

# Defensive localism in white and black: a comparative history of European-American and African-American youth gangs

Christopher Adamson

## Abstract

The activities of European-American and African-American youth gangs have been closely linked to the operation of changing racial and class structures. In this article, I compare European-American and African-American youth gangs in four historical periods: the seaboard city, 1787–1861; the immigrant city, 1880–1940; the racially changing city, 1940–1970; and the hypersegregated city, 1970–1999. I show that the differences between European-American and African-American gangs can be traced to the race-specific effects of labour, housing and consumer markets, government policies (especially crime control policies), local politics and organized crime on European-American and African-American communities. I conclude that European-American youth gangs facilitated cultural assimilation because of their close ties with formal and informal political authorities and organizations which commanded substantial social and economic power, whereas African-American youth gangs reinforced cultural separation because of their embeddedness in racially segregated, economically marginalized and politically powerless communities.

**Keywords:** Youth gangs; United States; ethnicity; race; assimilation; segregation.

In a country like the United States in which race and class have been the central structuring principles of urban life, we would expect significant differences in the patterns of historical development of European-American and African-American youth or street gangs. Indeed, the effects of racial and class structures on the behaviour of American youth gangs have been so profound that scholars who have sought to develop race-invariant theories of gangs and delinquency have been stymied.<sup>1</sup> Over the last fifty years, those criminologists and sociologists who have been sensitive to the differential effects of joblessness, residential segregation and the availability of public services on white and black

communities have acknowledged the absurdity of attempts to construct a single, race-invariant model of youth-gang behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

This is not to say that there are not similarities between white and black gangs.<sup>3</sup> It is true, for example, that both white and black youth gangs have been affected by economic disadvantage, family disruption and social disorganization. Gangs of both races have been predators upon, and protectors of, the communities in which they are embedded. For black and white teenagers, the gang has been a place in which to forge an identity and achieve social status. And just as white youth gangs have attacked vulnerable blacks, black youth gangs have attacked vulnerable whites. For both races, the gang has performed important community functions which can be subsumed under the rubric of defensive localism. These functions include the defence of territory, the policing of neighbourhoods, the upholding of group honour, and the provision of economic, social, employment, welfare and recreational services.

Despite these similarities, white and black youth gangs are profoundly different historical creations. They originated at different times, and their respective relationships to labour, housing and consumer markets, governmental institutions, formal and informal political authority, organized crime and agencies of crime control have been different. In the historical analysis which ensues, I compare the effects of these structural relationships on white and black youth gangs.

### **White youth gangs in the seaboard city, 1787–1861**

Black youth gangs did not exist as a recognized social problem until the great migration of the 1910s when large numbers of African-Americans came to the northern cities. Indeed, it was only with the massive second great migration of the mid-twentieth century, when a far more intractable urban ghetto was created, that politicians, prosecutors, police officials and social workers began to view African-American youth gangs as a threat to social order. In the nineteenth century, the assumptions of caste militated against the formation of territorial gangs of free black youth. No doubt groups of three or more young blacks got together on many occasions, and certain newspapers, such as the *North American and United States News Gazette* in 1853, did point to the existence of black youth gangs in Philadelphia (Davis 1982, p. 190). It is significant, however, that these black gangs were neither named nor territorial. At a time when African-American gatherings and parades were regarded with suspicion, the appearance of boisterous gangs of black teenagers on street corners, even in areas inhabited by many blacks, would have been dangerously provocative (Litwack 1961, p. 102).

White youth gangs, in contrast, existed at the very inception of the republic. In the late 1780s, for example, prison reformers commented on

the baneful presence of gangs of young people hanging out on Philadelphia's street corners (Meranze 1996, p. 94). The activities of white gangs, which became an increasingly visible presence in the ante-bellum city, were geared to the defence of local neighbourhoods. Gang youth, who were generally subservient to prominent adults in the community, upheld the local racial order.

By the 1820s white boys in their teens and early twenties were gathering on street corners in New York's Bowery and Five Points districts, Boston's North End and Fort Hill, and the outlying Southwark and Moyamensing sections of Philadelphia. These gangs of boys fought youths from other neighbourhoods for control of street corners and open lots. For example, New York's Smith Vly Boys, a gang which took its name 'from the marsh, or lowlands (Dutch *Vly*) in the lower, eastern part of the city', fought several Broadway gangs for control of the high ground on present-day Grand Street, then called Bunker Hill (Gilje 1987, p. 261). The Roach Guards, named in honour of a Five Points liquor seller, took on the Chichesters, the Plug Uglies and the Dead Rabbits. The Roach Guards' battle uniform was 'a blue stripe on the pantaloons, while the Dead Rabbits adopted a red stripe, and at the head of their sluggers carried a dead rabbit impaled on a pike' (Asbury 1928, p. 23). The impoverished suburbs of Philadelphia were home to a large number of turf-defending white gangs whose 'verminous designations', as *New York Tribune* reporter George Foster (1848, p. 35) put it, 'were written in chalk or charcoal on every dead-wall, fence, and stable door'.

It is important to recognize that white gangs were often multi-ethnic, especially in neighbourhoods that were not rigidly segregated by ethnicity. Dutch, English, Welsh, Scots-Irish, Irish Catholics, Germans and persons of mixed ancestry could be found in the same territorially defined youth gang. Territory was often more important than ethnicity in shaping the formation of white youth gangs. New York's Bowery gangs, such as the O'Connell Guards, the Atlantic Guards, the American Guards and the True Blue Americans – some of which were nativist and Protestant, others Irish Catholic – put aside their ethnic differences in order to defend their territory against Five Points gangs<sup>4</sup> (Asbury 1928, p. 28; Sante 1991, p. 200).

It is central to this article's argument to recognize that white youth gangs enjoyed a measure of support from the adult population. To be sure, gang boys annoyed adults by swearing and carrying on loudly in the streets; and their drinking, fighting, disrespect for property and theft disrupted the fabric of social life. But white gangs were sponsored by politically powerful adults, who rewarded them for defending the local neighbourhood. In some instances, youth gangs served an informal policing function. Gang boys in New York, for example, 'served as informal neighborhood constabularies'. They 'stood about on street corners with a studied watchful glower, making sure, as one New Yorker recalled, that

anyone who was 'exotic or unfamiliar' would not cause trouble or linger too long' (Wilentz 1984, p. 262). Gang boys also considered it their duty to protect young women in the neighbourhood. In the Bowery young toughs chased after prowling outsiders and voyeuristic 'aristos' seeking sexual liaison with Bowery girls (Stansell 1987, p. 95).

It was thus a hallmark of white defensive localism that street gangs were subservient to powerful adults in the community. Gangs allied themselves with social and political clubs and often took direction from political bosses, who depended on them to mobilize the vote and protect polling places on election days. Membership in a youth gang could lead to a career in local politics. Thus William McMullen, Philadelphia's influential saloon keeper, alderman, prison inspector and political boss, started his career as a member of the Killers, one of the city's violent Irish-Catholic fighting gangs.

White youth gangs patrolled streets and secured neighbourhood boundaries. The Killers, for example, won the support of the people of Moyamensing by protecting them from nativist invaders and by occasionally distributing food to the poor (Silcox 1989, p. 46). However, white youth gangs like the Killers also participated in collective attacks on free blacks. Given the caste assumption of black ontological inferiority, white gang boys looked upon black Americans as a people to whom the rules of honour-based conflict did not apply, and viciously assaulted inoffensive black women and elderly black men during riots.

In the 1830s young Irish and native-born workingmen expressed their contempt for New York's African Americans by savagely attacking black patrons of white drinking and eating houses, and by destroying the property of successful black tavern keepers (Kaplan 1995, pp. 606-9). In Philadelphia, in 1834, a 'party of half grown boys' precipitated a three-night riot by attacking a tavern with an interracial clientele. A mob then invaded the streets and alleys of Moyamensing, assaulting free blacks, looting their homes, destroying their furniture and bedding, and forcing many of them to flee into the city or across the Delaware. Many of the rioters described their activities as 'hunting the nigs' (Runcie 1972, p. 190). In 1849 Philadelphia's Killers burnt down the California House Tavern, an establishment owned by a mulatto who had married a white woman. As in 1834, a mob then proceeded to hunt down pedestrians on the streets of the African-American section of Moyamensing, killing three blacks and injuring at least two dozen others (Feldberg 1980, p. 59; Laurie 1980, p. 156).

The Irish antipathy towards African Americans was partly fuelled by competition for jobs on the docks, shipyards and building construction sites, and partly rooted in a *herrenvolk* republicanism which sought to deprive free blacks of any of the rights enjoyed by white citizens and members of the producing classes (Roediger 1991, p. 147). This antipathy found its ugliest expression in New York City's draft riot of 1863 and in

Philadelphia's voting day riot of 1871 (Lane 1986, p. 10; Bernstein 1990, p. 66). The impulse of Irish-Catholic youth gangs to victimize African Americans became an undeniable element in the century-long cultural transformation of the United States from a haven of Protestant purity to a white republic that included Catholics. Poor Irish immigrants strove to assimilate or, as Noel Ignatiev (1995, pp. 163–76) has put it, to 'become white' by victimizing African Americans. As early as the ante-bellum period, then, belonging to a white gang facilitated the cultural assimilation of European immigrants.

### **White youth gangs in the immigrant city, 1880–1940**

A significant number of the 13.5 million people who came to the United States from South, Central, and Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1924 settled in the cities of the Northeast and Midwest. The economic hardship and cultural dislocation experienced by many immigrant parents made it difficult for them to adequately discipline their children, let alone supervise their school work or guide them into rewarding employment. Immigrant children, who found themselves caught between the old-world communal practices of their parents and the norms of an often hostile host society, frequently got together in corner groups and gangs.

White youth gangs in the immigrant city were often multi-ethnic, generally subservient to ward politicians, resolutely territorial, delinquent in varying degrees and virulently racist. In 1927 the country's foremost gang expert, Frederic Thrasher, highlighted the involvement of immigrants in the youth gangs of Chicago. He noted that 70.4 per cent of Chicago's 10–24-year-old males were boys of foreign extraction, while a 'whopping' 87.4 per cent of the city's gangs were gangs of foreign boys. In contrast, 25.7 per cent of Chicago's 10–24-year-old males were American (that is, native white parentage) boys, while a 'miniscule' 5.3 per cent of the city's gangs were gangs of American boys (Thrasher 1936, p. 193, Table 5).

Progressive-era white youth gangs, like their ante-bellum predecessors, were often multi-ethnic. Thrasher's data include myriad examples of ethnically mixed white gangs. For example, the Tent Gang, which stole tinned goods from railroad cars, was made up of Italian and Polish boys. The Elstons, who fought 'innumerable battles of fists and bricks' against the Polish Belmonts, were Irish and Swedish. The O'Brien Juniors, known for their tradition of initiating new members by 'kicking them around', included Irish, Scottish, and Swedish boys. The Twelfth Street Boundary Gang was composed of Polish, Bohemian and Greek lads. Italian boys were invited to join a Jewish gang in the Maxwell Street area 'because of their compatibility and their residence in the area' (Thrasher 1936, pp. 136, 180, 258, 282, 310).

Thrasher determined the race and ethnicity of 880 out of the 1,313

gangs known to exist in Chicago at the time. If we exclude the sixty-three Negro gangs, the twenty-five mixed Negro-white gangs, and the five miscellaneous gangs, as shown in Table 1, then 787 of these 880 gangs were European-American gangs. Of this number, 351 gangs (or 44.6 per cent) were of mixed European-American ethnicity. Such a large percentage of ethnic mixing within gangs reflected the fact that immigrant Chicago was ethnically heterogeneous. As Thomas Philpott (1978, pp. 139–42) has revealed, the average number of nationalities in Chicago's immigrant neighbourhoods was twenty-two. None of the immigrant groups represented more than 50 per cent of the population in their neighbourhoods, except for the Poles, who constituted 54 per cent of their neighbourhood.

As in the ante-bellum period, white youth gangs often attached more importance to the defence of territory than to the promotion of the honour of a specific ethnic identity. Feuds between rival white gangs were typically about turf, and so persisted even when the ethnic composition of the feuding gangs changed. Moreover, many white gang boys interviewed by Thrasher expressed an existential disinterest in the question of ethnicity. 'Aw, we never ask what nationality dey are', said a Polish boy. 'If dey are good guys, dey get in our gang. Dat's all we want.' To be sure, ethnicity and territory sometimes converged. For example, Jewish boys in Chicago were at risk when they travelled unprotected through

**Table I** *Race and nationalities (ethnicities) of gangs in Chicago*

Race or ethnicity	Number of gangs	Percentage of total gangs
Mixed ethnicities	351	39.89
Polish	148	16.82
Italian	99	11.25
Irish	75	8.52
Negro	63	7.16
American – white	45	5.11
Mixed negro-white	25	2.84
Jewish	20	2.27
Slavic	16	1.82
Bohemian	12	1.36
German	8	.91
Swedish	7	.79
Lithuanian	6	.69
Miscellaneous	5	.57
Total	880	100.00

Source: Thrasher (1936, p. 191). The term ethnicity has been substituted for nationality.

solidly Polish territory (Thrasher 1936, pp. 215, 197). In ethnically polyglot white areas, however, the impetus for gang conflict was usually territorial rather than ethnic.

Politically powerful adults did not approve of many of the things that white gangs did, such as breaking windows, reporting false fire alarms, cutting cable lines, defacing street signs, disturbing the peace at night, insulting people on the sidewalk, pilfering from stores, breaking into private dwellings, and looting factory yards and construction sites (Philpott 1978, p. 73). Nevertheless, those adults sponsored white street gangs, and rewarded them for playing a key role in neighbourhood defence, especially since urban governments and police forces were weak, ineffective and often corrupt. While adults frowned on activities which undermined the quality of community life, they approved of the youth gang's role in keeping strangers, especially blacks, off their streets and beaches, and out of their parks, baseball diamonds, swimming pools, saloons and dance halls (Spear 1967, p. 206; Kusmer 1976, p. 185).

Ward politicians and street gang leaders often reached a mutually beneficial understanding. The former would pay the rent of an apartment that could serve as a gang clubhouse, while the latter would distribute campaign leaflets, put up posters, hustle up votes, and chase opponents from polling booths on election days. Ward bosses could mitigate the police harassment of gangs, and gangs could turn over a share of the proceeds of their illegal activities.

Local politicians legitimized street gangs by sponsoring neighbourhood athletic clubs. Cook County's Democratic Commissioner, Frank Ragen, set up the Ragen Athletic Club on Chicago's Halsted Street. This club was home to Ragen's Colts, a fighting gang of Irish youth ranging in age from seventeen to thirty. This gang, whose motto was 'Hit me and you hit a thousand', provided a *de facto* policing service for the community. Ragen Colt territory was the Back of the Yards district west of Wentworth Avenue extending south from 43rd to 63rd Street. Any black who made the mistake of crossing Wentworth Avenue risked being seriously injured. In 1918 the poet, Langston Hughes, then a high school student, made this mistake and was badly beaten up. Yet, every working day, thousands of black labourers had to cross Wentworth Avenue and make their way through hostile Irish and Polish streets in order to get to the stockyards (Tuttle 1970, pp. 103, 199).

Youth gangs served as nuclei for the white mob during the race riots in East St. Louis in 1917, Philadelphia in 1918 and Chicago in 1919 (Rudwick 1964, pp. 41-57; Tuttle 1970, pp. 32-66; Franklin 1975, p. 340). The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, which investigated the causes of the city's five-day riot, concluded that 'the riot would not have gone beyond the first clash' were it not for the involvement of local gangs and athletic clubs (1922, pp. 11-17). Members of Ragen's Colts, for example, drove into the Black Belt at night, setting fire to wooden

porches and shacks, and firing their guns at the windows and roofs of tenement buildings.

Approximately two-fifths of the violent confrontations between whites and blacks during the Chicago riot occurred in Bridgeport. Young people in this cohesive Irish-Catholic neighbourhood belonged to the Hamburg Social and Athletic Club. The youth gang known as the Hamburgs or Hamburgers were active participants in the street fighting. As the journalist Mike Royko (1971, p. 37) has noted, it is likely that one of the Hamburgs, the seventeen-year-old boy, Richard J. Daley, future mayor of the city, was caught up in the violence.

Another gang active in the riot, the Dirty Dozen, armed themselves with 'revolvers, blackjacks, and knives, and started out to get the "niggers"'. An ex-gang member recounted that about twenty gang members stopped a 'street car filled with colored people' at 35th and State Streets, which was about 'five miles or more from their own territory'. In the ensuing fracas, a 'colored woman' slashed a boy by the name of Shaggy Martin across the heart with a razor. Infuriated by this, the white gang extracted vengeance by killing two blacks and seriously injuring five others (Thrasher 1936, p. 47). This kind of racial violence was an offshoot of the politics of white defensive localism in the cities of the Progressive era.

### **Black youth gangs in the immigrant city, 1880–1940**

The immigrant city was the birthplace of the African-American youth gang. Most of our knowledge of the black youth gangs of this period comes from Thrasher's research. Whereas African-American boys accounted for approximately 3.8 per cent of Chicago's total boy population, African-American gangs made up 7.4 per cent of the total number of city gangs (Thrasher 1936, p. 193). The finding that the involvement of African-American boys in gangs was greater than their representation in the overall population of young people makes sense in the light of the fact that they were barred from unionized factory jobs, clerical positions and even unskilled, part-time positions.

Thrasher also found some racial mixing in the gangs of Progressive-era Chicago. As Table 1 reveals, twenty-five of the 880 gangs of known race and ethnicity were mixed 'Negro-white' gangs. Although only 2.8 per cent of the total, this percentage is relatively high when considered in the light of the small number of racially mixed gangs reported in the far more racially segregated cities of the second half of the twentieth century.

To be sure, white ethnic mixing in gangs was far more extensive than racial mixing. As Table 1 shows, 28 per cent (25 of 88) of Chicago's African-American gangs were racially mixed, while 44.6 per cent (351 of 787) of the city's European-American gangs were of mixed white ethnicity. The existence of racially mixed youth gangs was because African



Americans often lived interspersed among whites. The arrival of southern blacks in Chicago's Jewish neighbourhoods created friction, but 'the Negro boys brought in by this migration', one of Thrasher's informants stated (1936, p. 216), 'are being received in a friendly way by Jewish boys, and Jewish gangs are now fraternizing with the negroes'.

Whereas the white youth gangs of this period derived support from local political authorities and were aggressive in the defence of turf, black youth gangs existed in communities that were not yet large enough or ecologically distinct enough to sanction the vigorous defence of turf.<sup>5</sup> In Washington and Philadelphia, African Americans, many of whom worked as domestic servants, lived in unmapped alleys and streets behind the elegant houses of their white employers (Borchert 1980, p. 135; Lane 1986, p. 21). In New York, prior to the black settlement of Harlem in the 1910s, African Americans lived on many different blocks between 20th and 63rd Streets (Osofsky 1966, p. 12). On Chicago's South Side, less than a dozen blocks were 'entirely Negro' in 1910 (Spear 1967, p. 20). 'We have no LITTLE AFRICA in Cleveland,' an African-American clerk boasted in 1915. 'There is not yet a single street in this city that is inhabited by nothing but Negroes' (Kusmer 1976, p. 42). As late as 1930, following two decades of migration from the South, blacks were widely dispersed throughout Pittsburgh (Gottlieb 1987, pp. 66–67). In the same year, most of Milwaukee's blacks lived in white residential areas (Trotter 1985, p. 67). In none of these cities was the black population large enough for the formation of territorially aggressive black youth gangs. In the 1919 Chicago riot, according to the Commission investigating its causes, African-American gangs played an insignificant and largely defensive role (1922, pp. 11–17).

The exclusion of African Americans from urban political structures, their subordinate role in organized crime and the hostility of predominantly white police forces also inhibited the rise of turf-defending black street gangs. The white business élite, real estate developers, city politicians, police forces and dominant figures in organized crime conspired to locate the vice industry in areas of the city that were inhabited by large numbers of black people.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the illegal economy associated with prostitution, gambling and the provision of bootleg alcohol was largely controlled by whites. In Chicago's 'Levee', Detroit's 'Paradise Valley', or Cleveland's 'Roaring Third', white crime syndicates hired young black males to work as bouncers in speakeasies, as lookouts in brothels, and as numbers runners. Black entrepreneurs who attempted to establish their own rackets were ruthlessly suppressed. In Harlem, for example, Dutch Schultz relied on the police to wrest control of the policy racket away from Stephanie St. Clair (Schatzberg and Kelly 1996, p. 90). The racial order upheld by corrupt politicians, police forces, and white criminal syndicates permitted neither collective forms of illegality by black adults nor the aggressive defence of turf by black youth.

### **White youth gangs in the racially changing city, 1940–1970**

White youth gangs at mid-century continued to defend turf and uphold the racial order, and derive support for doing so from political leaders and organized crime figures. Ethnically heterogeneous areas continued to produce ethnically mixed gangs. Irish, Italian, Polish, Serbian and Mexican boys who lived on the same block or street in South Chicago joined the same gang and fought similarly mixed gangs from other blocks (Kornblum 1974, p. 74). In New York's Spanish Harlem, one particular Italian gang included 'maybe twenty guys who were Puerto Rican' (Wakefield 1957, p. 126). In Boston's Roxbury, the Senior Bandits and the Outlaws were predominantly Irish Catholic, but also included a few Protestants of British ancestry, French Canadians, and Italians (Miller 1969, pp. 16–20).

Elsewhere in Boston, the intermarriage of Irish and Italian families affected gang fighting. For many years, Charlestown's Irish-American gangs had been at feud with Italian-American youth from the North End. The bridge across the river was the site of battles which dragged on for hours and involved hundreds of adolescents armed with bottles, two-by-fours (timber planks), and slingshots. With the intermarriage of Irish and Italian families, however, Italian families began to settle in Charlestown. Thereafter Charlestown's residents began to view 'the Champas, Saccos, and Castranovas as "our Italians" or "white Italians" to distinguish them from "the goddamned Italians" across the bridge' (Lukas 1985, p. 155).

The traditional role which white youth gangs played in neighbourhood defence became more important during the 1950s when the influx of southern blacks created a tidal wave of urban racial transition.<sup>7</sup> Adults seeking to keep their neighbourhoods white formed neighbourhood improvement and homeowners' associations which mobilized youth gangs to do much of their dirty work. In the housing riots which occurred in the Chicago neighbourhoods of Fernwood and Englewood in 1947 and 1949, roving youth gangs terrorized the South Side, hauling blacks off streetcars and attacking University of Chicago students assumed to be sympathetic to racial desegregation (Hirsch 1983, p. 54). White youth gangs targeted black teenagers in neighbourhoods like Oakland, Kenwood, Hyde Park, Woodlawn, Park Manor and Englewood that were undergoing partial or complete racial transition. In the early 1960s, a large white gang attacked participants in the so-called 'wade-ins' – protests against the segregation of Chicago's beaches. This kind of activity was supported by adults. Gang boys who chased black pedestrians out of their neighbourhoods were, James Short and Fred Strodbeck (1965, pp. 193, 114) noted, 'spurred on to greater efforts by adults of the area who offered advice and encouragement'.

In Detroit, white homeowners' associations relied on youth support in their militant response to racial change. When a black family purchased

a home in a white neighbourhood, youth gangs could be counted on to throw stones and bottles at the newcomer's house, pile garbage on his lawn, block his driveway or slash his tires (Sugrue 1996, pp. 247–58). During the late 1950s, in what was then still the Italian section of Manhattan on the Upper East Side, much of the gang fighting was, according to a local settlement house worker, 'a reflection of the insecurity of the adults, who felt very hostile toward the Puerto Ricans and Negroes' who were moving in (Spergel 1964, p. 64). In mid-1960s Brooklyn, white adults moving out of Crown Heights, East Flatbush, Brownsville, Bushwick and Red Hook sanctioned youth gang violence directed at minority newcomers. Italian youth gangs in East New York vandalized a black realty office and grocery store, and armed themselves with lug wrenches to keep blacks off their streets and out of their parks (Connolly 1977, p. 134).

White street gangs were active at Chrysler Corporation's Dodge Main Plant in Detroit's Hamtramck municipality during the 1950s. The local chapter of the United Automobile Workers, in its efforts to uphold male white supremacy, 'drew support from neighborhood street gang members who had taken work in the plant' (Boyle 1997, p. 507). However, the usual way for white street gangs to uphold white supremacy was by terrorizing black newcomers in neighbourhoods threatened with racial change. In this regard, multi-ethnic white gangs signified that social solidarity among whites at mid-century was increasingly founded on a common identification with territory rather than on a particularistic identification with a specific European ethnic or cultural heritage (Kornblum and Beshers 1988, p. 219).

### **African-American youth gangs in the racially changing city, 1940–1970**

The rapidly growing urban black population led to an increase in the number of African-American youth gangs.<sup>8</sup> With the creation of large areas of concentrated black poverty, black youth gangs began to defend themselves and enter adjoining white territory. However, extreme ghettoization ultimately cut black youth off from white areas of the city so that black youth gangs began to prey on each other. While black gang boys received moral support from adults for defending turf, they received little concrete political or economic support because of the relative powerlessness of adults in disadvantaged black communities. The exclusion of black youth from legal jobs as well as from opportunities in white-controlled criminal syndicates resulted in an increase in violent gang feuding among black youth.

Initially, the geographic expansion of the black ghettos led to an increase in fighting between black and white youth gangs. As early as the 1940s, teenagers in Detroit's densely populated ghetto, Paradise Valley,

hung out on street corners and got into fights with white gangs in parks and playgrounds (Thomas 1992, p. 119). During the 1943 riot, black youth gangs adopted the same tactics that white gangs had traditionally used against black people. They assaulted white students and factory workers returning home on streetcars, and they hurled bricks at unsuspecting white motorists (Lee and Humphrey 1943, p. 28). In Chicago, black youth were no longer the passive victims of white violence. In 1957, when a white gang killed a black youth at 59th Street and Kedzie, black gangs retaliated and seriously assaulted twelve whites (Hirsch 1983, p. 291). Black gangs increasingly challenged whites over the use of streets, bridges, beaches, parks, school playgrounds, restaurants, ballrooms and roller rinks. Black teenagers on Chicago's South Side took on the Diablos, a white gang which tried to keep them out of the Capitol Theater. Reminiscing about the night his gang fought their way into the theatre, a former gang member, interviewed for the film *The Promised Land* (1995), remarked ironically, 'that was my first experience of integration'.

However, one effect of the doubling of black spatial isolation in northern cities between 1930 and 1970 was that turf-oriented black youth gangs became increasingly likely to prey on each other (Massey and Denton 1993, p. 46).<sup>9</sup> Turf rivalries on Chicago's West Side enmeshed the Imperial Chaplins and the Clovers, forerunners of the Vice Lords and the Egyptian Cobras (Perkins 1987, p. 28). Black-on-black gang warfare was endemic to the massive public housing estates constructed in the middle of slum neighbourhoods. One of wartime Chicago's largest youth gangs, the Deacons, was born in the Ida B. Wells housing project just a few years after its completion in 1941. The Deacons took on the Destroyers, who lived to the north of the projects, and the 13 Cats, who occupied the area south of Oakwood Boulevard (*idem*). From the Governor Henry Horner Homes, a project which opened on the Near West Side in 1957, the Vice Lords and Black Souls, a faction of the Devil's Disciples, fought with white gangs located in the neighbourhood to the north. When the whites moved away, the Vice Lords and Black Souls fought each other (Kotlowitz 1991, p. 18). In the early 1960s, Devil's Disciples, Blackstone Rangers, and Vice Lords began to carve up sections of the two-mile-long, quarter-of-a-mile-wide strip of twenty-eight identical sixteen-storey buildings along State Street that comprised the Robert Taylor Homes (Lemann 1991, p. 226).

As the population of vast areas of Philadelphia's north side became exclusively black in the 1960s, gang fighting became increasingly intraracial. In 1973, for example, two North Philadelphia gangs, the Valley gang and the Norris Street gang, fought over an abandoned area known as the 'graveyard' which consisted of '3 or 4 acres of smashed brick and twisted tailpipe' (Lieber 1975, p. 42). In Los Angeles, conflict-oriented black gangs began to form in the housing projects in Watts during the 1950s. A

little farther north in the Florence/Firestone district, which was undergoing racial transition, the Slausons emerged partly in response to attacks by whites on defenseless blacks. However, white flight led to turf- and honour-based rivalries between the Slausons and various Watts gangs. A few years after the formation of the first Crip gang in 1969, marauding Crips, belonging to different sets, such as the West Side Crips, Main Street Crips and Grape Street Watts Crips, began to victimize youth living on Piru Street in Compton, who then banded together for protection. The Pirus, Brims, Bishops, Blood Fives, Swans, and other gangs formed the nucleus of the Blood Nation. By the early 1980s not only were Crips fighting Bloods, but different Crip sets were also locked in deadly turf- and honour-based feuds (Valentine 1995, pp. 45–50; Quicker and Batani-Khalfani 1998, pp. 18–20).

Extreme racial segregation in Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis and Cleveland has virtually eliminated confrontations between black and white youth gangs (Dawley 1973; Hagedorn 1988; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Huff 1996). In New York, however, black-white gang violence has persisted in places where black housing projects were built near white working-class neighbourhoods. In South Brooklyn, for example, the proximity of the predominantly black Red Hook Houses to Carroll Gardens, an Italian neighbourhood of brownstones, has been the source of more than thirty years of interracial youth violence (Barron 1997; Martin 1997).

The increased violence associated with gang fighting in impoverished African-American neighbourhoods can be traced to growing joblessness among youth, especially in cities like Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit and St. Louis. Another reason why a destructive conflict subculture began to emerge among African-American youth was that opportunities for illegal work as bouncers or numbers runners declined. By 1940 Italian gangsters had seized control of numbers gambling in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Detroit, and, in 1952, Sam 'Mooney' Giancana took over Chicago's lucrative black-operated policy racket (Pinderhughes 1987, p. 147; Schatzberg and Kelly 1996, pp. 78, 102). The failure of black street gangs during the 1950s and 1960s to develop into criminal organizations, or even to provide major services to white criminal organizations, reflected their inability to influence the operation of crime or to launder money because of the political and economic marginality of urban black communities (Ianni 1974).

Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin were among the first sociologists to recognize, in their influential book, *Delinquency and Opportunity* (1960), that social disorganization and community breakdown brought about by political and economic marginality tend to decrease the involvement of youth in income-producing illegality and increase their participation in gang-fighting. A weakened community fabric, they argued, increases the degree to which gang youth resort to violence to win social status. Their

argument was empirically extended by Irving Spergel (1963, p. 250), who discovered that sophisticated, income-producing forms of youth crime, such as burglary, larceny and narcotics selling, were more frequent on Chicago's South Side, whereas crimes of violence, such as murder, manslaughter, assault and robbery, occurred more frequently among youthful offenders on the West Side. Gangs on the South Side, a much older, established ghetto community, engaged in criminally oriented behaviour, whereas the trend on the newly settled and rapidly growing West Side pointed towards a future in which growing numbers of black youth, unable to find legal work and excluded from illegitimate economic opportunities, would participate in turf- and honour-based gang violence.

The social scientists who undertook detailed studies of gang delinquency during the 1950s and early 1960s recognized that the greater social disorganization of black neighbourhoods made it more difficult for adults to control the violence of young people. Spergel (1964, pp. 40–43) compared patterns of delinquency in Slumtown, a structurally isolated, mixed Puerto Rican and African-American ghetto in Manhattan north of 100th Street and east of Fifth Avenue, with those in Racketville, an Italian section of Manhattan north of 86th Street between Second Avenue and the East River. He found that 'bopping' or gang fighting was four times more frequent in Slumtown. Not only were parents in Slumtown unable to help their children find either legal or illegal jobs, they were also unable to supervise their children's activities at school and in the street.

Whereas the youth of Slumtown resorted to fighting as a means of achieving 'rep', the Italian youth of closely knit Racketville rarely fought among themselves. As a local street-club worker reported, these kids

may decide every few months to go out and get a "spick", but there isn't a constant tension or pressure to participate in a gang fight as in other neighborhoods. Fighting isn't the usual subject of conversation among the Italian kids (Spergel 1964, p. 41).

Racketville's white youth gangs were discouraged from fighting each other by politically powerful adults. Moreover, those adults, some of whom were affiliated with locally tolerated organized crime families, rewarded youth gangs and street-corner groups for upholding the racial order by chasing Puerto Ricans and blacks out of Racketville. A similar situation existed in Chicago's white neighbourhoods (Short and Strodtbeck 1965, pp. 107–14).

The behaviour of white and African-American youth gangs during the 1960s reflected the profound differences in the social organization of white and black neighbourhoods. The journalist Walter Bernstein (1968), in a 1957 article in *The New Yorker*, described how local community

resources, such as the availability of the American Legion Hall for dances, were effectively used to discourage Italian-American gangs from fighting in the Park Slope neighbourhood of Brooklyn. Adults in socially organized, resource-rich white communities were able to control the violent excesses of their young people, whereas the growing joblessness, political powerlessness and social disorganization of inner-city black neighbourhoods made it far more difficult for adults in those neighbourhoods to prevent young people from fighting over turf and honour.

### **White youth gangs in the hypersegregated city, 1970–1999**

Continued suburbanization during the 1970s and 1980s decreased the number of white youth gang members relative to minority youth gang members.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, just as in previous eras, white youth gangs and corner groups were positively sanctioned by politically powerful adults for their role in upholding the racial order. During the late 1970s in South Philadelphia, members of a white youth gang called the Counts, according to a local informant, ‘had the blessing and support of their parents’ when they attacked blacks who ventured into their turf (Skogan 1990, p. 25). The people of Canarsie, an Italian-Jewish enclave in South Brooklyn, who, in 1972, objected to the busing of African-American children from Brownsville, approved of youth groups who armed themselves with iron pipes and heavy sticks and attacked ‘blacks they took to be suspiciously out of place’ (Reider 1985, p. 179).

Similar incidents occurred in Boston during that city’s busing crisis of the mid-1970s. Charlestown’s notorious Green Store Gang won approval from adults in the community for intimidating black families living in the Bunker Hill projects and adjacent Charles Newton development (Lukas 1985, pp. 157–8). In Dorchester, four street-corner gangs – the Roseland Street gang, the Shawmut Station gang, the Mather Street gang and the Wainright Park gang – tried to force a black family, the Debnams, out of the neighbourhood. The boys in these gangs did what the adults in the neighbourhood wished they could do but felt self-conscious about doing. They drove by the Debnam’s house at all hours honking and shouting racial slurs, threw rocks and bottles through their windows, exploded firebombs in their driveway, and removed planks of wood from their fence. The boys recalled that the community had failed to defend itself ‘when their parents lived west of Washington Street’, and vowed that this time they would not ‘let the colored push us out’ (Lukas 1985, p. 525).

In the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn, an 80 per cent white neighbourhood which experienced significant job loss and a decline in its Italian population during the 1980s, white youth gangs upheld the racial order (Alba 1995, p. 12). In the 1990s, Bensonhurst’s Avenue T Boys specialized in the practice of going on ‘missions’.<sup>11</sup> ‘That’s when,’ as one

boy described it, 'you go look for people who don't belong in the neighborhood and you beat 'em up. Sometimes we go out lookin' for blacks to jump. Sometimes we look for anybody who ain't supposed to be there'. Another boy revealed that by 'taking care of people who don't belong in the neighborhood, you get respect. Especially if it is some of the blacks from the Marlboro projects' (Pinderhughes 1997, pp. 132, 134).

The adult population within communities like Bensonhurst and Charlestown, besides sanctioning youth gangs for upholding the racial order, strove to curb gang behaviour, such as petty theft, vandalism, disorderly conduct and drug dealing, which detracted from the quality of life in the neighbourhood. Their ability to do so was facilitated by their political influence, their close ties with local police forces, and, most important, their economic power. White parents used their contacts with neighbours and local employers to get their children jobs and keep them out of trouble. The father of one of the Avenue T Boys, for example, owned a construction business and hired his son and other gang members (Pinderhughes 1997, p. 57). Even in economically declining blue-collar neighbourhoods, then, white adults were rarely so cut off from the labour market that they were unable to find entry-level jobs for their children. Boys with jobs were more likely to leave the gang in their early twenties, and the youth gang itself was less likely to be a troublesome presence.

### **Black youth gangs in the hypersegregated city, 1970–1999**

Since 1970 one effect of declining manufacturing and service employment on black ghettos is that black youth gangs have become far more troublesome. Between 1970 and 1982, the number of black men aged between 18 and 29 in the country's central cities who were either unemployed or marginally attached to the labour force increased from 24 per cent to 54 per cent (Lichter 1988, p. 782). The growing concentration of joblessness in increasingly segregated African-American ghettos has meant that black parents have been less effective than white parents in finding jobs for their children (Sullivan 1989, p. 74; Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996, p. 187). Moreover, the kinds of job available to young inner-city black males are typically poorly paid, part-time positions in the secondary labour market which fail to insulate them from the influence of gangs (Crutchfield 1995, p. 205).

Black male joblessness, which more than doubled levels of ghetto poverty during the 1970s, has also disrupted family and community life (Lynn and McGeary 1990). The withdrawal or breakdown of government services in jobless ghettos has aggravated the difficulties which impoverished African-American parents face in caring for, supervising and educating their children (Sampson 1987; Anderson 1990).<sup>12</sup> The fact that policing policies in places like North Philadelphia have been lax, on the one hand, or irrationally severe, on the other, has created an atmosphere



of danger on the streets, giving rise to a code of violence and legitimizing the tendency of young men to join a corner group of running buddies or a street gang for physical protection and psychological peace of mind (Anderson 1998, p. 81).<sup>13</sup>

The vast majority (84 per cent) of the gang members in St. Louis interviewed by Decker and Van Winkle (1996, p. 65) said they joined a gang because they found it impossible to live without some form of protection against the violence of rival gangs in nearby neighbourhoods. Young males growing up in underpoliced housing estates are most likely to live in fear of assault. A boy who joined Chicago's Black Disciples at the age of fifteen explained:

Around here, if you're not in a gang, they still think you're in a gang. You can't walk to school. You can't go where you want, when you want, so you might as well be in a gang. Then at least when trouble starts, you ain't by yourself. You got some aid and assistance (Terry 1994, p. A26).

Police have also contributed to the inner-city gang problem by the harshness and irrationality of certain of their responses (Tonry 1995, pp. 105–16; Miller 1996, pp. 80–86). William Chambliss (1994) has described policing and sentencing policies in Washington, DC whereby deproletarianized black males were repeatedly arrested and given long prison sentences for minor drug offences. Blacks have been five times more likely than whites to be arrested for drug-related offences, and thus account for much of the nearly fourfold increase in the proportion of drug offenders in US prisons – from 5.7 per cent in 1979 to 21.5 per cent in 1991 (Sampson and Lauritsen 1997, pp. 327, 354). The incarceration of adults has hurt black teenagers by depriving them of parental guidance at home, and the incarceration of teenagers has led directly to their future joblessness by isolating them from job networks and exposing them to the gangs operating behind bars. The mutually reinforcing effects of joblessness, incarceration and gang involvement have made it increasingly difficult for gang members to 'age out' of black street gangs (Hagedorn 1988; 1994a; 1998).

Adult authority has been particularly powerless in curbing gang violence in African-American housing projects. Certainly the fact that women and children comprise over 90 per cent of the population of many housing estates has made it easy for young male gang members to intimidate tenants. But the real reason why tenants have found it difficult to stand up to gangs is that they cannot rely on the social services of city and county governments. Whereas parents in white communities have relied on social workers, school teachers, truant officers and the police to deal with troublesome youth, African-American parents living in isolated housing projects have discovered that social workers, school

teachers and truant officers are often reluctant to visit, and city and housing police are often incompetent. In the early 1990s tenants at Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes felt that gangs did a better job of protecting them than did the housing police.

At least the gangs is giving us something, so lot of us prefers to help them 'cause we can *always* go to them and tell them to stop the shooting. Police don't do anything for us and they can't stop no shooting anyway (quoted in Venkatesh 1997, p. 95).

Parents in many of Chicago's housing projects have been unable to insulate their children from gang sniper fire, or prevent gangs from commandeering apartments as places to store weapons and stash drugs (Venkatesh 1996, p. 250; Belluck 1997, p. A1). Because of the breakdown of public services, some gangs have taken on a *de facto* community service role. As early as the 1960s, the Blackstone Rangers helped to pay the rents of the destitute elderly and obtained medical service for prostitutes (Sale 1971, p. 76). Since then, gangs have tried to provide a range of welfare, maintenance and recreational services. They have repaired apartments, sponsored picnics, barbecues and basketball tournaments, paid bail bonds for people in trouble with the law, and purchased groceries, clothing and sneakers for needy children (Kotlowitz 1988; Venkatesh 1997, p. 101).

African-American street gangs have progressed further in the direction of organized crime in Chicago than in the larger, less rigidly segregated, and more ethnically diverse cities of New York and Los Angeles. Over the years, the FBI and local agencies of law enforcement have targeted Jimmie Lee's Conservative Vice Lords, Larry Hoover's Black Gangster Disciples, and Jeff Fort's Black P. Stone Nation, a branch of which evolved into the criminal mob known as El Rukns, for their involvement in prostitution, drug-selling, gambling, theft, intimidation and extortion (Spergel 1995, p. 45; Schatzberg and Kelly 1996, pp. 200–4). Although unable to corrupt a white-controlled police force, Chicago street gangs have increasingly left their imprint on local politics. As Kotlowitz (1991, p. 39) noted, politicians aligned with one gang have not been safe on the turf of a rival gang.

One of Chicago's most powerful gang leaders, who derived much of his income from illegal activities occurring at rundown housing projects, made his home in a solidly middle-class black neighbourhood (Pattillo 1998). In this respect, he resembles Italian mafia leaders who have purchased homes in quiet residential districts. Despite this similarity, it would stretch the meaning of the term to suggest that black street gangs in Chicago or other American cities have become a mafia. At best, they are a proto-mafia. While the spread of the illegal drug economy has blurred the boundaries between organized drug gangs and turf-defending street gangs, the consensus among criminologists is that most

African-American street gangs lack the organizational structure, leadership and discipline needed to operate highly sophisticated illegal drug manufacturing and selling businesses.<sup>14</sup>

The name of one of Chicago's street gangs, the Vice Lords, conveys the nature of much African-American organized crime. Vice or vice-related illegality is contingent on a form of lordship – the military capacity to use violence or the threat of violence to control territory. In the 1990s, for example, Larry Hoover required heroin- and crack-dealing individuals and crews operating in Gangster Disciple turf to 'devote one day a week to selling drugs strictly for him' (Terry 1997, p. 12). The Italian and Jewish syndicates of the 1920s were unable to completely prevent bloodshed related to factional disputes over the extraction of tributary surplus from illegal operations. Black street gangs have been even less successful in preventing bloodshed, especially since 1985. In Milwaukee, a surge in gang-related violence during the 1990s resulted from battles to control the cocaine market (Hagedorn 1998, p. 95). In Chicago, two 'brother gangs' that were not traditionally in dispute – the Black Gangster Disciples and the Black Disciples – quarrelled over drug markets, resulting in forty-five feud-related homicides between 1987 and 1994 (Block *et al.* 1996, pp. 11–12).<sup>15</sup>

The relative organizational weakness of contemporary African-American street gangs, their orientation towards extracting tribute from small-scale, local illegal operators and the intensity of their fights over turf are indicative of the fact that African-American neighbourhoods remain ghettoized and excluded from both legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures.

## Conclusion

Over the last two hundred years, white youth gangs have facilitated the cultural assimilation of non-Hispanic European immigrants into American society. Irish Catholic, German, Swedish, Polish, Bohemian, Slovak, Lithuanian, Jewish, Italian, Serbian and Greek boys internalized from the culture of the ethnically mixed gang a sense of whiteness and Americanness. For white immigrants, the youth gang facilitated cultural assimilation because of its close ties with formal and informal political authorities and organizations which commanded substantial political and economic power. For African Americans, in contrast, the youth gang has reinforced cultural separation because of its embeddedness in racially segregated, economically marginalized and politically powerless communities.

Black youth gangs only appeared with the shift from caste- to class-specific forms of segregation which did not really get underway until the second quarter of the twentieth century. Racially mixed gangs were rare in Thrasher's day, and, with increasing racial segregation since then, have

become even more rare. Since 1950 continuous economic restructuring resulting from deindustrialization and commercial disinvestment has progressively weakened institutions of social control in the poorest urban black neighbourhoods. Lacking access to the organizational resources available to white parents, African-American parents and community leaders have found it difficult to curb youth gang violence. This was the case during the crack-related epidemic of violence which spread throughout the inner cities in the late 1980s.

The evidence of this article shows, first, that the causes of this epidemic were structural, not cultural; and, second, that a cultural predisposition towards violence has been far more characteristic of white than black youth gangs. African-American youth gangs have certainly resorted to violence in coping with social and cultural structures of racism and class oppression, but these same structures have been continuously reinforced by white youth gangs which, in performing their role in neighbourhood defence, have engaged in much socially harmful, violent and vicious conduct.

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### Notes

1. I use the terms youth gang and street gang interchangeably. A great deal of youth or street gang activity is non-delinquent. Some scholars (for example, Klein 1995, p. 75) insist that a predisposition towards law-violating behaviour be a defining element of the youth or street gang. Others (for example, Short, Jr. 1997, pp. 81–2) do not. Walter B. Miller (1982) introduced the term 'law-violating youth group' to cover the countless cliques, crews, crowds, bands, rings and groups of three or more associates or running buddies which are not recognized as youth or street gangs by urban police forces.
2. See, for example, discussions by Miller (1969), Suttles (1969; 1972), Spergel (1984; 1986), Bursik and Grasmik (1993, p. 134).
3. The word 'white' in this article refers only to persons of *non-Hispanic* European background. On the links between the country's various Latino ethnicities and cultures and youth gangs, see Moore (1978; 1991); Horowitz (1983); Vigil (1988); Sullivan (1989); Sanchez-Jankowski (1991) and Padilla (1992). On the impacts of residential segregation, economic restructuring and government neglect on Latino communities and their youth gangs, see Moore and Pinderhughes (1993); Moore and Vigil (1993); Chincilla, Hamilton, and Loucky (1993); and Sullivan (1993).
14. In pointing out that some ante-bellum youth gangs were multi-ethnic, I am not denying the existence of violent conflict between nativist and Irish Catholic gangs. One of Philadelphia's powerful nativist gangs, the Shiffers, named itself after George Shiffler, a

nativist political leader who was killed during the Kensington riots of 1844. This disturbance also radicalized the Schuylkill Rangers, one of the city's violent Irish Catholic gangs (Clark 1973, p. 11; Laurie 1980, p. 151).

5. In 1920 African Americans accounted for 7.4 per cent, 4.3 per cent, 4.1 per cent, 4 per cent, and 2.7 per cent of the populations of Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago and New York respectively (Osofsky 1966, p. 128; Spear 1967, p. 16; Kusmer 1976, p. 10; Lane 1986, p. 7; Thomas 1992, p. 26).

6. On the zoning of vice in black areas of New York, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee and Philadelphia, see, respectively, Osofsky (1966, p. 14); Spear (1967, p. 25); Katzman (1973, p. 171); Kusmer (1976, p. 48); Bodnar, Simon and Weber (1982, p. 227); Trotter (1985, p. 24); Lane (1986, p. 122).

7. From 1950 to 1960, the percentage of African Americans in northern cities increased dramatically, from 18 to 29 per cent in Philadelphia, from 16 to 29 per cent in both Cleveland and Detroit, and from 14 to 23 per cent in Chicago (Massey and Denton 1993, p. 45).

8. By 1970 African Americans accounted for 21 per cent of the population of New York City, around 33 per cent of the population of both Philadelphia and Chicago, 38 per cent, 41 per cent, and 44 per cent of Cleveland's, St. Louis' and Detroit's populations, respectively, 54 per cent of Newark's population, and 71 per cent of the population of Washington, DC (US Bureau of Census 1975, p. 23).

9. For an analysis of how the public housing, urban renewal, and highway building initiatives taken by governments and the private sector ghettoized African Americans during the 1950s and 1960s, see Bowly (1978), Hirsch (1983), Goldstein and Yancey (1986), Bauman (1987), Massey and Kanaiaupuni (1993), Mohl (1993), Kusmer (1995), Sugrue (1996). For an analysis of how suburbanization and suburban shopping mall construction siphoned off tax revenue and eroded the fabric of the central cities, leading to housing deterioration and abandonment, see Taub, Taylor and Dunham (1984, pp. 6-7); Jackson (1985, p. 284); Darden *et al.* (1987, p. 24); Miller and Wheeler (1990, p. 159); Lazare (1991, p. 270); Wilson (1996, pp. 34-50).

10. Curry (1995, n.p. Table 10) reviewed surveys of recent law enforcement data on the race and ethnicity of gang members in the United States, and concluded that between 1975 and 1992 white gang membership declined from 8.8 to 4.4 per cent of total gang membership, while African-American gang membership remained constant at about 48 per cent. Interpretation of these data is problematic, since the surveys defined gangs differently and were not based on random samples.

11. This name is fictitious. The gang's real name did, however, derive from the turf it defended. Although loosely organized and lacking a leadership hierarchy, specialized roles, and initiation rites, this gang was well-known throughout the metropolitan area. It was 'a community institution, having existed for years, with its membership being continually regenerated by the newer, younger members of the community' (Pinderhughes 1997, p. 54).

12. On housing abandonment, unsafe buildings, inadequate trash collection, the withdrawal of fire and ambulance services, underfunded schools and the closing of libraries, parks and recreational facilities, see Wallace (1990a; 1990b); Skogan (1990, p. 36); Weir (1994, p. 337); Kelley (1997, pp. 49-53).

13. At Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes during the late 1970s, city police officers rarely got out of their cars after dark (Lemann 1991, pp. 295-7). At Chicago's Henry Horner Homes during the 1980s, the city police frequently ignored reports of gang shootings (Kotlowitz 1991, p. 18). In North St. Louis during the early 1990s, officers in the 5th Police District freely admitted that they did not always respond to calls from residents, and often failed to file reports or follow up on assaults and vandalism (Ward 1997, p. 183).

14. See Fagan (1989); Klein, Maxson and Cunningham (1991); Hagedorn (1994b); Maxson (1995). Decker and Van Winkle (1996, p. 153) reported that gang involvement in drug selling in St. Louis during the early 1990s was 'generally poorly organized, episodic, non-monopolistic, carried out by individuals and cliques on their own' and never the gang's

*raison d'être*. Hagedorn (1998, p. 391) concluded that Milwaukee's black street gangs, despite their increasing involvement in drug dealing between 1988 and 1993, were not likely to mutate into organized criminal syndicates. For a description of Detroit's specialized drug gangs, see Mieczkowski (1986); Taylor (1990); Adler (1995).

15. African-American gangs have also feuded with Hispanic-American gangs in areas where the two groups live in relatively close proximity. In Los Angeles, for example, fighting between the African-American Venice Shoreline Crips and the Hispanic-American Culver City Boys resulted in eleven deaths during the summer of 1997 (*New York Times*, 20 June 1999, "Courts in Los Angeles Help Fight Gang Crime").

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**CHRISTOPHER ADAMSON** is a sociologist who has taught at Hofstra University, Hempstead, Long Island, New York.

ADDRESS: 23 Admiral Road, Toronto, Ontario M5R 2L4, Canada.