Children in Organized Armed Violence

Contextualized Summary for the United States
-Chicago, USA-

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Methodological Introduction

This study combines quantitative analysis of US Uniform Crime Report homicide data by city with a variety of qualitative interview material from Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and other US cities.

The qualitative interviews include 14 new interviews conducted exclusively for this report using the study guidelines; interviews conducted for sister studies of the history of gangs in Chicago, and for the Harry F. Guggenheim funded study, “Violence, Gangs, and the re-division of space in Chicago;” and transcripts of three waves of Milwaukee interviews from 1986 to 1992.

Due to guidelines by the University of Illinois-Chicago Institutional Review Board, interviews for this report were carried out with informed consent from approved studies of the “History of Gangs in Chicago” and “Violence, Gangs, and the re-division of Space in Chicago.” Due to existing guidelines on those studies, only young adults were interviewed concerning their experiences in organized armed violence as juveniles.

Chicago interviews for this study have taken place with young people in Chicago neighborhoods with the highest rates of violence: Lawndale, Garfield Park, Humboldt Park, Roseland, Robert Taylor Homes Housing Project, Logan Square, and the Back of the Yards. Three interviews were conducted in Garfield Park in cooperation with staff from “Operation Ceasefire,” a gang violence reduction project. Other interviews have already taken place in several other Chicago neighborhoods for the sister studies and material from those transcripts will be used in the final report for this study.

Interviews with Chicago gang members were conducted at various locations throughout Chicago and in the researcher’s office at the University of Illinois-Chicago’s Great Cities Institute. For this study, fourteen interviews were conducted with young adults who were involved with armed violence as children: Five respondents were Mexican-Americans, one Puerto Rican, and eight were African Americans. Two respondents were female, eleven male. One interview was with three respondents together and another was with two.
In addition, interviews and primary source material on Chicago gangs was analyzed from a study of the history of gangs in Chicago and published on gangresearch.net., the researcher's website and historical archive. Prior interviews with two hundred Milwaukee gang members were used as a comparative group in the search for common themes. Informal interviews with staff of Operation Ceasefire and Street Level Youth Media were conducted for the final section of this report.

All interviews were taped and transcribed and then analyzed using HyperResearch™, a qualitative software package.

1.0 Area of Study/Profile

1.1 Chicago, U.S.A.

Chicago is the United States' third largest city, with a population of nearly 3 million. Chicago was the nation’s manufacturing center for steel, machine tools, and meat packing throughout the 20th century. After attracting millions of eastern European immigrants, in the early 20th century, Chicago became a beacon for African American migrants and Mexican immigrants who streamed into the city to work in higher paid, unionized manufacturing jobs.

In Chicago, as in other large US cities, immigrant politics led to the formation of competing political machines. The Republican Party, based on older ethnic groups, business, and African Americans lost out to the Democratic machine led by the Irish and supported by the Polish and Italian working class. Chicago's neighborhoods saw extensive mobility by ethnic populations with the exception of the city’s Black population who were contained by hard and fast racial lines of segregation.

Chicago has always been a city deeply divided by race. The Black ghetto, formed in the early years of the 20th century, did not disappear, but spread with most African Americans still living in areas at least 90% Black. Areas of Black concentration are the areas of highest poverty, both in Chicago and the Midwest region. According to the US 2000 Census, about 1/4 of all African Americans in the Midwest, which includes former manufacturing centers Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee, live in poverty.
By the late 1960s, heavy industry in the Midwest began to relocate to the US southwest and overseas where wages were lower and unions scarce. In 1971, Chicago’s meat-packing stockyards closed and the steel industry crumbled as the Vietnam war wound down. Deindustrialization gutted Chicago of its high wage industries and between 1967 and 1982 a quarter of a million (46%) of its manufacturing jobs were lost. ii

Housing projects were constructed in the 1960s to provide housing for an expanding Black population. iii Tens of thousands of Black families were crowded into housing projects built in segregated areas. Chicago housing projects, from their beginnings, were 98% Black. iv In the 1990s, gentrification and the movement of population made the land where the projects were built more valuable. The projects are currently being torn down, resulting in displacement of the highly concentrated, very poor, Black residents. v
Violence in Chicago is concentrated in high poverty, African American neighborhoods. The highest areas of violence are the west side neighborhoods of Lawndale and Garfield Park and the south side’s Englewood, Grand Avenue (where housing projects predominated), and Roseland.

North Lawndale, for example, on Chicago’s west side, had a population of 120,000 in 1970 and has since lost more than 2/3rds of its residents. Once a largely Jewish community with huge manufacturing plants, North Lawndale today is a devastated zone of vacant lots with a 99% Black population and more than half of area children live in poverty. In 2000, its homicide rates stood at about 60 per 100,000,
Another poor and high violence area, Roseland, on Chicago’s far southside was once the home for Black steel workers. As the steel industry closed, Roseland became mired in poverty. As the housing projects near the city’s center were closed, many very poor public housing residents moved south to Roseland. Rates of violence have shot up in 2000 to a homicide rate of 34 per 100,000 with the increase in poor population.

Englewood, another area of high rates of poverty and violence has over the decades also been the scene of “white flight” (or the movement of white residents to the suburbs as African Americans move in. In the 1980s alone, more than 10,000 people left Englewood which now has a household income of about half of Chicago’s average and is more than 95% African American. Its homicide rate in 2000 was 60 per 100,000.

Mexicans began immigration into Chicago during World War I, but deportations in the 1930s, during the Great Depression, reduced their numbers. After World War II, both Mexicans and Puerto Ricans immigrated to Chicago in neighborhoods extended from just south of the downtown “Loop” to the city’s western boundaries. Mexicans displaced white ethnics in neighborhoods like the Back of the Yards, Pilsen, and Little Village and Puerto Ricans concentrated in the near north side communities of Lincoln Park and Humboldt Park. These neighborhoods have levels of violence higher than predominately white areas but lower than in the Black ghetto. Chicago’s Chinatown is a small, comparably stable area just south of the central business district.
1.2 Los Angeles, New York, and other US cities

Deindustrialization has had its greatest impact in the Midwest "rustbelt." Detroit, for example, has seen a precipitous decline in its population to under one million in 2000 and has levels of homicide equal to Rio de Janeiro. Other Midwest manufacturing cities with large Black populations, like St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Gary, also have high levels of violence. New York City, like Boston, San Francisco, Seattle, and other cities with a more diverse economy have witnessed sharp declines in violence in the 1990s. Los Angeles also experienced declines in violence, but in the last few years has seen major fluctuations in rates of violence.

The extent of armed violence between US cities varies enormously. It is impossible to understand these variations without understanding the history of "gangs" in US cities.

2.0 History of "Gangs" and Organized Armed Violence in the U.S.

2.1 A concise history of gangs in the United States

Gangs have long been a feature of most US cities. Gangs, in this report, refer to all kinds of organizations of the socially excluded, typically groups of children socialized to the streets. Beginning in the 19th century with waves of European immigration into northern and eastern cities and Mexican immigration to Los Angeles and other cities of the southwest, youth gangs formed from second generation immigrant youth. Gang kids fought, but firearms were seldom used and it was mainly young adults who committed lethal violence.

World War I created a desperate need for labor and Mexican and African Americans were recruited into northern industrial jobs vacated by white ethnic soldiers. The end of the war brought race riots throughout the United States, particularly in Chicago and other Midwest industrial centers, as white workers, the Ku Kux Klan, and others expelled African Americans from jobs and used terror to enforce segregation. During the Great Depression Mexicans were targeted for widespread deportations as jobs and housing became scarce. Black and Mexican youth formed small corner groups and often defended their neighborhoods against white gangs.
Economic opportunities in government and in the market sector for most white youth resulted in the dissolving of their adolescent gangs or their re-direction once members found jobs as adults. However, some delinquent Italian youth graduated into the mafia and some Chinese youth found illicit adult opportunities in tongs and Triads. On the other hand, Mexican and African American youth had a bleaker future, with both licit and illicit opportunity structures blocked.

African American gangs, at least in Chicago in the first half of the 20th century, were unconnected to the gambling and prostitution networks dominated by adults in the Black ghetto. Jobs were just too hard to find and were occupied by the fathers of youthful gang members and other male adults. Policy, a form of gambling where the customer bets on a daily “number” was a leading employer of Chicago African American males through the 1940s, Illegal gambling was controlled in all areas of the city by the urban political machine in alliance with Italian organized crime, but there was little violence accompanying gambling and prostitution.

The end of WWII brought renewed northern and westward migration of African Americans as well as increased Mexican immigration and the first influx of Puerto Ricans. Racial tensions rose everywhere as Blacks and Hispanics crowded into urban ghettos and barrios. But the US industrial jobs machine was slowing down and unemployment climbed in central cities at the end of the 1950s. At the same time, Black and Hispanic demands for civil rights and an end to segregation rose into mass protest. Gang members participated in the civil rights struggle in various ways while also clashing with militant political groups like the Black Panthers, who competed with the gangs for young recruits. The US government, in a program code-named COINTELPRO, seeded antagonism between gangs and political groups, at times provoking armed confrontations.

The 1960s ended with a “white backlash” and “war on crime” that moved the leadership of the gangs from the streets to the prisons. Most gangs in the US by that time were predominantly Black and Hispanic. The more prosperous white majority supported law and order policies that targeted minority gang members and street criminals. While left wing organizations, like the Black Panther Party, were smashed on the street, gangs in cities like Chicago maintained their organizations while in prison. For the first time, gangs in prison established lines of communication with their neighborhood branches. Gangs in Chicago and Los Angeles began calling themselves “street organizations” in the 1960s, underscoring
their role within the very poor and socially excluded. Gangs maintained a racialized identity with strong nationalist, Muslim, and other religious influences.\textsuperscript{xx}

The decline of the US industrial economy began to devastate Black communities across the US.\textsuperscript{xxi} Particularly in industrial cities like Detroit and Gary, Indiana, with heavy concentrations of African American workers, homicide rates skyrocketed as jobs disappeared and concentrated poverty increased. Riots by Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans testified to intolerable conditions of police brutality and joblessness.\textsuperscript{xxii} The gangs in large cities began to deal in narcotics and other underground economic activities, sometimes displacing mafia-run enterprises.\textsuperscript{xxiii}

Immigration from Central America and South Asia increased as US military interventions supported anti-communist ruling elites in Indochina, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. Gangs of Vietnamese, Salvadoran, and other South Asian and Central American youth formed in cities where these refugees fled.\textsuperscript{xxiv} By the 1990s, the break-up of the Soviet Union resulted in immigration from Eastern Europe and the organization of mafiyas and other types of Eastern European gangs. Mexican immigration continued at relatively high rates across the southwestern US border.

As US-backed policies of modernization failed to raise living standards in much of the Third World,\textsuperscript{xxv} international trafficking in drugs, long dominated by the Sicilian mafia in cooperation with French and US intelligence agencies, were replaced with new drug organizations in Colombia and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{xxvi} These suppliers found new markets in US Black and Hispanic communities for cocaine, previously a predominately white middle class drug. Gangs were among those who seized on the opportunity to make money and used their armed might to settle disputes and carve out or dominate markets for drug sales.\textsuperscript{xxvii}

While the biggest market for cocaine and other drugs continued to be more well off whites, drugs became the most profitable part of the underground economy in US cities and one of the leading employers of Black and Hispanic youth.\textsuperscript{xxviii} In US poor minority communities, as in the Third World, the informal economy, including the profitable trade in drugs, became a permanent part of the economic and social landscape.\textsuperscript{xxix} US street culture, often mimicking gang clothing, drug dealer lifestyles, and the promotion of “gangsta” rap, was diffused through the mass media all over the world.\textsuperscript{xxx}
2.2 Trends of Violence in US since the 1960s

Urban violence in the United States varies widely by cities and over time. The consistently high homicide cities, like New Orleans, Washington D.C., and Detroit, are among the most violent cities in the world with homicide rates at similar levels as Rio de Janiero.

All major US cities have seen homicide rates drop in the 1990s. But in New York City, Boston and many other “new economy” US cities they have dropped to historic lows. Overall, the US homicide rate has been in decline since the mid 1990s. Chicago’s homicide rate, however, has seen little change over the past decade. Los Angeles saw a major drop in homicides, similar to New York and other cities, but has seen its rate sharply fluctuate over the past five years.

Thus one cluster of US cities, including Detroit, Washington D.C., and New Orleans, are as violent as any cities in the world outside of Colombia, while a second group, including Chicago and Los Angeles, have rates similar to Mexico City, Lima, Peru, and Moscow. A third set of cities, led by New York and Boston, are declining toward European levels. San Juan, the capitol of the US colony of Puerto Rico, has
homicide rates comparable to Chicago, while overall homicide rates on the island are nearly three times the US average. Homicide peaked in Puerto Rico in 1994, with local drug wars driving the overall Island average up to about 25 per 100,000 comparable to Brazil’s at the time. Since then, overall homicide rates in both Puerto Rico and San Juan have declined.\textsuperscript{xxxi}

Homicide in many US cities began to rise in the late 1960s, particularly in industrial cities, as manufacturing jobs declined. Blue-collar cities like Gary, Indiana, St. Louis, Missouri, and Detroit and Flint, Michigan saw unprecedented leaps in homicide rates. In the early 1990s nearly every US city followed suit with major jumps in homicide related to the crack wars, as gangs and other drug organizations fought fierce battles over control of the profitable market for cocaine.\textsuperscript{xxxii}

Girls seldom use guns and female offenders, according to Uniform Crime Report data, have been consistently about 10\% of all homicide offenders. Many of those girls convicted of homicide are in fact guilty as accessories, what in the US is called “party to a crime.” The majority of homicide arrests of females are for domestic disputes. The female gang is an important source of identity for some girls, and typically a fighting gang, using weapons, but seldom firearms.\textsuperscript{xxxiii}
The 1990s US urban killing spree was an unprecedented epidemic of violence by teenage African American males not the young adults who typically are most offenders and victims. While youth crime as a whole remained steady in the 1990s, armed violence by adolescents jumped sharply in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Arrests of 13-17 year olds more than doubled between 1983 and 1993 while homicide by adults 25 and over actually declined.\footnote{xxxiv}

Moreover, it was among Black youth in US cities that most of the increases in youth homicide occurred. The homicide rate for 13-17 year old Black males peaked in 1993 with an unbelievable rate of 120 per 100,000. The white male rate was less than 10% of the Black rate. Rates of Latino violence, while varying between different nationalities, are intermediate between whites and Blacks.\footnote{xxxv}

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\textbf{White & Black Males 13-17}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart}
\caption{Chart revised from Cook and Laub, “The Epidemic in Youth Homicide.” In Tonry and Moore editors, \textit{Youth Violence}. 1999. Chicago, University of Chicago}
\end{figure}

Data from New York City disclose that non-gun homicide rates stayed stable throughout the epidemic and decline, while all of the increase in homicides — and subsequent decrease — could be attributed to youth with guns. The firearm homicide rate for youth aged 15-19 rose 176% from 1985 to 1991 and then dropped even more in the mid to late 1990s.\footnote{xxxvi}
Thus the rise and fall in homicide rates in US cities were associated largely with Black teenagers, guns, gangs, and the drug wars. Gang homicides in the US exceed 2000 per year, xxxvii with the majority in Chicago, Los Angeles, and other large cities. Many children and adolescents had armed roles within the gangs and members of drug organizations were the main victims and perpetrators of the 1990s epidemic of violence. According to Department of Justice and Uniform

![Figure 17: Gang Member Homicides, by Area Type](image)

Department of Justice Reports and Estimates of gang homicides in 1999

Crime Report data, during the crack wars, youth made up around 20% of all victims and offenders of homicide, while before and after the early 1990s, they made up about 10% of all victims and offenders. Today, homicide remains the 4th leading cause of death for all US males aged 10-14 and the 2nd leading cause of death of males 15-19 and 16-24. Firearms, mainly handguns, account for approximately 2/3 of all homicides in Chicago and Los Angeles, though during the crack wars firearm deaths sometimes exceeded 80% of all homicides.

One major difference between violence in Rio de Janeiro and other Third World cities and US cities is the limited extent of domestic violence by the US state and the virtual absence of killings of and by police. According 2002 UCR reports in the entire U.S.A., 56 law enforcement officers were killed “feloniously.” In Los Angeles, at the height of the crack wars in 1991 and 1992, 48 civilians were killed by police while during the same period there were more than 2100 homicides. Only one LA law enforcement officer was killed. In New York City, during those same two years, 51 civilians were killed by police during a time the city had more than
4000 homicides. Only three NYC law enforcement officers were killed in those two years.xxxviii

These percentages do not differ greatly from Chicago or other big cities. In Chicago in 2002, for example, only one policeman was killed in the line of duty and two in 2001. However, during Chicago’s Al Capone beer wars in 1926 and 1927, police killed 89 civilians and 20 officers were, in turn, killed by bootleggers. The killing of police and civilians during Chicago’s spate of violence in the 1920s was not matched by any city during the recent drug wars.xxxix On the other hand, Chicago averaged nine official complaints of police excessive force per day in 2002.xlix

2.3 Institutionalized gangs in Chicago and Los Angeles : Involved Actors

Gangs in the United States today vary widely between and within cities. Overall, the Department of Justice estimates there are approximately 3/4 of a million gang members in the US. There have been many attempts to categorize gangs, but in the context of this study, US gangs can be differentiated between “interstitial” and “institutionalized” gangs. “Interstitial”, a word used by the US “father” of gang research, Frederic Thrasher, xli to describe early Chicago gangs. It literally means “in between” or the transitions of youth, as from one neighborhood to a better one and/or from childhood to young adult. Most US gangs were, and continue to be, transitional “interstitial” groups, rising with one set of peers and declining as its peer group matures.

But in some cities, particularly Chicago and Los Angeles, gangs institutionalized, or persisted over generations. To say that a gang has institutionalized is to say that it persists despite changes in leadership (e.g. killed, incarcerated, or “matured out”), has organization complex enough to sustain multiple roles of its members (including roles for children), can adapt to changing environments without dissolving (e.g. police repression), fulfills some needs of its community (economics, security, services), and organizes a distinct outlook of its members (sometimes called a gang “subculture”).

Institutionalized gangs are variably organized. Some have adopted a corporate structure, with a Board of Directors and Chairman of the Board, like Chicago’s Black Gangster Disciples. Others, like White Fence in East Los Angeles, have an
informal, horizontal form of organization. In both Chicago and LA, membership in institutionalized gangs numbers in the tens of thousands.

2.4 Los Angeles Brief Overview

In Los Angeles, Mexican immigrants continued to flood the barrios of East LA throughout the 20th century. From the 1930s on, children of these waves of immigrants, in turn, formed klikas, or age-graded peer groups. These gangs, like “White Fence,” continue to this day. In the 1960s, “18th Street” developed chapters in several neighborhoods and began to institutionalize. Once a Mexican-American gang, 18th Street recruited members from El Salvadoran and other Central American refugees as well as Mexican immigrants.

These gangs strongly identified with their barrio, had little internal organization, and were buttressed by “pintos” or heroin-using gang members returning from prison. Young children are typically “jumped into” the gang in early adolescence. Being able to use a firearm is seen as a necessity for membership in institutionalized gangs. The large-scale incarceration of gang members provided a pool of young adults who had little else but the barrio with which to identify. Gangs like White Fence and Maravilla were feared throughout East LA. La Eme, a Mexican prison gang, also began to organize drug trafficking outside the prison, contesting neighborhood drug markets, and forming ties with gangs like 18th Street.

In the 1960s, African American Crips and Bloods in Los Angeles united youth gangs from several neighborhoods and in housing projects. These gangs became neighborhood alliances and developed a city-wide leadership that was loosely coupled to its neighborhood branches. Gang violence escalated in the late 1960s, as it did throughout the US, and there were a few violent confrontations between police and the gangs and large-scale arrests. Black gangs played sporadic roles within the city’s civil rights movement. The advent of the crack epidemic provided the gangs with an economic support for their activities and their proximity to Mexico encouraged links to Mexican suppliers.

Riots in Los Angeles in 1992 followed the acquittal of police whose brutal assault on an African American had been captured on videotape. Subsequently, the gangs in Los Angeles organized a gang truce that interrupted high levels of retaliatory violence. The gang truce movement expanded nationally, though it was condemned
by US law enforcement authorities as a masquerade for gang drug enterprises and had variable effects.

2.5 Chicago Gang History: Involved Actors.

Chicago neighborhoods have been home to gangs for more than a century. White ethnic gangs found sponsorship by area politicians who supplied jobs and patronage to them. White gangs were also deeply involved in decades of violence and bombings aimed at maintaining the Black community in segregated areas.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, new Black, Puerto Rican, and Mexican gangs formed. Unlike “interstitial” Black and Hispanic gangs of the past, these gangs would “institutionalize.” They have maintained their gang organization now for more than 50 years. The four major gangs in Chicago are the Conservative Vice Lord Nation, the Black Gangster Disciple Nation, The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation, and the Black P Stone Nation. Chicago also has dozens of other multi-neighborhood gangs including the Satan's Disciples, the Black Disciples, the 2-6 Nation, the Mickey Cobras, and the Latin Counts. All of Chicago's major gangs have gone through major changes and adapted to new conditions.

2.5.1 The Conservative Vice Lord Nation (CVL)

The CVL formed on the streets of Lawndale on Chicago’s west side in the 1950s. Originally an athletic club, the CVL took shape as its founding members were together in the St. Charles juvenile correctional facility. The CVL and other area gangs like the Egyptian Cobras fought white gangs in the schools and street corners as Lawndale became a majority Black neighborhood.

In the 1960s, the CVL had united most of the west side gangs into a “nation” and became one of the four largest gangs in Chicago, controlling many gambling and drug operations on the west side. At the same time, the civil right movement was attracting young African Americans, including gang members, to political struggle. In 1966, African American leader Dr. Martin Luther King moved into a Lawndale slum apartment as part of his campaign for civil rights and improved housing in Chicago. King met with the CVL and other gangs and solicited their support.

The Black Panther Party, the most militant wing of the civil rights movement, also began to court the CVL and other gangs. The CVL, along with the Blackstone Rangers and Black Gangster Disciples formed an alliance called “LSD,” or “Lords,
Stones, Disciples” along with the Black Panthers in order to fight discrimination in hiring and contracts. Politics competed with criminality for the allegiance of the gangs.

The “Conservative” Vice Lords, however, got their name in part from a “conservative” orientation toward their community that included developing legitimate business, like “Tastee Freez” ice cream studies, the “African Lion” clothing store, and numerous social and recreational centers. The CVL sought and received funding from private foundations and government. The CVL, like other Chicago gangs, included gang members who continued on a criminal path as well as socially conscious members, like 1960s spokesman Bobby Gore.

Rising rates of violence and the political threat of gang organization resulted in a “war on gangs” by Chicago’s powerful mayor, Richard J. Daley. Gore was arrested and jailed for ten years and the CVL leadership decimated as foundation funds were withdrawn under pressure from Daley. The CVL reverted to criminal behavior as its legitimate enterprises folded.

Lengthy prison terms for CVL leaders did not destroy the gang, but hardened their leaders who maintained ties to the street chapters. In the 1970s, Chicago saw a precipitous decline in industrial jobs, including on the west side. For example, the McCormick Works, which had employed up to 14,000 workers, closed by the late 1960s. North Lawndale and the entire west side became a land of burned out buildings and vacant lots. In a jobless land with declining services and little political power, the CVL turned to the underground economy. By the end of the 1980s, cocaine sales provided a substantial income for the gang.

The CVL maintained an umbrella structure, but drug selling was its prime activity. Children are recruited into the drug game, sometimes at an early age. According to one CVL member who was interviewed for this study:

The youngest people I know selling drugs, I swear to God, one of them is nine and the other one, he can’t be no more than 8 or 9. I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe it! And you should see it, he’s like a grown man, and he runs the spot just because how much he knows. He got people over 40 working for him and he’s 9 years old. He passes the packs out. He collects all the money, because he knows how to do. It don’t matter, he is 9
years old, and he knows more about drugs than some of the old people out there, just because what he knows. That’s why he do what he do. Shoot dice, he do everything, he ain’t any taller than this—. Nine years old, I can not believe that little one.

While most violence in Lawndale and other Black Chicago neighborhoods is over drug disputes, children at a very young age can obtain weapons. Official policy of the CVL, and other Chicago gangs, though prohibits youngsters from using guns,

Well, really most of the time people don’t want to give no kids no guns, because a kid will shoot a person way faster than a grown person because they … aren’t thinking like that, they just, you know, they do what they got to do and that’s why people don’t put guns in little kids hands like that, because if this shorty killed somebody and the police come get him, the police don’t want to lock him up, look how little he is, where’d he get a gun, you think he ain’t gonna tell? He’s gonna tell, so people protect themselves by don’t put nothing in their hands because they’re going to shoot somebody. Quick, all you gotta do is say something wrong to them and all they’re going to do is say okay, get their gun, come right back and shoot you. Now you dead, whoever they shot dead, this shorty’s going to get caught, what are they going to do, he’s nine, ten, whatever, fifteen, it don’t matter. And when they grab him, he’s going to jail and you’re going to jail too. So, don’t do it. It don’t be all about that killing and all that, nobody be all about that.

The CVL, like other Chicago gangs, have fractured in the late 1990s, and many branches have seen “renegade” chapters. Organized armed violence is now often now between factions of the gang, rather than between different gangs.

The CVL is one of the most influential organizations on the west side, and fears little from police operations. One member explains why

Police can’t stop drug dealers from working, nobody, I don’t care who you is, how many cameras you put up, people are going to get high. They got to get high and people is going to sell drugs. They see the police all day long… We know that, we look
at them, they’re rookies — all afraid, beat you up, keep riding around.

CVL drug operations are ubiquitous in Lawndale and Garfield Park despite an equally ubiquitous police presence.

2.5.2 The Black Gangster Disciples

The Black Gangster Disciples (BGD) began as a coalition of neighborhood gangs in Chicago’s southside Englewood neighborhood, long the City’s most violent community area. The BGD were involved with a number of social programs in the 1960s, but were never to the extent of the CVL. The BGD is probably the largest gang in Chicago and has chapters in dozens of cities across the US. The gangs’ biggest rival is a split-off, the Black Disciples, and ‘wars’ between the two have erupted sporadically over the last four decades.

In the 1960s, the gang developed a citywide structure and became the dominant gang in Chicago’s public housing projects. The largest of these projects were the Robert Taylor Homes, twenty-eight 16 story towers that were from the beginning 99% Black. As conditions in the projects deteriorated the Black Gangster Disciples claimed 26 of the towers and the Mickey Cobras the other two. The gangs organized the profitable drug trade within and around the towers. The projects were “defensible space” for the gangs, who retreated into them when police arrived and used them to shoot at rival gangs. As one respondent said:

And then, from their building you could look into our spot. And they had a sniper. And he was standing right there in front of the building, he was shooting right there. That’s where they were at and he shot [Sonny] in the head.... Yeah, cause I was in the back, cause, you know, in our building, there’s a little hole where you do the shoot out, so they shoot you...So, that’s where I was, then I when I came out, that’s when I heard the whole commotion, I heard what happened to Sonny.

The BGD became the target of federal prosecution as their leader Larry Hoover became more prominent and began to get politically involved. In 1992, the gang
changed its name from Black Gangster Disciples to Growth and Development in order to stress a more social role

... it’s all about what you is. You supposed to be a gangster, show me you got love for me, let’s grow and develop. We’re going to grow and develop things....

The gang organizes a youth section that is run by a coordinator, who makes decisions about weapons. One such coordinator explains

It’s all about their coordinator, and they got age brackets, from 12-16, that’s the shorty count, and then you got from 16 to whatever and that’s the adult count. From the shorty count, the shorty count has a coordinator and they got an assistant coordinator, and they bring all their problems to their assistant coordinator, the assistant coordinator bring it to the coordinator. So, they address their problems like that. If they’ve got a bigger problem, they’ll go to the adult coordinator or the adult assistant coordinator and he bring it to his coordinator.

The coordinator decides on gun distribution, though young children with guns are officially frowned upon by gang rules. The street reality, however, is often a different thing. When asked if gang leaders actually were reluctant to see kids with guns, one BGD explained

They don’t think like that. They think, like, shit, you a part of this. If something goes down, you got to ride (have a gun), that’s how is. That’s how I was looking at it. Shit, something go down, you ready to ride with them, cause if you don’t ride with them, then we’re going to ride on your ass. You ain’t had no other choice, but to ride with them.

Another said:

A. No little kids have no guns, it ain’t even like that, they don’t let no kids play with guns. But sometimes some little kids, 12 or
13, do be having their own guns, they came across or whatever, but they got their own gun to show somebody or whatever or something like that.

Q. Is a sixteen year old a kid?

A. He a teenager, and he liable to have his own.

Youth had access to all kinds of guns, both from the gang and off the streets. This young BGD is typical:

What kind of guns did you have?

A. When I was a shorty, I had .357, I had .25, I had a black one, another black one, a 100 shot tech, a 40 gauge. I had people giving me guns, old timers, I was like fifteen.

The federal prosecution helped fracture the BGD. Like other Chicago gangs, "renegade" factions have developed that come into regular conflict with the official gang

... everybody went on their own thing. There ain't no laws, and there ain't no rules, and the same rules that applied, the stuff they don't want you to do, and the stuff they do want you to do... still apply, but who out here to tell you what's the plan? Ain't no more gang meetings, you see what I'm saying, ain't none of that. And it's like, everyman for himself now. You know what you is and you know what you have, but don't be doing nothing stupid, but...

2.5.3 The Black P. Stone Nation

The Black P. Stone Nation has gone by many different names in its fifty year history. Originally the Blackstone Rangers, the gang formed from 21 smaller
neighborhood gangs in the late 1950s under the leadership of Jeff Fort and Gene Hairston. The Rangers were noted for their violence in combating rival gangs, especially the BGDs, their take-over of southside rackets, and the political savvy of their leader.

The Rangers were involved with numerous social programs in the 1960s and were the key elements in the unity discussions of the "LSD" — Lords, Stones, Disciples — the coalition of gangs allied with the Black Panther Party. The Rangers continued to adapt to changing conditions and re-invented itself as a pseudo-religion. By changing their name to the El Rukns, they fought for special privileges allowed religions in prison and registered as a tax-exempt "non-profit" organization. Raids by police continued to jail key leaders. The El Rukns began to get involved with Louis Farrakhan of the US Nation of Islam and were caught in a conspiracy with Muammar Khadafhy to smuggle a rocket launcher into the US. Fort and other El Rukn leaders were placed in maximum security prisons and effectively cut off from the gang on the street.

Currently, the Black P. Stone Nation, the most commonly accepted name for the gang today, is in decline but still has strong bases in several south side Chicago neighborhoods. They have youth sections and a Black nationalist tradition that continues to inspire strong loyalty. Many Stone branches also have developed "renegade" factions that war with the original gang branches.

2.5.4 The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation

The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (ALKQN) was formed in the 1950s as Puerto Ricans migrated to Chicago after World War II. Originally a neighborhood youth gang, the ALKQN formed multi-neighborhood branches and emerged as the largest Latino gang in Chicago. In rivalries with other gangs, the ALKQN recruited Mexicans and youth of other ethnicities in predominantly Latino neighborhoods.

The ALKQN were allied with a companion youth gang, the Young Lords in the 1960s. The Lords transformed themselves into a revolutionary organization and organized social programs, including a health clinic and free breakfast programs, in alliance with the Black Panther Party. The ALKQN and Young Lords organized street protests and the take over of a De Paul University cathedral as part of their pro-community struggle. The ALKQN’s violent rivalries and political ties brought them
into conflict with the police. Both the Youth Lords and the ALKQN were targeted by police and their leadership incarcerated.\textsuperscript{lxv}

The driving force behind the rise of the ALKQN was the gentrification of Lincoln Park, the original home of the gang. The Puerto Rican population of Chicago has been displaced twice by gentrification and in the last few years their current home neighborhood is being gentrified again. One of the top ALKQN leaders describes their home turf

> The east side of Humboldt Park is primarily Latin Folks, Latin Disciples, the Spanish Cobras, Dragons, Gents, and I don’t know who else is over there. They all grew up, same bush there. On the west side of it, it’s us, all Latin Kings.

The ALKQN maintained a nationalist Puerto Rican orientation, allying with Puerto Rican independence organizations in the 1970s and 1980s, including the F.A.L.N. who conducted bombings and terrorist actions.\textsuperscript{lxvi} Violence between the ALKQN and other Latino gangs and the police continued, as the ALKQN also became involved in the street level sale of narcotics.

They have a large, formal organization with an elected Crown Council and a vertical leadership structure that was headed by Gino Colon. Colon, like Jeff Fort and Larry Hoover, was incarcerated in the last few years in maximum security facilities and cut off from day to day contact with the organization.

The Kings have multiple youth branches, including Junior and Pee Wee Kings. Children play many roles within the organization, including the hiding of arms and their occasional use. While ALKQN policies restrict gun use to juveniles, the reality, like with other gangs, is quite different. Here is one King, who joined the gang at 14 talking about violence. Note that while he was deeply involved in drug ventures, violence for him, like other Latino gang members, has more to do with retaliation and gang rivalries.

> I (we) will kill for our boys. Our boys are our people. They are our family.
Like the African American gangs, the ALKQN have stayed involved with politics on a local level, trying to influence city politicians through getting out the vote and money. One gang leader told gangrsearch.net

They (local alderman and congressman) come to the Latin Kings when they need this little area to voter from. We help out in exchange for jobs.

Another King explained how the ALKQN kept political influence.

The legislators...need our vote because we make up so much of the community, and lets face it, we have power. Maybe the community doesn’t like to admit we have power, but the assholes that create the laws know we have control over our people because if we didn’t then they wouldn’t need our help. I don’t wan to help them, but let’s face it. Everything today is about connections. I need to make money, and with the way our economy is today, I’ll take a job any way I can get it. ...politics in our society helps us by letting some of our gang members receive jobs. The politicians probably won’t admit this because all of the corruption bullshit that is out there today,. But it’s true.

While gang violence between Latino gangs is highly publicized, it is only about half the rate of violence in Black communities. Latino gang violence is more often about color and retaliation and African American gangs are typically warring over drug turf.

The ALKQN also has chapters across the US and in several countries. The New York chapter was highly publicized as it attempted a full-scale transformation from a gang into a community organization. All chapters pledge allegiance to the “Motherland,” Chicago, although ties are more fraternal than hierarchical.

2.5.5 Other institutionalized Chicago gangs

Chicago’s neighborhoods are a patchwork of gang rivalries and drug markets. Streets often separate the turf or selling spot of one gang from another. Aside from the major gangs, Chicago has dozens of other multi-neighborhood
institutionalized gangs with sharply delineated territory. This picture has been complicated in the last decade by two factors.

First is the emergence of "renegade" factions within all the gangs. This crisis of control was commented on by every gang member who has been interviewed. The second factor is the displacement of African American gangs by the tearing down of public housing and Latino gangs by gentrification. As gang members are forcibly moved to another neighborhood, they come into conflict with the local gang and compete over drug markets. This has caused homicide in Chicago to move westward and southward as Blacks and Hispanics are pushed away from the city center. lxviii
2.6 Command Structure and ties to the community

To understand the command structure of Chicago gangs and their ties to the community, we must revisit the concept of institutionalization. Most gangs in the United States are short term "interstitial" gangs which go in and out of existence.
as members’ peer friendships mature. On the other hand, gangs in Los Angeles, Chicago and other cities have institutionalized with youth staying in the gang as adults. It is on these gangs that this study focuses. Institutionalization appears to occur given three conditions:

1. **Gangs institutionalize when urban conflict is racial, ethnic, or religious, not solely class-based.** Class conflict appears to decline over time in the United States within dominant racial and ethnic groups. Thus Irish and other white ethnic gangs assimilated into urban power structures. The mafia institutionalized as an out-group to the dominant Irish urban machines in the 1920s, but accommodated over time. However, African American and Latino gangs institutionalized as outsiders and their ethnic groups were excluded from legitimate power. Gangs typically have a strongly racialized identity, often with nationalist, religious, and/or political overtones.

2. **Gangs institutionalize in neighborhoods where formal controls, services, and economic opportunities are lacking.** When the state is unable to maintain control over ghetto spaces, street organizations arise to provide conflict resolution and order. In many neighborhoods, police involvement was welcomed when gang or drug violence got out of control, particularly during the crack wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Gangs at times, however, were granted legitimacy due to police racism and brutality. Second, the profits of the drug game allowed the gangs to provide area youth with entry-level jobs and opportunities in the illicit economy. In job-starved neighborhoods, the gangs fulfill an economic function. Third, the profits from the drug economy allowed the gangs to provide services, like sponsoring athletic teams, and helping residents in economic distress.

3. **Gangs institutionalize in defensible spaces.** In Brazil, the favelas are a perfect example of a defensible space explaining the persistence of the factions. In Chicago, the Black ghetto and high-rise projects also provided defensible spaces that allowed the gangs to persist. In East Los Angeles, the original barrios, like White Fence, were in valleys that formed natural, defensible grounds that gave the gangs space to develop. South Central Los Angeles and Compton, were segregated Black ghettos with newly built housing projects that encouraged the uniting of different neighborhoods into bigger, stronger, units.
Institutionalized gangs have strong ties to communities both through relatives who live there and the services they perform. Large numbers of community residents oppose the gangs, but some fear retaliation and some oppose police tactics. Gangs also take part in political, civic, and religious activity and have built long term relationships with community leaders. Corruption of police and local officials is a Chicago tradition continued by the gangs.

The major Chicago gangs have written literature, with laws and prayers, and titles for various officers. As the major gangs spread out over many Chicago neighborhoods and into other cities and states the Chicago leadership attempted to control out-lying chapters though establishment of appointed leaders, The Black Gangster Disciples, for example, re-organized in the last few years with appointed State “Governors” overseeing all branches claiming allegiance to the BGD Nation. Other gangs and street organizations have similar regional and national organization.

No serious study has investigated the nature of these Chicago-outlying ties, but it is reasonable to assume a great degree of flexibility. Milwaukee, for example, where the author had done over a decade of research, saw gangs form in the 1980s and take the names of Chicago gangs. Some gangs followed gang literature and made pilgrimages to Chicago looking for support, drug connections, and weapons. Others took only the name and had little to do with Chicago. As one leader explained why his Milwaukee gang rejected as leader someone with “rank” who moved from Chicago

> We got to thinking, we’re not following. Ain’t nobody going to come in and tell us how to run our shit. ’Cause this ain’t Chicago. This is Milwaukee.

Law enforcement continues to portray Chicago’s institutionalized gangs as tightly organized, hierarchical bureaucracies, sort of a criminal version of a police department or army. While all Chicago gangs have an ostensible leader, typically locked up and attempting to “call the shots” from behind bars, the actual “command structure” is both more complex and less conspiratorial than law enforcement believes.
Within Chicago, each gang has multiple branches and a city-wide leadership. The original set of leaders from the 1960s has been either killed or jailed. The gang structures, hierarchical on paper, in fact appears to be a loosely coupled, decentralized branch-based organization often depending on kinship ties. The Milwaukee Kings, for example (a Chicago gang not affiliated with the ALKQN) have established a set of laws ("Los Leyes") since the 1960s, but leadership is kept strictly within kinship groups. The current leader is son of one of the gangs' co-founders and brother to the last two leaders.

Institutionalized gangs, on the whole, appear to have centralized leadership that is loosely coupled to neighborhood branches and chapters in other cities. Military-style gang organization is more law enforcement rhetoric than street reality.

2.7 Gangs and the State

The state exercises effective control over most Chicago neighborhoods. Police are seen by gang members as legitimate, if often crooked, brutal, and racist. This young man talks about his problems with police. Note that police are seen as legitimate, but complaints are of what the respondent sees as unfair treatment.

Q. Do you get along with some of them?

A. Yeah, I've known a lot of police.

Q. Are there different kinds of cops?

A. A whole lot of different kinds. Not a whole lot, but it's, I've know some police. The only time they be pissing me off is when they take their job too seriously. Damn, just calm down, you're doing your job, getting your money, do your job. They just want to beat you up, if you ain't got nothing they can't catch you on nothing, so now they want to put something on you, that's the worst thing the police do, put something on you. They cheat you. Don't cheat me, beat me. You understand? If you're going to catch me, catch me, if you caught me, I tell the police, good job, you did your job, you found it, okay. But if they put something on you...
This Vice Lord shows both the hatred of the police, but also admits the reality of “who runs it” in the neighborhood.

Q. What would happen if a cop got killed?

A. How’s that?

Q. Say a cop was coming in and trying to do a buy and bust or something and something broke out and somebody killed him. What would happen?

A. Police are going to try to shut it down. There’s going to be hell. It hasn’t happened before, the police have got shot, but he ain’t got killed, but they sure shot at his ass. It was a couple years ago, about 94 or 95. The officer was John Kinzar. This was one of the police that would beat you up. I was little, in 95 I was 12 or 13. I wasn’t thinking about no drugs, I was in school. ... [cops] see us, we’d be walking, and they’d twist our arms and bend it and make us, what we used to call duck walking, duck walking in water....He was little. He was like, if anything happens to John Kinzar, he was gonna kill everybody in this neighborhood. We were twelve or thirteen and this is what the damn police told us.

So I know when police get killed, I already know what’s going to happen. Anybody’s stupid going to kill no police, but, sometimes they deserve that shit they be getting. They be doing some dirty shit, some dirty ass shit. Like I said, sometimes they take their jobs too far. They take their job too far, and see what happens. I don’t wish death upon nobody, but sometimes people deserve to die and that’s the way it goes. People got to die.

Police and the state, however, are seen by all those interviewed as being fundamentally racist. This Gangster says it best

A. That’s how it is....They want us to be dependent on the system. But that man [Gangster leader Larry Hoover] was
teaching us to not be dependent on the system. To be dependent on ourselves. He was trying to teach the niggers to go back to school. They didn’t want us to do that. They want us to stay right here, selling drugs, get your rent.

Q. So, racism is at the heart of it?

A. Right. Yeah. Like, you could be dressed the same, you know, dressed in a nice suit. I bet you if you walk down the street like that, they won’t say nothing, but if I walk down the street like that, they’d say something to me. They think I’m doing something. Oh, he must be up to something. Black man dressed like that, you up to something. You got a nice car, you could have a nice car, and I could have the same car and you could get away with it, but me, I sold drugs, I robbed somebody to get it. It’s racist. That’s all it is.

*It’s the gang versus the racism.* They want to take over the gang, but we won’t let them, so they going to try to lock us up and move us away… There’s gonna be about 40, 50 penitentiaries in Illinois. What? That’s what they’re trying to do.

Chicago gangs have a long political tradition. Both members from Black and Latino gangs discussed off microphone payments to police and aldermen for protection. One important development has been the election to office of former gang members in several neighborhoods. These politicians do favors for their old gang in return for help with election work.

Sometimes a politician can’t deliver, as this Disciple explains,

The Kings from 26
th street were doing favors for (an alderman) and he promised that he would get them jobs. Then he dropped out of the race so (the Kings) threw a bomb in his office and tried to kill him.

Police are also implicated in gang activity.
There are so many cops that are still gang banging. They don't necessary hang out on the corner. But they still help their people out. (Like they) take drugs in a stop (arrest) and take the drugs to their guys... Lots of them also work as bouncers (security) in bars and help there too.

The Latin Kings, like many other gangs, see themselves as not only gangsters, but also having a role benefiting the community.

And it's not because I'm willing to die for a gang but because I'm willing to die for the purpose of progress to improve my people's situation, other people's situation and for the betterment of our community.

In summary, today's gangs are not a revolutionary force, but, in an old Chicago tradition, trying to play a role within the political system through favors, corruption, and the use of the gang as a part of the political machine.

3.0 Homicide Tables for Chicago

see attached file

4.0 Conclusion

Nationwide the numbers of US children in organized armed violence are on the decline. Homicide rates for children and young adults have plummeted in most major cities, especially New York City a city which does not have institutionalized gangs. The early 1990s were the height the US drug 'wars' and the sharp increases in offenders and victims were largely due to Black and Hispanic kids in gangs with guns. The declines of the mid to late 1990s meant that in most cities those kids ceased to kill one another at the same rate. There is no academic consensus on the reasons for the "crime drop." Clearly, the stability of drug markets after years of warfare contributed to the sharp declines. However, as noted above, these sharp declines did not occur everywhere.

Institutionalized gangs in Chicago, Los Angeles, and other US cities, are
essentially groups of armed young men who often organize teenagers and children to play roles within the gang and drug business. It is mainly within these institutionalized gangs that some children have access to weapons and at times are entrusted with, or take, an armed role.

While in all cities, a few children commit individual acts of armed violence, it is only in cities with institutionalized gangs that we can speak of children or youth participating in organized armed violence. While there has been mention of the armed roles of children in several US studies over the past decade, no organized research effort has investigated this issue.

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i http://www.gangresearch.net/Globalization/guggenheim/images/animsidelegend.gif


v http://gangresearch.net/Globalization/guggenheim/housing/tribhousmur.html

vi gangresearch.net. Data from Chicago Homicide Dataset.

vii 2000 US Census

viii For a map of changing ethnicity in Chicago, see http://www.gangresearch.net/Globalization/guggenheim/images/animsidelegend.gif

ix “While gangs begin as unsupervised adolescent peer groups and most remain so, some institutionalize in barrios, favelas, ghettos, and prisons. Often these institutionalized gangs become business enterprises within the informal economy and a few are linked to international criminal cartels. Most gangs share a racialized or ethnic identity and a media-diffused oppositional culture. Gangs have variable ties to conventional institutions and, in given conditions, assume social, economic, political, cultural, religious, or military roles.” From “Gangs in Late Modernity,” in John Hagedorn, edited, Gangs in the Global City. Champaign. University of Illionois Press. In Press.


xii Thrasher, ibid


xiv http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/gangs&ghetto/Perkins.htm
Policy or the “numbers” is a form of gambling similar to the contemporary lottery. People place bets on a number, sometimes picked randomly or chosen from the published attendance at race tracks. Prior to the legal lotteries of today, the number or “policy” was nationally popular, especially in Black communities. Large number of “runners,” area “captains,” and other employees were needed to run this enterprise on a daily basis.


The US Federal Bureau of Investigation was alarmed by the the Black Panther Party and its growing links with street gangs. In Chicago, a secret FBI program, COINTELPRO, was used to plant rumors between the Blackstone Rangers and Black Gangster Disciples leading to armed clashes.


Wilson, ibid.


Hagedorn, ibid.


Police Department of San Juan, Puerto Rico


Gang data from official sources is unreliable, since definitions of "gang-involved" vary across jurisdictions and designations of a gang-related homicide are often subjective judgments from individual officers or responsive to political treatment.


Thrasher, ibid.


“To be” jumped into a gang means to fight one or more gang members for a specified period. Once the fight is over, the initiate becomes a full gang member.

The police beating of Rodney King was captured by a citizen on videotape and played on network television. It brought forth a massive response from the US public and when the police were acquitted of assault, Los Angeles erupted into a riot.


Thrasher, ibid.

Tuttle, Hirsch, and Black ibid.

Bennie Lee - http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/vicelords/believeitornot.html


http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/vicelords/VLTitle.html

http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/vicelords/Millionaires.html

http://www.uic.edu/orgs/kbc/lawn/la/thislit/slide01.html


Dawley, ibid.

Jacobs, ibid.


Emery, ibid.


http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/latinkings/Reyx.html

http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/latinkings/lkhistory.html

http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/younglords/chacha.htm


Venkatesh, ibid


http://gangresearch.net/ChicagoGangs/earlygangs/gangbur.html