" for all that they do.²⁶

²⁵ David Fanning, "Letter from David Fanning, Frontline Executive Producer," Frontline Public Broadcasting Service, 1995 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/tvkillguide.html> [accessed April 26, 2012].

²⁶ Gangland, "Lords of the Holy City"

“The debasement of our culture, of which gangsta rap is a big part, has coarsened children in general and put high-risk kids in a dangerous place. Taking drugs, carrying guns and disrespecting human beings is now not only socially acceptable in many situations, it is downright glamorous.”²⁷ This is the way the host, Bill O’Reilly, of *The O’Reilly Factor* views the nation’s problem regarding where our society places our interests and those we choose to glamorize in the media. Before events like the “Players Ball” occurred, at least of those that have been documented, this glamorization of gangsters did not happen. We constantly see increase in gang violence and violence in general among our population and we have remained blind to the reason why this is likely occurring. Historically, gangs before the era of mass media simply did not have access to these means of influence and growth, so it is impossible to make a connection to the gangs in the early 19th century and the media.

The Spread of Gangs: Madison

“No city, town, or neighborhood is totally immune from the threat of gangs.”

-David M. Allender

Typically, the only gangs that are seen as relevant and taken seriously are those that are in big cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Minneapolis, but over the past twenty years or so street gangs have branched off from these larger cities to smaller ones, like Madison. One method that these gangs spread has been labeled as the “imperialist method.” This involves large street gangs dispatching members to start a chapter in a new city or neighborhood to further some form of criminal activity.²⁸ Although it is hard to tell if gang members moved from larger

²⁷ Bill O’Reilly, *New York Daily News*, March 7, 2004 in Mike Carlie, *Into the Abyss: A Personal Journey into the World of Street Gangs* [Springfield: Self Publication, 2002] in *Opposing View Points: Gang*, 97

cities (like Derricks family from Chicago to Madison) for gang related reasons, it is evident that gang activity has increased in cities of similar size. A study conducted nationally by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, between 1996-2000 found that, “cities with a population of more than 250,000, all respondents reported persistent gang activity. Eighty-six percent of cities with a population between 100,000 and 250,000 and 61 percent of cities with a population between 50,000 and 100,000 reported persistent gang activity over the survey years, whereas only 6 percent and 9 percent, respectively, reported a total absence of gang activity.”²⁹ Whatever the reason for the spread of gangs, it is evident that it is occurring at a rate that most people fail to see. Madison would fall under the category of 250,000 and above, which experienced persistent gang activity in all of its respondents. Stephen Blue, a delinquency services manager for the Dane County Department of Human Services and has studied local gangs in Madison since 1986, believes that the growing rate of gang activity in the area is in part related to the loose leadership conducted by many of these larger gangs from big cities. Along with the loose leadership he blames the media for the amount of stars on television, like Snoop Dogg, who wears his gang colors (Blue, representing the Crips), and their ability to reach children who lack strong attachments to adults or school.³⁰ David Allender, author of *Gang Migration from Cities is a Serious Problem*, shares a similar opinion to Blue, but believes that cities in the Midwest have been especially vulnerable to influences from the West Coast and the Chicago area because of their high number of recent gang activity.³¹

²⁸ David M. Allender, *Gang Migration from Large Cities is a Serious Problem*, 2001 in *Opposing Viewpoints*, 32.

²⁹ U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance, “National Youth Gang Survey Trends From 1996 to 2000,” February 2002.

³⁰ Erickson, “The Gang Scene in Madison”.

³¹ Allender, 36

Gangs in Madison may not be getting the attention that those in larger cities are receiving, but they are there “there are now more than 1,100 gang members in the Madison area, they're not always visible. Nor is the connection between gangs and crime. Regardless, police and social workers say the gang problem here is real.”³² Another misconception with gangs in smaller cities is that the crimes they commit are less serious; this is far from the truth. In my interview with Lucas he mentioned multiple occasions in which himself or members of his gang were involved in many fights and other violent crimes.³³ Lucas was involved in several events like this and multiple shootings until the day he was caught in the Oregon shooting I mentioned in the introduction. Because of his involvement in this shooting he received two years in the Dane County Jail.

Conclusion

The history of gangs in the United States is one that is constantly changing with time. From the immigrants who first arrived from Europe who simply formed these groups to have something to belong to, and the delinquent boys like Bobby Gore who formed a social group for similar reasons, not realizing that what they created would eventually become one of the most feared and violent gangs around, to the Black Stones and Crips that now reside in Madison, it is clear that they have progressed along with our ever changing society. The influences that have affected these gangs have also progressed as we humans progress socially and technologically. The influence that media has had on gang members since 1972 when Willie Loyd was being named “Gangster of the Year” in Chicago, all the way to when there was a small gang named

³² “Gang Activity in Madison often flies under public radar,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 5, 2010. http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/local/crime_and_courts/gang-activity-in-madison-often-flies-under-public-radar/article_06ee28d4-b770-11df-8203-001cc4c03286.html?mode=story [accessed April 28 2012].

³³ Lucas, interview with author.

“Groove Street” that roamed the streets in Madison, has brought light to the fact that gangs are becoming a real problem. A problem that is being fueled by the mislead customs and ideals portrayed in the media that are forming our future.

“I used to think a gang was just a bunch of friends from the same neighborhood who hung and did everything together. Had a bond like brothers, would do anything for each other the violence and drugs just came with it. I then realized gangs use people, they use the sense of family to trick you to do what they want. One you’re done with the gang banging and activities they treat you diff and act like you sold out. Just because you want a better life.”

-Lucas

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