Portrayal of Street Gangs in Popular Culture: Part II of II

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Portrayal of Street Gangs in Popular Culture:
PART II – EMPIRICAL DATA and EXAMPLES
Portrayal of Street Gangs in Popular Culture:

PART 1

- Overview on the various mass media outlets that portray gangs
- Provide a general awareness to the depictions of gangs
- Overview of what, when, where and how gangs became infused with pop culture

PART 2

- Examine the data on gangs and popular culture, and why it is appealing
- Provide examples where fiction becoming reality – the impact of portraying gangs in the media on youth culture
- Explore the law enforcement and legal responses to the portrayal of gangs in the mass media

Przemieniecki, 2015 JusticeClearingHouse.com
What are the Mass Media Outlets?

- **Radio**
- **Books/Newspapers/Magazines/Comics**
- **Television** *(news/popular)*
- **Films** *(theatrical/VHS/DVD/BlueRay)*
- **Video Games** *(arcade/console/portable)*
- **Social Media Applications** *(Facebook, Twitter)*
- **Music** *(recorded/live)*
- **Internet** *(websites)*
Common Gang Identifiers

- Colors
- Hand signs
- Tattoos
- Graffiti / Symbols
- Self-Admission
- Turf/Territorial Battles
- Accessories (jewelry, hat)
- Language/Articles (*print media*)
- Loosely Organized (hierarchy)
- Police/Community response
- Style of Dress (Clothing*)
- Criminal Element
Gangs in Literature
(novels, memoirs, and short fiction)

- Western/New Frontier Gangs
- Irish Immigrants
- 1920s Chicago
- 1940s Harlem
- Nazis and Gangs
- Jewish Gangs
- Girl Gangs
- Military-school Gangs
- 1960s/1970s Barrio Gangs
- South Central Los Angeles Gangs
- Chinese Gangs
### Street Gang Films Most Often Mentioned/Discussed in the Academic Literature (n = 87)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Mentioned in Literature (n&gt;= 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boyz N the Hood (1992)</td>
<td>44 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colors (1988)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menace II Society (1992)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jack City (1991)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Side Story (1961)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Me (1992)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Warriors (1979)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juice (1992)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi Vida Loca (1994)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boulevard Nights (1978)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood In, Blood Out (1993)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Przemieniecki, 2015 JusticeClearingHouse.com
Depictions of gangs and gang members by news agencies are (1):
- NOT entirely accurate
- Often exaggerate behaviors and violence
- Stereotypical (e.g., depicted as male, poor, minority, urban problem)

Journalists are to blame – only interested in selling a story, not the truth (1):

Significant increase in news stories from 1988 – 2001 (2):

Decline in news worthy stories about street gangs from 2001 – 2008 (3) – WHY?

Steady increase from 2008–2015 (3) – WHY?


Przemieniecki, 2015 JusticeClearingHouse.com
DON DIVA
“The Original Street Bible”

- Warning label: Parental Advisory: Gangsta Content
- Two-sided covers: entertainment cover and street cover
  - Entertainment is for the public on newsstands
  - Street covers display gangster life, typically for shock value
- Crime, pop culture, and pinups
- Founded in 1999 – “For The Ghetto Fabulous Lifestyle”
- Circulation 170,000+
- 10% of circulation goes to prisoners incarcerated
- Don Diva's average sell through rate is 70% to 80%. The average sell-through rate for most magazines ranges from 30% to 40%
- [www.dondivamag.com](http://www.dondivamag.com)
  - Very informative website
  - Does not hide anything
F.E.D.S.
(Finally Every Dimension of the Street)
“Convicted Criminals, Sports, Music, Fashion, Film, Etc”

- Antoine Clark, former gang member
- "F.E.D.S. is not about entertainment, but deterrence. We show the downside of what's going on in the streets and try to scare people straight. The other magazines are imitations without the mission."
- "I will not publish stories of people who say they're not guilty," he said. "We're not here to give them glory, but to draw attention to the consequences of the gangster life." (Columbia News Service, July 2002)
- Circulation 10,000+
- NY Times reported that 90% were prisoners
- Claims to publish only 4x per year
- [www.houseofnubian.com](http://www.houseofnubian.com)
Television/Cable Shows
Portrayal of Gang Members’ Race/Ethnicity by TV/Cable Shows (n=23)

- Black: 35%
- Hispanic: 42%
- White: 13%
- Asian: 5%
- Mixed: 5%
Journalistic Gang Programs
Discovery, History, BET, National Geographic

Gang Wars
AMERICAN GANGSTER
Gangland
Gang Nation
Ross Kemp on Gangs
Urban Street Gang Films
Examining Gang-Related Films*

• Search for ‘street gang’ films identified by IMDb and AMG was conducted:
  – IMDb = 122 ‘street gang’ films
  – AMG = 89 ‘street gang’ films

• The following films generated the most news interest among newspapers:
  – Articles were selected based on the title of a ‘street gang’ film and reports of gang violence associated with the film
  – *Boyz N the Hood, Colors, New Jack City, Menace II Society, The Warriors, Blood In Blood Out, Juice, Boulevard Nights, American Me*

1960s

- Martin Scorsese's "Who's That Knocking at My Door"
- "A Street of Secret Sin Where Cold Menace Lurked at Every Door!"
- "Teenage Gang Debs"
- "West Side Story"
- "This Rebel Breed"
1970s

These are the armies of the night.
They are 100,000 strong. They outnumber the cops five-to-one.
They could run New York City. Tonight they're all out to get the Warriors.

Everything happens on the boulevard—and the boulevard happens at night.

The Silks... the most vicious street gang of all... led by the killer they call Eddie the Cat.

He was tough enough for the streets... was he tough enough to leave them?

From confidential police files...

The Shocking Story of Teenage Gangs
1980s
2000s
Depicting Race/Ethnicity in ‘Street Gang’ Films

Percentage of Gang Members by Race/Ethnicity, 1996-2011
Source: National Youth Gang Survey

- 33% White
- 31% Black
- 29% Hispanic/Latino
- 7% Asian

Average of Hispanic or Latino: 11%
Average of Black or African American: 35%
Average of White: 31%
Average of All Other: 47%

Przemieniecki, 2015 JusticeClearingHouse.com
Gender of Gang Members Depicted in ‘Street Gang’ Films

- **Males:** 93%
- **Females:** 7%

Source: NYGS

Gender of gang members 1996 to 2010

- **Average of Female:** 7%
- **Average of Male:** 93%

Source: NYGS

Przemieniecki, 2015 JusticeClearingHouse.com
Age of Gang Members Depicted in ‘Street Gang’ Films

- 13-19 years old: 81%
- 20 years or older: 19%

Age of Gang Members, 1996-2011
Source: NYGS

- Average of Juvenile (Under 18): 40%
- Average of Adult (18 and Over): 60%
Number of ‘Street Gang’ Films Depicting Types of Crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime Type</th>
<th>Number of Films</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homicide/Murder</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault/Battery</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug/Alcohol Use</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Trafficking/Distribution</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny/Theft</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary/Breaking &amp; Entering</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness Intimidation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive-by Shooting</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extortion</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle Theft</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Portrayal of Gang’s Race/Ethnicity by Decade in Films, 1960-2009

Przemieniecki, 2015 JusticeClearingHouse.com
According to academic research and law enforcement observations .... the gang film ‘COLORS’ is single-handedly responsible for introducing the gang world to youth culture.
Examples of gang violence from gang-related films

- The shootings and riots resulted from the showing of *Boyz N the Hood* (1991) in MN, OH, TX, WI, NV, AL, NY, IL, NJ, and MI.
- The screening of *Boyz* and the violence that followed resulted in increased security by as much as 60% at cinemas.
- *The Warriors* (1979), was blamed for multiple murders by the victim's families and the media in CA, FL, and Boston, MA which reached the Mass. Supreme Court.
- *Colors* (1988) prompted the shooting of one gang member and the injuring others.
- *New Jack City* (1991) has also been blamed for its share of violence (New York, Las Vegas, Detroit and Los Angeles, including a fatality).
Explaining Gang Behavior from Viewing Films*

Responses to “Straight Out of Compton” Film

Theaters worry ‘Straight Outta Compton’ could spark violence (NYPost, 8/14/15)

- The NYPD and the LAPD will be extra vigilant about any possible disturbances — especially during the many midnight showings scheduled around the country
- Extra cops will be on duty near theaters throughout the Brooklyn area
- Certain Manhattan Cineplex's will also receive “special attention,”
- Universal Pictures is offering to reimburse theaters for the costs of extra security for this weekend’s launch of “Straight Outta Compton,”
- “The threat of violence is very real,” according to former NYPD Officer John Cardillo. “Police are not deploying additional manpower because of some ‘racist’ projection. My sources tell me that gang intelligence units are receiving solid actionable intelligence that Bloods gang members will target theaters in certain areas because of pro-Crip content in the film.”

Gang-xploitation

- Gang identifiers (colors, language) are magnified
- An exaggeration of the gang culture
- Self-promotion videos, poorly made
- Straight to DVD
Video Games and Gangs
Definition of Gang-Related Video Games

A video game that displays the common identifiers of gangs (colors, graffiti, monikers, hands signs, tattoos, clothing), depicts acts of gang violence (drive-by shooting, drug dealing, prostitution), and promotes gang membership through a virtual world.
Since 2000 these Gang-Related Video Games have made it onto numerous Top 10 Most Violent Games Lists.
Examples of Gang-Related Video Game Violence

• **Newport, TN** (June, 2003) – Two teenage boys, Joshua (14) and William (16) Buckner open fired at vehicles traveling on I-40. Their action resulted in the death of one motorist, Aaron Hamel, and serious injuries to others. They were charged with reckless homicide, endangerment, and assault...teens told police they were bored and attempted to recreate images from GTA shooting motorists from the wooded hilltop overlooking the highway.

  — **UPDATE**: Plead guilty and still incarcerated for crimes committed.

• **Pittsburgh, PA** (December 2004) – Five teens, 12-14 yrs old, were finally caught after almost 4 weeks of spray painting the initials “GKU” which stand for “gangster kids united”...teens told police they were inspired by GTA:SA

• **Atlanta, GA** (August 2008)... “3 Teens Arrested; Say 'Grand Theft Auto' Taught Them About Molotov Cocktails”... Teens were arrested after blowing up Hondas with homemade Molotov cocktails made out of Sprite bottles. The 15- and 16-year-olds' response: "'GTA' taught me how." Molotov cocktails are in "Grand Theft Auto".
Examples of Gang-Related Video Game Violence

• **Fayette, Alabama** (June 2003) - Three police officers were killed by Devin Moore (Devin Darnell Thompson) who was brought in to the police station for questioning about a stolen vehicle. He grabbed a gun and shot two officers and a dispatcher. He did not want to go to jail. His actions are being linked to playing GTA. Moore told the arresting officers, "Life is a video game. Everybody's got to die sometime."

  – **UPDATE**: Has filed numerous appeals, including the ‘GTA insanity defense’. Was sentenced to death in 2005 and awaits execution by lethal injection.
Why are Gang-Related Video Games Appealing to Youth?

- **Famous Celebrity Voices**
  - Samuel L. Jackson (*Best Human Voice*), Ice T, James Woods, Chris Penn, Ray Loitta, Snoop Dogg, etc.

- **Music Selection**
  - Kool & the Gang, Guns-N-Roses, Tupac, Willie Nelson, Rage Against the Machine, Compton’s Most Wanted

- **Superb graphics – 3D**

- **Active participant in “gangland”**

- **Gang culture is appealing and “cool”**

- **Video games have gone portable**

- **Elaborate websites with many more features**
Researchers found that M-rated (age 17+) video game play was common among young adolescents (68% for boys; 29% for girls).

The *Grand Theft Auto* series was the most popular game for boys and second most popular for girls.

The surveys also found correlations (statistically significant relationships) between violent game play and some common childhood problems.

Boys were 2x more at risk of certain aggressive behaviors such as getting into fights, beating up someone, damaging property for fun, getting in trouble with teachers, getting poor grades.

Girls, the risk of problems was 3x-4x higher for those who played violent games.

There are many creative, social and emotional benefits from video game play, including violent content – relieves stress, anger, and frustration.

Outcome of Playing Gang-Related Video Games

• Desensitizes youths towards violence.
• Introduces youths not normally exposed to gang violence.
• Introduces the world of gangs
• Gives perception that gangs are "cool"
• Reduces respect towards law enforcement
Combative Efforts on Gang-Related Video Games
Prevention / Intervention Strategies

• Business Education Efforts
  – Do NOT sell to minors.

• Individual/Counseling Efforts
  – Video gaming education: Speak to youth groups about the dangers of gang-related video games and those consequences of acting out.
  – Re-sensitization of Youths: Bring the reality of gang life into perspective for those playing the game (ex. funerals; there are no “do-overs” in life).

• Parental Efforts
  – According to National Institute on Media and Family, 72% of parents do not know what’s inside the packaging of video games.
  – Set reasonable balance between video game and other activities; Restrictions and limitations; Learn about the ESRB ratings; Focus on “media literacy”; Focus on real dangers; Get involved!!!!
Social Networking Sites and Gangs
---cyber-bangin’ or net-bangin’ ---

Przemieniecki, 2015 JusticeClearingHouse.com
Gangs and the Internet: Headlines News

- ‘Investigation: Online Gangs’ (Fox 5 News, Washington, DC, Mar 2009)
- ‘Gangs finding new turf’ (Times, May 2001)
- ‘Gang brag about attack on internet’ (The Argus, UK, March 2007)
- ‘Experts: gangs are taking the Web’ (Newsday, Long Island, Nov 2007)
- ‘Internet gives gangs a new arena for violence’ (Houston Chronicle, July 2006)
- ‘Gangs using the web to recruit’ (Associated Press, July 2008)
- ‘Gangs turn to social networking sites to recruit’ (CBS 5 CRIMEWATCH, Feb, 2008)
- ‘Social Websites lure youngsters into gangs’ (Independent (UK), Dec, 2008)
Gangs Using Internet to Recruit?

• 74% of gang members who participated in study indicated that they frequent the Internet and established an online presence to gain respect for their gang(1)

• Original study conducted by Hesse and Przemieniecki (2007) examined academic and media content for connection between gangs, the internet and recruitment.

• Examined articles dating back to 1996 that mentioned gangs recruiting new members on the Internet

• At that time, gangs using the internet was relatively new to law enforcement officials and the prevalence of gang recruitment on the internet was still unknown

Gangs and the Internet: What is Really Happening?

• Research has shown that street gangs use social media mainly to post videos depicting their illegal behaviors, watch videos, threaten rival gangs and their members, display firearms and money from drug sales (1)(2)(3)

• 45% of gang members participate in at least one form of online offending such as selling drugs online, threatening/ harassing individuals, posting violent videos online or attacking someone on the street for something they said (4)

• Numerous examples of gang members taking violence from social media to the streets

Truth about Gangs and Recruiting Online

• Very little support for the view that gangs use the full capacity of the Internet to organize gang activities\(^1\)

• Gangs are NOT recruiting online primarily using social networking sites!\(^2\)\(^3\)

• Law enforcement/FBI interpret the glorification of gangs on members’ pages as a recruitment measure\(^4\)

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Most Common Social Networking Sites Used by Gang Members

- MySpace
- Xanga
- Snapchat
- Twitter
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Instagram
- Kik
- Chirp
Table 1: Comparative analysis of organized crime presence on Facebook between 2010 and 2011 on Facebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nb of Pages/Groups</th>
<th>Nb of fans/members (2010)</th>
<th>Nb of fans/members (2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hells Angels</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14,775</td>
<td>42,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crips</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4,598</td>
<td>5,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloods</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1,993</td>
<td>3,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5,923</td>
<td>1,454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin Kings</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1,255</td>
<td>1,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th Street</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almighty Vice Lord Nation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Gangs on Twitter*


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nb of profiles</th>
<th>Nb of followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloods</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hells Angels</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin Kings</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crips</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3,657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3,303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Posse</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almighty Vice Lord Nation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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* JusticeClearingHouse.com
Gang Activities Online*

Conclusions – FINAL THOUGHTS

• Have an awareness/understanding of gangs and the gang lifestyle as portrayed in the media is important.
• Recognize differences between “REAL” gangs and “REEL” gangs.
• Street gangs reveal much more about their social life than the constructed violence seen in films/TV/books/video games/etc.
• Do not assume what you see/hear/play in the media as an accurate depiction of street gangs.
• The portrayal of street gangs is often a story beyond crime – political and social commentary.
• Music and the Internet are the most utilized mediums for promoting the gang culture; provides gang members a venue to share with others the gang’s criminal exploits and are often rife with exaggeration, bravado and insults.
• The reality is that the portrayal of street gangs in the mass media DO have an impact (varying degrees, particularly in suburban/rural areas) on our youth.
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