

**FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**  
**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/PRIVACY ACTS SECTION**  
**COVER SHEET**

**SUBJECT: CRIPS AND BLOODS**  
**DRUG GANGS**

# L.A. Gang Member's Arrest Concerns Police

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By Paul W. Valentine  
Washington Post Staff Writer

**BALTIMORE, Sept. 26**—An alleged member of a notorious Los Angeles street gang called the Crips was arrested here today on weapons charges, fueling speculation among federal agents that the 10,000-member gang has extended its drug network to the Washington-Baltimore area.

Agents said they arrested Armando Eugene Mines, 25, as he entered a city court to answer a local assault charge. At the same time, other agents searched his recently rented suburban Baltimore apartment and confiscated 2.5 pounds of suspected cocaine, a semiautomatic rifle, \$10,000 in cash and cocaine-packaging equipment, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Harvey E. Eisenberg.

An affidavit filed by agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms in federal court identified Mines as a member of the Crips gang, one of several large, increasingly violent gangs in the Los Angeles area where California authorities say more than 380 people were killed last year in feuds over drug customers and territory.

Law enforcement officials say the Crips and a rival gang called the Bloods have extended their networks into other cities such as Seattle, Toronto and Kansas City. Today's arrest of Mines here marked the first tangible presence of the Crips in the Washington-Baltimore area, officials said.

They would not say whether other Crips members are in the area but said their investigation is continuing. The federal affidavit indicated agents had Mines under periodic surveillance for several months.

"He was distributing drugs at least for himself . . . if not as an arm of the gang," Eisenberg told reporters. He said he did not know whether the suspected cocaine seized at Mines' apartment came from Los Angeles.

Mines was arrested after a sealed, five-count indictment was handed down by a federal grand jury here last week charging him with acquiring firearms with false identification and illegally possessing firearms as a convicted felon. The charges carry a maximum sentence of 25 years' imprisonment and \$1.25 million in fines upon conviction.

Eisenberg said additional charges against Mines are expected. Mines is being held in custody pending a detention hearing Wednesday. Prosecutors, citing what they say is Mines' dangerousness and likelihood of flight, want him held without bail until trial.

According to the federal affidavit, agents traced Mines to the Crips after city police arrested him in June on a charge of assault with a handgun and seized a 9mm semiautomatic pistol from him that he had purchased from a Baltimore gun dealer using the name of his brother, Robert Edwards Mines Jr. of Los Angeles. He also had purchased a .44-caliber revolver in March from the same dealer, the affidavit said. He was released on bond in the assault case.

Through fingerprint analysis, the affidavit said, agents determined the identity of Armando Mines and learned from California authorities that he was a "documented" member of the Los Angeles neighborhood branch of the Crips called the Santana Block Crips. He also had a 1983 burglary conviction on his record, agents said.

The affidavit said the Crips have about 10,000 members in the Los Angeles area and are divided into loose "sets" or groups identified by local street names or landmarks.

A "recent wave . . . of shootings and gangland-style homicides in the Los Angeles area, along with increased competition for the drug dollar and the accompanying law enforcement response, have driven gang members to expand or relocate their drug trafficking," the affidavit said.

- The Washington Post P-4
- The Washington Times \_\_\_\_\_
- Daily News (New York) \_\_\_\_\_
- The New York Times \_\_\_\_\_
- The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_
- The Chicago Tribune \_\_\_\_\_
- The Los Angeles Times \_\_\_\_\_
- The Christian Science Monitor \_\_\_\_\_
- USA Today \_\_\_\_\_

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# The Drug Gangs

Spurred on by the flourishing narcotics trade, they're waging war in cities across the country. As crime rates rise, can the cops battle back?

**B**leak by day and terrifying by night, south-central Los Angeles could be the set for some B-picture about the world after a nuclear apocalypse—a nightmare landscape inhabited by marauding thugs and hard-nosed cops, a world in which innocence is hostage to violence and bystanders too often wind up as victims. When darkness comes to Watts, law-abiding citizens cower behind locked doors. Shadowy groups of young men pad quietly down the alleyways while police cruisers roam the streets and helicopters chatter overhead. The police presence is overwhelming: anyone on the street is liable to be stopped and questioned. "Hands on the car, homeboy! Where's your ID? What's that in your pocket? Got any dope? Seen any gang bangers? Where you been, where you going? Answer me, homes—I'm talkin' to YOU."

Week by week and year by year, the ominous statistics mount up: in 1987, when gang homicides rose to 387 in Los Angeles County, the cops made more than 12,000 gang-related arrests and countless thousands of curb-side rousts in south-central L.A. The name of this tough and dangerous game is suppression—a massive attempt by the outnumbered Los Angeles police and sheriff's departments to keep the estimated 70,000 gang members in Los Angeles County off balance and on the defensive. It isn't working. Despite years of experience combating street crime, few L.A. cops will deny that their war against the groups has taken a decisive turn for the worse. The gangs are better armed and more violent than ever before; they are also

## DRUG CRISIS

more adept at evading the law. It's like Vietnam, says one prosecutor: "The cops are winning all the battles, but we're still losing the war."

The reason is drugs—particularly crack, or "rock," cocaine. The crack trade, built on the enormous influx of cocaine from Latin America, is now

transforming some of the country's toughest street gangs into ghetto-based drug-trafficking organizations. Equally ominous, according to law-enforcement sources, is the fact that at least some L.A. gangs have now established direct connec-

*Nightmare landscape: L.A. bust, guarding the home of a drug witness in New York.*

JOHN SOGA







Miami Boys - a drug group

tions to major Colombian smugglers, thus ensuring a continuous supply of top-quality cocaine.

Dangerous as it is, the situation on the West Coast is just part of a much larger problem. Big-city gangs in New York, Chicago, Miami and Washington, D.C., are breaking into the crack business as well, and some are actively spreading drugs and violence to other cities all across the country map. In Chicago, where gang membership has now reached an estimated 10,000 after a fall in the 1970s, the infamous El

Rukns are under active investigation for drug trafficking. In New York, where a rookie cop was assassinated by a cocaine kingpin's hit men three weeks ago, police are struggling to contain an explosion of drug-related violence that has left more than 500 persons dead in upper Manhattan alone during the past five years. A Miami-based gang called the Untouchables is pushing crack northward to Atlanta, Savannah and other cities of the Southeast, where the group is known and feared as the "Miami Boys."

There are black gangs, Hispanic gangs, Asian gangs and gangs drawn from specific nationality groups. Police from Boston to Houston are alarmed by the emergence of Jamaican gangs known as "posses." According to federal sources, there are 30 to 40 posses with a total of about 5,000 members now operating in the United States. Clever, cunning and extraordinarily violent, the Jamaicans are buying and selling crack in major cities from Los Angeles to Austin. The only major problem, the only real threat to the posses,

**BEST COPY AVAILABLE**



cial agent James Watterson of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. "And what's scary is that the crack problem just keeps getting worse."

The ghetto gangs' entry into drug trafficking on a major scale may be creating the nation's biggest crime problem in decades. Drug profits are soaring—and so is the drug-related homicide rate in cities where the gangs are most entrenched. It is arguable, in fact, that the emergence of drug gangs from coast to coast is very similar to what occurred during the early years of Prohibition, when La Cosa Nostra—the Mafia—consolidated its status as an underworld cartel by building on the profits of illicit alcohol. "Look at the development of organized crime in the United States," says Thomas Repetto, president of the Citizen's Crime Commission of New York, a privately funded group. "If we've learned anything, it's that once we let these guys get too big, we've got a situation that will take decades to [control]. The [ghetto] gangs now have an opportunity provided by the crack explosion and the breakup of [traditional] organized-crime groups. These gangs are where the [Italian] gangs were when they moved into bootlegging. We can't let that happen again."

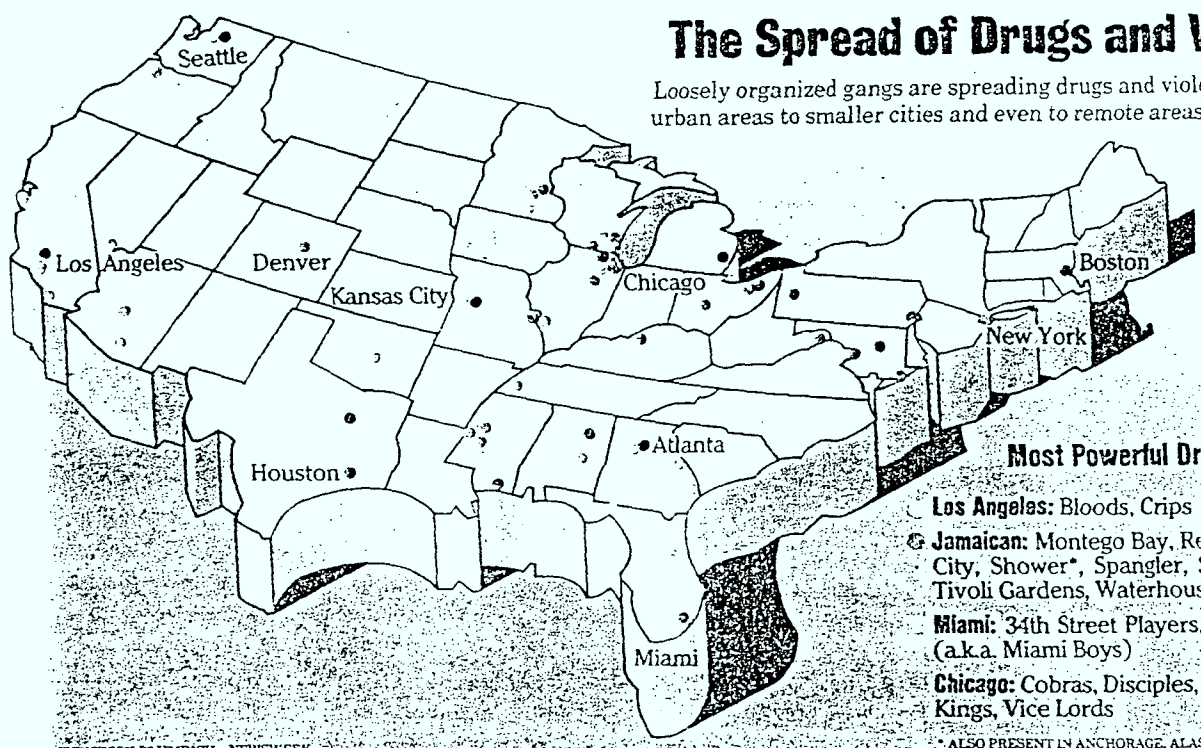
**'Kill him':** The analogy to Prohibition, as Repetto notes, has one significant flaw: today's ghetto gangs, especially the Jamaican posses, are far more violent than the Mafia. In part, the extraordinary level of violence is the result of the ready availability of military and paramilitary weapons.



TONY O'BRIAN—PICTURE GROUP  
The ghetto tradition of mock-feudal gangs has taken its most violent turn yet: Hispanics in fro

Guns like Uzis, AK-47 assault rifles and AR-15 semiautomatics are widely bought (some even legally in gun shops) by gang members, who finance their high-tech arsenals with profits from the drug trade. Another factor, experts agree, is the sociopathic recklessness of these youth: big-city ghettos and barrios are full of teenagers whose poverty and deprivation have immunized them to both hope and fear.

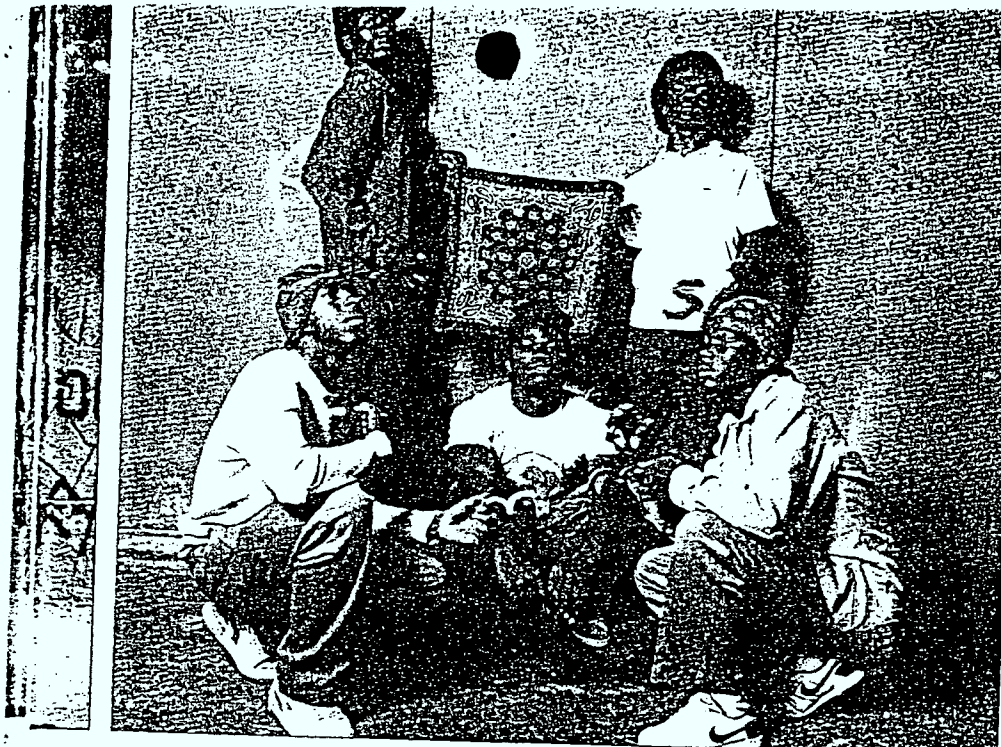
The result is a casual acceptance of—and sometimes enthusiasm for—torture and murder. "drive by" shootings and public mayhem. "If they don't kill you, they'll kill your mother." BATF's Watterson says of the Jamaican gangs. "The Cubans and Colombians don't want to deal with them because they're so dangerous." But the point applies to New York's black and Dominican drug gangs as well. Investigators say



CHRISTOPH BLUMRICH—NEWSWEEK

\*ALSO PRESENT IN ANCHORAGE, ALASKA





MARK RICHARDS—PICTURE GROUP

graffiti marking 'turf' in L.A., Grape Street Watts Gang members last December

like a letter of the deaf alphabet, for identification when the members are not wearing their colors.) But local variations on the theme are endless, and Crip gangs are almost as likely to fight each other as they are to fight the Bloods.

The days when rival gangs fought each other only over turf and colors are fading fast. In Los Angeles, Chicago, New York and dozens of other cities, gang conflicts have become a form of urban-guerrilla warfare over drug trafficking. Informers, welters and competitors are ruthlessly punished; many have been assassinated. Gang turf, which is still demarcated with graffiti in Los Angeles, now involves more than bragging rights: it is sales territory. Some gang graffiti are coded threats. One in south-central L.A. reads as follows: "Big Hawk 1987 BSVG c 187." To translate, Big Hawk is a gang member's street name. BSVG stands for Blood Stone Villains Gang, a Bloods set. The lower-case c, which is deliberately x'd out, indicates that the writer kills Crips, and the number 187 refers to the section of the California criminal code for murder.

**Rollers and O.G.'s:** The variety of drugs sold by big-city gangs (page 27) includes heroin, marijuana, PCP, hallucinogens and designer drugs like fentanyl, a synthetic heroin that is even more potent than the real thing and just as addictive. But crack cocaine is the rage—and the scourge—of the ghetto. Crack is a drug peddler's dream: it is cheap, easily concealed and provides a short-duration high that invariably leaves the user craving more. It was probably inevitable that street gangs, observing crack's arrival in their neighborhoods over the past several years, would be drawn into trafficking themselves. South-central Los Angeles today, like Miami and New York, is flooded with crack. It is sold on street corners by peewees and in rock houses operated by bangers. Somewhere behind the scenes, much of the ghetto cocaine trade is controlled by what Los Angeles calls "rollers" and "O.G.'s"—old gangsters, a term that usually refers to gang veterans, many of them still in their 20s, who have been to prison.

Rollers, short for "high rollers," are gang members who have made it big in the drug trade, whether or not they are actually at the top of the distribution pyramid. Typically, rollers are in their teens or 20s. They tend to wear gold jewelry and drive flashy cars: Datsun sports coupes, five-liter Mustangs, BMW's and Mercedes-Benzes are among the most popular models. Roger Hamrick, a community-relations worker in Miami, remembers a gang member who moved to Daytona Beach, Fla., to peddle crack. "When he left [Miami], he was on a bicycle," Hamrick says. "When he came back, he wore more gold than Mr. T. and he was sitting in a white Mercedes. He's

these gangs make a point of staging their assassinations in broad daylight whenever possible. "You don't kill no mother—from across the street," one young hit man explained to undercover agents. "You walk up to him, you kill him in his head."

Gang culture—the mock-feudal tradition of inner-city kids banding together for comfort, support and mutual protection—has a long and, some would say, romantic history in America. Think of "West Side Story." It is still true that many gangs are little more than collections of neighborhood youths with a penchant for macho posturing, petty crime and street brawls over girls or turf. Recruitment begins early, in the grade-school years: gang veterans call their young acolytes "peewees" or "wannabees" (want-to-be's). Though old hands say the custom is dying out, initiation by a Los Angeles gang is supposed to be a brutal ritual known as being "courted in" or "jumped in." To be jumped in is to receive a beating administered by three or four gang members: the candidate is expected to show his fighting spirit. If he passes the test, the peewee then becomes a "banger" or "gang banger" and is entitled to share in the gang's fortunes or, more commonly, misfortunes (George Will's column, page 76).

**Colors and signs:** The two most notorious L.A. gangs—the Bloods and the Crips—are not really gangs at all. Instead, the names denote legendary confederations among hundreds of subgroups, or "sets." Sets are formed along neighborhood lines, and only a few have more than 100 bangers; 20 to 30 members is commonplace. Leadership is usually collective, and internal organization is rudimentary. One

gang expert with the Los Angeles Police Department, Deputy Chief Glenn Levant, says most sets are as casually organized as a pickup basketball game. Bloods wear red and Crips wear blue; traditionally, each gang member wears or carries a bandanna (his "rag") to show his colors. (Many gangs also use "signs," which are hand gestures

Dressed for battle: Washington, D.C., cop MARTY KATZ—OUTLINE





not even 24 years old and he has two Mercedeses and a Rolex watch." Says Bill Blanco, another gang specialist in Miami: "Who you are is dictated by the gold chains, the Rolex, the car. And everybody's got a car phone." Cellular telephones are more than decoration, of course: they are extremely useful in the drug trade. Beepers, which are equally useful to dealers, are now so common among ghetto teenagers that Los Angeles public schools have banned them.

Some gang veterans say the cocaine trade in south-central L.A. is controlled by 15 to 20 O.G.'s—an assessment that is shared by knowledgeable law-enforcement officials. Deputy Chief Levant, who commands a newly formed LAPD unit that specializes in major drug traffickers among the street gangs, says 75 to 100 gangs are now actively involved in cocaine distribution. Some of these groups, he says, now have sales totaling up to \$1 million a week. "There is a link between the South Ameri-

cans and the street gangs." Levant. That link—the strategic nexus between the Colombian cocaine cartel and its level distribution in the United States—is becoming increasingly visible to investors in southern California and elsewhere. There is little question that some of the drug traffickers have now established direct relationships with top-level Colombian smugglers. According to Los Angeles County officials, the Colombians are willing to sell drugs to O.G.'s and rolle-

## A Jamaican Invasion in West Virginia

With its tidy clapboard houses and neat apple and peach orchards on land George Washington surveyed centuries ago, Martinsburg, W.Va. (population: 13,000), seems far from the mean streets normally patrolled by drug gangs. But over the last three years, an invasion of Jamaican drug dealers has turned the home of the Mountain State Apple Harvest Festival into a mecca for cocaine.

The Jamaicans first arrived in Martinsburg as migrant workers to pick apples and peaches at harvest time, but many stayed on to peddle coke and crack. Hundreds squeezed into small apartments in a poor neighborhood called "the Hill" and transformed several blocks near the center of town into an open-air drug supermarket. Supplied by couriers shuttling between Jamaican gangs in Washington, Miami and New York, as many as

50 dealers could be found brazenly hawking dope in broad daylight, just three blocks from the police station. At times business was so brisk that intersections were clogged with traffic; many cars bore out-of-state license plates. The customers "were all ethnic groups, age groups and every profession," says police chief Jack Strobbridge. "They came riding up on skateboards, on bikes, in Mercedes-Benz cars, in pickup trucks." Stores in the region mysteriously sold out of vitamin B; police soon figured out that dealers were using it to "cut" the cocaine. Then the Jamaicans introduced crack—and started a run on plastic food-storage bags used to package the drug.

Martinsburg's 28-man police force carried out small raids but were overwhelmed by the dealers. In a region where one or two murders per year was the norm, 20 homi-

cides, all drug related, occurred in 18 months as rival dealers fought for control. Cases of venereal disease shot up as prostitutes imported by the dealers worked the streets. At local schools, students hired as drug couriers strutted around in expensive Nike jogging suits and gold chains, intimidating classmates and teachers. A police raid of a Jamaican dealer's house turned up crude photographs of a former homecoming queen posing half nude, pieces of crack lying about her. According to law-enforcement authorities, she later gave birth to a baby fathered by the dealer.

**Needles and knives:** Residents were virtually besieged in their homes. Theresa Shamburg was unable to leave her driveway without being offered "crack, cocaine or reefer" by pushers. Discarded needles and knives littered her front yard. She called po-

lice but they were unable to drive away the dealers. One night, when the Jamaicans outside became particularly raucous, Shamburg woke to see her husband crouched with a shotgun in one hand and a pistol in the other, grimly waiting for a break-in.

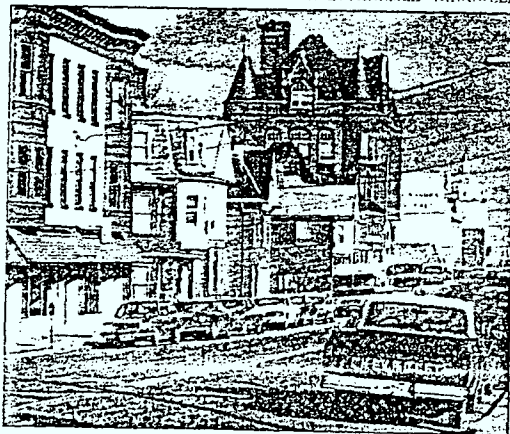
Under pressure from the community, local police asked the federal authorities for help. In fall 1986 some 20 agents from a special federal drug task force and local police raided 26 drug dens, arresting 35 dealers and seizing a cache of high-powered weapons. Police also found a "hit list" with the names of local judges and law-enforcement officials. The suspect, arrested, insisted the names were targeted only for a mystical curse by Jamaican witch doctors. Even so, three county magistrates began carrying guns for self-protection.

**Street action:** The raid pushed the most blatant dealers off the streets—at least for a while. Much of the street action moved down the road to Charles Town, 16 miles away. But many Jamaican dealers have kept up a flourishing underground trade in Martinsburg. On warm days, Theresa Shamburg once again sees dealers congregating across the street. The Shamburgs will not wait to see what happens next. After three years of trying, they have finally found an out-of-town buyer for their home. They are moving to a house in the country, but Shamburg suspects there is no escape. She says: "I really don't think it's safe anywhere anymore."

MARK MILLER in Martinsburg

From picking apples to selling coke and crack: A downtown street, in a Martinsburg home

WALLY McNAMEE—NEWSWEEK



MARTINSBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT PHOTO





PHOTOS BY MARK RICHARDS—PICTURE GROUP

**Peeweess and Wannabees:** *Street-gang acolytes with walkie-talkies for lookout duty*

a consignment basis, a strong indicator of the cartel's trust. One example of the increasingly close connection between the Colombians and the ghetto dealers was uncovered during Operation Pisces II, a two-year investigation run jointly by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and state and local authorities in California and Florida. Pisces II was a money-laundering sting aimed at identifying both smugglers and dealers. In a videotaped conversation between two Colombian smugglers and detectives who operated the fake money "laundry," the Colombians admiringly describe a black trafficker in south Florida. "That s.o.b. he just ordered and ordered; it was hard to keep him stocked," one smuggler exclaimed. "Those blacks are really the best ones," the second smuggler agreed.

**East and West:** There is equally little question that some of the more aggressive big-city gangs have begun to spread the drug trade into the heartland. Police from Denver to Vancouver report that Los Angeles gangs are moving in to establish branch operations selling rock cocaine. In Atlanta, Savannah and Montgomery, Ala., authorities say the Miami Boys are following the same expansionary pattern. Chicago gangs have appeared in Milwaukee, Minneapolis and Racine, Wis., and the Jamaican posses seem to be organizing crack outlets almost everywhere. Kansas City authorities recently managed to break a Jamaican posse that began importing crack from its East Coast base sometime in 1985; the posse was operating 75 crack houses that grossed \$400,000 a day. After that success, however, Kansas City was invaded from the West Coast as well. In February four members of an L.A.-based Bloods gang were indicted for selling cocaine, and investigators say they have identified 15 L.A. gang members

in their city. "This is the first time we've seen an American gang move into town," says U.S. Attorney Robert Larsen. "They're great entrepreneurs."

The big-city boys have two things going for them. First, they are usually able to buy top-quality cocaine directly from major smugglers at wholesale prices—as little as \$10,000 per kilo. The second is that they are better armed and far more violent than the gangs or drug rings they encounter in smaller cities. As a result, they can compete successfully on price and quality—and if those classic business advantages are insufficient to establish a beachhead, they intimidate the competition with mayhem and murder. In Atlanta, says police Lt. John Woodward, the invading Miami Boys

demonstrated the attitude that "we're bad and we'll prove it to you... [they'll] walk up to [their competitors] and just kill 'em. It's not, 'I'm going to out-macho you.' It's 'I'm going to kill you.'" The result, Woodward says, was 13 homicides in 1987.

Enriched by their drug profits, big-city gangs can now easily afford the overhead of far-flung operations. The gang may send a scout—often a younger member—to test the market in the target city. If the first expedition pans out, a larger group will follow to rent a ghetto apartment as a stash house for volume sales. Woodward says the lookouts and runners are often local. Bodyguards may be either locals or out-of-towners. But the higher-ups, who control the stash and count the money, are always members of the invading gang. The amount of cocaine involved, Woodward also says, need not be large—a kilo or so every few days. Bring in "one kilo and you've got 10,000 bags of crack, and that will supply quite a few little housing areas for a few days," he says. "You're talking about \$25 a bag, or \$250,000 per kilo. The kilo costs [the Miami Boys] \$10,000 to \$12,000 in Miami, so there is a great, great profit margin here."

**The posses:** Although there is still some controversy over just how well organized the American drug gangs are, no one doubts that the Jamaican posses are as disciplined as they are violent. Many members are believed to be illegal aliens, and the groups themselves are usually based in Jamaican-immigrant communities on the East Coast—New York, Miami, Washington, D.C., among others. But their nationwide spread over the past several years has been staggering. The posses are major factors in the crack trade in most East Coast

cities. They are also active in Dallas and Houston, in cities across the Midwest and, remarkably enough, they have recently been spotted in Anchorage, Alaska. Like most American drug gangs, the Jamaicans are known to hire local helpers when they open a crack house in a new city. But the core group is always from the island, and no outsiders are allowed to penetrate the upper echelons of the ring.

U.S. lawmen say many of the posses have their roots in the slums around Kingston, Jamaica. Their names reflect that genealogy. The Riverton City posse is named after a Kingston neighborhood, and so are the Maverly and Waterhouse posses. (The Jamaicans call themselves posses after the armed bands in American Westerns.) Some, like the Shower and



**Ritualistic farewell:** *Gang funeral in Los Angeles*



Spangler gangs, claim vague affiliations with Jamaican political parties: the Spangler posse aligns itself with the People's National Party of former prime minister Michael Manley, while the Showers identify with the Jamaican Labor Party of current Prime Minister Edward Seaga. Jamaican politicians, however, disavow any connection to the groups.

In reality, most posses were probably marijuana-smuggling rings in Jamaica. But the crack explosion of the 1980s offers unlimited profits to the posses just as it does to American gangs, and Jamaicans have been even quicker than the American gangs to exploit the opportunity. South Florida, with its Colombian drug connections, is the adopted home for an estimated 1,000 posse members. The Shower and Spangler posses are the two main groups, and some lawmen say all other gangs are offshoots of these two. The lesser posses have exotic names like Dog, Jungle and Okra Slime. One group, the Jungle Lites, is reputed to be expert in guerrilla-warfare tactics, and police suspect they may have received military training in Cuba.

**Reggae and death:** But every posse has a fearful reputation for violence. Nationwide, according to U.S. experts, the Jamaican gangs have been linked to 800 murders, including more than 350 last year alone. Posse gunmen are known to prefer shooting their victims in public, and reggae clubs in major cities have a well-deserved reputation for frequent homicides. A dispute between posse members at a reggae club in Houston last October led to a fatal shooting in front of nearly 100 witnesses, and New York police report that homicides occur almost weekly at a popular Brooklyn nightspot known as the Love People disco. Torture and maimings are posse trademarks as well. "They don't mind shooting people. We've had numerous cases of Jamaicans who were shot in the knee or leg," says Dallas police investigator Charles Storey. "A lot of groups have a potential for violence, but [the Jamaicans] demonstrate it daily." Dallas police say Jamaicans were linked to 35 homicides in 1987 and 10 to 12 so far this year.

The explosive growth of the drug gangs nationwide is put-

ting enormous pressure on police all across the country. Cocaine and heroin traffickers are now deeply entrenched in the ghettos of many larger cities, and drug profits are a powerful incentive to hundreds of thousands of unemployed black and Hispanic teenagers. In addition, many gang members are increasingly expert in exploiting loopholes in the law. As a result, California and New York authorities are considering new anti-gang legislation patterned after the federal RICO (Racketeer-Influenced Corrupt Organization) law; such state RICO statutes will enable prosecutors to seek longer prison terms for gang leaders

convicted on other charges. Officials in cities like New York, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.—to say nothing of Los Angeles—are also being forced to reorganize their police departments to meet the threat of drugs, which means cutting back on manpower for other crimes. "We need more resources—people and equipment," says Frank Storey, the FBI's chief drug official. "Resources are the most critical problem at the federal, state and local level."

Outmanned, outgunned and outspent, the cops are fighting back as best they can. There is nothing they can do to control the spread of weapons like Uzis and AK-47s. As long as such guns have been adapted to fire only on semiautomatic—a procedure that is readily reversed by outlaw gunsmiths—the sales are wholly legal under federal law. Officers who must deal with the gangs routinely wear armored vests (which often will not stop an assault-rifle round), and many departments now equip all their officers with automatic pistols to increase their firepower. But ghetto busts are extremely dangerous anyway: in Boston, for example, Police Lt. Det. Mel Ahearn has trained a special "Jamaican entry squad" to take on the posses in their strongholds.

There is every indication, meanwhile, that the gang/drug problem will get worse. If the analogy to Prohibition is accurate, the gangs have only begun to consolidate their hold on drug trafficking—and given their growth so far, it seems reasonable to expect that they, like the Mafia before them, will become even more skillful in evading law enforcement. The supply of smuggled drugs—Asian heroin, Mexican heroin and cocaine most of all—seems almost limitless. At the same time, the federal government, which has scattered the responsibility for combating drugs among dozens of different agencies, seems to lack a coordinated national strategy. Who's running the war, America's hard-pressed cops are asking—and when are the good guys finally going to win?

TOM MORGANTHAU with  
MICHAEL A. LERNER in Los Angeles.  
RICHARD SANDZA in Washington.  
NONNY ABBOTT in New York.  
DAVID L. GONZALEZ in Miami.  
PATRICIA KING in Chicago  
and bureau reports



MARK RICHARDS—PICTURE GROUP

On-the-spot lab work: An officer tests for drugs in Los Angeles

## A Street-Side Pharmacopeia

Over the last two years some drug dealers have abandoned marijuana and heroin to push crack. But others are doing a brisk business in new imports—and some old standbys. A report from the city streets:

**Cocaine and crack:** A glut has forced the price of a kilogram of cocaine from \$65,000 four years ago to \$10,000 in some places. In some cities, a vial of crack costs only \$3.

**Marijuana:** Though somewhat harder to find since the crack boom, pot is by far still the nation's most popular illicit drug; 18 million Americans smoke it regularly.

**Hallucinogens:** A watered-down form of LSD is making a comeback, mostly in the West. Sales of inexpensive liquid PCP are up again on the East Coast.

**Mexican heroin:** The street price for Black Tar, which is as much as 80 percent pure, can climb to \$500 per gram. A bargain brown-powder heroin sells for \$120 to \$150.

**Asian heroin:** One form comes from the Golden Crescent (Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India) and another from the Golden Triangle (Burma, Laos, Thailand).

**Fentanyl:** A potent heroin substitute known as China White, the synthetically produced "designer drug" is mostly a West Coast fad. Street price: \$3,200 a gram.

# The Battle to Control 50,000 Gang Members on the Streets of Los Angeles

By Matt Lait  
Special to the Washington Post

LOS ANGELES—John (Big Sleepy) Lewis seemed bored as he stood with his hands cuffed behind his back, staring over the heads of the police officers who had stopped him for questioning. Residents of the neighborhood east of Culver City watched impassively from the porches of graffiti-covered houses as he was released minutes later.

Since joining the city's oldest black street gang, the Crips, 12 years ago, Lewis says he has been shot three times, has seen several friends killed and cannot recall all the times he has been taken to jail. At 21, he is older than most of his fellow "gangbangers," as they call themselves. He was released from prison a few months ago after serving a year for possessing cocaine and an Uzi machine gun.

Over the last few years, black gangs in Los Angeles—particularly the Crips and their archrivals, the Bloods—have grown into well-organized drug-trafficking networks, feuding violently over clients and territory.

Recently, in search of larger profits, the two major gangs have expanded to cities as distant as Toronto and Seattle, forcing law enforcement agencies to develop new ways to combat them.

With more than 50,000 hard-core gang members, mostly black, Hispanic and Asian, in Los Angeles County, police are battling what many say is a losing war. A report released this week by the National School Safety Center puts the estimate even higher at 70,000 members here, surpassing Chicago with 10,000 and New York with 5,000.

"We're not making a big dent," said Sgt. Alan Thatcher of the Los Angeles Police Department's antigang unit. "It's a brush fire effect. A murder happens over there, so we go over there and try to solve it, and then there's a murder over here and we go here, and on and on . . ."

Compared to the same period last year, gang-related homicides in 1988 have risen 50 percent in the city and almost 100 percent in the county, according to police and sheriff's department statistics. There have been 40 such murders in the city through February and 28 in the county to date. The total last year was 381.

In response, the Los Angeles Police Department has launched its GRATS (Gang-Related Active Trafficker Suppression) project that expects to jail as many as 100 gang members a month on drug charges. Many make instant bail with the pocket money they carry, sometimes thousands of dollars.

The department's Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH) unit also has reorganized to fight street violence, and the city attorney has won a court injunction prohibiting certain Crips from loitering, trespassing and harassing neighborhood residents.

Citing increased gang activity, the Los Angeles City Council has voted to add 150 officers to its 7,100-member force by June 1989; Mayor Tom Bradley has asked for an additional 250. The annual cost of the new officers would be \$26.4 million. On Thursday—the same day that three gang-related shootings left seven people wounded—city and county officials received \$2.73 million in federal grants to help combat such violence.

Now, partly in response to such targeting, many gang members have moved to other West Coast cities, where the drug-market competition is less keen and local law enforcement officers know less about their methods.

Police in San Diego, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle report a recent influx of Los Angeles gang members. They also have been reported in Phoenix, Tucson, Shreveport, La., and Toronto.

"The black gangs have gone to other cities looking for fertile grounds for the selling of narcotics where the price is a little more inflated, and have set up McDonald's-like franchises throughout the United States and even up into Canada," Los Angeles Police Cmdr. Larry Kramer said.

Officer Neil Crannell of the Portland Police Department said the Crips appeared there in 1986 and the Bloods in 1987.

"When they first came here, Bloods and Crips were kind of palling around together, and they hung out at some of the same places, but a few months after that, they changed and now they're separate antagonists, increasing in numbers," he said.

In Seattle, local authorities sought help from federal investigators, including the Federal Bureau of Inves-

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- The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_
- The Chicago Tribune \_\_\_\_\_
- The Los Angeles Times \_\_\_\_\_
- The Christian Science Monitor \_\_\_\_\_
- USA Today \_\_\_\_\_

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igation, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. DEA and Treasury agents in Seattle arrested three Los Angeles gang members on cocaine-trafficking charges last month, seizing a sawed-off shotgun, \$5,680 in cash, quantities of crack, a small safe, drug paraphernalia and business records.

The growth in gang membership here is partly attributable to the profit motive.

"It's hard to tell a 15-year-old kid with \$3,000 in his pocket, who before never had a dollar, that this is the wrong way to go," said Detective Michael Berchem of the Los Angeles Police Department's antigang unit.

In many cases, the older members of the gang delegate the real work of acquiring and selling drugs to younger members because juveniles receive lighter penalties if caught. In exchange, the junior member gets a share of the profits.

"It's basically like any other business, the higher up you go the less you have to do with the actual business," Berchem said.

But Dr. Lorenzo Merritt of Project HEAVY West, a nonprofit counseling center that tries to help children stay out of jail, said they join "fundamentally because of a need for acceptance and identity. It generally means an absence of a cohesive . . . family life where there is no sense of belonging and respect."

Even youths who don't want to join a gang sometimes see no choice. A 19-year-old Crips member who identified himself by his gang name, Jay Stone, said: "You join to survive. If you're not in a gang, you have no protection from other bangers. Once you're in, though, you're in for good."

"If you want to be a man, you're in it," Lewis said.

The Crips were identified as the city's first large black gang in the early 1970s, according to police. Shortly afterwards, the Bloods formed to protect themselves and since then, the gangs have become mortal enemies. Membership is determined largely by neighborhood.

Crip members advertise their affiliation by wearing blue on everything from shoelaces to the bandanas that hang out of their back pockets. Bloods wear red in the same fashion.

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So far this year, at least 53 bystanders have been killed or wounded by gang members in Los Angeles, police said. Several of those killed, died because they wore the wrong colors in a gang's territory.

Although Hispanic gangs in Los Angeles have a history dating back to the turn of the century and account for some of the city's gang-related violence, they tend to be "more territorial," Kramer said.

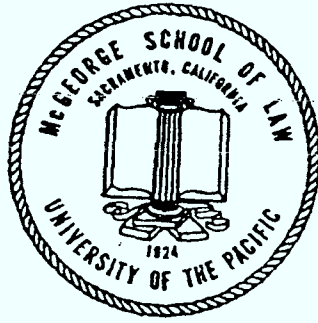
"Hispanic gangs are not into the monetary gain as much as they are into proving their manhood and the fact that they are machismo and defending what they see as their neighborhood," Sgt. Wes McBride of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department said.

But police say emerging gangs of Asian youths may soon rival the Bloods and the Crips in terms of drugs and violence. The recent deaths of two DEA agents in a Los Angeles County shoot-out with suspected Asian drug dealers raised fears that Asian gangs, with direct links to Asian heroin, are developing into major narcotic organizations with potential for extreme violence.

Meanwhile, the Crips and Bloods, with dozens of affiliate factions throughout the city, remain the dominant gangs. And police say the Crips fight among themselves.

"There are many more Crips than there are Bloods. But within their different factions, you very seldom see Bloods feuding with other Bloods but it is very common to see other Crips feuding with other Crips," Kramer said.

"The bottom line to the whole thing here, is that it doesn't make any sense because there's nothing to make any sense about it," Berchem said. "Why a guy over on this street will shoot a guy six blocks away because he's a different kind of Crip, but yet, six blocks over the other way is a gang of Crips that he gets along with . . . just doesn't make any sense."



McGEORGE SCHOOL OF LAW  
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**THE CITIZENS' HANDBOOK OF  
CALIFORNIA STREET GANGS: 1992**

By  
Paula Marie McKibbin, J.D.  
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### BLACK STREET GANGS

As of March 1992, out of the total number of 942 street gangs identified in the G.R.E.A.T. System, 299 were identified as black street gangs.<sup>144</sup> In the author's opinion, of all youth, black youth are in the most danger of joining street gangs and becoming involved in street gang criminal activity. Statistics reveal that although blacks comprise only 6% of the country's general population, they make up 46% of the nation's prison population.<sup>145</sup> According to David Sandoval, twenty-five percent of black male youth are in either jail or prison, or on parole or probation, compared to only six percent of white male youth.<sup>146</sup> Forty-four percent of the black population cannot read, and an additional 17% are semi-illiterate. The national dropout rate for black students is 22%; however, in some cities, such as Los Angeles, the school dropout rate for black youth is 50%. In addition, 56% of the black families have no men in their household.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>144</sup> McBride, see n. 8.

<sup>145</sup> Ron Johnson, Consultant, Community Reclamation Project, Los Angeles, California, "Rites of Passage: Bringing the High-Risk Youth to Adulthood," Community Mobilization: How to Survive in the '90's, Conference Proceedings, Office of Criminal Justice Planning, Los Angeles County Interagency Task Force on Gang Violence, and California Council on Criminal Justice, 1990, p. 139.

<sup>146</sup> Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, Limited Life Opportunities for Black and Latino Youth, December 1990, p. 11.

<sup>147</sup> Taylor, see n. 20.

Black street gangs have existed in the areas of South Central Los Angeles and Compton since the early 1920's. These early gangs, one of which was called the Boozie gang, consisted of family members and close friends who involved themselves in limited criminal activity designed to make themselves appear tough and to provide a source of funds. The early black street gangs were more territorial than they are today. In the 1920's, the different black gangs fought each other, but they did not engage in stabbings or shootings.<sup>148</sup> During the late 1930's, the Slauson gang was the most active; whereas in the 1950's and in the 1960's, gangs such as "the Businessmen," "the Home Street Gang," and "the 117th Street Gang," were active. Since these early gangs concentrated their criminal activity within the black neighborhoods, they were virtually unnoticed by the rest of the public.<sup>149</sup>

In the 1960's, black street gang activity caused two rival street gangs, the Crips and the Bloods, to organize. The Crips were the first to form in 1969. Contrary to popular belief, these early Crips were comprised of black male youth from the upper middle class of society. They attended Washington High School in South Central Los Angeles. The Crips soon made a name for themselves by confronting other youth and forcing them to fight; to give up their possessions;

<sup>148</sup> Id.

<sup>149</sup> Association of Orange County Deputy Sheriffs, p. 23, see n. 88.



and, in some cases, to join the Crip street gang.<sup>150</sup>

When law enforcement and school authorities were either unable or unwilling to provide the protection needed by members of the public from the Crips, black youth in many neighborhoods started to form their own gangs for self-protection against the Crip gang members. One such gang that formed was called the Bloods. The early Bloods called themselves Pirus, naming themselves after the street they lived on in Compton, California.<sup>151</sup>

Although the Blood-Pirus initially were successful against the Crips, the Crips soon began to outnumber the Bloods. By the mid-1970's, the Crips had built a reputation for themselves as the strongest black street gang in the State. The growth in Crips' gang membership has increased steadily to a present ratio of three Crips for every one Blood. Today, all black street gangs align themselves with either the Crips or the Bloods. The Crips and Bloods continue to be rival gangs. Nowadays, however, as many people may not know, the majority of the street gang warfare occurs between

<sup>150</sup>Office of the Attorney General, State of California Department of Justice, Unclassified Confidential Publication for Law Enforcement, Crips and Bloods Street Gangs, BOCCI Unit, p. 3; Hourie Taylor, Police Commander, Compton Police Department, Black Street Gangs Organization and Subculture, rev. June 1988, p. 3.

<sup>151</sup>Taylor, see n. 20.

the various Crip gangs.<sup>152</sup>

Both the Crips and the Bloods organize themselves into sets made up of different age groups. The membership within each set includes groups of "wannabees," "peripherals," "associates," and "hard-core" gang members. The would-be gang members, also known as "wannabees," are between 6 and 10 years of age. The young members form a set of "baby gangsters" who are between the ages of 11 and 15. The hard-core gang members form a set of "gangsters" who range in age from 16 to 22. The older gang members, who are over 22 years old, are called "original gangsters."<sup>153</sup>

In order to identify themselves to others, the Crips and the Bloods began wearing, i.e., "flashing," their respective gang colors. The Crips began wearing blue clothing, and the Bloods began wearing red clothing.<sup>154</sup> More recently, tattoos have become another popular means of identification used by black street gang members.<sup>155</sup>

Black street gangs are not as culturally oriented as traditional Hispanic street gangs, and they have fewer subsets. They usually have only a few older gang members.

<sup>152</sup> Information obtained from Bob Ferber, Assistant Supervisor, Gang Unit, Los Angeles City Attorney's Office, Los Angeles, California, on May 8, 1992.

<sup>153</sup> Taylor, p. 7, see n. 150.

<sup>154</sup> Id.

<sup>155</sup> Id.



They are not as oriented or as loyal to the gang as are the Hispanics. Unlike Hispanic gang members, black gang members put their own interests before those of the street gang.<sup>156</sup> If a black gang member holds any loyalty, it is usually to another gang member, rather than to the gang itself. Another difference between the blacks and the Hispanics is that many black youth, unlike the Hispanics, have been known to speak openly to law enforcement officers about themselves and their gangs when they are away from their street gang comrades.<sup>157</sup>

In the 1970's, the more sophisticated black gang members started to abandon their distinctive gang attire in order to avoid detection by law enforcement and school officials.<sup>158</sup> In recent years, all Crips and Bloods have begun to "dress down" in order to avoid detection by law enforcement officers. Rather than wearing all-blue clothing, Crip gang members nowadays may conceal somewhere on their person only blue-colored scarves, also known as "rags," to identify their gang affiliation. Bloods may reveal their gang involvement by carrying only red-colored rags.<sup>159</sup>

In 1984, it was firmly established that many black street gang members were involved in drug trafficking. They

<sup>156</sup>Arizona Department of Public Safety, Intelligence Division, p. 8.

<sup>157</sup>Marshall, see n. 5.

<sup>158</sup>Association of Orange County Deputy Sheriffs, p. 35, see n. 88.

<sup>159</sup>Id.

trafficked predominately marijuana and PCP, and their business steadily increased to include cocaine.<sup>160</sup> In 1987, Crips and Blood operations mushroomed into new territories beyond Los Angeles, in part because a quantity of rock cocaine that sold for \$25 in Los Angeles could be sold for as much as \$80 elsewhere.<sup>161</sup> Since 1984, the Crips and the Bloods have quickly transformed themselves into well-organized distributors of narcotics.<sup>162</sup> In 1991, both Crip and Blood street gangs were engaged in crack operations in 22 states and at least 27 major cities.<sup>163</sup>

As of 1988, gang veterans and law enforcement officers determined that the cocaine trade in South Central Los Angeles was controlled by 15 to 20 black street gang original gangsters.<sup>164</sup> Los Angeles Police Department Deputy Chief Levant reported in that year that 75 to 100 black street gangs were actively involved in cocaine distribution, with weekly sales totaling as much as \$1,000,000.<sup>165</sup> Law enforcement officers have discovered that black street gangs are connected

<sup>160</sup>Taylor, see n. 20.

<sup>161</sup>Id.

<sup>162</sup>Id.

<sup>163</sup>Skolnick, p. 8, see n. 49.

<sup>164</sup>Id.

<sup>165</sup>Office of the Attorney General, State of California, Department of Justice, p. 2, see n. 100.



with the Columbia drug cartels.<sup>166</sup>

Black street gangs establish themselves in a community by initially living with or contacting blood relatives of individual street gang members.<sup>167</sup> In some cases, they may offer \$50 to \$100 per day to single mothers or elderly persons who are on fixed incomes in exchange for using their residences to deal cocaine.<sup>168</sup> Law enforcement officers have discovered that some Bloods and Crips may forego trying to establish themselves in some neighborhoods and deal drugs from motels located along the major Interstate 5 and Highway 99 corridors in California.<sup>169</sup>

Black street gang members often establish themselves in new locales by throwing lavish parties. These newcomers flash a lot of money and offer gifts to people in the new locale in order to persuade them to attend their parties. After the guests arrive, the gang members offer them alcohol and crack cocaine, realizing that once they get someone to try crack cocaine, they have a guaranteed addict and consequently a guaranteed client.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Id., p. 7.

<sup>167</sup> Christopher Kuntz, Sacramento Police Department, Investigation of Black Street Gang Drug Distributors, 1988, p. 5.

<sup>168</sup> Id.

<sup>169</sup> Kuntz, p. 6, see n. 167.

<sup>170</sup> Marshall, see n. 5.

Black street gang drug dealers often use commercial airlines, buses, and automobiles to transport themselves and their illegal drugs to new locations in order to conduct their criminal activities.<sup>171</sup> Law enforcement officers have discovered that the Los Angeles street gang members seem to prefer arriving at their destinations by automobile or by bus between the hours of 6 A.M. and 8 A.M., hoping thereby to minimize contact with law enforcement officers.<sup>172</sup>

Law enforcement officers also have discovered that when a black street gang member transports cocaine, he often is accompanied by a female, who is often white. The white female usually carries the cocaine concealed on her person. When law enforcement officers stop the black male, they often do not suspect that the white female is with him.<sup>173</sup>

In order to avoid forfeiture of the expensive cars that they buy with the proceeds of their drug trade, black gang members register their transport vehicles in the names of their parents, siblings, and close relatives.<sup>174</sup> They also are using rental cars more frequently. Los Angeles International Airport is a popular car rental location.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>171</sup>Kuntz, see n. 167; Office of the Attorney General, State of California, Department of Justice, p. 6, see n. 100.

<sup>172</sup>Kuntz, p. 7, see n. 167.

<sup>173</sup>Id.

<sup>174</sup>Id.

<sup>175</sup>Id.



Only a few of the black street gang members who are involved in drug trafficking end up making a substantial amount of money. These gang members often buy respectable businesses, and some of them get out of drug trafficking altogether. Law enforcement officers are aware that these black street gang members now own several big businesses and live in some of the best neighborhoods in California. They also associate with people of money and influence, who are often white upper-class citizens. They move out of their old neighborhoods, but they still maintain ties with the neighborhood. They use homes in the old neighborhood as stash pads for money and drugs.<sup>176</sup>

Law enforcement officers are starting to see whites and Hispanics in Crips gangs, as well as Asian gangs that claim Crips affiliation.<sup>177</sup> These officers believe that the recruitment of whites and Hispanics into their street gangs is an attempt by the Crips to expand drug markets into suburban areas and to enable them to transport drugs more easily across the country. For example, law enforcement officers recently discovered that children of white families in Corona who lived in \$500,000 homes had joined black street gangs. These white youth go outside of their wealthy city surroundings to affiliate with black street gang members. They told law enforcement officers that their reason for

<sup>176</sup> Marshall, see n. 5.

<sup>177</sup> Id.; Quarry, see n. 9.

joining black street gangs was to experience the sheer excitement of being a gang member.<sup>178</sup>

### CARRIBEAN STREET GANGS

#### JAMAICAN STREET GANGS

Until recently, the Jamaican street gangs, known as Jamaican posses, had confined themselves to cities along the East Coast. Law enforcement officers consider them to be ruthless and heavily involved in narcotics trafficking. In April 1992, law enforcement officers detected the presence of Jamaican posses in the State of California. It appears that Jamaican posses sent scouts to infiltrate the narcotics market in this state. These officers do not know at this early date whether or not the Jamaican posses are trying to establish themselves permanently in the Los Angeles area.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>178</sup> Marshall, see n. 5.

<sup>179</sup> Angeles, see n. 135.