

Gangs, Schools, and Social Change: An Institutional Analysis

By
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Understanding gangs and schools requires us to go beyond neighborhood-level analysis because spatial analyses tend to downplay or ignore social movements as key to fundamental change. This article supplements a traditional ecological approach with an institutional analysis of both schools and gangs. A history of Chicago gangs reveals that gangs are not one thing; at times they have played positive roles within schools and taken part in social movements. The author's personal experiences with gangs and schools in Milwaukee and Chicago are presented as evidence documenting the mutability of gangs, the damaging consequences of some educational policies, and the importance of including gang members in social movements. The current Black Lives Matter movement presents opportunities for nonincremental, disruptive change and the potential inclusion of gangs and gang members in a broader strategy to create a better society.

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Urban schools exist in particular spaces, and while no two schools are alike, it would be a mistake to think that schools in what Elijah Anderson (2011) has called the “iconic ghetto” are necessarily inferior to their cosmopolitan or suburban counterparts. We have ample evidence of well-functioning schools that operate in the heart of segregated urban spaces. Space is not fate. Schools are institutions that are influenced by the spaces where they reside, but are “loosely coupled,” learn from one another,

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and have distinct histories and cultures (Weick 1976). This article focuses on the workings of both schools and gangs as institutions.

Adopting an institutional analysis means not discarding but temporarily putting to one side the influential spatial metaphors of the Chicago School. Since the work of Fredric Thrasher (1927), gangs have been “ecologically” conceptualized as disorganized neighborhood peer groups. But gangs are not always just about the neighborhood, and even in ghetto spaces they vary considerably. In Chicago and elsewhere, gangs, which Hughes (1939) called “bastard institutions,” have persisted over decades both on the streets and in prisons, continually adapting to changing conditions (Hagedorn 2008, 2015). Like schools, “institutionalized” gangs perform a variety of ceremonial and symbolic functions (J. M. Meyer and Rowan 1977). Just as school officials affirm that “schools educate,” Chicago gangs have historically put forth “rationalized myths” of themselves as “neighborhood protectors,” “businessmen,” or “community activists.” These myths influence gang members and can be valuable avenues to developing positive behavior within gangs. In Chicago, gangs have forged both overt and covert relationships with other institutions, including with police and politicians, as well as with schools. They have been an illicit yet influential node within the city’s institutional landscape.

To understand how gangs and schools interact, we need to grasp the local and citywide history of both institutions. Schools and other institutions are deeply affected by the spaces where they operate, but they also have a “life of their own” that is not fully determined by place (Selznick 1957). Schools tend to model themselves “isomorphically” on other “successful” schools (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) through media, social scientific studies, and conferences. Similarly, gangs mimic the organization and culture of other gangs, which they learn about through members’ prison experiences, watching movies, and listening to music. Institutional processes of both schools and gangs are not confined to ghetto spaces.

An institutional perspective also differs from spatial analyses in its conceptualization of social change. The ecological perspective of the Chicago School implies a fundamental goal of social control over “disorganized” spaces. Great emphasis is often placed on the possibilities of creating high-performing schools in the midst of the conflicts and disorganization of the ghetto. Similarly, proposals for the control of gang violence center on neighborhood-level social control and “systemic” relations of local groups to elites and police (Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Papachristos 2011; Sampson 2012). Change, as seen by these social disorganization theorists, is typically incremental and closely tied to a neighborhood’s capacity to command external resources from politicians and foundations. These spatial theories assume that the locus of control will remain within existing nonlocal power structures.

Spatial theories that grapple with how to maintain discipline in schools have led some educators to go so far as to have “police in the hallway” and to adopt other means of closer surveillance and supervision (Nolan 2011; see also Kulkarni; Martinez; and Verma, Maloney, and Austin, all this volume). Spatial metaphors seamlessly lend themselves to strategies for social control. For example, “collective efficacy” (Sampson 2012) is a neutral concept that purportedly explains how

to mobilize residents to control neighborhood violence. But collective efficacy historically has been more effectively demonstrated by how Chicago's white communities worked in tandem with City Hall, real estate interests, police, and vigilantes to successfully keep their neighborhoods segregated (Hirsch 1983). Spatial theories have tended to downplay, failed to mention, or even been hostile to mass movement strategies for radical change—for example, earlier neocolonial models (Blauer 1969). By looking at spaces as “natural areas,” Robert Park (1967) shifted sociological focus away from the workings of citywide institutions such as real estate or policing and concentrated on controlling local disorder.

An alternative perspective bases theory and practice more on social change than on controlling space. Social movements necessarily disrupt the normal workings of what some call “permanently failing organizations” such as schools or police departments (M. W. Meyer and Zucker 1989). Street protests can expose the limitations of rationalized myths of steady improvement and loudly express the impatience of the socially excluded. The Black Lives Matter movement is a prime example of this disruptive perspective (Taylor 2016). While it is possible to create high-performing schools in the ghetto, social movement theories argue that these model schools, even if their successes can be sustained, leave out the vast majority of poor and minority students and do little to uproot structures of inequality (Castells 2004; MacAdam 1999).

Gangs have typically been seen as a reason for the need of stronger discipline in schools. Gang members are often treated with “zero tolerance” and expelled or suspended, purportedly to maintain an orderly learning environment. My 35 years of gang research, however, suggests that “gang problems” have not always been caused by the purported disruptive “nature” of gangs in underclass neighborhoods. Sometimes crises have been more the result of ill-advised citywide school policies and administrators defending a myth of their being “in control” to superiors and to the public. I have argued that gang membership should not be a reason, *ipso facto*, for exclusion from schools. Based on assumptions of social change and my own experience, I believe that schools have the capacity to do more than educate a select handful of students; they could reach out further to the “truly disadvantaged,” including gang members.

This is not necessarily a rational process; nor is it a program that could be implemented in some orderly manner. Social movements, it seems to me, can be key to sparking fundamental changes in some schools. Mass movements can deeply influence students, teachers, and administrators and promote an “identity, uniqueness, and separateness” that allow a school an opportunity to find “novel solutions” to problems like gangs (Weick 1976, 7). Schools can use social movements to break from a homogeneous mold and include many otherwise neglected or rejected youth.

In sum, this article argues that spatial metaphors are an inadequate lens to understand institutional processes of both schools and gangs. Fundamental change in education, I believe, is unlikely to follow from spatially oriented theories of control. Rather, change is more likely to occur through mass movements that disrupt myths of local order and allow some schools to reach out to alienated and hostile youth, like gang members.

Gangs, Institutions, Race, and Space

This article draws on my own personal experience, as an activist and researcher, with institutionalized gangs and schools in Milwaukee and Chicago. These examples are informed by several key tenets of my theoretical perspective on gangs.

The main lesson that I have learned from my long years of research can be summarized by the phrase, “Gangs are not one thing.” In *A World of Gangs* (Hagedorn 2008), I examined the fluid form of gangs globally; gangs often morph from loose neighborhood peer groups to ethnic militias, organized crime syndicates, community organizations, or even religious police. At the same time that some gangs have become organized crime syndicates, others have become participants in social movements. In contrast to the tenets of ecological theory, all gangs do not mechanically begin in the community; some are founded in prison and then play major roles in neighborhoods, for example, La Eme in California. While many gangs come and go, some persist for decades and develop constitutions, divisions of labor, and distinct cultures. Gangs vary by gender, ethnicity, age, neighborhood, city, and region, as well as by the level of violence in which they are involved over time. I have concluded that a gang is not a static entity circumscribed by rigid law enforcement definitions (Miller 1958; Klein 1995) or by “group process” definitions (Thrasher 1927; Short and Strodtbeck 1965).

Neither are gang members themselves one kind of person, the “defiant individualists” as portrayed by Sanchez Jankowski (1991) or “losers” as they are often stereotyped by police. The few studies of the entire membership of gangs or probability samples of them (Hagedorn 1994; J. W. Moore 1978, 1991) find that gang members come from different kinds of families and have very different personalities. I have suggested elsewhere that gang members have “multiple conflicting identities.” They can be both tough guys and devoted children and grandchildren, simultaneously profane and religious, defiant individualists but also obedient to some kinds of authority. Within a gang, some are brilliant leaders and others led by threats of brute force. Some are addicts, and others refuse to use controlled substances. Some come from conventional families, and others are products of extreme abuse and neglect. Gang members vary and are quite different from their media stereotypes. School personnel, then, need to base policies and practices on concrete investigations and research of actual gangs and individual members, not merely follow prescriptions from often out-of-date, one-sided, simplistic law enforcement manuals.

Gangs in Chicago are often put forth as a model for gangs elsewhere. A careful history of gangs in that city, however, shows considerable variation over time in gang organization, activities, and level of violence (Hagedorn 2006, 2015; Aspholm 2016). In becoming institutionalized, gangs in Chicago, as in many other cities, have adapted to various economic and demographic changes, as well as to housing, educational, police, and correctional policies. A brief historical overview demonstrates that Chicago gangs can be understood not merely as reflections of neighborhoods but in relation to broader institutional processes.

A Brief History of Gangs in Chicago

Thrasher (1927) defined the 1,313 gangs that he studied in the 1920s as loose adolescent peer groups; but even in his own study, 243 of the gangs he found were social athletic clubs (SACs), typically adult-run and tied to local politicians. Another 192 were “mixed” adult and youth groups. Many gangs in Italian areas at that time had become institutionalized and were incorporated into the “Outfit,” Chicago’s name for the mafia, and developed a decentralized structure that dominated illegal markets in Chicago for decades. Alternately, many Irish gang members used their SACs as an institutional pathway into politics or city jobs. The most prominent gang member from the Hamburg Athletic Association (HAA) was Richard J. Daley, later the mayor of Chicago. Daley was a 19-year-old HAA member when the Hamburgs were key participants in the 1919 race riots. But the future mayor never disclosed his activities during those deadly July days when his “homies” did drive-by shootings in nearby Bronzeville. Daley was no “wannabe” or marginal member. He later served as the Hamburgs’ president for 15 years.

The In\$ane Chicago Way (Hagedorn 2015) tells how Chicago gangs in the 1960s began as local groups à la Thrasher. They did not stay confined to single neighborhoods for long, though, as they built coalitions and morphed into multi-neighborhood “super-gangs.” This transformation began as white gangs defended their turf against “invasions” of blacks and Latinos moving out of overcrowded neighborhoods. For their part, gangs such as the Vice Lords, Blackstone Rangers, Latin Kings, and Spanish Cobras organized chapters across many neighborhoods to meet the white challenge. Gangs were about space, but it was racism that first drove the gangs to institutionalize across neighborhood lines. At the same time, the demise of the civil rights movement at the end of the 1960s helped to turn gangs away from politics and into drug sales as a means of survival.

In *A World of Gangs* (Hagedorn 2008), I examined these developments by comparing and contrasting Daley’s Hamburgs to the Chicago Vice Lords (CVL), an African American gang with aspirations toward conventionality. Like the HAA, the CVL began as a tough neighborhood gang and then “went conservative” and started legitimate businesses and social programs. Whereas Irish gang members had taken jobs as police and city employees, the CVL found those conventional occupations blocked by discrimination and outright racism. The CVL joined with Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement to demand that the pathways to jobs in government and contracts with the Irish be opened to them too. The CVL campaigned against violence and worked to unite gangs citywide to demand jobs and better services. Instead of welcoming the Vice Lord members into the establishment, the old gang banger Daley declared war on them and defunded their social programs. This dead end for legitimate employment predictably resulted in the CVL moving into the control of illegal markets as a survival strategy. It was not neighborhood-level processes that transformed the CVL, but policies of the political machine, police repression, and a fateful decision to adopt a “Black Mafia” strategy of organized crime.

In the 1970s, as deindustrialization wracked the city, rates of violence soared as multineighborhood gangs competed against one another. Not only colors and corners but dollars were at stake, as lucrative profits from drug sales lined the pockets of gang leaders. The gang wars of that decade and the onset of the “War on Drugs” resulted in mass incarceration and the first signs of a new site for gang formation. Rather than neighborhoods, gang decision-making resided in prison where the leaders could safely meet and plan. To control violence, both for personal safety and to create a more stable environment for drug sales, the rival People and Folks coalitions began in Stateville prison in 1978. Within the Folks coalition, the black-dominated Gangster Disciples formed a board to coordinate the dozens of major Folks gangs with thousands of members. They eventually put forth a program of “Growth & Development,” a procommunity “rationalized myth” that coexisted with their reliance on drugs and violent wars with other gangs. They sponsored truces, and members even ran for local office. The Gangster Disciples of the last decades of the twentieth century were many things: community activists and drug sellers, advocates of peace and partisans in war, locked out of the system but also trying to find a way into it.

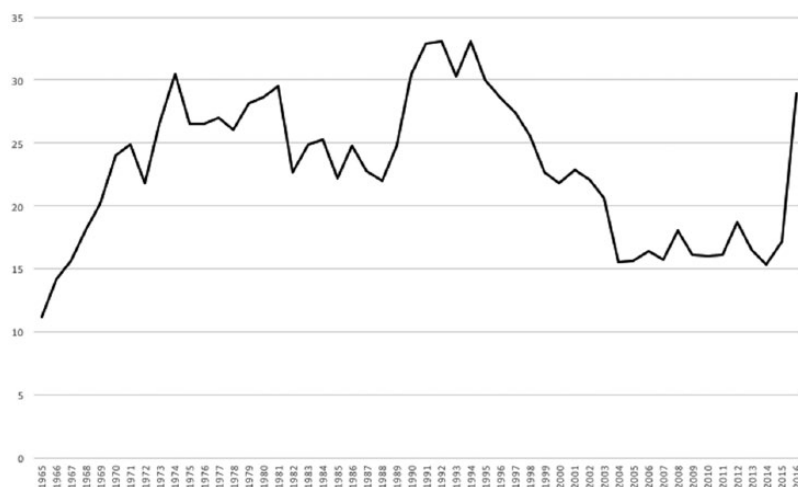
The In\$ane Chicago Way describes the Latino iteration of the Folks coalition: Spanish Growth and Development (SGD). I describe SGD’s “Tabla,” or ruling body, with formal constitution and laws that instilled a broader, supraneighborhood identity on dozens of Latin Folks gangs. From the 1970s until the end of the century, Chicago gangs adopted broader identities of “People” or “Folks” that aimed to transcend neighborhood and had religious, political, and procommunity aspects. All of Chicago’s institutionalized gangs stressed education in their written laws and constitutions, and veteran gangsters were expected to urge youth to complete their education and some to advance to college.

Both People and Folks gangs developed relationships to Chicago politicians just as SACs had in the past. Drug monies could be diverted into political contributions, and alliances were built covertly. Chicago police maintained their long tradition to “serve and collect” (Lindberg 1998); *In\$ane* describes how dozens of police officers working with gangs accepted bribes, with some even becoming “drug kingpins.” Following the path of the Outfit, Latino gangs in particular became major players in machine politics. Neighborhood was still important, but gang leadership had centralized, and most gangs adopted a bureaucratic, vertical model of organization.

The peace promised by the People and Folks coalitions broke down in the 1990s with simultaneous internecine wars: Black Disciples vs. Gangster Disciples; Vice Lords vs. Four Corner Hustlers; the War of the Families among Latin Folks gangs. Homicide rates reached record highs. Gang organization was shattered by multiple factors: the transfer of incarcerated gang leaders into supermax (maximum-security) prisons, the destruction of public housing towers and the resultant scattering of African American gang members citywide, declining profits from crack sales, and the exhaustion of rank and file gang members with pointless and bloody wars.

As a result, African American gangs in Chicago today have mainly devolved into local cliques, with a “culture of autonomy” (Aspholm 2016) in contrast to a 1990s

FIGURE 1
Homicides per 100,000 in Chicago, 1965–2016



SOURCE: Author, from Uniform Crime Reports.

“culture of obedience.” Homicide had declined to about half its 1990s rate but has also become more spontaneous and unpredictable. Violence today is based on local incidents, rather than formal wars dictated by incarcerated gang chiefs. Latino gangs, on the other hand, were battered but not shattered by the 1990s. The demise of public housing, whose residents were 99 percent black, had little impact on Latinos. With ties to Mexican cartels, drug markets have stayed profitable, and major Latino gangs such as the Latin Kings and Spanish Cobras have consolidated ties to rising Latino politicians and the machine. The gang scene in Chicago today is radically different from any other time in the city’s history.

In many ways variations in homicide rates in Chicago parallel the history of gangs (see Figure 1). The sudden increases in the late 1960s through the 1970s reflect city-wide wars of the new multineighborhood gangs. The brief decline in the 1980s was in part an effect of the People and Folks coalitions’ attempts to control violence. The wars of the 1990s occurred as both People and Folks coalitions imploded. The sudden declines from the mid-1990s to 2004 reflect the end of the wars and splintering of African American gangs. Until quite recently, homicide rates have been relatively flat since 2004 despite the Chicago Police’s futile attempts to credit “call ins” or other spurious antigang policies as violence control.

What this brief historical synopsis shows is that Chicago gangs are defined by neighborhood but more so by broader identities. These “bastard institutions” have been powerfully affected by extraneighborhood institutional processes, for example, correctional, housing, and policing policies, and the racist segregation practices of city hall. Gangs have tended toward organized crime but have also been active in social movements and have always been political players. In a word,

Chicago gangs are clearly not one thing. The particularly fractured nature of gang organization today means that youthful gang members have an increased potential to be won over to participate in social change, though the challenge is daunting.

Personal Stories of Gangs and Schools

This challenge can be illustrated by telling some stories from my 35 years of personal experience with gangs and schools. Let me start with a story about social movements, organized crime, and the changing nature of gang leadership in CVL.

The Vice Lords change

When I began teaching in Chicago in 1996, I became good friends with Bobby Gore, who had been the spokesman for the CVL in the 1960s. Gore was a champion of the CVL prosocial turn, founding legitimate businesses such as the African Lion, which sold clothing, and Taste Freeze ice cream parlors in Lawndale. Gore was also instrumental in founding the House of Lords, Art & Soul, and many other social programs run by what became CVL, Inc. He was one of the key negotiators promoting truces among the gangs and spearheaded LSD, a citywide coalition of Lords, Stones, and Disciples that “took Chicago on a trip” in 1969, fighting for jobs for African Americans in construction.

Gore’s charisma was one reason the Chicago Police targeted him, and he was framed and convicted of a murder charge. Without his leadership and with government-funded jobs taken away by Daley, the Vice Lords regressed and moved to control vice markets on the West Side despite Gore’s strong opposition. Like other African American gangs, the Vice Lords developed vertical leadership structures with written laws and iron discipline. Dealing with the Vice Lords and other gangs from the 1970s to the end of the century meant negotiating with powerful leaders.

For example, one of the Vice Lord sets in the 1990s was led by a young man whom I call “Red.” I introduced him to Bobby Gore and watched him as he learned about the legacy of his own gang, how in the 1960s the CVL were mainly fighting for the community. He and I organized a meeting of four generations of Vice Lords, young kids who were the children of the children of the 1960s Vice Lords. Red brought a couple dozen kids from his neighborhood, and I invited several older Vice Lord men and women, including Bobby Gore.

Two things stood out. First, the youngest kids did not even know who Bobby Gore was. After Red explained and Bobby arrived, the kids listened with awe to his wisdom. While they were soldiers in Red’s drug business, they were clearly capable of being influenced to take a different path. After the elders left, we had an enthusiastic discussion about whether a political, rather than a criminal, path was possible. I passed around research money to pay the youth for their participation, but Red had brought so many that I ran short. I told him my problem and he solved it. “Everyone!” he announced in a commanding voice. “Put the money that you received in front of you and pass it down to me.” They did so without

hesitation or complaint. Red then redivided the money so that everyone got the same amount and passed it back. His “troops” were disciplined, and there was a culture of absolute obedience. Dealing with these kids was not possible without dealing with Red.

Fast forward a decade to Lawndale and the world had changed. Red told me that his gang had been scattered by gentrification, and the destruction of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) projects had caused Gangster Disciples to move into formerly all-Vice Lord neighborhoods. The once hierarchical gangs had been shaken, and “now the kids don’t listen to us like before.” Vertical organizations had been replaced with horizontal structures, often with no one formally in charge. There are not rules to mechanically follow, laws that can be enforced, or leaders who can “violate” (that is, discipline) rule breakers. Looking at the South Side, Rob Aspholm (2016) says that the old culture of obedience has been replaced by a “culture of autonomy.” Despite the founding of a CVL history museum to diffuse a progressive message to Lawndale youth, today’s gang youth are largely alienated and unaware or unconcerned about gang history. Bobby Gore’s work was unfinished, and leaderless gangs are difficult to influence.

If gang problems broke out in schools in the past, a sensible approach would have been to seek out their leaders, like Red, and negotiate. Since there are few legitimate leaders today, conflict mediation has to rely on other, less formal resources. An example from a neighborhood school in Auburn-Gresham in the early 2000s illustrates this situation.

A gang’s institutional ties to schools

For a long time, this school catchment area was home to a Blackstone Ranger set. At this time the local Ranger branch had split into rival factions like other African American gangs across the city had. Families had lived in this neighborhood for generations, and fathers and sons had both belonged to the gang and attended the local elementary school. “Ted,” an older Ranger leader, took me to the school to meet the principal. On the way, he chastised kids on the basketball court to “straighten their hats or take them off,” removing any gang identifiers that could provoke trouble in a tense environment. I met the principal, who grew up with Ted and may have been a Ranger himself. He explained that the kids today were the younger brothers and sisters of older Rangers. He said that he had few discipline problems in his school since the Rangers were “big on education,” and older brothers and sisters could be called on to talk with the kids if someone got out of line. While this neighborhood was characterized in some contemporary studies as “disorganized,” informal links between the gang and the school contributed to a relatively high degree of order even as the Stones were factionalizing (N. Moore and Williams 2010).

Gang coexistence in schools

The presence of gang members in schools does not necessarily mean that disruption is inevitable. Another example was an alternative school that was part of

the gang diversion program I ran in Milwaukee two decades before I taught in Chicago. One tactic I used to divert youth away from gangs was to reach out to the mothers of adolescent gang members to help me recruit them to the school. I ended up with students from nine different gangs who sat together as they worked toward a GED. I hired some of the older gang members as supervisors, and discipline problems were nonexistent.

I found that older gang members typically understand the value of education and can be tapped to urge younger children to stay in school. Additionally, the literature produced by all of Chicago's institutionalized gangs explicitly values education. For example, the Latin King Code of Conduct incorporated in its constitution states: "All young brothers and sisters going to school are obligated to stay in school. If you drop out you will be violating the rule to stay in school because an illiterate King is a weak King."

As the Auburn-Gresham example shows, in relatively stable neighborhoods older siblings and kin are likely a more effective resource for administrators than police in the hallways. But not all neighborhoods are stable, and black communities particularly have been disrupted by damaging and misguided citywide school policies.

Problem students and problem teachers

In Milwaukee, we called its school desegregation plan "one-way busing" because only black children would be bused. African American children were taken from their neighborhood schools and scattered into schools all across the city. In *People and Folks* (Hagedorn 1998), I described how children in one all-black neighborhood were bused to 95 of the city's 108 elementary schools. This dispersion badly weakened the capacity of parents to control their schools or interact with them like Ted did in the Auburn-Gresham school. In fact, I asked gang leaders in my first study what they would do differently if they were principal of their high school. Their model reply was "I would talk to them," indicating a lack of relationships between gangs and administrators, the direct opposite of the Auburn-Gresham school. The citywide policy of one way busing had helped to destroy informal social control in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

The desegregation plan also sent buses from one neighborhood to the next, picking up kids to deliver them to faraway "integrated" schools. Often youth from rival gang neighborhoods were assigned to the same bus, which led to fights on buses and at bus stops. Gang rivalries were intensified by the busing plan. Thus, Milwaukee's gang problems were severely aggravated by institutional policies conceived far from a "disorganized" neighborhood. Other school policies had contributed to Milwaukee's gang problem as well.

I was appointed to an MPS Suspension Task Force to look at what we knew was the disproportionate suspension of black students in the newly "integrated" schools. But what we did surprised the officials and angered the teachers' union. Rather than look at *problem students*, we looked at which specific teachers in each school initiated suspensions. We found that a relatively small number of *problem teachers*, sometimes just one within a school, were responsible for a

disproportionate number of suspensions. This meant that, for example, a gang-identified student did not “make trouble” within all classes but may have been singled out by a single “ticket-happy” teacher within the school. The student was suspended or expelled even though he or she may have been doing fine in all classes but one. The desegregation plan had broken MPS high schools’ traditional links to neighborhoods, insulating such rogue teachers from parental input and control, and suspensions soared.

Closing schools in Chicago

School policies in Chicago have also destabilized relationships between schools and families and have fanned gang violence. In 2006, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) closed North Lawndale’s Collins High School and later reopened it as a charter school. The African American students who had attended Collins were dispersed to other schools, but many were reassigned to nearby Little Village High School (LVHS), a mainly Mexican school in adjacent South Lawndale. Black-Latino violence broke out immediately, and school officials had to ban black students from walking to the school through a hostile Mexican neighborhood. During that time, I convened a large number of teenage Vice Lords in another focus group, many of whom were former Collins students now attending LVHS. Their new school housed both Latin Kings and rival 2-6 gang members, though it was located in 2-6 turf. I asked the Vice Lord teenagers if they thought gangs or race were the main reason for the violence. “Race!” they yelled out, and then described multiple physical attacks on their way to school. The closing of Collins had weakened North Lawndale’s prize high school and also fanned the flames of racism.

In 2013 Mayor Rahm Emanuel ordered the closing of fifty schools, nearly all of them in the black community. I was asked by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) to examine how the closings might exacerbate gang violence. I concentrated my research on the West Side. The CTU had provided me with maps of all the closing and destination CPSs, on which they superimposed maps of gang turfs that I had obtained from the Chicago Crime Commission. I interviewed West Side residents who told me the school closings were one more thing that had weakened their neighborhood over the past decade, particularly after the tearing down of CHA towers. Residents from the Robert Taylor Homes, many of them Gangster Disciples, had moved over the past decade into West Side housing, some of it squarely within Vice Lord turf. The new arrivals had disrupted traditional gang networks, destabilized the neighborhoods, and incited violence (Hagedorn 2013).

This situation contributed to some of the older gang sets shattering into smaller cliques, many of them unaffiliated with the established gangs, just as Red had described. The maps of gang turf that the Chicago police were using to identify trouble spots were out of date and useless. My own tour of the area led by Vice Lord leaders revealed several contested drug spots and flashpoints that were not on any map. Kids going to new schools would be traveling through unknown, contested, and dangerous areas. Once in the new schools even more uncertainty

awaited with no historical ties of teachers or principals to families, in stark contrast to Auburn-Gresham.

The 2013 school closings in Chicago were in one sense about racialized space, affecting mainly poorly performing schools in African American neighborhoods. But in another way, the school closings can be seen as an institutional attempt to strengthen Mayor Emanuel's political machine through increasing private profits in charter schools, patronage from new contracts, and competition for power with teachers' unions (Lipman 2011). The black community was powerless to stop the closings, just as it had been powerless to foil plans for housing segregation in the first and second ghetto (Hirsch 1983). The scattering of African American CHA residents to the far South and West Sides and the suburbs with the closing of public housing projects was a further demonstration of black powerlessness. A Guggenheim-funded study of housing and homicide I did with Brigid Rauch (Hagedorn and Rauch 2007) documented the diffusion of violence to the South and West Sides and the suburbs as the CHA projects were demolished.

The school closings also exacerbated conflict between blacks and Latinos, just as the closing of Collins High School in North Lawndale had done six years before. When I showed several Latin Kings maps of routes that African American students would need to take through Mexican areas in Pilsen and Little Village to reach the new schools to which they would be assigned, they had a uniform response: if black kids walked through Latin King neighborhoods, there would be violence. Wisely, most of the routes that crossed racial boundaries were changed by CPS. Unlike black gangs, Latino gangs were not affected by the demise of CHA housing, since few of them had lived there. While weakened by leaders, such as the Latin Kings' Gino Colon, being moved into faraway or supermax prisons, Latino gang structures have maintained a more coherent organizational structure than have African American gangs. Dealing with Latino gang problems in schools, therefore, may require more attention to gang structures than does dealing with African American gangs.

Gang girls and sexual abuse

Female gang membership is often neglected in discussions of schools and gangs. Girls join gangs for the same reasons that boys do, but research suggests that girls in gangs come from more troubled homes than their male counterparts. Sexual abuse and harassment drive girls, more than boys, into gangs that they hope will protect them. In Milwaukee, when we asked female gang members how they would spend a million dollars, the model response was to fund shelters where girls, in gangs or out of them, could go for protection. While not every gang girl has a background of family abuse, educators should always keep that possibility in mind when problems occur with gang-affiliated young women in school.

The story of Jacqueline (Jackie) Montañez illustrates how unchecked sexual abuse can lead to violence. In 1992, 15-year-old Montañez and two other girls shot and killed two male Latin Kings in Humboldt Park in Chicago. Montañez

was charged with two homicides, waived into adult court, and given a mandatory sentence of life without parole. Prosecutors demonized Jackie as “the teen queen of criminals” and as a “seasoned hit man.” The only evidence of motive allowed at trial was gang retaliation.

I was asked to be part of what became a worldwide appeal for clemency for Jackie. My first reaction to hearing about her case was to ask what had happened to her as a child, since the literature is clear that “women who kill” almost always have a background of abuse (Jones 1996). When Jackie was only seven years old her Latin King stepfather began to rape and beat her and put her to work in his drug game. She ran away repeatedly, but police and social workers returned her to her stepfather, who continued the abuse. She finally ran away permanently, dropped out of school, and joined the Maniac Latin Disciples (MLD), blood rivals of the Kings. She met the MLD’s leader, Fernie Zayas, on a visit to prison, and he named her leader of the Lady Disciples. With a street name of “Loca D,” she was willing and expected to retaliate after a Latin King drive-by shooting.

But why did she really kill those two “enemy” soldiers? I interviewed her in Dwight Correctional Institution, an Illinois women’s prison. I asked her to close her eyes and tell me about what had happened that night, moment by moment. She got to her description of firing the shot that killed the first young man and then broke down crying. “It wasn’t them I wanted to kill, it was my stepfather,” she said through her tears. Damaged children like Jacqueline Montañez need to be identified early on in schools. Working with counselors, students like Jackie need to be kept from the streets, not pushed out and allow the false illusion of a gang “family” to put her and others at risk.¹

These stories are about variation within and between gangs over time. They expose a side of gangs that differs from their stereotype as merely disruptive elements and suggest some ways to work cooperatively with them. Gang members can certainly be disruptive in the classroom, but if they are treated like humans and teachers have some sense of gang history, gang members can be included rather than excluded, and they can help to promote a learning environment. But a model school here or there does not attack the root causes of inequality. To do this we need to discuss how schools, gangs, and social movements can work together.

Social Movements and the Control of Spaces

Inner-city schools have the capacity to excel even in spaces of social exclusion. Today, as African Americans have taken charge of many schools and police departments as well as become mayors of cities, control of spaces has become racially tinged. Within schools, maintaining a learning environment requires discipline. I recently had a conversation with a close friend, an African American educator who has built a high-performing school in Milwaukee’s central city. He was defending his school’s “zero tolerance” policy over fighting. “With school choice in place,” he said, “parents can just take their kids somewhere else if there are problems.” Some schools have become islands of salvation for their students

in a sea of violence and disorganization. We all want our kids to attend such schools.

But the control over particular places is sometimes framed in opposition to broader movements for change. Indeed, the Chicago School of sociology was led by Robert Park, who strongly discouraged activism. Park had worked as secretary to the famed assimilationist Booker T. Washington and largely ignored the work of his contemporary, W. E. B. Du Bois, whose searing indictment of racism called out for social action (see Duneier 2016). The explicit focus of Park's ecological critique was on natural processes of changing spaces and a belief in the inevitability of progress. He left broader institutional structures of inequality in the background since he was confident that history was proceeding in the right direction. Academics were supposed to stay on the sidelines, maintain "objectivity," and advise elites.

Not all social scientists shared Park's retreat from activism. C. Wright Mills (1959) argued that Robert Park's role as "advisor to the King" may be the academic norm but is not the only role for social scientists. An independent commitment to the "politics of truth" (p. 178) can lead social scientists to direct their findings toward the public as well as elites. Mills would have been sympathetic to Kenneth Clark, who, in *Dark Ghetto* (1965), advocated that researchers take on the role of "involved observer."

This role is particularly difficult to maintain when one is not only a participant in the community but when one brings to the attempt to use this method, with that degree of clarity and objectivity essential for social science accuracy, a personal history of association with and concern for many of the people in the very community one seeks to study. ... The role of "involved observer" ... demands participation not only in rituals and customs but in the social competition with the hierarchy in dealing with the problems of the people he is seeking to understand. ... The "involved observer" runs the risk of joining in the competition for status and power and cannot escape the turbulence and conflict inherent in the struggle. (Clark 1965, xvi)

Clark directly challenged academics and the "privileged" to take action: "The chances for any major transformation in the ghetto's predicament are slim until the anguish of the ghetto is in some way shared not only by its victims but by the committed empathy of those who now consider themselves privileged and immune to the ghetto's flagrant pathologies" (1965, 222).

All research is guided by values, but like the physician treating disease, Alvin Gouldner (1968) argued, we must not let our diagnosis inhibit action. Clark and Gouldner are among those who concluded that social control of some spaces may be necessary but is not sufficient to bring justice. Social movement theories argue that fundamental changes come from mass pressure. As Frederick Douglass famously said, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."² Social movements can force educational changes, but also can involve students and educators in broader movements for change. These movements in themselves can make for lasting educational lessons.

In Milwaukee in the 1980s, for example, a mass mobilization in the African American community stopped the closing of North Division High School and the

school board's plans to make it a specialty school closed to families in the neighborhood. Directly following this mobilization, a mass movement against the police killing of Ernie Lacy won the first-ever indictment of police officers for killing a black youth. These movements took place at the same time that gangs were forming, and youthful black gang members were attracted to marches of up to 10,000 protesters. Debate and discussion about education and policing swirled around Milwaukee from the campuses to street corners, pushed to prominence by movements that upset the political order. These movements were the proximate cause and inspiration for my own career of activism and research with gangs.

Unfortunately, the district attorney dropped the indictments under pressure from the police union, and only a small measure of justice was attained. The 1980s "episodes of contention" (MacAdam 1999) died out in Milwaukee, and with police again "getting away with murder," hostility and alienation increased on the streets. Gangs were not diverted from a mainly destructive path. The Milwaukee police and education movements remained local struggles, unlike those in the 1960s, which had pulled many gangs and their members into more powerful social movements.

Over the past few years, movements over police violence have swept the United States from Baltimore to Ferguson. In summer 2016, youths rioted in Milwaukee's Sherman Park neighborhood where I had begun my work with gangs 35 years prior. The proximate cause was the police killing of Sylville Smith, a black gang-involved youth (Hagedorn 2016). For me, the desperation and anger was all too familiar, and it erupted as rioting and violence. As in Ferguson, the formal civil rights movement, demonstrating in the daytime, was related to, yet separate from, the movement of youth, including gang members, rioting at night.

In *In\$ane*, I argued the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement today can broaden its reach even to gang members. The BLM movement is not neighborhood based but, like the movement of the 1960s, was sparked by police brutality and is of pressing concern to all black youth. Recent reports of gang truces in Baltimore and other cities show the capacity of gangs to respond positively to such events. An opportunity exists to enlist them in broader struggles. The mobilizations from the churches to the streets in Ferguson, Missouri, is one example of gangs joining with broader segments of society in struggles for justice. Young people are open to an education about justice that takes place within these movements that cannot easily be replicated in the classroom. The spring 2016 Chicago Teachers Union one-day strike incorporated police accountability demands into a broad progressive agenda, linking reform in the institutions of education and police. Involving students in movements for police accountability may be a better way to promote a learning environment than bringing police into a school for "safety."

The Department of Justice estimates that nearly a million youths and adults are formal gang members, with many more "wannabes" or fringe members.³ From the point of view of the control of spaces, gangs are seen as a potentially disruptive force. From the point of view of social change, I argue, gangs are a

question mark, a potential force that history has shown can be swept up into broader movements to work cooperatively with others.

Conclusion: Beyond Spaces

These are old question of the limits of reform. We all know that schools have their hands full creating and maintaining a learning environment. Yet we have seen that even in the poorest and most segregated urban spaces, high-performing schools can be created. The large number of alienated and hostile gang members in our country is one indication that local efforts to reform schools are not enough. Our high-performing schools and their talented tenth cannot be hidden behind walls but instead need to reach out to the most marginalized populations, including gangs.

Kenneth Clark recognized the challenges of piecemeal change a half century ago. While we have seen that space is not fate, Clark worried that race could become fate. He presciently wrote:

Aside from any latent or subtle racism which might infect school personnel themselves, they are hampered by the gnawing awareness that with the continuing flight of middle-class whites from urban public schools and with the increasing competition which education must engage in for a fair share of the tax dollar, it is quite possible that Americans will decide deliberately or by default to sacrifice urban public schools on the altars of its historic and contemporary forms of racism. If this can be done without any real threat to the important segments of economic and political power in the society and with only Negro children as the victims, then there is no realistic basis for hope that our urban public schools will be saved. (1968, 110)

Clark realized that the ecological and “ethnic succession” approaches of the Chicago School failed to describe the actual experiences of African Americans and their gangs. The ghetto did not fade away, and the advance of some African Americans into the middle class still left behind an underclass with its institutionalized gangs (Wilson 1978, 1987). Clark came to realize that the problems of African Americans did not have to do with “pathological” black spaces, but more with the racist manner in which institutions, including schools, functioned (see Sharkey [2013, 116] for some surprising empirical support). Strategies for incremental change, including integration plans, have not brought educational improvements for African American youth far enough or fast enough. Many of these strategies have intentionally decreased community control of schools, leaving power in the hands of institutional elites who, Clark saw, were fundamentally not concerned with the enrichment or empowerment of black youth.

Although African American gangs have been dismissed as criminal and disruptive, this article has shown that Chicago’s black gangs have taken on many forms over the years and are in the midst of even more change today. The structured gangs of the past had normative values of education. The less structured gangs of today are even more open to outside influences, including educators.

Discussions of gangs and schools can be more than an issue of how to control educational spaces. The persistence of gangs indicates that educational policy must recognize that solving the problems of black poverty and violence requires no less than the “radical reconstruction of society” called for by Dr. King and so many others. It requires us to go back to the classics of education, such as David Tyack (1974), Paul Willis (1981), and Paolo Friere (1970), to recognize that one of the prime functions of schools has always been to reproduce inequality.

That realization does not mean the struggle for educational reform is futile or that we should give up on public schools. Involvement in social movements along with teaching about history and inequality are ways that real learning can take place that can change the world. Even gang members can be moved to embrace this kind of activist education. Sometimes teaching in this manner will be in contradiction to a normal, orderly flow in educational spaces. Sometimes that is how we learn best.

Notes

1. As a result of the Supreme Court overturning the constitutionality of sentencing juveniles to mandatory life imprisonment without parole, Jackie was resentenced to 63 years in prison on October 14, 2016. Practically this means she will be released in 7 years when she is 47 years old. She will have spent 32 years in prison.

2. Frederick Douglass, speech on “West India Emancipation” delivered in Canandaigua, New York, August 4, 1857, printed in *Two Speeches by Frederick Douglass* (Rochester 1857), available from http://libraryweb.org/~digitized/books/Two_Speeches_by_Frederick_Douglass.pdf (accessed 9 January 2017).

3. See <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Survey-Analysis/Measuring-the-Extent-of-Gang-Problems#estimatedgangmembers>.

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