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THE URBAN STREET GANG AFTER 1970

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■ **Abstract** This review discusses research on the urban street gang after the 1960s, the period in which social scientists began to conceptualize the gang outside of the social-problems framework. Street-gang research has changed dramatically in the past three decades in accordance with general shifts in sociological research, including developments in gender studies, economic sociology, and race and ethnic relations. This review addresses these major trends and debates and highlights suggestions for areas of future inquiry that build on innovations of contemporary scholars.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early twentieth century, the study of gangs has shifted in accordance with general theoretical and methodological changes in sociology. Frederic Thrasher's seminal work, *The Gang* (Thrasher 1927), conducted as the discipline was forming, is often cited as the earliest comprehensive sociological investigation of the urban street gang. Many of the critical dimensions of street-gang activity that he identified, including adequately defining gangs and determining patterns of entrée and exit, remain subjects of interest and debate in contemporary research. But Thrasher also ignored or de-emphasized other aspects of street-gang activity, such as the roles of race and gender as structuring principles of social action, politics as a primary factor shaping gang activity and neighborhood organization, and the relationship of gangs to modes of material accumulation. His relative interests and disinterests, and his general approach to gangs as principally neighborhood-based entities, may be partially explained as an outcome of his commitment to the human ecology paradigm, then dominant in urban sociology (see Schwendinger & Schwendinger 1974, Venkatesh 2001).

Over the next half century, until the end of the 1960s, sociology changed in important ways, but the ecological interpretation of cities remained strong as a guiding vision of both urban studies and street-gang research. In particular, the postwar era appeared to be a watershed moment for researchers of gangs (Cloward & Ohlin 1960, Cohen 1955, Miller 1958, Short & Strodtbeck 1965, Spergel 1964). The ascension of survey research and the growing links between sociology and social policy deeply influenced street-gang research, and civil rights actions in

American cities drew the country's attention to the status of its most disenfranchised youth. The inner-city, minority youth gang became the principal empirical object, and the gang was viewed primarily as a social problem, one involving the challenges to social integration faced by disenfranchised inner-city minorities. In effect, the fields of criminology and social work laid claim to gang research, to the diminution of those working in sociology departments.

This review discusses street-gang research after the 1960s, the most recent significant period of change in this field. In this time, movements in cultural and gender studies, economics, and social history radically altered sociology. The reliance on human ecology theory and the social-problems approach to street gangs have both been called into question, and new perspectives have emerged. This review addresses some of the most important directions taken by social scientists in response to both shifts in the organization of sociological research and changes to the street gang.

Two caveats are in order: First, although it is instructive to compare the intellectual historical development of street-gang research in America with other cities and countries (Hazlehurst & Hazlehurst 1998b), any such comparison would exceed the boundaries of this review. Comparative, cross-cultural, and global investigations of gang activity are beginning to emerge (see Hazlehurst & Hazelhurst 1998a and Klein et al. 2001 for two recent edited volumes), but they are not directly reviewed here.[1] Second, there are many studies of delinquency, psychology of deviance, youth violence, and so forth that touch on gangs indirectly or loosely consider gang activity as either a determining variable or an outcome. Because this review is directed primarily at identifying critical trends in gang research, i.e., those studies that take gang activity as a direct object of analysis, these tangential studies are not considered.

We organize this review by outlining several of the most interesting debates in research and substantial bodies of work in emergent subfields that are dramatically altering our understanding of urban street gangs. We begin by reviewing the debate on the gang's involvement in entrepreneurial activity. We then turn to studies on female gangs and gang members and on broader issues related to gender. This subfield has not only produced one of the more substantial sets of studies on gangs in a variety of sites and in different formations, but also brought researchers' attention to cultural practices, media representation, and the interplay of race, class, and gender. Next, we focus on racial and ethnic composition of gangs and the ways in which race and ethnicity are thought to shape gang activity. In the fourth section, we address research on gangs and the state, both in juridical settings, such as legislatures and courts, and in related institutional settings,

[1]In addition to research collected in the cited edited volumes, several recent exemplary studies of gangs and urban street youth outside the United States include Hagan & McCarthy 1997 (Canada), Márquez 1999 (Venezuela), Pillay 2002 (South Africa), Sanchez & Pedrazzini 1992 (Latin America), White 2002 (Australia), and White & Perrone 2001 (Australia).

such as police and carceral facilities. Finally, we point to fruitful areas for further research.

THE BUSINESS OF GANGS

In the mid-1980s, the phrase "gang and drug problem" became part of popular discourse. Media and law enforcement tended to depict the urban street gang as systematically involved in drug trafficking and, to a lesser degree, other illegal or underground economies such as prostitution and extortion. Although researchers found contradictory evidence, most agreed that in previous eras there were only occasional reports of such involvement (Chein et al. 1964, Keiser 1969, Moore 1991, Spergel 1964). The following basic questions thus became subjects of debate for social scientists: (*a*) To what extent are urban street gangs entrepreneurially motivated? (*b*) How does commerce activity affect the group's activity? Any such commitment to revenue generation could signal the gang's decreasing interest in protecting territory and its move away from other social activities, such as participation in local politics and peer support—generally regarded as hallmark activities of the gang (Thrasher 1927). Thus, answering these questions would involve revisiting the basic task of defining what a gang is.[2] Entrepreneurial activity could also lead to variations in the gang's demographic profile, its use of violence, and the motivations of its members to remain active. If in fact these changes had occurred, theories of gang formation and reproduction would have to be revised.

Evidence from both qualitative studies of single gangs and quantitative surveys of individual gang members suggests that urban street gangs have indeed become more immersed in various underground economies (Collins 1979, Hagedorn 1988, Padilla 1992, Sánchez Jankowski 1991, Spergel 1995, Sullivan 1989, Taylor 1990, Venkatesh 2000). The precise historical moment in which this shift occurred remains uncertain. Some studies suggest that the gang's entrepreneurial interests either formed or escalated significantly (in organizational scope and intent) with the introduction of crack cocaine into most large American cities in the mid-1980s (Block & Block 1993; Fagan 1993; Hagedorn 1991, 1994a,b), although there is compelling evidence that the gang's commercial mien predated the arrival of crack cocaine (Curtis 1998, Klein 1995, Taylor 1990). When analyzed by ethnic group and the particular social context of gang activity (i.e., large cities, East versus West Coast), it appears that different ethnic gangs entered into underground economies at different times and that the developmental trajectories of gangs in large urban areas is distinct from smaller cities and towns (Chin 1990, Curtis 1998, Howell & Gleason 1999, Howell et al. 2002, Spergel 1995). Thus, researchers find lower

[2]There is a longstanding and largely technical debate on the proper definition of the street gang. We address these ongoing discussions to the degree that they are part of the general struggle by researchers to understand the purview of gangs and gang activity in light of the post-1970s shifts addressed in this review. (See Bursik & Grasmick 1993 and Horowitz 1990 for reviews of difficulties in defining street gangs.)

levels of organization in cities such as San Diego (Decker et al. 1998); St. Louis (Decker & Van Winkle 1996, Miller 2001); Denver, Cleveland, and Columbus (Huff 1996b, Miller 2001); Kansas City (Fleischer 1998); Seattle (Fleischer 1995); Milwaukee (Hagedorn 1988); Pittsburgh (Klein 1995); and Rochester (Thornberry et al. 2003). Researchers also continue to produce evidence of higher levels of organization in places such as Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles (Bourgois 1995, Brotherton & Barrios 2002, Padilla 1992, Papachristos 2001, Sánchez Jankowski 1991, Venkatesh 2000; see Decker et al. 1998 for a discussion of "emerging" and "established" gang cities). Still, the range of contradictory findings suggests that neat divisions by ethnicity or historical urban development do not necessarily hold fast.

There is also disagreement regarding the scope of involvement of street gangs in various forms of underground economic activity. Sánchez Jankowski's (1991) comparative study of 37 gangs revealed a rational approach by gang members to emergent illicit opportunities in their communities, as reflected in the gang's intricate organizational structure, codes of conduct, and rules specifying permissible behavior. Although this argument finds support in other studies—again, typically in the context of large metropolitan areas (Block et al. 1996; Fagan 1990; Levitt & Venkatesh 2000; Taylor 1990, 1993; Venkatesh & Levitt 2000; Williams 1992)—the consensus appears to be that drug trafficking is usually a secondary interest compared to identity construction, protecting neighborhood territory, and recreation. Further, gangs involved in drug trafficking may only constitute a small proportion of all gangs (Huff 1996b, Klein 1995, Klein & Maxson 1996), with most remaining decidedly nonentrepreneurial. Finally, gang members engaged in drug trafficking are doing so either outside the auspices of the gang or via a specialized subunit within the gang (Decker & Van Winkle 1996, Klein et al. 1991, Waldorf 1993).

The debate on gangs in drug trafficking also involves the attendant consequences of underground economic activity on gang structure and practice. Sánchez Jankowski's (1991) study provides a well-developed argument that gangs have grown more complex in terms of their leadership structure, bylaws, and relations with surrounding institutions as a result of their economic interests. There is only minimal, and largely dissatisfactory, evidence that entrepreneurially oriented gangs are capable of reproducing large, localized drug trafficking operations and that they can expand into new locales to form citywide and regional ventures (McKinney 1988, Skolnick et al. 1988; see Howell & Decker 1999 on Skolnick's California research). Hagedorn's (1988) study of Milwaukee gangs is more typical in arguing that gangs cannot carry out a highly organized form of drug trafficking beyond the block level and that forces promoting their expansion (e.g., school desegregation) do not necessarily manifest in an extended, more cohesive organizational structure. Research on Latino gangs in Chicago and Los Angeles similarly suggests that urban street gangs involved in drug trafficking are unable to maintain anything more than low levels of organization (Padilla 1992, Vigil 1988) and that gangs should not be compared to businesses or corporations (Decker & Van Winkle 1996, Klein 1995).

Although the debate about entrepreneurship tends to focus on organizational changes to the gang, researchers have also examined shifts in the age profile of members and new opportunities for youth-adult connections (see Klein 1995 and Spergel 1995 for overviews). Although a majority of researchers identify adolescence as a salient feature of the urban street gang (Covey et al. 1992, Huff 1989, Lasley 1992), Moore (1978, 1991) found that Chicano male and female gangs are not limited to youth and can include many older members—all of whom may be organized into distinct age cohorts or "klikas." Her evidence of intergenerational membership is confirmed in Horowitz's (1983) study. Hagedorn (1988) employs a careful mix of observational and interview methods to demonstrate that one of the principal factors promoting age differentiation—and the retention of older individuals in the gang—is that men released from prison join their gang-affiliated youth and adolescent counterparts in hopes of finding sources of income generation (see Chin 1996 for relations between Chinese-American youth gangs and their adult counterparts in organized crime). Venkatesh (2000) and Valdez (2002), studying Chicago and San Antonio, respectively, found that as a result of adult joblessness, in the mid-1980s, the age profile of gangs changed to include more young adults and some in their thirties and forties. Spergel (1995) cites evidence that, in general, adult groups are incorporating youth, although others counter that this trend is not dominant or pervasive and is limited to individual members rather than entire groups (Fagan 1996; Hagedorn 1991, 1994a,b; Klein 1995).

There is some evidence that gang members are more violent or delinquent than nongang members and that entrepreneurialism may exacerbate certain forms of gang violence (Battin-Pearson et al. 1998; Esbensen & Huizinga 1993; Fagan 1990; Klein 1995; Maxson & Klein 1990, 1996; Spergel 1995; Thornberry et al. 1993; Thornberry 1998; Venkatesh 2000; Venkatesh & Levitt 2001; Walker-Barnes & Mason 2001). However, nearly all studies note that disparities between reports of gang violence from different data sources (e.g., police records, self-reports) and across jurisdictions make it difficult to ascertain whether increased gang entrepreneurialism has changed gang members' involvement in violent practices (Block & Block 1993; Fagan 1996; Klein 1995; Maxson & Klein 1990, 1996; Rosenfeld et al. 1999). Furthermore, although some researchers anchor increased gang violence in escalated drug trafficking, other findings complicate this correlation. In a series of studies on Chicago homicide rates between 1965 and 1989 (i.e., covering the period of the emerging crack markets), Block & Block (1993) found no evidence that gang homicide, in comparison to other kinds of homicides, is directly related to either drug use or trafficking per se. In an effort to explain the well-documented decline in youth violence and overall violence in major American cities after 1994 (see Butts & Travis 2002 for an analysis of this decline with regard to youth), Curtis (1998, 2002) described in great detail the transformation in uses of violence associated with the crack-cocaine trade in the 1980s and early 1990s and with the heroin trade in the 1990s. Whereas the earlier era saw a "corporate" (Taylor 1990) model and public displays of violence, Curtis (1998, 2002) demonstrated that the later period saw a change toward localized control and a

decrease in retaliatory violence between and within different street groups. Indeed, Curtis & Hamid (1999) attributed this decline to the emergence and reorganization of a well-known and well-organized New York street organization, the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation. Spergel (1992) also found evidence contradictory to the dominant thesis that black and Latino gangs were responsible for apparent increases in violence during the so-called crack epidemic of the 1980s.

Both the nature of the gang's turn toward entrepreneurial activity and the consequences of this shift remain an active source of debate among researchers. Although there is clearly no consensus in the past 30 years of research regarding the timing and scope of this shift, considerable advances have been made in highly localized contexts, such as cities and particular communities within cities. Much of the research remains focused on the inner- and central-city environs (for exceptions, see Evans et al. 1999 and Muehlbauer & Dodder 1983). This focus may need to expand into other spaces (suburbs, working-class and middle-class neighborhoods) because researchers have documented entrepreneurial gang migration into these areas as well as the rise of newly formed gangs outside of core, central city spaces (see Maxson et al. 1996 for a review on gang migration).

GENDERING THE GANG

Since the 1970s, street-gang researchers have more forcefully incorporated a gender analysis into their research, thereby addressing historic criticisms that the experiences of female gang members and male-female relations within gangs have been subordinate to the experiences of male members (Campbell 1984, Curry 1998, Miller 2001, Moore & Hagedorn 2001, Venkatesh 1998). The focus on female gang members and female gangs represents the most substantial body of work in terms of advancing street-gang research into new analytic terrain. There is a concerted effort to consider "girl gangs" [3] and female members as a subject in and of themselves (for the earliest examples in this vein, see Brown 1977, Miller 1973, Quicker 1983), not simply as appendages to male gangs or members. Female and male gangs are often viewed as comparable (Joe & Chesney-Lind 1995, Esbensen et al. 1999, Moore 1991), rather than the former as a weak version of the latter. Researchers directly analyze female perspectives and experiences (Brotherton & Salazar 2002, Burris-Kitchen 1997, Campbell 1984, Harris 1988, Joe & Chesney-Lind 1995, Moore 1991, Nurge 2002, Venkatesh 1998) and inquire into the reproduction of feminine and masculine identities (Bourgois 1995, Joe & Chesney-Lind 1995, Laidler & Hunt 2001, Mendoza-Denton 1995, Messerschmidt 1999, Moore 1991, Portillos 1999, Schalet et al. 2003). Some have deployed feminist theory against human ecology, criminology, and sociology of deviance

[3]Girl gang is the conventional terminology in contemporary research (by male and female researchers and feminists alike). Male-only and male-dominated gangs have typically been referred to simply as gangs, whereas female-only and female-dominated gangs are gender marked with the diminutive "girl."

paradigms in their attempts to break the hegemony of a social-problems orientation toward gang research (Burris-Kitchen 1997, Campbell 1984, Chesney-Lind 1993, Messerschmidt 1999, Miller 2001, Nurge 2002, Venkatesh 1998). Notwithstanding these advances, critics (Brotherton & Salazar 2002, Chesney-Lind 1993, Curry 1998, Joe & Chesney-Lind 1995, Miller 2001, Moore 1991) make clear that contemporary research still recycles stereotypes and offers sensationalist portrayals of female gang experiences by using little more than anecdotal evidence.

In an effort to redress the relative invisibility of women in earlier periods of gang research, most recent studies of gender and gangs consider gender to be an empirical variable by measuring levels and forms of female involvement. These studies apply established categories of gang research to females (e.g., recruitment, violent behavior, desistance, enforcement, penal response, aging) and compare findings to male-specific studies. Key questions include the following: Do girls in gangs act like their boy counterparts? Are they more or less violent? Why do girls join gangs? How do gangs with female members differ from all-male gangs?

Answers to these questions have not produced consistent findings. Girl gangs, like their male counterparts, differ significantly from one gang to the next, from one city or time period to another (Nurge 2002). Although some studies reveal gender-based differences between gangs, others do not (see Daly & Chesney-Lind 1988 and Miller 2001 for discussion of "generalizability" problems). Nearly all researchers agree that female gangs and gang members do exist, yet estimates of their proportion of the overall gang population (itself a matter of disagreement) vary considerably.[4] Most figures hover around 30%. This divergence in estimates can be attributed in part to data sources (Moore & Hagedorn 2001), the result often being systematic underreporting of female gang involvement (Esbensen & Huizinga 1993). Research based on state records tends to report at the low end, sometimes less than 10% (Curry et al. 1994, Howell 1994, Spergel 1995), whereas self-reports and ethnographic studies produce higher estimates, up to 46% (Bjerregaard & Smith 1993, Campbell 1984, Chesney-Lind 1993, Esbensen & Deschenes 1998, Esbensen & Huizinga 1993, Esbensen & Osgood 1997, Fagan 1990, Klein 1995, Moore 1991).

Female gang violence and behavior is perhaps the most controversial issue in current research, with scholars strongly disagreeing on individual levels of involvement in violent activities and on broader questions about the consequences of female gang membership. Stereotypical residues of earlier gang research, namely, the maintenance of narrow parameters regarding what constitutes an appropriate or even possible set of gang activities for girls and women. Nevertheless, there is broad concurrence that females and males involved in gangs commit violent offenses with different frequencies—females less often than males—and that females tend to be involved in less-violent crimes than males (Chesney-Lind et al. 1996,

[4]See Curry (2001) for a discussion of research on the proliferation of gangs in the United States and Bookin-Weiner & Horowitz (1983) and Venkatesh (2002) on the role of ideology and forms of knowledge production in gang research.

Deschenes & Esbensen 1999, Klein 1995, Spergel 1995; for dissents, see Fleischer 1998, Taylor 1993). There is also general agreement that gang membership leads to higher rates of violent offending for females compared to those not in a gang, similar to the case with males (Esbensen & Huizinga 1993, Esbensen & Winfree 1998, Fagan 1990, Thornberry et al. 1993). Miller (2001) suggests that females use their gendered identity as a protection against engaging in especially risky or violent behavior, even while they are aware that the benefits of this protection may entail the cost of lower status in the sexualized hierarchy of the gang.

The subset of research on entrée and exit of girls into and out of gangs has been especially productive in answering the question of why girls join gangs, a question sometimes asked with an implied undertone: Why would any (good) girl possibly want to join a gang? As already noted above, and perhaps more so than in studies of male-only gangs, research on female gangs emphasizes a complex social context as the basis for entry into the gang (Brotherton & Salazar 2002; Campbell 1984; Fishman 1995, 1999; Miller 2001; Moore 1991; Venkatesh 1998). In their study of the Queens of the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation, for instance, Brotherton & Salazar's (2002) literature review groups "push/pull" factors common to much research on females and gang membership; the most salient of these factors are identity crises, family dynamics, economic survival, community networks, and social class pressures. Burris-Kitchen (1997), Lauderback et al. (1992), and Taylor (1993) argue that economic necessity and opportunity—more so than other factors—drive female gang membership. Esbensen & Deschenes (1998) suggest that, although ties to "negative" peers explain both male and female gang membership, the correlation is higher for females (see also Haynie 2002 on gangs and peer networks, Giordano et al. 1986 and Cairns & Cairns 1994 on friendship and delinquency). Some scholars also suggest that family pressures may be more gendered for females than for males—females may have to negotiate differing family and peer ideas about femininity, for instance (Campbell 1984, Moore 1991, Nurge 2002)—and as the frequent primary caretakers of children, females may exit gangs at parenthood (Moore & Hagedorn 2001; see Giordano et al. 2002 on gender and desistance from crime). Conversely, Bjerregaard & Smith (1993) found little support for the hypothesis that parental supervision or attachment correlate with female gang involvement. Bowker & Klein (1983) concur, adding that the nexus of racism, sexism, and poverty is more important than family issues or sexual violence for explaining female gang involvement (for somewhat contradictory findings on family attachment, see Esbensen & Deschenes 1998, Joe & Chesney-Lind 1995, Moore 1991). In a similar vein to Bowker & Klein (1983), Baskin and colleagues (1993) and Miller (2001) argue that females are drawn into crime (not just into gangs) for many of the same reasons as males—mainly reasons connected to poverty, which, in turn, leads to social breakdown in neighborhoods.

Answers to questions about motivation for joining a gang and the use of violence once in the gang are contingent on the researcher's interpretation of the overall benefits and drawbacks of membership for girls and women (Curry 1998). The central difference between this debate for male and female gangs is the assumption

that females are marginalized on the basis of gender and that the gang formation may uniquely address, counteract, or exacerbate that marginalization. Building on early theoretical work on gender and crime (Adler 1975, Simon 1975) and contemporary studies by gang researchers (Chesney-Lind 1993, Joe & Chesney-Lind 1995, Taylor 1993), Curry (1998) provides a categorization in this regard, dividing research into two groups: studies that find more benefits than costs for females in gangs ("liberation hypothesis") and those that find just the opposite ("social injury hypothesis"). Research concluding gang membership is beneficial suggests that females in girl gangs find protection from sexual and other violence perpetrated by family or nongang members (even as they are exposed to violence within the gang); sisterhood (Brotherton 1996, Campbell 1984, Harris 1998, Joe & Chesney-Lind 1995, Lauderback et al. 1992, Moore 1991, Quicker 1983); support to rebel against gender, racial, and class stereotypes and oppression (Brotherton & Salazar 2002; Brown 1999; Fishman 1995, 1999; Harris 1988; Moore 1991; Quicker 1983; Venkatesh 1998); opportunity for economic survival (Lauderback et al. 1992, Taylor 1993, Venkatesh 1998); excitement (Brown 1999, Chesney-Lind 1993); and the possibility of constructing alternate forms of femininity (Harris 1988, Laidler & Hunt 2001). Some, notably Taylor (1993) and Lauderback et al. (1992), also find that those in girl gangs achieve parity with males in their use of violence—apparent evidence of their success in entering traditionally masculine arenas. Alternately, some of these same authors and others note downsides of gang involvement: For females these include increased levels of sexual abuse, and for males, arrest or incarceration (Curry 1998, Moore 1991). It is worth pointing out Nurge's (2002) argument that this division of the consequences of gang involvement for females is likely overwrought. Not only do many researchers who find benefits of membership for individuals also find limitations (Campbell 1984, Chesney-Lind 1993, Curry 1998, Moore 1991, Nurge 2002), but studies more closely connected to the liberation hypothesis (e.g., Taylor 1993, Lauderback et al. 1992) also qualify their findings by noting the overall harms of gang membership.

In the subfield of gender research on gangs, constructions of masculinity, modes of sexuality, and cultural representations of gender have become important to counter the social-problems approach. These new approaches effectively provide analytic devices to rethink the gang as a social organization or as a strategy for individual youth to negotiate collective experiences. Different constructions of masculinity are implicated in the ways young people realize aspirations toward loyalty, honor, respect, and social bonding (Bourgois 1995, Horowitz 1983, Joe & Chesney-Lind 1995, Laidler & Hunt 2001, Messerschmidt 1999). Such gendered dynamics may vary across racial and ethnic groups (Walker-Barnes & Mason 2001). Building on one of the central contributions of feminist theory—gender is linked to other forms of oppression and privilege, forming a race-gender-class nexus (Collins 2000)—Venkatesh (1998) argues that the historic neglect of the social-service needs of African-American women in Chicago led to the formation of street gangs among the disadvantaged strata. Evidence in Brotherton & Salazar's (2002) study of the Queens of the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation reveals

that females find support along a continuum—from an ethnic-based pride—to help them take care of family and children, and pursue educational goals. Their findings add weight to their portrayal of the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation as a street organization, rather than a gang, as a viable means for countering changes in the urban political economy of New York City in the early 1990s. We note that, in contrast to work on gang entrepreneurialism, the regional distinctions that emerge in studies of girl gangs and female gang involvement have not been adequately explored to date, either through comparative research, multisite ethnography, or historical analysis.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Racial and ethnic differences among street gangs have become a more pressing issue for researchers in the past three decades (Short 1996, Spergel 1995). We anticipate that this issue will continue to interest researchers as patterns of migration into U.S. metropolitan areas, including notably steep increases in foreign-born residents, particularly from Latin America (U.S. Census Bureau 2002), change. The most well-developed research on ethnicity and urban gangs appears with respect to Latino gangs (Brotherton & Barrios 2002, Esteva 2002, Horowitz 1983, Moore 1978, 1991, Padilla 1992, Smith 2002, Valdez 2002, Vigil 1988, Zatz & Portillos 2000). However, more recent work has also begun to analyze Central American and Asian youth and their patterns of gang formation (Chin 1996; Joe 1994a,b; Toy 1992; Vigil 2002; Vigil & Yun 1996; see Tsunokai & Kposowa 2002 for a review of research on Asian gangs). Vigil (2002) has offered one of the few comparative studies, noting interactions among and distinctions within newly arrived Vietnamese and Salvadorans as well as settled African Americans and Chicanos. Most research on race and ethnicity, however, is directed at a single community, such as a Chinatown (Chin 1996, Takagi & Platt 1978), El Barrio in East Harlem (Bourgois 1995), Vietnamese enclaves (Joe 1994a, Wyrick 2000), predominantly African-American South Side Chicago (Venkatesh 2000), or Puerto Rican neighborhoods in northwestern Chicago (Padilla 1992). Moore and colleagues (1978, 1991) conducted the longest ongoing field research with a longitudinal study of Chicano gangs in East Los Angeles.

Central analytic concerns with respect to racial and ethnic patterns of gang activity do not directly follow Thrasher's (1927) observation that gangs offer new immigrants and ethnic groups an available avenue for assimilation. Contemporary researchers no longer view the gang as primarily, or solely, a viable route to mainstream social integration (Venkatesh & Levitt 2000). They note instead that gang membership tends to push members toward increased levels of delinquency, heightened recidivism, and other negative social outcomes (Esbensen et al. 1999, Thornberry et al. 1993). Instead, researchers have utilized race and ethnicity principally to differentiate gangs from one another. These categories are also harnessed to explain the relative variances in involvement in drug trafficking, violence, family behavior, masculinity and femininity, and other aspects of gang activity and

behavior (Chin 1996, Curry & Spergel 1992, Hagedorn 1998, Moore 1991, Spergel 1995, Vigil 2002, Vigil & Yun 1996, Walker-Barnes & Mason 2001). Smith's (2002) study in New York City offers the most systematic discussion of new immigrant groups (Mexicans) forming gangs in contexts with established gangs and racial/ethnic hierarchies.

In the 1960s, gangs became synonymous with minority populations—typically African Americans and Latinos living in the poorest, inner-city neighborhoods. Recent research suggests that such conflations may shield distinctions among different racial and ethnic gang formations; moreover, the correlation between minorities and gangs may well be an artifact of definitional boundaries as much as a measure of actual gang membership. Evidence suggests that more attention needs to be paid not only to the racial and ethnic diversity of street-gang activity (Short 1996, Howell et al. 2002), but also to white ethnic groups that participate in delinquency yet are not conventionally considered by researchers to be gangs, such as fraternities, motorcycle and "biker" outfits, militias, skinheads, or the Ku Klux Klan (see Sanday 1990 on fraternities, Baron 1997 and Hamm 1993 on skinheads, and Spergel 1995 on varieties of white gangs and their similarities to black and Latino gangs). Studies based on self-reports find relatively equal distributions of white and black gangs in urban areas (Bursik & Grasmick 1993, Spergel 1990), whereas highly localized ethnographic work finds a smaller, but nonetheless identifiable, presence of white and black gangs in single areas (Hagedorn 1988, MacLeod 1995, Sánchez Jankowski 1991, Venkatesh 2000). Using data from the National Evaluation of the Gang Resistance and Education Training (GREAT) program, Esbensen and colleagues (1997, 1999) found that, although white youth in their sample were less likely to be in gangs than blacks or Latinos, a quarter of gang members were white. Moreover, contrary to Thrasher's (1927) prediction that the gang would decline as neighborhoods gained social cohesion and increased formal and informal ties to stable institutions, Spergel (1990) reports gangs among second- and third-generation European immigrants, including Italians, Irish, and Poles.

Notwithstanding these findings, law enforcement agencies variously report between just over half (Egley 2002) and up to 90% (Curry et al. 1992) of gang members in their jurisdictions as being made up of members from minority racial and ethnic groups. It is also clear that blacks and Latinos are arrested for gang offenses more frequently than any other racial or ethnic group (Spergel 1990). Data from the National Youth Study (Elliott 1994) suggest that the ratio of black to white arrest rates for adolescent males is four to one, even though the offending rate is three to two. Yet during the height of the crack-cocaine epidemic, when poor black and Latino gangs were thought to be the most violent, one Chicago-based study suggested otherwise (Spergel 1992).

Sánchez Jankowski (1991) and Hagedorn (1988) found a small but significant proportion of all-white gangs, even though their own studies focused on cities with predominantly black and Latino gangs. White gangs do not eschew serious violence (MacLeod 1995, Muehlbauer & Dodder 1983), although Spergel (1995) argues that they are less violent overall compared to black and Latino gangs. Comparative

historical analysis (Adamson 2000) suggests that, in the past, white gangs were more violent than other gangs. Furthermore, although gangs provided an avenue for assimilation for white ethnic gang members, the opposite course (i.e., segregation) was the outcome for black gangs (see Schneider 1999 for a history of postwar gangs in New York). Adamson explains this difference as an outgrowth of the possession by European gangs of highly useful ties to urban political machines—ties unavailable to African American gangs. One avenue, yet to be explored systematically (although see MacLeod 1995), is to document the experiences of white gangs in smaller and mid-sized cities that face structural conditions similar to those of their black and Latino counterparts in larger cities—namely, social marginalization, high unemployment rates, depleted social services, and educational systems that do not adequately help young people move into labor markets.

Some research has pointed to ways in which gang members' ethnic self-identification interacts with organizational structure and group ideology. Most of these studies emerge from field work with Latino gangs. In accounts of the transformation of a large Puerto Rican street organization in New York, Brotherton & Barrios (2002) discuss the incorporation of a political ideology among Latino gangs and the effects for organizational cohesion and the capacity to develop collective initiatives (see also Curtis 1998, 2002; Curtis & Hamid 1999; Esteva 2002; Pérez 2002; Valdez 2002). Venkatesh (2000) (Venkatesh & Levitt 2000) and Padilla (1992), working in Chicago with African-American and Latino gangs, respectively, explore members' subjective understandings of gang activity and how their motivations to participate are formed out of political views that their ethnic groups suffer discrimination in schools, labor markets, and financial institutions. Vigil's (1988) study, based in Los Angeles, has argued that ethnic self-identification, specifically "choloization," acculturates youth to street life rather than to mainstream society (on ethnic identity, see also Brotherton & Barrios 2002, Horowitz 1983; Moore 1978, 1991; Mendoza-Denton 1995; Padilla 1992; Pérez 2002; Vigil 2002).

Another, less-prominent approach to race and ethnicity describes and catalogs gang behavior by tying particular gang practices to perceived distinct cultural attributes of the ethnic group. Spergel (1995) summarized some of the more common findings associated with different ethnic or racial groups: Latino and black gangs are more violent than white gangs (see Spergel 1992; Curtis 1998, 2002; MacLeod 1995 for dissents); Asian gangs are the most "secretive" and are less interested in reputation or status (see Chin 1996 for opposite findings on Chinese gangs); black gangs are increasingly involved in drug trafficking in comparison to Latinos (Curtis 1998, 2002 finds otherwise); Asian gangs are also involved in drug trafficking and extortion more than turf defense (again, see Chin 1996 for contradictory findings); Latino gangs defend turf and are flamboyant in their clothing, graffiti, and overall style (see Ellis & Newman 1972, Hebdige 1979, MacLeod 1995, Pillay 2002, Willis 1977 for studies on style among other ethnic and racial groups within and outside the United States); and black gangs struggle for economic survival and so turn to drug trafficking (see Brotherton & Barrios 2002 and Kontos et al. 2002 for several studies finding related patterns for other groups). Spergel (1995) qualified aspects

of his review and conclusions, noting that there is great variation among different groups in various cities. Indeed, contradictory findings in almost all other studies in recent research, in addition to those already cited, suggest that little about gang behavior can be definitively tied to cultural attributes of racial or ethnic groups.

Additional research is necessary to understand methodically the precise ways in which cultural organization and gang organization articulate with one another. Sadly, the prevalence for criminological and human ecological frameworks has not enabled researchers to do much more than draw stereotypical conclusions of the role that culture and ethnic group–specific attributes may play in the sphere of gang activity. As with gender, research will need to harness developments in theories of racial and ethnic formation (see Omi & Winant 1986 for a review) and apply them consistently to the practices of urban gangs to create foundations for systematic analysis of the role of culture in gang life.

LAW, POLITICS, AND THE STATE

There has been growing interest in the relationship of street-gang activities to legal institutions and juridical processes. In part, this reflects the observation that street gangs have become more entrepreneurial and, hence, criminal as well as deviant. In effect, the pre-1970s paradigm, namely the gang as a social problem, has shifted partly to include an approach to the gang as a social threat that requires intervention from enforcement and judicial institutions. As such, concerns over socialization, individual personality adjustment, and the social integration of delinquents into mainstream institutions often are diminished in terms of guiding analysis, intervention, and policy development. They have been partially supplanted with questions regarding the role of the state in the reproduction of gangs and gang activity; the relationship of the gang to police, the judiciary, and legislatures; legal approaches to combating gang activity; and the significance of gang activity in the context of community-wide sociality.

In the 1980s, numerous municipalities passed ordinances to enhance law enforcement's capacity to deter gang activity and prosecute gang members. Attempts to prevent or deter gang activity via legislation raised for law enforcement officials the same difficulties that social scientists typically confront. Most notably, police, lawyers, judges, and legislators face the challenge of forming an adequate definition of the street gang (Astavasadoorian 1998, Klein 1997). Some scholars have critiqued existing municipal ordinances for employing vague definitions and inadequate specifications of the gang qua an organization and gang activity qua an identifiable, bounded social practice (Mayer 1993, Sanday 1990). Most ordinances are intended to prevent known gang members from inhabiting public space; these so-called anti–gang loitering or nuisance ordinances enable law enforcement officials to deploy mass arrest and dispersal techniques (Astavasadoorian 1998, Boga 1994, Kainec 1993, Klein 1997, Meares 1998, Trosch 1993).

Another central issue in the courts is determining the constitutionality of such ordinances in terms of restrictions on rights to free speech and assembly, i.e.,

whether limiting gang members' access to public space infringes on members' civil liberties (Geis 2002, Kainec 1993) and whether police officials can correctly identify individuals as gang members before initiating interdiction (Trosch 1993). There are also legally motivated arguments suggesting that such limitations on civil rights may be justified in contexts of high crime where policing has historically suffered (Meares 1998). Several evaluations currently exist regarding the effectiveness of civil injunctions as a means of reducing gang violence (Eck & Maguire 2000, Maxson et al. 2001).

A second prominent debate surrounds the application of federal racketeering statutes to street gangs to deter the gang's organized drug-trafficking operations (Allegro 1989, Lynch 1987). Here, the critical issues lie in demonstrating that the gang is both an "enterprise," i.e., a collective unit organized for business purposes, and has "continued" involvement in criminal activities (Bonney 1993, Skalitzky 1990). The state's utilization of RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) statutes was an outgrowth of the creation of specialized units within both police departments and prosecutorial divisions (e.g., district attorney, state's attorney) dedicated solely to gang-related crimes (Spergel 1995). The creation of distinct law enforcement/prosecutorial task forces (and other intensive policing measures in general) has typically occurred in large cities (Padilla 1992, Sanders 1994, Spergel 1995) and usually for gang activity in lower-class and minority communities (Covey et al. 1992). Even where these specialized organizational units exist, there remains considerable ambiguity regarding social groups that are targeted as gangs, practices that qualify as gang-related, and specific policies that will guide interdiction (Needle & Stapleton 1983). Evaluations of both the use of RICO statutes and the creation of specialized gang units are mixed. Neither has produced overwhelming reductions in gang activity, although in the largest cities (Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego) there appear to be some preventative benefits (Goldstein 1990, Sheldon et al. 1997, Skolnick 1994, Walker 1994).

The relationship of gangs to carceral institutions (e.g., jails, juvenile institutions, detention centers) has attained growing interest. However, despite the stated concern among researchers and policymakers that prison-based gangs are a social threat in terms of effects on offenders (Camp & Camp 1998, U.S. Government Printing Office 1996), there is little direct research on prison gangs (Spergel 1995). Most sampling frameworks incorporate incarcerated gang members into their studies of street-based gangs (Decker et al. 1998, Moore 1978, Ralph et al. 1996, Venkatesh & Levitt 2000)—as opposed to employing spaces of incarceration as a fieldsite (exceptions are Jacobs 1974, 1977 and Sheldon et al. 1997).

Institutional theorists have been interested in analyzing transformations of the U.S. penal system and the consequences for inmate self-organization and inmate relationships with communities of origin (Camp & Camp 1988, Duxbury 1993, Jacobs 1977, Wacquant 2000). Ethnographers have constructed prison gangs as outposts of "supergangs" (Knox 1994, Sánchez Jankowski 1991, Venkatesh

& Levitt 2000)—large, nationally organized or franchised street gangs such as the Vice Lords, Gangster Disciples, Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation, Netas, Bloods, or Crips. Studies of Chicago gangs in particular tend to fit into this category, with researchers citing the rule of various "gang lords" whose influence over the street has remained or even increased while incarcerated (Decker et al. 1998, Papachristos 2001, Venkatesh 2000). For the most part, however, street-gang researchers have excluded prison-based gangs from models and case studies. Like outlaw motorcycle gangs, skinheads, or wanna-bes (Klein 1995), prison-based gangs are typically not perceived as street gangs owing to their distinct profile in terms of recruitment strategies, membership, and practices (Klein 1995). Prison-based gangs are thought to exist exclusively inside jails, prisons, or other carceral facilities. They also recruit members through threats and force or by offering protection from immediate violence, sexual or otherwise (Decker et al. 1998). Yet this definition of prison gangs has been criticized as insufficient for fully addressing interconnections between prisons, streets, and gangs. Some have argued that changes on the street, such as vertical organization of street gangs and the gang's immersion into drug trafficking, altered the relationship of gangs to prison (Hagedorn 1998, Venkatesh 2000, Venkatesh & Levitt 2000), whereas others have located the changes in the realignment of U.S. criminal justice policy after the 1970s, which motivated gangs to enact internal organizational and behavioral changes (Brotherton & Salazar 2002).

Research on gangs and the law has worked not only from the top-down perspective of judicial, enforcement, and penal institutions, but also from the perspective of gang members' perceptions of, and interactions with, the state. One significant line of research is the participation of street gangs in social-change efforts—a theme that had not been emphasized by researchers since the 1960s when gangs in Chicago developed intricate collaborative and oppositional relations with grassroots organizations and government agencies (Spergel 1995). In the early 1990s, street gangs in major U.S. cities, including Los Angeles, St. Louis, Cleveland, New York, Chicago, and Milwaukee, attempted once again to incorporate an ostensibly political component to their collective mission. In some cases, this meant developing voter registration drives and grassroots mobilizing (Kontos et al. 2002, Venkatesh 2000). In other instances, gangs were identified as critical actors in grassroots actions to improve social services, clean neighborhood streets and parks, and, in general, act as an organization responsive to the needs of marginalized youth and their communities (Brotherton & Barrios 2002; Pattillo 1998; Sánchez Jankowski 1991; Spergel 1995; Venkatesh 1998, 2000). In these practices, there was often an expressed conviction by gangs and gang leadership that their work was in response to the lack of provision of goods and services by government agencies and nongovernmental actors and that their attempts to provide redress for these service-delivery gaps was also motivated by the need to reconfigure their own personal identity as legitimate stakeholders in the community (Bourgois 1995, Brotherton & Barrios 2002, Kontos et al. 2002, Sánchez Jankowski 1991, Venkatesh 2000).

FUTURE ISSUES

The new directions in gang research reviewed above show great promise in terms of enriching our understanding of the American urban street gang. There remain significant opportunities to refine analytic perspectives and chart new empirical terrain. We conclude with a brief summary of some of the most exciting and pressing areas of future research.

Since its inception, street-gang research has been wed to the notion that gangs are highly local actors motivated by the need to protect territory and claim turf. This location-based perspective remains at the core of much research, despite evidence that local gangs have nonlocal members and that gangs migrate and/or expand into new territories (Venkatesh 2000). Movements of members and patterns of consolidation and expansion of gangs across established boundaries do not negate the importance of research focused on neighborhoods, communities, and other bounded spaces, but they do raise the following questions: (*a*) In what ways are gangs local entities, in light of these extra local practices? (*b*) Could other units of analysis be incorporated beyond block, neighborhood, and community?

A transition from location- to institution-based research is an important methodological realignment that might be fruitful to pursue. In the past decade, researchers have explored schools, for example, as settings of gang activity. Schools, of course, have administrative boundaries and hence incorporate an adolescent and youth population in ways that supercede and traverse gang-based territorial delineations. Thus, the potential for understanding local and nonlocal gang practices is present. The use of the school setting has yielded benefits in terms of understanding how gangs recruit, organize, and interact (Haynie 2002; Pattillo 1998; Trump 1996, 2002; Vigil 2002). Self-reports by students in both public and private high schools as well as by school administrators indicate that the presence of gangs in schools has increased between 1989 and 1995 (Howell 1999), although research suggests that the precise level of escalation is not entirely clear (Short 2002, Thompkins 2000). Vigil (2002) notes that schools may be a useful place not only to observe gang interactions, but also to implement social policies that deter or counteract gang formation. To date, however, he suggests that schools have missed opportunities to positively intervene in the lives of gang members in school (see also Trump 2002).

Other institution-based research orientations that have only been explored minimally, yet have shed light on gang organization and practice, are churches and other places of worship (Barrios 2002, Pattillo 1998, Pattillo-McCoy 1999), public housing developments (Popkin et al. 1995, Venkatesh 2000), political machines (Adamson 2000, Chin 1996), and the media (Huff 1989, Lane & Meeker 2000, Sánchez Jankowski 1991). All could be mobilized by researchers to anchor a multifaceted methodological framework for understanding the ways in which street gangs operate in varying social and spatial contexts.

It is also worthwhile to reframe the current understanding of exactly how gangs act in bounded urban spaces. There remains a tendency to conflate the urban street gang with its inner-city variant (Klein 1995). Although scholars readily admit

that street gangs exist in many different urban locales, the disproportionate share of research on gangs is based in underclass (i.e., racially segregated, minority, concentrated poverty) neighborhoods. Gangs have been identified in suburban as well as exurban and rural areas (Bursik & Grasmick 1993, Evans et al. 1999, Hethorn 1994, Spergel & Curry 1993) and may even be growing in these areas at higher rates than in the central city (Egley 2002, Klein 1995, Thompkins 2000). Moreover, given that recent studies (Maxson et al. 1996) find that gang migration is limited to highly bounded regions in and around the city, not spread nationwide, it is certainly possible that there may be interesting connections among gangs and gang members living in different parts of the metropolis.

A deeper understanding of how gangs act locally will necessitate both a systematic exploration into non-inner-city spaces of gang activity as well as an embrace of non-African-American and Latino populations. Results from Census 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2002) indicate that the United States is currently in the largest period of immigration since the turn of the previous century. The foreign-born percentage of the population (approximately 11%) is as high today as in 1930 and only slightly lower than in the boom immigration years between 1880 and 1920 (then between 13% and 15%). Most immigrants currently come from Latin America and Asia, not Europe, and they are settling in the South and West, not the North and East. Of particular importance is the need to continue understanding the changing ethnic face of American cities and the ways in which street gangs participate in shaping new communities—whether spaces of newly arrived immigrant populations or those formed by migratory movements of extant urbanites owing to processes such as desegregation and public housing redevelopment. In other words, patterns of local gang activity may be mediated by cultural and social organizational attributes of the racial/ethnic group in question.

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