

Fanon's Children: The Black Panther Party and the Rise of the Crips and Bloods in
Los Angeles

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Abstract

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Black nationalists of the Black Power era often viewed Black criminality as an essential component to Black political consciousness. "There have been those black Americans who have resisted white America," activist Julius Lester argued. "These were the field niggers during slavery, Nat Turner, the Black abolitionists, Garvey, and in our own time, Malcolm, the hustler on the corner and the high-school dropout." Scholars have amply demonstrated the ideological logic of Julius Lester's thinking about the guy on the corner, but how the guy on the corner makes sense of the Nationalist argument is undertheorized in the current literature. In an era when gangsta rap has come to be seen to epitomize urban Black manhood, this question remains crucial today. What then is the relationship between oppositional, self-destructive notions of Black identity and Black political consciousness as lived and experienced by urban Black youth? Building on the work of Franz Fanon and more recent theories of coloniality, the study explores the relationship between the two as they have evolved in the lives of young Black men.

The historical relationship between the Black Panther Party and the Crips and Bloods serves as a lens through which I examine the interplay of criminality and radicalism in Black consciousness in the United States. Thus, this dissertation is not primarily a study of gang activity or the Black Panther Party. Rather, it is a sociological study of how evolving political activism, state actions and economic conditions have shaped Black consciousness. The relationship between self-destructive notions of Blackness and resistance is complex. That organizations like the Black Panther Party have attracted significant numbers of gang members is well documented. Still, it is a fact that most Black youth have not been in gangs or in radical organizations such as the Black Panther Party. Nevertheless, I argue, the historical relationship between the two social collectivities illuminates a fundamental aspect of Black consciousness. This tension between criminality and radicalism has long been recognized in Black life. Whether in celebrations of the folk figure Stagger Lee, Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas, or Hip Hop artist Tupac Shakur, the intersection of oppression, resistance and criminality occupies a crucial place in the Black experience. However, the particular, shifting balance of these tendencies at any given moment is a matter of critical importance in how Black Americans navigate their American dilemma.

For Askari

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I was one of three born to my mother
an older sister and an older brother
we've seen it hard we've seen it kind of rough.
But always with a smile she was sure to try to hide
the fact from us that life was really tough.
I can hear my mother call.
I can hear my mother call.
Late at night I hear her call.
Oh Lord I hear her call
Oh Lord, Lord I hear her call.
She said, "Father, Father it's for the kids
any and everything I did.
Please, please don't judge me too strong.
Lord knows I meant no wrong.
Lord knows I meant no wrong."

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

To smash something is the ghetto's chronic need. Most of the time it is the members of the ghetto who smash each other, and themselves. But as long as the ghetto walls are standing there will always come a moment when these outlets do not work.

-James Baldwin¹

Raymond Jackson² had long admired Alonna Dietrich from a distance. Finally one Friday morning he summoned up enough courage to ask her out. They were set for 7:00 that night. The only obstacle was coming up with some money to take her out. Raymond did not need much, just a few dollars for some gas and something to eat, and perhaps a little bottle of liquor. There were plenty of small time hustles that could generate money on short notice, schemes ranging from high risk-high reward to low risk-low reward. Anything from stealing and recycling pallets and manhole covers to sticking up pimps and heroin delivery men. The only problem was that these were all either too dangerous or too time consuming for the little bit of cash Raymond needed. There was one old reliable source however, robbing a *paletero* man—an ice cream and *chicharone* push cart vendor. It didn't pay much, but it didn't take much of a risk either. Undocumented workers, Raymond reasoned, are the most vulnerable people. Like the pimps and dealers, they weren't likely to inform the police, and, more importantly, they lacked the capacity to retaliate.

At lunch time, Raymond found a cousin who had recently mentioned wanting to make some money and they set off on their mission. As they crept up Hamilton Blvd in Raymond's raggedy '64 Impala, they spotted a *paletero* coming down a side street. Reaching under the seat for his Glock 9mm, Raymond turned to his cousin and said, "Let's get him." They parked about half a block up the street and jumped out of the car determined to get their hands on some cash. Laboriously pushing his heavy cart in the scorching southern California sun, the *paletero* was paying no attention as he approached the two youths. Raymond and his cousin walked as if they were going to innocently pass him by until they arrived face to face. Raymond drew his gun from his waist and demanded, "*Dame la feria!*"

"I've been on both sides of the gun-in-the-face equation many times," Raymond would recall,

and the response of the person unfortunate enough to have an empty hand in the encounter has varied little. The brief moment of blinding fear and anxiety powered by an overwhelming rush of adrenaline is followed by the sudden realization that these moments may be your last. Like anything else, though, it's something you can become accustomed to, and although the feeling of fear may remain, with experience you learn to contain your fears and handle the situation as rationally and safely as possible.³

¹ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, [1955] 1983), 111.

² All names have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of my informants.

³ Raymond Jackson, interview by author, Pomona, CA, February 22, 2010.

This day was different however. Anger and fear were mysteriously absent from the *paletero*'s face; his gaze merely suggested the fatigue and cynicism that a life of hard labor can produce. No panic, just a look of "what else can go wrong today?" "Damn," Raymond remembers thinking, "his luck is even worse than mine."

The two youth went through the *paletero*'s pockets, and bills spilt chaotically onto the street. Raymond realized that he had hit the jackpot. Then, as he stuffed his pockets, his eyes met those of the *paletero*. The misfortune and hardship in his face jarred Raymond's conscience. He felt guilty. Not out of fear or regret for breaking any law or committing a violent act. Indeed, he had always found a pleasure in the brutal nature of armed robbery. "It had been easy to imagine my victims were the pigs with a badge and a gun who brutalized us on a daily basis and that we were somehow restoring justice to society, turning the tables so to speak," he remembers. Moreover, even if his victims had not spit in his face or called him a nigger, had not even represented the hatred and injustice of the world, Raymond found satisfaction in his actions.

On this day, however, Raymond felt a sense of guilt which was impossible to shake. He sensed that he was violating someone just like himself. Someone to whom the world had dealt a bad hand. He felt that he was stealing from "the people." It was as though Raymond's consciousness had temporarily succeeded in bridging the differences that existed between himself and the *paletero*. The entire incident became somewhat comical as Raymond began stuffing some of the money back into the *paletero*'s pockets. The man's look of despair suddenly turned into confusion. They shared a smile as Raymond apologized with a "sorry man," before running off with pockets bursting of cash.

Raymond had long been prepared to hold up the *paletero* man. As young kids looking for money to play video games or buy candy, he and his friends would walk up to the grocery store in the near-by hills where the white folks lived. Thinking they were hustling, they would spend what seemed like hours hanging in the parking lot telling each white passer-by that they needed change to call their mothers. Praying for their benevolence they would ask for a quarter, all the while with the sinister intention of using the change for candy and video games. "I would have probably seen more quarters had I chosen to dig through my parent's couch," Raymond recalls. Moreover, although he was aware that begging broke his parents rules of "being proud," and he would most surely "catch a whipping" if he were to be caught, Raymond and his friends would ascend up the hill to carry out their task. Raymond's deceitfulness must have been obvious as the responses he met were often very hostile. Why then did he need to ask white people for money?

The humiliation arising from Raymond's childhood interactions with whites resonated with him across the years. The profound feelings of inferiority that he felt as a result of white people's piercing looks of disgust became a recurring theme throughout his life. As an adolescent, he would often fantasize about confronting some of these same people in a dark alley and sticking a gun in their face. The dejection he felt as a child beggar, the shame and despair of a vagrant, the demoralization would be relieved if he could just catch one of these people alone. "If I had the gun," Raymond imagined, there would be no need to emasculate himself as his weapon would trump their whiteness and they would be forced to recognize him on an equal level. If their gaze asserted his inexistence, the gun would deliver his being. If they thought of Raymond as a criminal, he would show them how much of a criminal he could be. Thus, when Raymond robbed the *paletero* man, he felt not only a belated sense of solidarity and guilt, but also a sense of exhilaration, an exuberance that was tied to his feelings of indignation,

humiliation, and hatred for the treatment he received. His desire for recognition could be satisfied through violent encounters.

But this desire alone does not explain Raymond's acts. Although he may have fantasized about robbing white people, his violence and aggression were perpetrated exclusively on his own side of the tracks. Despite his resentment, Raymond afforded the white man a sense of nobility, and his reverence for white people was matched by antipathy and disdain when it came to his own people. Just as he, they were inferior and thus deserving the violence. In Raymond's actions, there was an ever-present perverted sense of bigotry. By punishing them for their Blackness he could relieve himself of his own. By playing the role of the white man, he could become white for that moment. And yet, as Raymond reified the social hierarchy by not only embracing his own inferiority, and chastising others for their Blackness, he was somehow challenging social roles defined to him. Because the white man called for passivity and obedience, there was subversion in the act of violence itself because it required a level of hostility and aggressiveness.

However, during this particular act of violence, there was a moment of self-actualization that rendered the equation of asserting his humanity through robbing the *paletero* impossible. The look on the *paletero's* face presented a contradiction that challenged the satisfaction that Raymond received from violence as the empathy that he now felt caused him to reflect on his actions. Raymond's ascendancy was based on a fabrication. At this moment, he was the white man. Just as Raymond was undeserving of their looks of disgust when he was a child, the *paletero's* inferiority was rooted in a falsehood. Raymond now realized that he and the *paletero* were both the same, stigmatized unfairly. Yet, Raymond chose to keep some of the money.

I write of this incident not only because of the vividness and centrality it holds in the consciousness of my informant, but also because of the paradox which I believe this sort of act presents for scholars. There are clearly two warring identities present in this story. And the two warring identities are reflective of the warring identities prevalent at the community level. On the one hand Raymond simultaneously felt and committed a genuine act of solidarity by giving this man some of his money back while perpetrating an act of violence. Raymond's words of "sorry man" expressed his genuine feelings of remorse. On the other hand, sticking a gun in someone's face was an enjoyable experience even as he realized his current victim was the wrong target. Raymond's ambivalent feelings reflected the degree to which even though there was no white person present, whiteness itself was still present, even as his emerging consciousness began to call into question its legitimacy.

Raymond's robbery of the *paletero* is an illustration of an act that many of his peers from similar environments have engaged in. Some of these acts are expressed as individuals, others are organized acts of groups. In both cases, whether individual or collective, these acts epitomize a kind of consciousness that is prevalent among many young Black males.

In 1987, at the age of eleven, Raymond was "put on the set" and officially became a member of South Side Village Crip in Pomona, California. As a Crip, Raymond's life, although not exclusively, has been heavily organized around violence. He has survived periods of intensified warfare and witnessed the murder of countless close friends and family members, been beaten down by police on several occasions and shot in the face by rival gang members. For most gang members, these war stories are commonplace. For the majority of Black youth however, gang life is not a reality. Although not always manifested in violence, what is common for Black youth is the particular type of alienation and consciousness which manifest in

Raymond's robbery of the *paletero*. Therefore, this study is an exploration of that consciousness, of which, gangs provide a particularly useful lens.

Raymond's personal experience evokes larger questions about the nature of Blackness in the United States. It also raises questions about the relationship between Blackness as racial identity; Blackness as resistance to racism and oppression; Blackness in its struggles with individual goals and self-hatred. All of which enable us to identify and interrogate the many tensions, conflicts and forces at work on young Black men living in the United States at this time. Although the majority of Black males are not gang members and Raymond's outward actions were exceptional, scholars have long treated behaviors such as Raymond's as a quintessential component of Black identity. To reduce such behavior to pathology I believe is a fundamental mistake. And I believe it is far more fruitful to explore the many tensions at work on individuals in these circumstances. And far more fruitful to explore how these tensions come into play at different points in individual lives, embedded as they are in different social contexts. The lives and experiences of young Black men—through adolescence and adulthood in Los Angeles from the 1960s to the 1980s provides an excellent opportunity for such an interrogation. Thus, an exploration of this incident not only illuminates gang behavior, but can elucidate Black life and Black consciousness in general. In order to illuminate how that identity has typically been conceptualized in the scholarly literature, in the following sections, I survey gang literature as well as the writings of several of the most imaginative Black thinkers.

Social Disorganization Theory

The Ecological Model

One can divide scholarly treatments of gang life into three broad camps. The ecological approach originating with Frederic Thrasher's 1927 *The Gang: a study of 1,313 gangs in Chicago*, is the foundation on which much contemporary gang research is built. Arguing gangs were a natural byproduct of poorly organized immigrant communities, Thrasher called attention to the social context of gang members rather than the actual behaviors. For this tradition, the focus is not crime, but the formation of social identities and urban social relationships. By emphasizing the physical processes of the urban landscape, Thrasher provided a critique of theories which linked crime to the innate pathologies of ethnic immigrants.

According to Thrasher, gangs were rooted in the ecology of immigrant communities, resulting from the combination of social disorganization and the ordinary mischief of teenage boys. Operating without sufficient social integration mechanisms, this normal mischief naturally manifested itself in the form of gangs. With immigration, urban growth and the accompanying failure of social institutions, gangs naturally developed in the unplanned quarters of Chicago. Inhabited by immigrant youth whose cultural values conflicted with those of their traditional parents, these poorly organized sections of the city served as an incubator that transformed wayward youthfulness into gangs.

Formed at the margins of immigrant enclaves ripe with the cultural conflict of youth and their traditional parents, the gang, Thrasher argued:

is an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The result of this

collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory.⁴

They were “interstitial” both because of their spatial development, forming at the margins of the city, and also because they were temporal in nature, developing along the mischievous path from childhood to adulthood. Gangs formed on the boundaries of underdeveloped ethnic enclaves where the state’s apparatuses had not yet adequately reached. In his ecological model, boredom is a natural organism which infects the cell of youth and is activated from its otherwise inconsequential dormancy through the environmental factors associated with social disorganization. Under normal circumstances this youthful boredom would not develop into gangs.

For Thrasher, gangs were not representative of ethnic pathologies brought by immigrants from their native soil, rather they were a product of the failure of social institutions and cultural conflict in America itself. Gangs were caused primarily by the social integration problems of conflict and instability that were emblematic of socially disorganized immigrant neighborhoods. They were spontaneous peer groups forming in the slums which lacked safe outlets for everyday teenage promiscuity.

By calling attention to the spatial processes and social factors which contribute to gang development, Thrasher’s ecological model provided a powerful critique of reactionary theories which linked crime to the instinctual pathologies of immigrants, and laid the foundations for contemporary gang research. Still ecological theories leave one with an insufficient understanding of gang members as social actors, and grossly underestimate the political nature of gang activity.

Cultural Deviance Theory

Whereas Thrasher argued that gang members were characterized by the same motivations as other youth, cultural deviance theorists attribute gang behaviors to the values of members rather to their relationship to the broader society. Their unit of analysis is usually the behavior of the individual; youth who because of cultural pathologies have chosen to join a gang. With the focus on individual manifestations of “lower class culture” these scholars connect the pathologies of distinct subcultures to gang formation. In the 1950s the cultural deviance model began to emerge as researchers began to shift their focus from the process of development of gangs to the behaviors of gang members. As police attention of minority gangs grew, researchers began to reframe the way in which they thought about youth gangs.⁵ Focus on the gang’s process of development shifted to the behavior of gang members and attributed gang development to the cultural deficits and alternative value structures of blighted communities.⁶

What is at the core of each strand of the cultural deviance model is its locating of gang formation in the inability of the poor to self regulate and its tendency to highlight the pathological aspects of gang members. They argue that the values defined within poor urban communities stand in contrast to the normative rational moral structure of mainstream society.⁷

⁴ Frederic Thrasher, *The Gang a study of 1313 gangs in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1927] 1963), 46.

⁵ Walter Miller, *Violence by Youth Gangs and Youth Groups as a Crime Problem in Major American Cities* (Washington: Department of Justice, 1975).

⁶ Albert Kircidel Cohen, *Delinquent Boys; The Culture of the Gang* (Glencoe, IL.: The Free Press, 1960).

⁷ Cohen, *Delinquent Boys*; Gerald D. Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968).

The development of this distinct set of values which provides urban youth with an alternative means of gaining status is to blame for the development of gangs. Thus, whereas Thrasher lifted the focus from gangs to the larger social order, these scholars tend to focus on the gang itself.

According to this paradigm, broken-down social structures in the ghetto cause many inner-city youth to develop cultural pathologies. The gang is a natural outgrowth of several factors, chief among them, as in the case of the ecological model, social and economic exclusion affecting minority groups, which produces a culture of poverty and dysfunction. Gaining in popularity amidst the political turmoil of the 1960s, this model's growth coincided with the rise of minority gangs in the inner city, differentiating itself from previous models by its emphasis on the criminality of the poor.⁸ As is the case with the Thrasher model, lacking in social, economic and cultural capital, gang youth reflect the social disorganization of the ghetto.⁹

Unlike the ecological paradigm however, the cultural deviance model treats criminality as the essence of gang culture and gang behavior is attributed to the cultural transmission of deviance. According to this paradigm, ghetto youth are socialized into subcultures with alternative value structures. Perpetuated by lower class culture, this differential association is to blame for gangs. Youth in demoralized communities develop institutions such as gangs due to their pathological cultural traits. These criminal and pathological cultural traits of the underclass are central to this understanding of gang behavior, as the gang is a product of society and a repository for social malaise. In this understanding, crime is the initial motivating factor which influences youth to join street gangs. The pathologies that leave these individuals with a higher propensity for delinquency are present before the gang develops, thus gangs are criminal at their core and gang members are simply adhering to forms of behavior which are valued in their communities. These theorists naturalize culture and see the rise of racialized street gangs as a symptom of the alternative value structure of marginalized minority groups.

This cultural transmission of deviance is distinct from the Thrasher tradition as it assigns a level of agency, even if pathological, to youth. Although gangs develop from the social isolation and poverty of ghetto life, they are rooted in the backwardness of underclass culture. As Thrasher believed that gangs were a manifestation of boyish mischief coupled with social disorganization, for these theorists, although gangs are located in socially disorganized communities, they are the enterprise of subgroups which value crime. In addition, whereas the ecological model believed in the ability of social welfare institutions to assimilate these youth, because the cultural deviance model considers these organizations inherently criminal, combating them becomes the province of law enforcement.

If the virtue of Thrasher's model is its ability to explain how individuals are influenced by social isolation, the virtue of the cultural deviance model is its ability to illuminate the cultural responses to that very same isolation. In addition, its focus on culture provides a window into the self-destructive aspects of gang life.

There are problems with this explanation however. Although this paradigm is able to account for the counterproductive aspects of gang culture, it is incapable of explaining the non-self destructive elements of gangs. It is incapable of understanding gang youth as rational moral agents and is unable to explain the long tradition of gang involvement in community organizing. It implies that as a unit the gang is socially disorganized and simply pathological. There is a

⁸ John M. Hagedorn, "Gangs, Institutions, Race, and Space: The Chicago School Revisited" in *Gangs and the Global City: Alternatives to Traditional Criminality*, ed. John M. Hagedorn, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁹ Malcolm W. Klein, *The American Street Gang: Its Prevalence, Nature, and Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Miller, *Violence by Youth Gangs and Youth Groups as a Crime Problem in Major American Cities*.

long history of gang involvement in politics and community organizing in cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago and New York that disproves this notion however.¹⁰ As a theoretical construct, this tradition is unable to explain this long history.

The Adaptation Model

Built upon the work of Thrasher, a number of contemporary theorists continue to contend that gangs are best understood by their process of formation.¹¹ Like Thrasher, these scholars argue that the environment is the primary factor in contributing to gang formation. Unlike Thrasher however, the city is not a natural and spontaneous space of development but the objective result of power relations. The inequality built into the city is a manifestation of political processes which are entangled with the formation of gangs.¹² The physical and social environment is not impartial and the social disorganization of marginalized communities is the result of a struggle over resources.¹³ Gangs which must be understood in the context of this struggle, are groups of social actors actively engaging in the battle over these resources. Because the ecological model ignores that powerful interests are built into the city and assumes their neutrality, for these scholars, Thrasher fails to see gangs as social actors fighting over limited resources.

Gangs represent compensatory instruments in the eyes of the adaptation paradigm.¹⁴ Rooted in the underclass literature, these works tend to focus on the processes in which youth adapt to social and economic exclusion.¹⁵ According to this model, gangs are caused primarily by social factors that lead youth to develop alternative social organizations. As in the ecological model, criminality is not an integral part of this tradition and the focus is on the actual development of the gang itself rather than the behaviors of its members. Gangs are formed in impoverished communities when social institutions begin to fail youth. However, these gangs are reactions to socio-political circumstances and not formed out of natural teenage boredom as is the case with the ecological model. Trapped in a marginalized environment, youth develop informal networks such as gangs to confront their situation. These networks, according to this interpretive framework, represent a rational response in an environment in which other opportunities are limited.

¹⁰ Luis Barrios, "Gangs and Spirituality of Liberation." in *Gangs and the Global City: Alternatives to Traditional Criminality*, ed. John M. Hagedorn, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007); David C. Brotherton, "Toward the Gang as a Social Movement." in *Gangs and the Global City: Alternatives to Traditional Criminality*, edited by John M. Hagedorn, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Juan Francisco Esteva, "Urban Street Activists: Gang and Community Efforts to Bring Peace And Justice to Los Angeles Neighborhoods." in *Gangs and Society: Alternative Perspectives* ed. Louis Kontos et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Sudhir A. Venkatesh, *Community Justice and the Gang: A Life Course Perspective*. (New York: Columbia University 2001).

¹¹ Hagedorn, "Gangs, Institutions, Race and Space"; Joan W. Moore, "Understanding Youth Gangs: Economic Restructuring and the Urban Underclass." in *Cross-cultural perspectives on Youth and Violence*. ed. Meredith Watts (Stamford, CN.: JAI Press, 1998); Venkatesh, *Community Justice and the Gang*.

¹² Hagedorn, "Gangs, Institutions, Race and Space."

¹³ John M. Hagedorn, "Race Not Space: A Revisionist History of Gangs in Chicago" *Journal of African American History*, VOL 91; NUMB 2, (2006). Hagedorn rightly notes that Black street organizations are different than other street gangs because of the enduring patterns of racism in American society. His analysis however, does not illuminate the interplay of political and criminal identities in Black street organization life.

¹⁴ Hagedorn, "Gangs, Institutions, Race and Space"; Carl Taylor, *Dangerous society* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1989).

¹⁵ Hagedorn, "Gangs, Institutions, Race and Space."

While early forms of this model focused on the cultural and social adaptation of marginalized communities,¹⁶ contemporary theorists have built on this paradigm by focusing on the economic adaptation of youth excluded from the job market.¹⁷ Typically in the adaptation model, the gang serves as a compensatory instrument for youth with insufficient social and economic opportunities. In this economic adaptation model, people turn to the black market when they are excluded from legal means of employment.¹⁸ John Hagedorn has argued that minority gangs are a social and political response to the circumstances of ghetto environments and serve as a tool for economic and political action.¹⁹ For Hagedorn, gangs are groups of youth with limited opportunities that have organized themselves to resist social and economic inequities and depending on the socio-political circumstances, do not necessarily engage in criminal behavior.

Adaptation scholars argue that contemporary gangs must be understood in the context of shifts in the political economy. Disruptive forces in the social environment have led to the formation of gangs. Gangs are collective responses to structural constraints, as ghetto dwellers attempt to adapt to limited opportunities and the lack of institutional resources. These local communal reactions of the poor must be understood in the context of the restructuring of the economy associated with globalization.²⁰ They argue that Thrasher's mistake of understanding gangs as temporary and not institutional can be avoided when taking these shifts into account. As the political and economic circumstances change and economic opportunities become bleaker, gangs have become institutional and are no longer a temporary deviant departure from youth.

Gangs have become entrenched in the postindustrial city because the post fordist environment has left youth void of opportunity and forced them to garner their income from illegal means.²¹ This post fordist crisis of late capitalism, shapes gangs in ways which Thrasher was unable to foresee. As the ecological model attributed the emanation of gangs to the temporary environmental conditions of immigrant life, and viewed gangs as not distinctly belonging to any race, adaptation scholars attempt to account for the racialized nature of contemporary gangs. They ascribe this racialization to the shifts in political economy. Whereas prior immigrant groups were able to assimilate, Black and brown youth have been trapped within the confines of the postindustrial city. Although the processes of industrialization and urbanization are not inherently racial, and are primarily economic in nature, their particular contemporary form has become racialized. Thus, gangs are formed by the racial oppression of Black and brown urban youth.

Thrasher understood gangs as interstitial groups of peers, locating them in the youthfulness and social disorganization of urban immigrant landscapes. Groups of youth forming gangs in the absence of social institutions was believed to be a temporary condition of

¹⁶ Thrasher, *The Gang*.

¹⁷ John M. Hagedorn, *People and Folks: Gangs, Crime and the Underclass in a Rustbelt City* (Chicago: Lake View Press, 1998); Moore, Understanding Youth Gangs; Sudhir Venkatesh, "The Social Organization of Street Gang Activity in an Urban Ghetto," *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (1997).

¹⁸ Moore, Understanding Youth Gangs; Venkatesh, "The Social Organization of Street Gang Activity in an Urban Ghetto."

¹⁹ Hagedorn, "Gangs, Institutions, Race, and Space."

²⁰ Hagedorn, "Gangs, Institutions, Race and Space"; Venkatesh, "The Social Organization of Street Gang Activity in an Urban Ghetto."

²¹ Hagedorn, *People and Folks*; Moore, Understanding Youth Gangs; Venkatesh, "The Social Organization of Street Gang Activity in an Urban Ghetto."

the immigrant experience and would dissolve as each group assimilated. However, the contemporary persistence of gangs has led adaptation scholars to question this notion. They contend that the presence of older gang members and the institutionalization of street gangs today is rooted in the underground economy of the postindustrial city and that the social processes of the gang must be understood within the context of deindustrialization. Moreover, Sudhir Venkatesh argues, that gang participation in the underground economy is not only motivated by the lack of economic opportunities of the city but also rooted in the post fordist shift in social identity from production to consumption. Similarly, Sanchez-Jankowski contends that the cultural aspects that shape involvement in the underground economy are motivated by perceptions of cultural capital and the expectation of possibilities in the legal market. In doing so, he urges scholars to move beyond the environmental processes of globalization, and consider the effects of both culture and perception. The appeal for a focus on the relationship between culture and symbolic codes and styles as well as the entire range of gang activities within the deindustrial landscape is a common theme of adaptation scholarship.²² As Hagerdorn argues: “Just as the method of understanding gangs has been to investigate processes of immigration, urbanization, and industrialization, today the keys to understanding gangs are processes of globalization—the redivision of space, the strengthening of traditional identities, and the underground economy.”²³

With the development of the ecological model, Thrasher laid the foundation for gang research by illuminating the social processes that give rise to the development of gangs. By treating the gang as not simply a receptacle for social forces, but a group that constitutes an organization of social actors, the adaptation model has advanced the work of Thrasher’s ecological model. Through its attention to the shifts in political economy the adaptation paradigm is able to account for factors such as the institutionalization of gangs amidst impoverished minority communities.

Although this tradition illuminates the ways in which youth adapt to oppressive circumstances however, its weakness lies in the fact that it is unable to accurately summarize the self and community destructive aspects of gang life. It treats violence as solely an outcome of, or cultural reaction to, economic conditions. Although treating gang members as social actors, it still defines the gang as a primarily economic force determined by the socio economic conditions. It explains Raymond Jackson’s robbery of the *paletero* as the actions of an individual with limited opportunities, but is unable to explain the fact that he found pleasure in violence.

Gang Theory and the *Paletero* Incident

The internal turmoil Raymond experienced during his robbing of the *paletero* highlights a fundamental aspect of gang life as well as a quintessential component of the Black experience. When analyzing this tension, each one of these theories gives us an essential but incomplete picture. Although these models have contributed to the understanding of both the processes of development of gangs and their behaviors, it is their inability to accurately characterize the duality which Raymond exhibited during his robbery of the *paletero* man which begs for a retheorization of the gang problem. This inner turmoil is at the heart of the experience of so many Black youth and must be unpacked if we are to develop a more in-depth understanding of actions such as Raymond’s.

²² Hagerdorn, Gangs, “Institutions, Race and Space”; Venkatesh, *Community Justice and the Gang*.

²³ Hagedorn, “Gangs, Institutions, Race, and Space,” 3.

The ecological model would explain Raymond's acts of violence as the outcome of an individual operating within the limits of his structural environment. While cultural deviance theorists would argue that Raymond's alternative values motivated his actions, the adaptation model would argue he had no other options to garner money. Ecology would interpret his feelings of solidarity as a stage of assimilation, while the cultural deviance and adaptation models are unable to offer an explanation of his empathy. None of these theories is able to explain the simultaneity of Raymond's feelings. Cultural deviance theorists who would demonize his violent actions, have a set of explanations why he is robbing the *paletero* but are unable to imagine that he was sorry for the events that took place. This strand is unable to predict Raymond's feelings of guilt and solidarity with his victim. Similarly, the works of adaptation theorists only give half the story by being unable to explain the fact that although Raymond was truly sorry, he enjoyed the act of armed robbery.

Gang literature is full of this half debate. Researchers uphold a false dichotomy in which each position is overstated. In their conception of the problem it is an either/or proposition: Gang members simply mirror oppression or they are social actors shaping their own identities. Generally, researchers make one of these two conclusions. In the latter the gang is a rational response to oppressive social forces, a fundamentally economic and/or political entity organized in its fight to combat social inequities or to take advantage of opportunities in the illicit economy denied to them by society. In the former the gang is simply a pathological and criminal enterprise, rooted in the backward value system of disadvantaged urban youth. But is another explanation plausible? Can individuals (and organizations) simultaneously engage in self-destructive behavior while being moral social actors as well?

As with the adaptation model, many popular contemporary scholars analyzing Black ghetto life argue that social and economic isolation are the root cause of violent actions such as Raymond's. For example, William Julius Wilson contends that the increasing neglect of the urban poor which has been driven by economic development and conservative policies leaves ghetto residents in a state of isolation.²⁴ Plagued by despair, one of the natural consequences of this social and economic segregation is the development of the cultural traits typically described, as the pathology of ghetto residents. Wilson however does not follow the same line. He identifies the cultural traits and behavior, but he does not see them as pathology, but rather as the response to urban deprivation and disadvantage. There is another much older tradition however, that argues that the fact that the poor in the U.S. are in all actuality *not* fully isolated, that explains actions such as Raymond's. For these scholars, it is precisely the fact that the disenfranchised in America are conscious that other people in society are allowed to be human while they are not, which explains their anger and frustration. Without this realization, they would lack the necessary reference to define and conceptualize their inhumanity. It is in this second tradition that I locate my own work.

W. E. B. Du Bois and Double Consciousness

The type of anger and ambivalence exhibited by Raymond has long been a common theme in the literature of leading Black thinkers. This tradition traces its roots to W. E. B. Du Bois. Although Du Bois' *Philadelphia Negro* embeds Black crime in the social environment of

²⁴ Wilson. William Julius, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner-City, The Underclass and Public Policy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

the city, perhaps his most lasting contribution is his insistence that the social environment includes racist discursive elements that lead Black people to develop a peculiar consciousness.

Du Bois' theoretical legacy contrasts with those who see Black consciousness as only pathological or heroic resistance. His lasting contribution is his assertion that Black consciousness is both pathological AND heroic resistance. In his classic *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois traces this internal conflict to a fundamental contradiction that arises at the point that the Black man realizes he is different from the rest of society. The fact that others conceive of him as inferior while he is forced to confront an ever-present example of humanity to continually compare himself, jars his consciousness. The construction of his inhumanity is determined not simply by the racism that labels him inferior but also by the ubiquitous existence of the model of humanity provided by whiteness. The Black man is:

born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.²⁵

This contradiction arises from the moment the Black child realizes that he is a problem.

Du Bois argues that those who are determined to live up to the standard of humanity set by whites are destined to fail and that trying to be human on someone else's terms inevitably leads to frustration. Simultaneously captivated by the riches of the white world, yet due to his inferiority forbidden to enjoy any of its fruits, the Black man's frustration often drives him to self-destruction. For many Blacks, "the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?"²⁶ The longing for recognition by the white world on their terms, can have devastating consequences. "This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand people,—has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves."²⁷ For Du Bois, "The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost." It is the search to reconcile this "contradiction of double aims" which is at the root of the unrest in the Black psyche.

What Du Bois contributes, that others who came before him were unable to accomplish, is the notion that the fundamental characteristic of Black consciousness is the sense of contradiction or tension. This tension is a natural by-product of having a stigmatized population in a democratic nation or society that frames itself as egalitarian. For Du Bois, as we look in the mirror we simultaneously see ourselves through both our own eyes and white eyes; it is not a

²⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books, [1903] 1989), 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

question of seeing ourselves as either one or the other. In other words, White inability failure or refusal, to recognize Black humanity breeds an inferiority complex within the Black man. The internalization of this inferiority negates Black self-consciousness and produces an internal contradiction. One way that this contradiction manifests itself is through spoken language. What this means is that when you speak, you are simultaneously speaking partially in your voice and partly in white America's voice; therefore the words that come out necessarily require unpacking because the thoughts themselves are compromised by this double consciousness. Scholars often fail to recognize that Black consciousness is not simply shaped by exclusion or inclusion. Du Bois' lasting contribution is his illumination of the fundamental duality of Black consciousness.

Double Consciousness and Black Criminality

In his 1899 *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* Du Bois examines crime amongst the Black population of Philadelphia. As the ecological model attributes the formation of gangs to the disorganization of immigrant neighborhoods, similarly Du Bois blames Black crime on the social environment of Black Philadelphia. For Du Bois, "crime is a phenomenon of organized social life, and is the open rebellion of an individual against his social environment."²⁸ Unlike Thrasher however, Du Bois recognizes that "Negro problems" are due to the "peculiar history and condition of the American negro."²⁹ He argues that the peculiarities of slavery and emancipation, and the competition between recently emancipated Blacks and immigrants over scarce resources, steer disadvantaged urban Blacks to lives of crime. Emancipation left an ignorant, undisciplined, and morally weak population "incapable of competing in the race of life," while immigration diminished the already limited opportunities for work.³⁰

In addition, the third and most important variable contributing to Black crime in Philadelphia was the "environment in which the Negro finds himself."³¹ Du Bois' concept of environment moves beyond the physical and social space depicted in Thrasher's ecology model. He explains:

We dimly seek to define this social environment partially when we talk of color prejudice –but this is but a vague characterization; what we want to study is not a vague thought of feeling but its concrete manifestations. . . His strange social environment must have immense effect on his thought and life; his work and crime, his wealth and pauperism. That this environment differs broadly from the environment of his fellows, we all know, but we do not know just how it differs. The real foundation of the difference is the widespread feeling all over the land, in Philadelphia as well as Boston and New Orleans, that the Negro is something less than an American and ought not to be much more than what he is.³²

Du Bois attempts to account for the unique role racialized oppression played in shaping the consciousness of people of African descent within his concept of environment. Unlike

²⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press[1899] 1996), 235.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 283.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 269.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 284.

³² *Ibid.*, 284.

immigrant communities for Thrasher, Du Bois believed that the legacy of slavery left the Black population vulnerable to the challenges of an urban social environment. Crime was the natural reaction for a recently emancipated, uneducated, lazy and despised population that was herded into the urban battle over scarce resources. In stark contrast to his notion of the talented tenth, Du Bois conceived of those who fell victim to these circumstances of ghetto life as the “submerged tenth.” He argues, “this social environment of excuse, listless despair, careless indulgence and lack of inspiration to work is the growing force that turns black boys and girls into gamblers, prostitutes and rascals.”³³

Although *The Philadelphia Negro* predates *The Souls of Black Folk* by four years, we can infer that Du Bois believed the Black criminal class to be too unsophisticated to suffer from double consciousness. The Black criminal appears to not recognize his humanity, and thus unable to grasp the equation of double consciousness. There is no “longing to attain self-conscious manhood,” because he believes in his own inferiority and is motivated by his laziness rather than a desire to assert his humanity. Du Bois traces Black crime to the effects of slavery and prejudice: “the violent economic and social changes which the last fifty years have brought to the American Negro, the sad social history that precede these changes, have all contributed to unsettle morals and pervert talents. Nevertheless it is certain that Negro prejudice in cities like Philadelphia has been a vast factor in aiding and abetting all other causes which impel a half-developed race to recklessness and excess.”³⁴ In this sense, double consciousness is a gift that the underclass does not partake in. While the educated Negro is conflicted, the Black criminal lacks a foundation to contrast his nothingness. The necessary contradiction for double consciousness is absent and the backwardness inherited from slavery is perpetuated by a racist society. Du Bois believed that white charity encouraged this shiftlessness and deterred honesty and hard work amongst the Black underclass. He comments,

[f]or thirty years and more Philadelphia has said to its black children: “Honesty, efficiency and talent have little to do with your success; if you work hard, spend little and are good you may earn your bread and butter at those sorts of work which we frankly confess we despise; if you are dishonest and lazy, the State will furnish your bread free.” Thus the class of Negroes which the prejudices of the city have distinctly encouraged is that of the criminal, the lazy and the shiftless; for them the city teems with institutions and charities; for them there is succor and sympathy; for them Philadelphians are thinking and planning; but for the educated and industrious young colored man who wants work and not platitudes, wages and not alms, just rewards and not sermons—for such colored men Philadelphia apparently has no use.³⁵

Those that work hard are conflicted and suffer from double consciousness because they believe in the American dream while the criminal class is unable to imagine beyond their own inferiority.

Although Du Bois gets us an understanding that the central aspect of Black consciousness is one of tension, his summation of the constituent elements of double consciousness lead us to only understand Raymond’s empathy for the *paletero* as emanating from a belief in the legitimacy of American ideals. His insistence that this internal strife stems from the attempt to

³³ Ibid., 351.

³⁴ Ibid., 351.

³⁵ Ibid., 352.

reconcile the contradiction between Blackness and the belief in American democratic principles, leave us unable to understand genuine acts of solidarity between marginalized people. For Du Bois, Raymond's apology to the *paletero* is not evidence of solidarity with the oppressed, rather it is an example that demonstrates Raymond had realized and believed that there are rules to society that any good American would honor. Du Bois would understand Raymond's robbing the *paletero* as evidence of an individual merely acting out the role assigned to him by a racist society. His theory is unable to understand this event as an attempt by Raymond to assert his humanity because for Du Bois, humanity is ultimately found in the reconciliation of the Negro and America. The Negro who acts out violently is simply a reflection of white racism, an artifact of being enslaved.

For Du Bois, people fall victim because America tells them two things; one that the United States is the land of freedom, the other, that they are inferior and can never be free. The result is a struggle to resolve this contradiction. There are two warring streams of consciousness, one the Negro and the other, the American. For Du Bois then, there is hope if we believe in America; the only problem that remains is to get America to believe in us. The reason there is hope found in Raymond's comment of "sorry man" is not because of any solidarity with other colonized people or the presence of any expression of humanity, rather it is an expression in the belief of America and unsurprisingly, many ex-gang narratives read this way.

Popular accounts of gang life tell the stories of ex-gang members who have found their redemption in the realization that they too are members of American society. The contradiction within their consciousness is resolved and their salvation fulfilled as they embrace the hope of American meritocracy and strive toward a new life by becoming "contributing" members of society. By giving up the gang life, their self annihilation is overcome and the havoc that they have inflicted on themselves and society is forgiven. In actuality, although at times Raymond's story may contain elements of this notion, it complicates this Du Boisian assertion by taking into account an oppressive state apparatus. Although, Raymond believed in America when he went up to the hills to beg for quarters because he believed in the legitimacy of whiteness, his actions of robbing the *paletero* both challenge and reaffirm notions of white supremacy. Throughout his analysis Du Bois insufficiently deconstructs the foundation of white supremacy and affirms the legitimacy of American ideals. Black power advocates argue that the field slave is the authentic Black man and that the house slave is compromised. In some sense Du Bois is saying the opposite which ultimately raises questions of whether there is a class bias in his conceptualization of double consciousness. His preoccupation with the talented tenth steers his focus to concentrate on legitimizing the Negro in the eyes of America and reconciling the two.³⁶ A reading of Du Bois leaves us unclear of what double consciousness looks like. However, we

³⁶ This preoccupation is more prevalent in the early writings of Du Bois as he would go on to become less elitist later in life. An example of Du Bois' early inability to understand the complexities of underclass Black consciousness is reflected in his critique of Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, [1928] 1987). Failing to recognize McKay's themes of Pan-Africanism, Du Bois wrote in the June, 1928 issue of *The Crisis* that *Home to Harlem* "for the most part nauseates me, and after the dirtier parts of its filth I feel distinctly like taking a bath." In addition, his disdain for Marcus Garvey, whom Du Bois referred to as the "ugly Black gorilla" further highlight his early class biases. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Browsing Reader: Review of Home to Harlem" *Crisis*, XXXV June 1928. For a discussion of McKay's Pan Africanism as well as Du Bois' review of *Home to Harlem* see John Lowney's "Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of Home to Harlem - Critical Essay," *African American Review* Volume 34 Number 3 (2000). For a survey of the relationship between Marcus Garvey (who held similar views of McKay's *Home to Harlem*) and W. E. B. Du Bois see Colin Grant's *Negro With a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey and his Dream of Mother Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

can turn to the writings of some of the more prominent Black novelists, for compelling literary insights into the social phenomena that is central to my research. Here I explore some key exemplars, in the works of Richard Wright and James Baldwin.

Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas and Black Violence

Du Bois' concept serves as a foundational lens in the study of Black consciousness. However, although Du Bois provides a framework for understanding the duality of this consciousness through his American/Negro dialectic, its class bias precludes understanding Black violence as a manifestation of this disorder. For that, Richard Wright offers us Bigger Thomas—the proverbial violent Black male, the archetypical expression. The protagonist of *Native Son*, 20 year old Bigger Thomas is the embodiment of internalized racism. In *How Bigger was Born*, Wright affirms that the character of Bigger is based on a typology which he believes is native to the Black experience. Wright tells of a host of Biggers he met throughout his life which are the basis for the character, the common thread linking them, their violent outbursts and confrontations with racialized mores. He traces this violence to a society which excludes Black people all the while enticing them with the vast riches of America. As Du Bois, for Wright this combination produces a psychic tension. Unlike Du Bois however, this tension is not limited to the talented tenth and manifests in actions which Du Bois would attribute to underclass culture. For Wright, Black violence is not simply the natural reaction of an immoral, uneducated and lazy populace confronted with limited opportunities, but is the product of the very tension Du Bois describes. This tension is experienced by Blacks across class lines and is rooted in the same dialectical process of defining humanity in a society which precludes it that Du Bois describes.

Wright illuminates how this tension goes beyond the internalization of inferiority and can lead to outbursts of self-destructive violence which make manifest the complexity of the tension itself. Bigger Thomas stands as an example of white supremacy manifesting itself through Black violence. But also violence—even Bigger's, is a protest. Bigger attempts to reconcile his self hate with his own humanity and his violence manifest as an expression of the tension inside his own body. When he lashes out, it is a reflection of his own brutalization and of his search for his humanity.

Blacks resort to violence because they are “so *close* to the very civilization which sought to keep them out, because they could not help but react in some way to its incentives and prizes, and because the very tissue of their consciousness received its tone and timbre from the strivings of that dominant civilization.”³⁷ In the case of Bigger Thomas, violence resulted as, “the sense of power and fulfillment—did so much more to dazzle the mind with a taunting sense of possible achievement that the segregation it did impose brought forth from Bigger a reaction more obstreperous.” This tension is one which Wright himself would struggle. In *How Bigger was Born* he describes the struggle in his consciousness to reconcile his own being with the view of himself which he sees through the eyes of others. “Like Bigger himself, I felt a mental censor—product of the fears which a Negro feels from living in America—standing over me, draped in white.”³⁸

This “mental censor” leads to a frustration that can result in violent outbursts. Du Bois' failure to locate double consciousness in the Black underclass is ultimately rooted in his class bias. Double consciousness is the burden of a privileged class and necessarily does not manifest itself

³⁷ Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Perennial Classics, [1940] 1998), 438.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 448.

in violence. Wright makes manifest the scars of oppression in a way that Du Bois does not. Bigger is able to protest his oppression, even if its expression is still defined by America. For Wright, Raymond's robbery of the *paletero* is more than a manifestation of internalized hate produced by racism. Raymond robbed him not just because he hated him, but in addition Raymond also hated himself because he had been made subhuman. And this, Du Bois' belief in the legitimacy of American ideals does not get us.

Unlike Du Bois' *Philadelphia Negro*, the Black criminal for Wright is not completely brutalized and he suggests that Black violence is a conscious act and often a consequence of the same tension that Du Bois describes. Wright's ability to locate this tension among the Black underclass is partially due to his preoccupation with the outward manifestations of conflicted consciousness. Although the example of Bigger Thomas complicates Du Bois' notion of Black consciousness as fundamentally conflicted, Wright's focus on proletariat manifestations of this tension overlook its pervasiveness across class lines.

James Baldwin

James Baldwin acknowledges Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas but adds this crucial dimension. Wright depicts Bigger as the embodiment of a consistent myriad of racial protest. A Black rebel who consistently left the Black masses astonished by his confrontations with the racial order of the day. For James Baldwin however, Bigger is a representation of the quintessence of Black consciousness, an expression of the frustrations of everyday people. His monstrous violence emanates from a tension that is part and parcel of Black consciousness. As with both Du Bois and Wright, this tension is between the Black man's struggle to assert his humanity in a social order that necessitates his inferiority. By simply looking for an outward pathological manifestation of an inferiority complex however, Baldwin argues we miss its internal existence within all Blacks.

In addition, Baldwin believes in the possibility of Bigger to assert his humanity through violence and thus, the ever present tension in the Black mind isn't simply an either or form of dualism, but a duality of simultaneity. Baldwin elucidates some of the anger and frustration commonly experienced by Black men. In his *Notes on a Native Son*, Baldwin describes the moment when he "first contracted some dread, chronic disease, the unfailing symptom of which is a kind of blind fever, a pounding in the skull and fire in the bowels. . . There is not a Negro alive who does not have this rage in his blood—one has the choice, merely, of living with it consciously or surrendering to it."³⁹ This "blind fever" results as the Black man is confronted with the task of proving his humanity to a society which is constantly signifying his inferiority. For Baldwin, the constant dehumanization which is at the heart of racism, leads to a struggle in the consciousness of the Black man in which he is forced to see himself through the eyes of others. He must resolve his humanity within a point of reference which insists he is subhuman. Baldwin describes Richard Wright's character Bigger Thomas as the embodiment of this battle. Drawing on Bigger, Baldwin states "remembering a million indignities. . . hating it; hatred smoulders through these pages like sulphur fire. All of Bigger's life is controlled, defined by his hatred and his fear." He reminds us that, "[f]or Bigger's tragedy is not that he is cold or black or hungry, not even that he is American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at his birth." Bigger is only able to breach this state of non-being and establish his humanity through violence. Baldwin

³⁹ Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 94

argues that “his fear drives him to murder and his hatred to rape; he dies, having come, through this violence, we are told, for the first time, to a kind of life, having for the first time redeemed his manhood.”⁴⁰

Baldwin stresses the fact that this “manhood” is problematic. Full of contradiction and turmoil, yet expressing a thread of his humanity, Bigger’s violent actions at once both confront and cooperate with the white supremacy that permeates his being. In *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin details one of his personal experiences with this turmoil. Refused service by a white waitress in a New York restaurant, Baldwin “hated her for her white face, and for her great, astounded, frightened eyes. I felt that if she found a black man so frightening I would make her fright worth-while.”⁴¹ Acting within the limitations of a racist society, paralyzed by its external structural forces and crippled by its indelible stain on his consciousness of self, his anger boils over until he explodes. Hunting for the first available weapon, Baldwin snatches a cup of water from the table and violently throws it at the waitress. The waitress ducks and the sound of the mirror shattering behind her finally brings him back to reality.

Baldwin’s attempt to assert his humanity within the constraints given to him by a racist society is the quintessence of the Black experience and is an essential component to understanding Black consciousness. “[T]he African, exile, pagan, hurried off the auction block and into the fields, fell on his knees before that God in whom he must now believe; who had made him, but not in His image. This tableau, this impossibility, is the heritage of the Negro in America.”⁴² It is this quandary, to obtain one’s humanity with inhuman tools in a society that defines you as a monster that must be unpacked in order to understand Black violence.

Baldwin argues that we tend to think in either/or categories in which the Black child is either a monster or a victim. For Baldwin, Bigger is not a monster but is trying to assert his humanity necessarily through monstrous means. Like Wright, the dualism is not an either/or, it is a simultaneity. Moreover Baldwin argues that he faces precisely the same task as Bigger.

Where Du Bois locates the quintessence of double consciousness in the Black elite, and Wright in underclass, Baldwin recognizes it in all Blacks, whatever their class. Moreover, Baldwin sees this turmoil as irreconcilable and thus a necessary component to white domination. As Baldwin argues, “it must be remembered that the oppressed and the oppressor are bound together in the same society; they accept the same criteria, they share the same beliefs, they both alike depend on the same reality.”⁴³ He acknowledges the monster in every Black human being while avoiding the pitfalls of buying into a racist stereotype, through his attentiveness to the internal tension rather than its outward manifestation. It is this tension that I am interested in.

Frantz Fanon

In the end, Bigger Thomas acts. To put an end to his tension, he acts, he responds to the world's anticipation . . . The Negro is a toy in the white man's hands; so, in order to shatter the hellish cycle, he explodes.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁴¹ Ibid., 96.

⁴² Ibid., 21

⁴³ Ibid., 21.

Despite Baldwin's portrayal of Bigger Thomas' internal tension as the quintessence of Black consciousness, his analysis is still largely descriptive and does not engage with a global theory of race. This global theory is provided by Frantz Fanon. For Fanon, the modern capitalist world system was constructed through European colonial expansion that imposed the racial dehumanization of colonial subjects. For Fanon, this process of colonial dehumanization is the root cause of the Black man's psychic tension.

Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* examine the effects of the process of European colonization on the colonized as racialized subjects.⁴⁵ In his analysis the juxtaposition of the settler and native, born out of European colonial expansion, established a social order through the physical subjugation of the native population. This social order, or what Fanon dubs a "massive psychoexistential complex," establishes the settler's humanity vis-à-vis the native's inhumanity and becomes normalized as psychology. The concept of "race" is the vehicle in which this colonial domination of the native is articulated and normalized. For in the colonies, "[t]he cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich."⁴⁶ Thus, dehumanization is an inherent element of the colonial process.

Fanon argues that, "Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched" when analyzing the alienation of the colonial subject because his or her very existence is defined by difference.⁴⁷ Thus, for Fanon colonial oppression is fundamentally different from class in Marxism. Hallmarks of the colonial project, the entangled and fundamentally dehumanizing processes of economic exploitation and racialization create a particular psychology in the Black non human.

For Fanon, "[w]hite civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro" and produced within him, an inferiority complex.⁴⁸ He argues,

we can say that every neurosis, every abnormal manifestation, every affective erethism . . . is the product of his cultural situation. In other words, there is a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly-with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio-work their way to one's mind and shape one's view of the world of the group to which one belongs.⁴⁹

Although the racist colonial order is founded on the denial of the native's humanity and forces him to operate within a "zone of nonbeing,"⁵⁰ his inferiority is never fully internalized, "for, in his innermost spirit, the native admits no accusation. He is overpowered but not tamed; he is treated as an inferior but he is not convinced of his inferiority."⁵¹ The colonial order, in all of its

⁴⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, [1952]1967), 139-140.

⁴⁵ Although Du Bois began to conceive of the Black population of the U.S. as constituting a "semi-colony" in his 1920 *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe) and Richard Wright was deeply involved in anti-colonial work, particularly during his time in France, Fanon is the first of these authors to comprehensively link race to the colonial project.

⁴⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 40.

⁴⁷ Unlike the alienation of the white proletariat, for Fanon the colonial subject's alienation is a result of a double process: economic and the "epidermalization" of inferiority.

⁴⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵¹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 53.

organs from the physical to the symbolic, simultaneously acts to inhibit and provoke resistance by keeping “alive in the native an anger which [it] deprives of an outlet.”⁵²

In turn, the “epidermalization” of this inferiority deprived of an outlet, creates a “state of permanent tension” within the colonial subject.⁵³ For Fanon, this permanent tension is the root cause of “Black-on-Black”⁵⁴ violence. Although the racist colonial order is ultimately to blame for the native’s inferiority complex and tension, his violence is aimed solely at other natives because of the white monopoly of the ability to initiate racial violence. This monopoly is established and legitimized through the colonial order in which the Black man is taught to “stay in his place and not to go beyond certain limits.” This results in his desire for “muscular prowess” and “aggression.”⁵⁵ The “symbols of social order” remind the native not to turn his aggression towards the colonizer. This repression keeps the native’s anger alive and the resulting tension finds its first outlet in Black-on-Black violence.

Fanon argues that “[t]he colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people. This is the period when the niggers beat each other up.”⁵⁶ The problem with this first outlet is its ironic effort to destroy oppression by destroying the oppressed self. Ironically Fanon does not necessarily see this Black-on-Black violence as completely destructive because of the emergence of consciousness. The fratricidal period is temporal because it never deals with the primary contradiction of the colonized subject’s condition—the colonizer. He elaborates on the process in which white supremacy manifests itself in Black-on-Black violence:

“While the settler or the policeman has the right the livelong day to strike the native, to insult him and make him crawl to them, you will see the native reaching for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native . . . It as if plunging into a fraternal bloodbath allowed them to ignore the obstacle, and put off till later the choice, nevertheless inevitable, which opens the question of armed resistance to colonialism. *Thus collective autodestruction in a very concrete form is one of the ways in which the native’s muscular tension is set free.*”⁵⁷

For Fanon then, Black-on-Black violence is simultaneously a manifestation of oppression, and an act of resistance to it.

Fanon provides theoretical context for the contradictions between criminality and resistance and frames them as dialectics of colonialism. For Fanon then, Raymond’s actions against the *palatero* were neither a pathological result of economic exploitation nor a purely revolutionary phenomenon. In some sense however, although not fully developed, these actions

⁵² Ibid., 54.

⁵³ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁴ The term “Black-on-Black” is problematic. Although it is accurate at a kind of behavioral level, it obscures both the role of white domination in Black behaviors, a role Fanon did much to clarify, and also obscures its deployment as an ideological tool by white elites and the state in order to shift blame from racial oppressors to their Black victims. The term thus has some usefulness, and I use it here, but it must always be read with caution. The term came to prominence at precisely the time the Crips were emerging and constitutes a discourse through which the state and policy elites obscured the role of oppression in shaping violence within the ghetto. See David Wilson, *Inventing Black-on-Black Violence: Discourse, Space, and Representation* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

⁵⁵ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 52.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁷ [my emphasis] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 54.

heralded a revolutionary consciousness. Fanon's conception of this process as linear and steadily moving towards a revolutionary consciousness has proven to be overly optimistic. Moreover, as Robert Allen reminds us in the opening lines of *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*,

[t]he course of a revolution is never direct, never a straight line proceeding smoothly from precipitating social oppression to desired social liberation. The path of revolution is much more complex. It is marked by sudden starts and equally sudden reverses; tangential victories and peripheral defeats; upsets, detours, delays, and occasional unobstructed headlong dashes. It may culminate in complete victory, crushing defeat, or dead stalemate.⁵⁸

So then, as Fanon asked in 1961, “[w]hat are the forces which in the colonial period open new outlets and engender new aims for the violence of colonized peoples?”⁵⁹

Internal Colonialism, Coloniality and Black Violence

Fanon's argument illuminates the psychology of the colonized by historicizing the intersubjective and material experiences of colonized people. A number of scholars, particularly in the Black power era, utilize Fanon to understand the Black experience in the United States.⁶⁰ Employing the theory of internal colonialism, they argue that the oppression of minority groups within the United States is similar to that of third world colonial subjects.⁶¹

The quintessential forms of Black exploitation, slavery, Jim Crow segregation and the Black ghetto—all defined by exclusion, mirror the structures of domination in the colonial world. Individual racism is not solely responsible for the oppression of Black people who face political and economic subjugation enforced through a military apparatus—the police.⁶² This dominance was originally established by force through the social structures of slavery and segregation while the ghetto acts as an internal colony within the immediate borders of the U.S.

⁵⁸ Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Trenton: Africa World Press, [1990] 1992), 1.

⁵⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 59.

⁶⁰ The Black Liberation Movement of the 1960s is often credited with the creation of the internal colonial model. The concept however, goes back much further. Although Du Bois began to argue that the Black population in the U.S. constituted a “semi-colony,” the conceptual framework was first formed into a coherent political movement in Sicily in the 1940s. Published under his pseudonym Mario Turri, *La Sicilia ai Siciliani* by Sicilian revolutionary and leader of its guerilla forces, Antonio Canepa linked Sicily's roots to the Maghreb of north Africa, rather than Italy and the house of Savoy. As Black radical theorist would do in the 1960s with the United States, Canepa argued Sicily represented a distinct historical, cultural, linguistic and ethno-racial group, exploited and controlled by Italy through a situation although similar, for Canepa, worse than that of the Italian colonies of north and east Africa. (see Turri *Sicilia ai Siciliani*. For the history of Islam in Sicily see Michele Amari, *Storia dei Musumliani di Sicilia. V. 1 - 3* (Catania: R. Prampolini [1858] 1933 – 1939). For an excellent analysis of Amari's discussion of the Islamic contribution to the socio-political devolvement of Sicily, see Roberto Dainotto's *Eurpoe (in theory)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). For a discussion of the struggle for Sicilian Independence during the time of Canepa see Monte Finkelstein, *Separatism, the Allies and the Mafia: the Struggle for Sicilian Independence 1943 – 1948* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1998).

⁶¹ Bob Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper & Row 1972); William Tabb, *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto* (New York: W.W. Norton 1970).

⁶² Tabb, *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto*.

empire. Originally enslaved non-wage laborers, contemporary internal colonial subjects differ from the white proletariat because they suffer from coerced forms of labor.⁶³

William Tabb argues that many of the attributes of third world nations also exist within the Black ghetto. The problems of low per capita income, high birth rate, and a small middle class, all exist within the ghetto. In addition, the ghetto economy is controlled by outsiders, goods and services are imported, and jobs such as police and teachers are all held by outsiders. As in third world nations, residents of the ghetto are forced to rely on their major export, which in the case of the internal colony is cheap labor. The State maintains its domination and political control over the internal colony through police, schools, social services and puppet leaderships. In addition, the police in the internal colony serve as a foreign army of occupation. They function to protect property and repress political dissent.⁶⁴

Premised on the understanding of colonialism as a form of formalized labor coercion, the internal colonial model proved insufficient for accounting for post-1965 transformations in the United States.⁶⁵ With the withering away of Jim Crow and legalized discrimination, it became difficult for internal colonial theorists to draw parallels between the Black ghetto and third world colonies.

Anibal Quijano's "coloniality of power"⁶⁶ framework overcomes the conceptual limits of the internal colonial model by addressing the historical continuities of racial domination in the absence of formal colonial rule.⁶⁷ These continuities are rooted in the coloniality of power, the specific model of power that emerged as a result of European colonial domination of the "Americas."⁶⁸

The cornerstone of this model, Quijano argues, is "the social classification of the world's population around the idea of race."⁶⁹ For Quijano, "this racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established."⁷⁰ Coloniality then, proves useful because it not only heralds the intersubjective relations Fanon attributes to the colonial project, it also provides a framework for understanding the continued forms of racial domination in the absence of colonial

⁶³ Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley, University of California Press 2003).

⁶⁴ Tabb, *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto*.

⁶⁵ Robert L. Allen, "Reassessing the Internal (Neo) Colonialism Theory," *The Black Scholar*, v. 35, #1 (2005); Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*.

⁶⁶ Nelson Maldonado-Torres defines coloniality as the "long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in commonsense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience" Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the development of a concept" *Cultural Studies* Vol. 21, Nos. 2 - 3 March/May (2007), 243.

⁶⁷ Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*.

⁶⁸ Ramón. Grosfoguel, "Para descolonizar os estudos de economia política e os estudos póscoloniais: Transmodernidade, pensamento de fronteira e colonialidade global." *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, number 80: (2008); Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*; Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being"; Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Cultural Studies*. Vol. 21, Nos. 2-3 March/May. (2007); Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Cultural Studies*. Vol. 21, Nos. 2-3 March/May. (2007).

⁶⁹ Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 533.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 533.

administration. As Robert Allen has remarked, the concept of coloniality has continued relevance for analyses of contemporary Black life in the United States.⁷¹

Conclusion

In its focus on the processes of colonial domination rather than the psychology of the colonized, the internal colonial model, with its description of the four phases of Black life; slavery, segregation, the urban ghetto and contemporary prison expansion, essentially heralds a critique of racial domination. Its reformulation through the coloniality of power, coupled with Fanon's colonial conceptual framework provide a crucial theoretical lens for understanding the preeminence of tension in the Black psyche.

Although Fanon asserts that Black-on-Black violence is rooted in the colonial process, is temporary, and has the potential to metamorphosize into revolutionary violence, his sense of triumphalism views this process as linear and steadily evolving towards revolution. He does not explain what the political economic circumstances that should lead to the ebb and flow of consciousness look like. The history of Black street gangs must be placed in the longer tradition of Black resistance to colonialism in the United States in order to understand the forces at play that give rise to this oscillation of consciousness. Within this history, the ideology of resistance has traversed the valleys and plateaus that accompany the colonial project. There is no inevitable process and, given the conditions, revolutionary consciousness can expand or decrease. How then, do we explain the ebb and flow of Black consciousness?

Rooted in Du Bois' concept of double consciousness, this literature pushes us to look at Raymond's incident with the *palatero* in new ways. As this tradition demonstrates, the question of whether or not Raymond is a gang member is immaterial. And yet this is the question that preoccupies the analysts of gangs. What the literature overlooks is the vital question of the nature of Raymond's consciousness. And this same literature overlooks the vital question of the array of forces at play on his consciousness—from Black racial identity, resistance to racial oppression, material self-interest and individualism; as well as internalized self-hatred. Fortunately there is no need for us to throw out the literature on gangs altogether. The history of gangs is particularly fruitful for illuminating the nature of consciousness and its ebbs and flows. An examination of gang history is useful because gangs can draw out areas that Fanon did not fully explicate. In Los Angeles and Chicago, the two most important cities for gangs in the United States today, the explosion in gang membership actually coincides with state repression of political dissidents. This fact suggests that there are political motivations for gang involvement that traditional frames have overlooked.

Research Design and Methods

This dissertation utilizes oral histories of people who have lived through critical historical moments in the formation and proliferation of Black street organizations in Los Angeles. These oral histories provide a narrative account of individual perspectives on the development of contemporary street organizations as well as crucial aspects of Crip and Blood ideology. In addition, these individual histories provide insight into the relationship between state actions and the development of individual and collective consciousness. By using oral histories this study aims to develop a theoretical model that can explore the intersection of oppression, resistance and criminality, rather than treating these phenomena as disconnected historical forces. Through an exploration of the lives of selected individuals, my dissertation charts the history of the

⁷¹ Allen, "Reassessing the Internal (Neo) Colonialism Theory."

political economy of Black street organizations in Los Angeles. Because the majority of contemporary street gangs trace their roots to early 1970s Los Angeles, this study focuses on the L.A. area from 1964-1989.

Research Population

Given its centrality in the history of Black street organizations, Los Angeles is an ideal location in which to have collected data. To offset the scarcity of literature on the politics of gangs in L.A., I chose to interview surviving members of the formative years of the Crips and Bloods as well as second and third generation members. In addition, several participants were affiliated in various capacities with organizations such as the Black Panther Party and Black Guerilla Family. The views of those who encompass both the street organization and formal political social arenas provide particular historical insight.

There were a total of 34 interviewees. I did not choose to use scientific sampling methods, but rather selected participants based on age and street organization membership. I have utilized a snowball sample in which I was familiar with all of my initial participants from either prior research or prior political organizing. These initial participants served as informants and contacts for subsequent participants. All participants were Black males and were members of street organizations in Los Angeles County. Names of individuals and organizations have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of my participants.

The selection of interviewees was made on the basis of biographical information, with primary concern for their street organization involvement. Individuals who were members of street organizations in the early 1970s served as my initial participants. These interviewees were chosen because they had lived through and participated in the formation of street organizations at crucial points in history. Several were affiliated with the Black Panther Party and the US Organization in various informal degrees.

The second phase of data collection focused on younger street organization members. The initial participants during this second phase were selected from participants in one of my previous research projects. These participants then served as informants and contacted subsequent participants.

Data Compilation

This project included observation of several participants over a span of seven years. Doing so allowed me to track the constancy of their accounts. I have recorded and transcribed the autobiographical memoirs of my interviewees. These stories present an overview of the Black experience in Los Angeles from the early 1960s to the late 1980s. These stories served as guidelines and through them I have been able to chart the development of Black street organizations in Los Angeles and the ways that development reflected larger patterns in the evolution of Black consciousness. Interviews of participants were conducted at various sites including public spaces and private homes of participants and lasted between one and three hours.

Questions were open-ended and were directed at life experiences rather than targeted questions dealing with criminal activities. Interview questions were intended to illicit responses regarding experiences. My aim in the interview process was to get a sense of how state actions have shaped the consciousness of my participants, both individually and collectively. Therefore, interactions with state agencies, including experiences in school, interactions with police and welfare agencies were all topics of conversation. Other frequent topics of conversation centered

around the everyday lives of my participants. Descriptions of their family lives, leisure activities and aspirations illuminated the nuanced and complex ways in which these men have come to navigate the obstacles in their lives. I structured each open-ended interview to explore these varied modes and forms of survival. Despite my efforts to abstain from conversations which discussed illegal activities and topics which could endanger my subjects, there were several occasions in which our conversations inevitably covered subject matter which could be compromising in one way or another. In order to protect my informants, I deleted any such discussions before transcribing the interviews.

While deleting these conversations represents the loss of some data, my doing so helped build trust with informants, more than making up for any loss. Moreover, the years I have spent studying and working with Black youth who participated in the world of Los Angeles street organizations has fostered this trust. Still, particularly in a study of this sort, participant accounts cannot be taken at face value. Police officers, for instance, rarely acknowledge in interviews the practice of forcing youth to enter the territories of rival gangs in order to foment conflict. Ultimately, this dissertation is a study of consciousness and not activity. For this purpose, the question of whether actions attributed to another youth really described the deeds of the respondent matter little and by not pressing the question of the identity of the protagonist, I was able to solicit fuller accounts.

This study included archival work and written documentary sources served as supplementary data. Perspectives of interviewees and events where ever possible were corroborated with newspaper accounts, federal and state commission reports on police conduct, other sets of oral histories and unpublished documents.

An Overview of Chapters

This study engages with many of the issues and tensions just raised, and does so through an exploration of the ebb and flow of Black consciousness in Los Angeles from the 1960s to the 1980s. To uncover the form and content of this consciousness, I will survey the historical development of Black street gangs in Los Angeles. Chapter Two serves as an historical overview of the formation of Los Angeles' Black community by tracing the trajectory of the racialization of Africans in California from Spanish colonization to the economic and political repression that fomented the Watts Uprising. Chapter Two concludes with a discussion of Black cultural nationalism in Los Angeles, a form of resistance in critical contestation with the revolutionary political nationalism of the Black Panther Party that would help shape early Crip/Blood ideology. Chapter Three covers the formation and demise of the Black Panther Party in Los Angeles. I explore the state's successful efforts to neutralize the popularity of Black political consciousness through its military defeat of the Black Panther Party. As both a leader of Los Angeles' largest street gang and then the L.A. Chapter of the Black Panther Party, Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter embodies the historical tension described above. Chapter Four tracks the formation of the Crips, an organization which initially developed in Bunchy Carter's neighborhood, the epicenter of Black Panther politics in Los Angeles. Through interviews with first-generation Crips and Bloods, this chapter explores how early Crip/Blood ideology both incorporated and resisted the forces of dehumanization in 1970s Black Los Angeles. Chapter Five explores how evolving Crip/Blood ideology, state actions and economic conditions shaped Black consciousness among Crips and Bloods in the 1980s. I examine the increasing dehumanization of young Black men and its connection to the growing state insurgency that disconnected young Crip and Blood organizations from the ideological groundings of their

founders. Facing the ever-increasing military suppression and drug saturation of Los Angeles, the early vision of Raymond Washington would give way to an atmosphere of fratricidal warfare unfolding throughout the 1980s. Chapter Six, the conclusion, summarizes the dissertation's findings and considers the lessons this history illuminates for future Black liberation struggles.

CHAPTER 2 BLACK ANGELES

Nobody defined themselves as blacks in Africa,
whites in Europe, or Indians in the Americas
before the European expansion to the Americas.
-Ramón Grosfoguel¹

The Black Queen of California

“On the right hand from the Indies,” Spanish novelist Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo wrote in his romance *Las Sergas de Esplandián*, “there is an island called California, very near to the Terrestrial Paradise.” The island, according to Montalvo, “was peopled with black women, without any men among them, because they were accustomed to live after the fashion of Amazons.”² Written in 1510, fifty-seven years after the fall of Constantinople, the California of *Las Sergas* was named after and ruled by the mythical Black queen Califia, who joined with the Turks in their siege of Constantinople. The queen’s name, which is derived from the Arabic خليفة or *khalifa*, translates to successor, and was a term that was commonly used in Islamic Spain to refer to those in political authority under successive Islamic dynasties.³ Montalvo’s Black queen and the popularity his narratives enjoyed represent a view of people of African descent starkly at odds with those of today. Califia was seen as a person who possessed and was capable of political authority.

The search for Montalvo’s island of Black women generated the interest of the Spanish conquistadors. While sailing up the western coast of Mexico in the spring of 1535, Hernán Cortés and his expedition stumbled upon what they thought to be an island. From the pages of *Las Sergas*, Cortés gave this new land the name California. The fact that Cortés would name this new territory after a mythical Black queen associated with Islamic rule is of no surprise when

¹ Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley, University of California Press 2003), 22.

² Edward Everett Hale, *The Queen of California: The Origin of the Name of California*. (San Francisco: The Colt Press, [1864] 1945), 6.

³ There is strong evidence that Montalvo’s character of Califia was inspired by the legend of Mansa Musa which was disseminated in Islamic Spain through the works of Ibn Khaldun and Abraham Cresques. Khaldun documents the early history of the Malian empire in his late fourteenth century work *Kitāb al-Ibar*. Cresques, a Jew from Majorca, created the Catalan Atlas, a map of the known world in 1375 at the behest of Charles V of France. Norman Roth, *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2003). Considered to be “the most important of the medieval maps” the atlas depicts Mansa Musa with a crown of gold wielding a golden scepter and holding a nugget of gold. Just as the land of queen Califia, Mansa Musa’s wealth was legendary in Islamic Spain as the gold he is said to have distributed on his Hajj in the year 1324 (60,000 pieces in Cairo, Mecca and Medina alone) is said to have lowered the price of gold for the next decade. A. J. H. Goodwin, “The Medieval Empire of Ghana” *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, Vol. 12, No. 47 (Sep., 1957), 110. Emblazoned onto the Atlas are the words, “this Negro lord is called Musa Mali, Lord of the Negroes of Guinea. So abundant is the gold which is found in his country that he is the richest and most noble king in all the land.” Quoted in *Medieval Jewish Civilization*, 137. *Kitāb al-Ibar* and the Catalan Atlas consolidated the legend of Musa in Spain. The legends of his wealth and the tales of his female warriors are strikingly similar to Montalvo’s description of the Black women of California. Notice Montalvo’s description of the female warriors of California: “their arms were all of gold . . . for in all the land there is no other metal” Hale, *The Queen of California*, 6. See also, Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, *The Labors of the Very Brave Knight Esplandián* (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies State University of New York at Binghamton, 1992).

one considers that the Spain of Hernán Cortés in 1535 had only emerged from Islamic control some forty-three years prior. Combining territories of the al-Andalus Caliphate and the Christian kingdoms of Castile, Aragon and Navarre, Spain was “a country where coexistence had been practiced for centuries.”⁴ That the Spanish would imagine a Black figure, who, although an enemy of the eastern Roman empire, was a person relatively unmarked by the pathologies we today associate with Blackness, is rooted in the Moorish history of Spain.⁵ Although Moorish domination of Iberia ended in 1492 and the name “California” was inscribed onto the territory conquered by Cortés twenty-five years after it appears in the pages of *Las Sergas de Esplandián*, the notion that Africans could be the human equals of the Spaniards extends beyond Montalvo’s romance. The racial ideology articulated in *Las Sergas* was among the first Spanish imports to the new world.

The attitude toward Black people expressed by Montalvo reflected in part continuing relations between Spanish and Africans that extend beyond enslaver and enslaved. In fact, the first “white settlers” of California included Africans in their numbers. As Matthew Restall argues, the myth of the white conquistador ignores not only the role that natives played in assisting the Spanish conquest of the Americas but also that of the “Africans, free and enslaved, who accompanied Spanish invaders and in later campaigns equaled or exceeded them in number.”⁶ Indeed, three hundred Africans accompanied Cortés on the spring 1535 voyage when he gave California its name. Born in West Africa around 1480, Juan Garrido was a seasoned conquistador who had participated in the conquests of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guadalupe, Dominica and Florida, before joining Cortés on the 1535 voyage.⁷ By no means is the case of Garrido exceptional. By the time Antonio de Mendoza, Viceroy of New Spain, was alerted to the news that Africans and Natives were plotting a slave revolt on September 24, 1537, there were already 10,000 Africans in Mexico City alone.⁸

Gradually, however, as the institution of slavery came to dominate the political economy of New Spain, Montalvo’s vision of Africans as human beings began to disappear from the Spanish imaginary. With the discovery of the planned revolt of Mexico City, Viceroy Mendoza appealed to King Charles I of Spain to halt the shipping of Africans, pleading, “I write to ask Your Majesty to suspend the sending of the Blacks I had requested for the time being, because if there were large numbers of them [here] and another such plot occurred we might be unable to control the situation and the land might be lost.”⁹ As the Spanish began to backtrack on their notions of Black humanity, officials in New Spain enacted a series of restrictive codes which denied Blacks the rights previously afforded them. One example came on October 20, 1548 when the continued threat of armed insurrection led Viceroy Mendoza to issue an order banning the sale or transfer of weapons to any Black in New Spain.¹⁰

⁴ Ana Echevarria, *The Fortress of Faith: the Attitude Towards Muslims in Fifteenth Century Spain* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 4.

⁵ For a history of Spanish attitudes towards Muslims and Islam in the Fifteenth Century see Echevarria, *The Fortress of Faith*.

⁶ Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 45.

⁷ Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 55-56.

⁸ Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 52.

⁹ Antonio de Mendoza, *Enslaved Africans in Mexico: The 1537 Rebellion Plot Report of Antonio de Mendoza, Viceroy of New Spain, to King Charles I of Spain, Excerpts*. accessed February 21, 2010, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/settlement/text6/SlavePlotMexico.pdf>

¹⁰ Robert Brady, “The Emergence of a Negro Class in Mexico, 1524 – 1640” (PhD diss., State University of Iowa, 1965), 118.

Still, the restrictions instituted in New Spain never equaled the barbarity of American slave codes. In Mexico, for example, Africans were allowed to petition the viceroys for permits to carry weapons. Successful applicants were usually those who were able to prove they were of good character and in need of self-defense.¹¹ Americans think of race as a story of progress, but actually for people of African descent in Los Angeles, there was no better time than the beginning. Moreover, even if a racist hierarchy increasingly asserted itself. When the city of Los Angeles was founded in 1781, it was less characterized by the rigid racial categories that we see today.

The Founding of Los Angeles

On December 27, 1779, with the hopes of establishing naval bases to protect their interests from Imperial England and Russia, Spanish officials issued an order to officer Fernando de Rivera y Moncada to enlist families to build a settlement in Alta California. Antonio Mesa, a Black man from El Real de Los Alamos, would be the first to register for the mission. The majority of the original 46 settlers of Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciúncula, known today simply as Los Angeles, in fact, would be of African descent. Landing on September 4, 1781 along with Antonio were his wife Anna Gertrudis Lopez and their two children, another volunteer named Luís Qunitero, his wife Petra Rubin and their five children.¹²

These original *pobladores* were recruited primarily from the New Spanish provinces of Sinaloa and Sonora.¹³ With large numbers of free Blacks serving as soldiers, miners and agricultural laborers, these provinces were characterized by racial attitudes that were more relaxed than in other areas of New Spain.¹⁴ As a result, race was less a factor for these first residents of Los Angeles, a point highlighted by J. Max Bond in his 1936 dissertation, *The Negro in Los Angeles*. “Of course,” Bond argues, “these first settlers are to be distinguished from their modern brothers, the twentieth century Negro, by background, race, and culture.”¹⁵

Indeed, in the beginning, Blackness wasn’t Black in the American sense. During the first seventy years of Los Angeles’ existence, under Spanish and then Mexican rule, the town’s racial structure remained largely unchanged. However, once California became part of the United States and the city began to grow, matters changed. As California moved from Spanish colony to Mexican province to United States territory, American racial categories and politics became the dominant ideology even in the absence of a substantial Black population.

Black Migration to Los Angeles

Los Angeles grew little in the first century of its existence, and few Blacks followed the initial settlers. The experiences of these early Black migrants however was foundational in the formation of the racial hierarchy that we see in Los Angeles today. From all accounts, Los

¹¹ Brady, *The Emergence of a Negro Class in Mexico*, 120.

¹² Lawrence B. De Graaf and Quintard Taylor “African Americans in California History, California in African American History,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, ed. Lawrence B. de Graaf et al. (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2000); Jack D. Forbes, “The early African heritage of California,” in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*, ed. Lawrence B. de Graaf et. al. (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2000).

¹³ Paul Robinson, “Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles,” in *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities*, ed Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón. (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁵ J. Max Bond, “The Negro In Los Angeles: A Dissertation” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1936), 4.

Angeles' shift from Spanish colonial rule to an independent Mexico did little to change the prosperity that Blacks enjoyed. In fact, Paul Robinson argues, during the 25 years of Mexican control of Alta California, Black equality was at its peak. As a province of Mexico, Alta California was under the control of two governors of African descent, Manuel Victoria and Pio Pico. As Robinson suggests, "the example of Pico illustrates how blacks were hardly limited by race in Alta California, where a multiracial society developed that was open to upward mobility and assimilation of people of African descent. Particularly in civic and commercial life, Africans and their descendents experienced few limitations on their prosperity."¹⁶

With the U. S. acquisition of California in 1845 however, this prosperity would soon be eradicated. In the same way that the relative advantage Blacks had enjoyed in Spanish Florida, and in French and Spanish Louisiana would soon end with the arrival of the Anglos, so it was also with their arrival in California.¹⁷ Drafted in 1849, the California Constitution explicitly prohibited the immigration of free Blacks. State officials were particularly concerned that Black immigrants might be brought to California by slaveholders to work the goldmines. It was believed that a mass of Black laborers would discourage more desirable immigrants and burden tax payers.¹⁸ Although California was admitted into the union as a free state on September 9, 1850, Blacks were essentially under constant threat of relegation to slavery with the passage of repressive covenants such as the Fugitive Slave Law of California.¹⁹ Introduced by Assemblyman Henry A. Crabb, the Fugitive Slave Law made it illegal for any enslaved Africans in California to take their freedom. Furthermore, the law discouraged the immigration of "free" Blacks from other states, keeping Black migration to California relatively low. Those that did arrive faced a litany of draconian measures designed to control and subjugate a despised population. Blacks were restricted from the right of testimony, holding office, serving as jurors, attending public schools and intermarrying with whites.²⁰ Moreover, on January 28, 1870 the California legislature rejected the 15th amendment to the United States Constitution and continued to deny Black men suffrage.²¹

Confronted with legal restrictions that limited their opportunities, the majority of Blacks of California during these early years were forced to eke out a meager existence. Others, however, found opportunities in the California frontier. African American James P. Beckwourth, developer of the trail that bears his name, earned his living by guiding early settlers through the Sierra Nevada.²² Many other nineteenth century Black settlers would follow Beckwourth's example, serving as covered wagon guides and escorting newcomers through the rugged California terrain. The majority of these successful pioneers chose to remain in the California hinterlands rather than the emerging city of Los Angeles, however. By the time California achieved statehood in 1850 there were only twelve Blacks who were registered as residents in

¹⁶ Robinson, "Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles," 27.

¹⁷ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana. The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, 1992); Jane G. Landers, ed., *Colonial Plantations and Economy in Florida* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2000).

¹⁸ Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 35; Bond, "The Negro In Los Angeles," 5.

¹⁹ Robinson, "Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles," 30.

²⁰ Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*; Bond, "The Negro In Los Angeles," 8-10.

²¹ Bond, "The Negro In Los Angeles," 8.

²² Charlotta A. Bass, *Forty Years: Memoirs From the Pages of a Newspaper* (Los Angeles: C. A. Bass, 1960).

the city of Los Angeles. Of these twelve, the only one not living under the roof of a white family was the successful barber, “Nigger” Pete Biggs.²³

The 1850s population of Black Los Angeles increased by fifty-four. Bridget “Biddy” Mason arrived in California as the enslaved property of Robert Smith. Smith, a devout Mormon, decided to relocate to San Bernardino to help form a growing colony started by the marauding Mormon Battalion under the orders of Brigham Young.²⁴ Although California was admitted to the union as a free state in 1850, Biddy Mason and her three daughters would remain in bondage until 1856, when it came to the attention of Robert Owens that Mason’s enslaver Robert Smith was intending to take her to Texas.²⁵ Formerly enslaved in Texas himself, Owens had become prosperous after obtaining a contract to supply wood to the U.S. Army in Los Angeles. After hearing the news of Smith’s plans to transport Biddy to Texas, Robert Owens procured the assistance of the local sheriff and rescued Biddy and her family. On January 1st 1856, Biddy and the thirteen others enslaved by Robert Smith were legally granted their freedom by the courts in Los Angeles. Biddy had served as a midwife during the time of her enslavement; upon winning her freedom, she relocated to Los Angeles and found work as a nurse. Biddy would go on to invest in property and become one of the wealthiest Black women in Los Angeles. With her holdings Biddy became famous for her charitable work, including the establishment of soup kitchens, and her work with prisoners. Robert Owens’ son Charles would later marry Biddy’s daughter Ellen, forming a Black aristocracy whose descendants would become some of the wealthiest Blacks on the west coast. The property controlled by the Charles Owens/Mason family would serve as the nucleus that forged the Black community of Los Angeles.

The 1880s saw the Black population of Los Angeles increase from 102 to 1,285 (see table 1).²⁶ This growth was due to a convergence of several factors. Southern California cattle ranch landlords began to diversify their interests, establishing vineyard and citrus groves, and experimenting with cotton, tobacco and silk.²⁷ The combination of cheap land for housing and new job opportunities created by economic diversification heightened California’s appeal to immigrants, an appeal reinforced by the completion of the Santa Fe Railway in 1880 that drastically shortened the time of travel to California from the East Coast and mid-West. At the same time, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 resulted in a shortage of agricultural workers. Having lost its supply of cheap Chinese labor, the California Cotton Growers and Manufacturers Association imported Blacks from the American south.²⁸

²³ Bond, “The Negro In Los Angeles”; Robinson, “Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles,” 29.

²⁴ B. H. Roberts, *The Mormon Battalion: Its History and Achievements* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1919); Sergeant Daniel Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War. 1846-1847* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Librarian of Congress, 1881).

²⁵ Robinson, “Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles,” 31.

²⁶ Emory J. Tolbert, *The UNIA and Black Los Angeles: Ideology and Community in the American Garvey Movement Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies University of California, Los Angeles, 1980).

²⁷ Glenn S. Dumke, “The Real Estate Boom of 1887 in Southern California.” *Pacific Historical Review* 11 (4) (1942).

²⁸ Keith E. Collins, *Black Los Angeles: The Maturing of the Ghetto, 1945 - 1950* (Los Angeles: Century Twenty One Publishing, 1980), 5.

Table 1 Black Population of Los Angeles by Decade: 1870-1910²⁹

Year	Total Number	Percentage of Total Population
1850	12	0.7
1860	66	1.5
1870	93	1.6
1880	102	0.9
1890	1,258	2.5
1900	2,131	2.0
1910	7,599	2.3

To many observers, the emerging city of Los Angeles appeared to offer exceptional opportunities to Blacks. Excluded from public schools and other institutions, Black Angelenos were encouraged to develop their own institutions by Booker T. Washington during a 1901 visit. Ed Thompson and his wife, who was originally from Mexico, began instructing 16 children in the front room of their First Street home.³⁰ Recalling the spirit of self-help of the early 20th Century, journalist Charlotta Bass describes L.A. as the “city of refuge” for Black people. This spirit and the relative affluence of local Blacks led W. E. B. Du Bois to declare, “[o]ut here in this matchless Southern California there would seem to be no limit to your opportunities, your possibilities” during a speech in Los Angeles.³¹

Unfortunately, the future that Washington, Du Bois and other observers imagined for Black Los Angeles failed to materialize. Locked out of the emerging industries and limited to menial work, relatively few Blacks migrated and most of those that did were forced to find work in agriculture, domestic service, or other menial sectors. Moreover, Black families were increasingly concentrated in segregated areas.³²

Even within the emerging ghetto, however, distinctions emerged. Among the most desirable jobs available to Black men was that of railroad porter. By the 1880s, 20 percent of employed Black males in Los Angeles were working as railroad porters. A community of Blacks who were able to secure work as Pullman porters settled in an area neighboring the downtown rail yards on First and Los Angeles streets.³³ Although Black Los Angeles experienced both class cleavages and racial oppression, neither was in the early years, so intense as to produce the kinds of violence that would mark the decades after World War II. Both oppression from without and division from within were, however, increasing.

When migrants arrived in the emerging American metropolis, they found an increasingly racist public. Unlike the ethnic enclaves found in northern American cities, many of the white migrants to Los Angeles were native born whites who imported the racist ideology of their places of origin. In 1902, a white mob encircled the residence of a daring Black Angeleno who had purchased a home beyond the Seventh Street boundary.³⁴ Still, Blacks fought back. The homeowner drew his gun, scattering the mob. In solidarity, a group of armed Blacks came to his

²⁹ Bond, “The Negro In Los Angeles,” 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

³¹ See W.E.B. Du Bois, “Colored California.” *Crisis*, Vol. 6, Aug. 1913 for Du Bois’ description of his 1913 visit to California.

³² Robinson, “Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles.”

³³ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁴ Bond, “The Negro In Los Angeles,” 35.

rescue, keeping watch over the home.³⁵ Soon, other Black families followed his lead and began to settle into homes beyond Seventh Street. From the moment the American racial system began to establish itself in Los Angeles, Black people could not count on authorities to protect their homes or rights. Rather, like the daring homeowner, they resisted. From day one, this resistance invited charges of criminality and suggested the fine line separating criminality and resistance even in the consciousness of Blacks themselves.

In the years that followed, an expanding Black population confronted not only the threat posed by a hostile white population but also the threat posed by a hostile state. By 1915 the majority of Black residents in L.A. were confined to Central Avenue. Growing hostility from white migrants would come to a head in the spring of 1914. Despite being “only four doors down from Central Avenue,” Mary Johnson arrived at her East 18th Street home to find all of her possessions scattered on the front lawn and a sign reading “nigger if you value your hide don’t let night catch you here.” After calls to the Sheriff’s office fell on deaf ears, Johnson headed to the offices of the Black newspaper *The California Eagle* where an army of one hundred women gathered in her support. After the women marched to her house, the Sheriff’s office finally responded and stood watch as Johnson reentered her home.³⁶

Housing battles did not end with Mary Johnson’s victory,³⁷ and Blacks became increasingly skeptical that Los Angeles was the oasis of opportunity imagined by Du Bois and Washington. In 1914, these emerging racial tensions and the accompanying struggle over housing rights would lead some in the Black Community to begin drawing up plans to build a Black settlement in Baja California, Mexico.³⁸

In the face of this backlash however, most Blacks chose to stay and their numbers would continue to grow. The Black population would be bolstered even further with the arrival of 3,000 refugees fleeing the Tulsa race riot in 1921.³⁹ Black migrants clearly understood that Los Angeles did in fact offer opportunities and rights denied in Tulsa or the Jim Crow South. Compared to the centuries long traditions of state supported slavery and violence, the emerging system of ‘separate but equal’ that was crystallizing into laws based on established practice, and the Ku Klux Klan, California looked relatively better. Still, they also understood that the promise of America was increasingly compromised by the threat that whites perceived as the Black community grew and by the increasing centrality of American racial norms in the structuring of life in Los Angeles.⁴⁰ It was little consolation to the Black family burnt out of their home, or the Black man pursued and beaten by mob or police in California, that violence in the Jim Crow south was far worse.

City officials attempted to confine the rapidly increasing Black population to the Central Avenue area by establishing a series of housing restrictions. Still, the 1929 California Supreme Court decision to uphold housing restrictions on the west side began steering Blacks into new areas of South Central. As large numbers of Dust bowl migrants arrived in Los Angeles, the

³⁵ Ibid., 35.

³⁶ Bass, *Forty Years*.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Bass, *Forty Years: Tolbert, The UNIA and Black Los Angeles*.

³⁹ Tolbert, *The UNIA and Black Los Angeles*.

⁴⁰ Bond, “The Negro In Los Angeles:” John H. M. Laslett, “Historical Perspectives: Immigration and the Rise of a Distinctive Urban Region, 1900–1970,” in *Ethnic Los Angeles*, ed Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

expansion of the Black community increasingly infringed upon territories desired by whites.⁴¹ In February of 1931, Mrs. Bertha Picard was found guilty of contempt of court for “permitting Negroes to occupy the premises at 249 East 45th Street.”⁴²

With the industrialized sector developing later in Los Angeles than northern American cities, many arriving migrants were limited to farm labor. In fact, Los Angeles’ economy was largely agricultural until the 1930s. Attracted by the availability of non-union labor, General Motors, Ford, Chrysler and Studebaker began investing heavily in Los Angeles in the 1930s. Together, these four companies invested \$16 million in South Central Los Angeles by 1940.⁴³ Although these industries expanded rapidly and created thousands of jobs, Blacks in Los Angeles only benefited indirectly. The reluctance of Los Angeles industries to integrate meant that most Black migrants could only find work in the service sector. In fact, over half of working Blacks were employed in the domestic service sector.⁴⁴

As the eve of World War II approached, the semblance of a ghetto was rapidly forming in the Black areas of Los Angeles. Housing and labor restrictions increasingly isolated the Black population and the Los Angeles of yesteryear, the L.A. of the *pobladores*, had faded from memory.

With the outbreak of World War II and the expansion of the shipping and aircraft industries, Los Angeles would once again offer the promise of relative prosperity for southern Blacks. Labor shortages in wartime L.A. would lead tens of thousands of Blacks in search of a better life to the city of angels. As John Laslett points out, in California “employment grew from approximately 900,000 in March 1940 to 1,450,000 by October 1943.”⁴⁵ Settling among the established Black community along Central Avenue the influx of southern migrants led to massive overcrowding. Hemmed into a district lacking the capacity to accommodate the daily arrival of migrants, many Blacks began moving southward into areas predominantly occupied by whites. The congestion was relieved somewhat with the construction of public housing facilities in Watts in 1944. At the same time, concessions won by Black unions coupled with the shortage of a white labor force, opened up opportunities for Blacks in the previously segregated industrial sector. Many of these newly employed Blacks relocated to Watts in the search for housing which was closer to the factories. In the 1940s the number of Black residents of Watts skyrocketed from 8,814 in 1940 to 92,117 in 1950.⁴⁶ As the borders of the Black ghetto grew, neighboring white communities like Compton and Lynwood increasingly became hotbeds of white hostility.

Discrimination against rural southern Black migrants was not limited to the anti-Black sentiments of white Angelenos however. The sure signs of social stratification and class tensions within the Black community that became far more prominent in the 1970s, were already emerging. For example, with wartime industry came the establishment of an entrenched Black

⁴¹ To be sure, dust bowl migrants also faced discrimination upon arrival to California. The LAPD, in fact, deployed 136 officers to 16 points of entry on California’s border with Arizona, Nevada and Oregon in order to deny dustbowl migrants entry into the state. See Cecilia Rasmussen, “LAPD Blocked Dust Bowl Migrants at State Borders” *Los Angeles Times* March 09, 2003 and John Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies: On the Road to the Grapes of Wrath* (Berkeley, Heyday Books, [1936] 1988).

⁴² Bass, *Forty Years*, 99.

⁴³ Laslett, “Historical Perspectives.”

⁴⁴ David M. Grant, Melvin L. Oliver, and Angela D. James “African Americans: Social and Economic Bifurcation,” in *Ethnic Los Angeles*, ed Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

⁴⁵ Laslett, “Historical Perspectives,” 54.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

working class that further solidified existing class cleavages within the Black population. Settling on the east side, working class and lumpen Blacks were resented by many of the wealthy west side Black elites. Already in the 1930s, J. Max Bond found that Black communities based on class and place of origin had begun to form in several sections of Los Angeles. Much like Du Bois' study of Black Philadelphia, because they had migrated to Los Angeles from northern cities, Bond believed that the families on the west side were better prepared for the challenges of city life, while the southern migrants on the east side lacked the cultural capital to prosper in an urban setting. He found the eastside "community was composed primarily of families that came to Los Angeles directly from the plantations and the rural towns of Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama. The culture patterns of the rural South flourish side by side with modern industry."⁴⁷ For Bond, the rates of poverty and delinquency were necessarily higher on the east side due to the lack of acculturation of Black southerners.

These migration patterns and class cleavages would play an integral role in the development and orientation of Black street organizations. Enclosed within the ghetto and surrounded by gangs of white hoodlums, Black youth on the east side began organizing themselves to combat white violence. Mike Davis argues

[a]s tens of thousands of 1940s and 1950s Black immigrants crammed into the overcrowded, absentee-landlord-dominated neighborhoods of the ghetto's Eastside, low-rider gangs offered "cool worlds" of urban socialization for poor young newcomers from rural Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Meanwhile, on the other side of Main Street, more affluent Black youngsters from the Westside bungalow belt created a white "car club" subculture of Los Angeles in the 1950s.⁴⁸

Even further, this legacy had a direct effect on the organization of radical politics in 1960s Los Angeles as members of west side clubs primarily joined the ranks of the Us organization and the L.A. Chapter of the Black Panther Party was predominantly filled with former members of the east side clubs.

Amidst the backdrop of unemployment, overcrowding and racial terrorism, these groups formed by young Black males in 1940s Los Angeles thrived in an emerging ghetto as the "city of refuge" rapidly became another bastion of American white supremacy.

Table 2 Black Population of Los Angeles by Decade: 1920-1960⁴⁹

Year	Total Number	Percentage of Total Population
1920	15,579	2.7
1930	38,894	3.1
1940	63,774	4.2
1950	171,209	8.7
1960	334,916	13.5

⁴⁷ Bond, "The Negro In Los Angeles."

⁴⁸ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990), 293.

⁴⁹ Keith E. Collins, *Black Los Angeles: The Maturing of the Ghetto, 1945 - 1950* (Los Angeles: Century Twenty One Publishing, 1980), 9, 41; Raphael Sonenshein, *The City at Stake: Secession, Reform, and Battle for Los Angeles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 48.

The Formation of Black Street Organizations in the 1940s

With the explosion of the Black population in wartime 1940s L.A. came the ghetto symptoms common to many northern industrial American cities. As Black families attempted to escape the overcrowded conditions of Central Ave. they were met with a growing hostility as whites were pushed to outlying suburbs. Patrolled and enforced through both public agencies and private citizens, the borders encircling the Black ghetto became sites of racial confrontations as police and organized groups of white teenagers terrorized the Black community. In the late 1940s, Black youth responded by forming social clubs to protect themselves from the escalating anti-Black violence of the city. Groups like the Dartanians, Huns, Farmers, Gladiators, Del-Vikings, Rebel Rousers, Blood Alley, Haciendas, Slausons and the Businessmen were formed by young Black teenagers. Growing up in Slausons territory, Danifu Bey remembers the police and white teenage hooligans “used to keep most of the Blacks on the East Side and in Watts, you couldn’t travel through the city freely.”⁵⁰

In 1947 newly arrived teenage migrants in the South Gate section of Los Angeles formed the Businessmen to protect themselves from white hooligans who strictly enforced racial boundaries by terrorizing Black youth who strayed beyond the confines of the ghetto. Organized by age, the Businessmen were made up of the Seniors, Juniors, Babies, and the Unborn subsets.⁵¹ Arriving in L.A. from Galveston, Texas, R and B recording artist and former member of the Businessmen, Barry White experienced first-hand the ferocity in which these racial boundaries were enforced as he was chased through the streets by the LAPD for five miles.⁵² Born in Birmingham, another member of the Businessmen, Winston Slaughter remembers the LAPD as much worse than the police in his native Alabama. One of the terror tactics employed by Los Angeles police consisted of kidnapping Slaughter and his comrades and dropping them in foreign territory.⁵³ Formed by Jefferson High School students who were the children of domestic and garment workers from Louisiana and East Texas, the Businessmen developed in this environment of police repression.⁵⁴ In fact, former businessmen Carter Spikes, remembers the LAPD 77th Street Division as “the last bastion of white supremacy.”⁵⁵

The terror felt by Black and Chicano citizens of L.A. did not come from the Police alone. In fact, in his autobiography Chief Daryl Gates fondly recalls how as a teenager, he and his compatriots would hunt down non-white teenagers who wandered into the white community, “on Friday nights, we’d go looking for White Fence members who dared to stray into Highland Park.”⁵⁶ “You couldn’t pass Alameda Blvd, because those White boys in South Gate would set you on fire” original Businessmen member Raymond Wright recalls.⁵⁷ Louis Tackwood, who would later go on to infiltrate the Black Panther Party as an agent provocateur for the FBI recalls how Black youth organizations formed as a response to this white violence. “It goes back a long way. We used to all hang together. I think it was more for security than anything. You know,

⁵⁰ Danifu Bey, interview by JR Valrey, *P.O.C.C. Block Report Radio* Los Angeles, CA, November, 2005.

⁵¹ Jill Leovy, “New job for an old gang” *Los Angeles Times*, May 03, 2008.

⁵² Kevin Chappell, “Barry White: Comeback of the Decade,” *Ebony* May 1995.

⁵³ Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: the Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995).

⁵⁴ Jill Leovy, “New job for an old gang.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Quoted in Daryl F. Gates with Diane K. Shah, *Chief: My Life in the LAPD* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 291.

⁵⁷ Alejandro A. Alonso, “Territoriality Among African American Street Gangs in Los Angeles” (MA thesis, University of Southern California, 1999), 75.

like, we lived in a spread-out area and with so many white boys in between the area, they used to just jump on us if they would catch one of us at a time.”⁵⁸

Born in New Orleans on February 20, 1943 Tackwood moved to Los Angeles at the age of seven.⁵⁹ Upon arrival in Los Angeles, Tackwood quickly realized that the American racial order was not unique to the south.

The neighborhood I lived in was basically white when we first started living there. And like I said, you couldn't cross from Broadway to Main or Main to Figueroa without fighting. So it was more of a thing like, we like, you know, you get caught walking with a girl, by yourself, and you know you got a killing coming. If the white boys catch you with a girl see . . . you know what I mean? It was self-defense mostly.⁶⁰

Joining the Huns, he remembers “coming up, it was a thing of self-protection. The fellas stuck together.”⁶¹ With the organization of these clubs, Black youth had an apparatus to defend themselves from the marauding bands of white teenagers like those of the teenage Daryl Gates. Tackwood recalls “[w]e used to couldn't cross Figueroa because the white boys run us home. They's couldn't cross Figueroa either cause we'd run them home. And like we got in a fight one night and some cats was yelling “kill them Niggers-kill them niggers.”⁶²

For Tackwood and many others, the Spook Hunters were by far the most feared of the White terrorist organizations:

Across the road was the white boys . . .they had the Spook Hunters. At the time we didn't want to fuck with them. Phew, they had some bad white boys then! The Spook Hunters were from everywhere, surrounding the black community. They had on the back of their jackets, they had a white man standing on a nigger's head. We captured about 900 of their jackets, boy, but we fought for a long time with them.⁶³

The Spook Hunters declared war on Black youth throughout Los Angeles. One such war developed in 1958 with a Black club from Compton called the Swampmen, after a Black girl, Nadie Smith had been elected homecoming queen of a local high school.⁶⁴ Black clubs formed an alliance after white students placed signs in front of the school reading “We don't want a nigger queen in our yearbook.”⁶⁵ Tackwood recalls how the Spook Hunter menace led various Black clubs to join forces:

⁵⁸ Citizens Research and Investigation Committee and Louis E. Tackwood, *The Glass House Tapes: The Story of an Agent Provocateur and the New Police Intelligence Complex* (New York: Avon, 1973), 68.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁰ Tackwood, *The Glass House Tapes* 76.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁴ Robert Conot, *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness: the Unforgettable Classic Account of the Watts Riot* (New York: Morrow, 1967); Jeanne Theoharis “W-A-L-K-O-U-T!” High School Students and the Development of Black Power in L.A. in *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level* ed Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁶⁵ Theoharis “W-A-L-K-O-U-T!”

Well, so what was happening in South Gate, Inglewood, Huntington Park . . . all around us, was that the Spook Hunters were raising hell. They were catching brothers every way they could. They came from all over, Inglewood High, Leuzinger High everywhere.

He continues

So I called a meeting and said “Look here, the Spook Hunters are raising hell and we got to put a stop to it.” This was about in ’59. So we took about twenty of their jackets at Centinela Park one night . . . We bumper-jacked a few up against the head, tore up a few cars, you know, the usual stuff. Well, the Spooks ran through Watts one night. Shot at everything they could. Shot at every brother they could. Yeah, well we said, okay, if that’s the way it’s gonna be. . . You remember, the Lyons drag strip? Well they used to go out there every Friday night. We thought we would get them, there. I called all the clubs together and we came out there from six different ways. And we took about three hundred jackets that night and there wasn’t any more Spook Hunters.⁶⁶

Detroit Red in L.A.

As Los Angeles’ Black population boomed, one man with a greater vision than most for the need for Black people to organize was Malcolm X. In 1957, he came to the city and established the Nation of Islam’s Mosque no 27. The Nation of Islam appealed to many of the city’s refugees who had quickly realized that the Jim Crow they thought they had escaped had clearly followed them west. Concerned over the presence of Elijah Muhammad’s followers, city officials began keeping tabs on the group.⁶⁷ After several skirmishes with the police, hostilities erupted when police shot seven members in an April 27, 1962 raid on the mosque. In addition to killing twenty-nine year old Robert T. Stokes, the LAPD shot and wounded Arthur Coleman Jr., Roosevelt Walker, Clarence Jinkles, Monroe Jones and brothers Robert and William Rogers. In addition, seventeen NOI members were arrested in the attack.⁶⁸ Calling the Nation of Islam members “fanatical anti-white cultists,” both police and the white media blamed the victims for the fracas.⁶⁹

In the aftermath, rumors abound spreading fear of an inevitable full-scale war between the “white-hating Muslim sect” and the LAPD.⁷⁰ In fact, the crisis reached international proportions when police agencies on both sides of the US /Mexico border combed the area in search of the “Muslim brotherhood,” after 180 NOI members reportedly, “vanished mysteriously after crossing the border into Mexico.”⁷¹ Further fanning the flames of hysteria, Ethel Bryant, the first Black field aide to be appointed by the Los Angeles Mayor’s office, received an anonymous phone call threatening, “I’m calling for the Muslims. We’re going to get you.”⁷² Although Malcolm publicly denied the allegation that the call was made by the NOI, arguing, Mrs. Bryant was, “a Negro deeply respected by our community,” Mayor Sam Yorty ordered the LAPD to assign officers to protect Bryant.⁷³ Yorty, who compared the NOI to “Nazis,” arguing

⁶⁶ Tackwood, *The Glass House Tapes*, 82.

⁶⁷ “New Muslim Outbreaks Possible, Parker Warns,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1962, 26.

⁶⁸ “Muslims’ Riot,” *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 28, 1962, 1.

⁶⁹ “Muslim Cultist Killed, 6 Hurt in Police Battle,” *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 29, 1962, D1.

⁷⁰ “New Muslim Outbreaks Possible, Parker Warns.”

⁷¹ “Guards On Border Look For Muslims,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1962, 1.

⁷² “Negro Deputy of Yorty Gets Phone Threat,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1962, 19.

⁷³ “Leader Denies Muslim Made Telephone Threat,” *Los Angeles Times* May 7, 1962, 32.

they were a “hate organization dedicated to the destruction of the Caucasian race,” requested a meeting with Attorney General Robert Kennedy to secure the approval of utilizing increased measures in his war on the Nation of Islam.⁷⁴

After receiving news of the raid, Malcolm quickly traveled to Los Angeles, calling the attack “one of the most savage, ferocious, inhuman atrocities ever inflicted upon unarmed, innocent human beings in a so-called democratic and civilized society.”⁷⁵ Malcolm according to historian Manning Marable, was deeply disturbed by the ambush on the mosque. The Black leader, Marable documents, “began to recruit members for an assassination team to target LAPD officers.”⁷⁶ The strategy, however, was shot down at the NOI’s highest level and Malcolm was forced to abandon his plans after failing to receive the approval of Elijah Muhammad.

For much of the Nation of Islam top brass, Malcolm had not been able to shake his hoodlumish past as Detroit Red. Louis Farrakhan, in fact, remembers Malcolm as “gangsterlike.”⁷⁷ Despite his disapproval of Malcolm’s tough disposition, Farrakhan concedes Malcolm “had a tremendous sway over men that came out of the street with gangster leanings.”⁷⁸ Indeed, Malcolm’s sentiments captured the growing frustrations of rank and file NOI members as well as street youth in general. Moreover, Malcolm represented an increasing radicalization amongst a diverse spectrum of Black Los Angeles. At a community meeting held at the 2nd Baptist Church, organized in response to the attack on the mosque, Keynote speaker, Chairman Wendell Green of the Negro Committee for Representative Government compared the LAPD to “a conquering army in an occupied country when dealing with Negroes.”⁷⁹ Even the NAACP chimed in, arguing in Los Angeles, there is a “situation amounting almost to a reign of terror.”⁸⁰ It was Malcolm’s speech however, that best articulated the sentiments of those in attendance, receiving several standing ovations. “It’s been 400 years of undiluted hell,” Malcolm exhorted. “If we don’t hate the white man, then you don’t know what you’re talking about.”⁸¹ Malcolm X tapped the energy of a growing frustration that reached far beyond the 1,200 community members in attendance at the May 13 meeting. The same week as Malcolm spoke, Muslim prisoners transferred from San Quentin and Folsom organized a hunger strike of an estimated 1,000 inmates at the maximum security California Men’s Colony.⁸²

Although police actions at Mosque No. 27 played a crucial role in Malcolm’s radicalization, without the support of the Nation of Islam he was not in a position to launch a viable political campaign. Still, Malcolm’s efforts and the sympathetic response they generated from Black Los Angeles heralded the emerging consciousness crystallized in the formation of the Black Panther Party.

The Radicalization of L.A.

Ironically Malcolm achieved in death what he was unable to achieve in life. Street organizations in Los Angeles took another step toward radicalization following the February 21,

⁷⁴ “New Muslim Outbreaks Possible, Parker Warns,”; Gene Hunter, “Yorty Calls Racial Situation Tense, Asks Federal Help,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1962, A1.

⁷⁵ Muslim Leader Accuses Police of Murder *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1962.

⁷⁶ Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Viking, 2011), 207.

⁷⁷ Marable, *Malcolm X*, 207.

⁷⁸ Marable, *Malcolm X*, 207.

⁷⁹ “1,200 Negroes Charge Police With Brutality,” *Los Angeles Times* May 14, 1962, 2.

⁸⁰ “Don’t Make Muslims Scapegoats for Police Brutality, Negroes Urge” *Los Angeles Times* May 9, 1962, B1.

⁸¹ “1,200 Negroes Charge Police With Brutality,” 2.

⁸² “Hunger Strike Ended at Men’s State Prison,” *Los Angeles Times* May 10, 1962, 15.

1965 assassination of El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. In Watts, this radicalization achieved its widest articulation in the August Uprising. Although often portrayed by white media and the state of California's McCone Commission as mindless criminals, many young Black participants in Watts viewed their actions as a legitimate response to political violence against Black activists, among them civil rights workers in Mississippi and Malcolm in New York. Whereas the McCone Commission blamed the uprising on the cultural backwardness of southern migrants, pacifist civil rights leader Bayard Rustin argues that the rebellion "was carried on with the express purpose of asserting that they would no longer quietly submit to the deprivation of slum life."⁸³ While meeting with Watts residents on a street corner, Rustin met a young man who declared, "we won because we made the whole world pay attention to us. The police chief never came here before; the mayor always stayed uptown. We made them come."⁸⁴

Many social scientists would trace Black activism to expectations that rose at a faster pace than actual improvements.⁸⁵ Events in Los Angeles however, tell a different story. While in some ways opportunities and rights for Black people had surely increased in the mid-twentieth century, in many ways they had not. The relative inconsequentiality of race, which characterized life in early Los Angeles had no parallel in the 1960s. With massive overcrowding, Watts held all the characteristics of a northern American slum. Housing density in Watts, for example, was 25.7 people per acre, compared to the 9.2 average for Los Angeles. Housing segregation in Los Angeles, poverty, and unequal education or political access were the results of both economic and political developments. Passed on November 3, 1964, Proposition 14 "prohibited either the State or any subdivision from making or enforcing fair housing legislation."⁸⁶ These sorts of restrictive covenants coupled with the concentration of subsidized public housing in Watts enclosed the Black population into a ghetto. In the 1960s, Los Angeles was the third most segregated major American city, behind Chicago and Cleveland. Between 1950 and 1960, only 1,437 of the 400,000 Black in Los Angeles lived outside of the segregated areas of the Central District, San Pedro, Venice and Pacoima.⁸⁷ By the time Watts erupted in 1965, the epicenter, the 77th division precinct was 85% Black.⁸⁸

As the eve of the Watts uprising approached, confrontations between Black and white clubs had all but disappeared. Still, white supremacy shaped Black youth even without the physical presence of white people. Youth violence in the east side ghetto was primarily between rival Black clubs. The Huns in fact, pushed their grievances with the Spook Hunters aside and turned their aggression towards several other Black clubs. Through violent attacks on other clubs, the Huns began absorbing smaller organizations and expanded their territory.⁸⁹ Originally War Chief of the Dartanians, Louis Tackwood and his comrades joined the ranks of the Huns in an effort to defeat other organizations. Unified, he describes how they engaged in a protracted struggle with the Slausons:

⁸³ Bayard Rustin, *The Watts "Manifesto" & the McCone Report* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1966), 3.

⁸⁴ Rustin, *The Watts "Manifesto."*

⁸⁵ James A. Geschwender, "Social Structure and the Negro Revolt: An Examination of Some Hypotheses." *Social Forces* 43 (1964): 248–256; Clark McPhail, "Civil Disorder and Participation: A Critical Examination of Recent Research." *American Sociological Review* 36 (1971): 1058–1073.

⁸⁶ California Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, *An Analysis of the McCone Commission Report* (1966), 3.

⁸⁷ Conot, *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness.*

⁸⁸ California Advisory Committee, *An Analysis of the McCone Commission Report.*

⁸⁹ Tackwood, *The Glass House Tapes.*

The Slausons really got us tangled up. We fought and fought but you see, ours was the violent thing. We conquered by violence, we had no ideology or nothing. The Slausons was an idea. They didn't wear no jackets. They just considered themselves Slausons and that was it. . . the Slausons were sharp dressers and their old ladies were good-looking too. We were trying to kill an idea, just couldn't do it. Everybody was a Slauson. They had little Slausons, Baby Slausons, Slausons, and Slausonettes. They had about one thousand men. Everytime we'd knock one gang down, another one come running behind it. We lost too many men that way. They used to call our school the slaughter house. You know Fremont. So we called it off. Just tried to isolate them.⁹⁰

Despite the rivalries between neighborhood groups, a stream of Black consciousness was emerging amongst members of the Clubs. Essential to this Black awakening was the unfolding of national events. In addition to Malcom X's martyrdom, the murder of three Civil Rights workers in Mississippi, the failure to convict suspect Byron De La Beckwith for the assassination of Medgar Evers in 1964, the violent attack on marchers in Selma in March of 1965, as well as the memory of Emmitt Till's lynching 10 years prior.⁹¹ In addition urban Black frustration had been manifest in the 1964 uprisings in Harlem, Rochester, Jersey City, Patterson, Elizabeth, Chicago and Philadelphia. Winston Slaughter of the Businessmen expressed the popular sentiment of the time, "they couldn't fight 'Whitey' in the South but we sure can here."⁹² Locally, the passing of Proposition 14 angered many Black residents who experienced housing discrimination first-hand. In addition, although the Spook Hunters no longer posed any real threat to the Black community, the LAPD under the direction of Chief Parker was notorious for its abuse of the Black and Chicano communities. Former Famers member Darrel Clarke recalls, "the police used to really fuck us up back then."⁹³

In the aftermath of the Watts uprising of 1965, researchers at UCLA conducted a survey investigating the issues and attitudes of residents within the curfew area. The study found 65% of Blacks believed the police used unnecessary force in arrests and that police beat people up once in custody while 70% believed police unnecessarily searched homes.⁹⁴ Forty-five percent of those surveyed reported being harassed, stopped and searched unnecessarily.⁹⁵ These findings led the researchers to conclude:

the police are viewing their responsibility as that of protecting the white community and keeping Negroes in line. As a result, the Negro community is frequently without the normal protection accorded to other communities. The police and the courts seem less concerned about Negro criminality directed solely against other Negroes. The Negroes see themselves as victims of a dual and selective law enforcement system."⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Tackwood, *The Glass House Tapes*, 81.

⁹¹ Conot, *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness*: Horne, *Fire This Time*: Rustin, *The Watts "Manifesto"*; Watani Stiner, "Something More Precious Than Freedom" (San Quentin: San Quentin State Prison, 2005, photocopies).

⁹² Quoted in Horne, *Fire This Time*.

⁹³ Darrel Carter, interview by author, Los Angeles, Jul. 7, 2010.

⁹⁴ Nathan E. Cohen *Los Angeles riot study: Summary and Implications for Policy* (Los Angeles: Institute of Government and Public Affairs, UCLA, 1967), 11.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

In addition to complaints of police terrorism, participants reported poor neighborhood and economic conditions, mistreatment by whites and job and housing discrimination were all concerns in their community. As major urban centers in the U.S. began to recover from the economic slump of the 1950s, the unemployment rate for Black males in South L.A. was still a high 10.9% in 1965. Those who were able to find work were disproportionately employed in service and general labor sectors. With the cost of living in L.A. steadily on the rise, the real income for Black families had fallen. In addition, the poverty rate was on a steady incline and had reached 30.9% by 1965.⁹⁷

The Military Occupation of Los Angeles

On Monday, August 11, 1965 the unfolding of events in Watts between citizens and local police would lead to a campaign that sent more troops into the streets of Los Angeles than had been deployed in the U.S. invasion of Santo Domingo in April of the same year.⁹⁸ Just after 7:00 pm the frustrations of citizens came to a head as CHP Officer Lee Minikus pulled over twenty-one year-old Marquette Frye on 116th and Avalon.⁹⁹ Raised in the coal mining town of Hanna, Wyoming, Marquette had no experience with the police until moving to Los Angeles at the age of twelve.¹⁰⁰ His father, Wallace, a former cotton farmer from Oklahoma, had been recruited by the United Mine Workers to relocate to Wyoming in 1944. As a child growing up in the homogenous setting of Wyoming, Marquette was a surprisingly assimilated child.¹⁰¹ In fact, he fondly remembers the feelings of belonging he enjoyed in Wyoming. It was not until he relocated to Los Angeles that he began to experience distinct feelings of alienation.¹⁰² Like so many others in L.A., Marquette would go on to become affiliated with one of the local Black clubs.¹⁰³

At the time of his confrontation with Officer Minikus, Marquette had been in L.A. for eight years and had become well acquainted with the racial politics Los Angeles and the tactics of the LAPD. In fact, on his first day in Los Angeles at the age of twelve, Marquette was picked up by the police after going out for an ice cream.¹⁰⁴ As a juvenile, Frye was incarcerated at a forestry camp for two years after being convicted of snatching a purse. The day of his encounter with Officer Minikus, Frye had been in court in Inglewood in support of his friend Milton who had been brought up on charges of burglary.

Officer Lee Minikus' arrest of Marquette Frye would be the fuse that ignited Black frustrations in L.A. After pulling over Marquette and his brother Ronald just two blocks from their home, Minikus placed Marquette under arrest and refused to allow his brother to drive their mother's car home.¹⁰⁵ As Minikus radioed for the car to be impounded, a crowd of onlookers steadily grew from dozens to hundreds. The crowd came in the defense of the Frye's and began

⁹⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁹⁸ Matthew Lasar, *Uneasy Listening: Pacifica Radio's Civil War* (Cambridge, U.K.: Black Apollo Press, 2006).

⁹⁹ California Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, *Transcripts, depositions, consultants reports, and selected documents* (Los Angeles, 1965) 9.

¹⁰⁰ Conot, *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness*.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.,

¹⁰³ Alex Alonso, "Out of the Void: Street Gangs in Black Los Angeles," in *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities*, ed Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón. (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 162.

¹⁰⁴ Conot, *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness*.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

scuffling with officers. As events progressed, the crowd began throwing rocks and other objects and their frustrations eventually boiled over as they forced the police to retreat. After sporadic outbreaks of confrontations with police and white motorists throughout the evening, control appeared to have been established late that night as police set up a perimeter to confine the outbursts. At 2:00 pm the next day, the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission held a meeting at Athens Park, eleven blocks from the scene of the Frye arrest, between community members and city officials.¹⁰⁶ After police refused to meet the demands of residents who called for the immediate withdraw of white officers from the perimeter area, skirmishes broke out. At 5:00 pm, approximately 22 hours after officer Minikus initial arrest of Marquette Frye, Chief William Parker phoned the National Guard asking them to prepare for deployment.

The LAPD had long been preparing for ghetto tensions too explode. In 1964 the California National Guard, in cooperation with the FBI, began joint riot control training exercises at the request of Chief William H. Parker. Parker had initially alerted Governor Edmund Brown that subversive elements were in danger of causing civil disturbances in July of 1963.¹⁰⁷ On Friday the 13th, two days after the initial altercation with Marquette Frye, Chief Parker alerted the 146th Air Transport Wing of the California Air National Guard in Van Nuys and the 129th Air Commando Group in Hayward to be prepared to airlift troops into Los Angeles.¹⁰⁸ Among the troops readying were 1,000 Air Guardsmen in Hayward preparing for the deployment to the Panama Canal Zone. After conferring with General Roderic Hill of the California National Guard, Mayor Yorty and Chief Parker on Friday afternoon at 4:50 pm, Lieutenant Governor Glenn Anderson signed the order commanding the California Army National Guard forces to occupy Los Angeles as American troops set out to attack Black citizens.¹⁰⁹

Under the command of Colonel Bud Taylor, troops invaded residential areas and quickly commandeered schools and playgrounds. Colonel Taylor established the Brigade Command Post and commanded the 2nd Brigade to proceed to the 97th Street School. He then ordered the 1st Battalion, 160th Infantry to assemble at Manchester Playground and sent the 1st Reconnaissance Squadron, 18th Armored Cavalry to John Muir Junior High School and the 1st Squadron, 111th Armored Cavalry to Jacob Riis High School.¹¹⁰

Colonel Taylor then assembled his men.

At [Will Rogers] park. . . units formed in company columns marched to the 65th Fire Station, at Success and 103rd Streets, where police assigned to the area had established a command post. There units were deployed in tactical formations. Company b moved to the east sector, with its far boundary at Grape Street and extending back to Beach Street, and including east-west streets between 102nd place and 105th Street. Company A followed, to establish its eastern boundary at Beach Street and occupy a similar area extending west to Success Avenue. Companies deployed in column formations and

¹⁰⁶ California Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, *Transcripts, depositions, consultants reports, and selected documents*.

¹⁰⁷ California National Guard, *Military Support of Law Enforcement During Civil Disturbances: A Report Concerning the California National Guard's Part in Suppressing the Los Angeles Riot, August 1965* (Sacramento, 1966).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

moved into assigned areas. Troops were positioned on each side of the street with about 15 yards between men.¹¹¹

Riding through the ghetto firing at citizens from .30 caliber machine guns mounted atop Jeeps, troops laid siege to entire neighborhoods.¹¹² In fact, 40th armored division had set up machine guns throughout the curfew area complete with hand painted signs reading “turn left or get shot.”¹¹³ In addition foot soldiers marched through the ghetto firing upon civilians. The National Guard reports, “Troop C men on dismounted patrol captured several looters. In one case attracted by the sound of breaking glass, a sergeant patrol leader dashed in the direction of the noise and spotted a looter. The man took off and refused to halt until several rounds were fired at him.”¹¹⁴ In another incident a private saw the outline of a man standing in a doorway leading to a balcony. The sentry fired a warning shot and the figure withdrew. A few moments later the man suddenly reappeared. The Guard fired once more. Police entered the building and found the civilian “had been killed and sent the body to the morgue by civilian ambulance”

In the aftermath of the siege, 34 lay dead, 3,952 civilians arrested and 1,032 wounded with \$40 Million in damage to the city.¹¹⁵ Although city officials blamed gangs for the unrest, the role of the Black clubs is hard to gauge. The Los Angeles County Probation Department reports that only 4.8% of juveniles arrested during the uprising had gang affiliations. The study commission warns, however, “the figure for gang affiliations is necessarily very conservative because gang members attempt to conceal their gang membership from peace officers.”¹¹⁶ What is definite, however, is that the state’s brutal repression of the uprising had a lasting effect on the Black clubs of Los Angeles.

Cultural Nationalism Establishes a Foothold

Although the majority of youth arrested for participating in the uprising spent their childhood in the South, by that time, they also had lived for 10 years or longer in Los Angeles, giving them a well-digested taste of the brutality of urban ghetto life.¹¹⁷ In 1965, the Watts uprising would bring all these organizations together. Born in Houston, Texas in 1948, Watani Stiner moved to Los Angeles along with his four siblings in 1955.¹¹⁸ A teenage member of the Gladiators, he recalls the uprising:

I remember it primarily as a taste of freedom. At age seventeen, my participation in the rebellion was enthusiastically random and psychologically satisfying. It felt so liberating riding and running down the streets screaming at the top of my lungs, “Burn, Baby, Burn!” Civil War!” Remember Emmet Till!” In my mind, this was payback for all the TV images of vicious dogs and water hoses turned loose on Black people in the South. We were showing Southern Negroes just how to deal with these white folks! And the real

¹¹¹ Ibid., 14-18.

¹¹² Ibid., 29.

¹¹³ Horne, *Fire This Time*.

¹¹⁴ *Military Support of Law Enforcement During Civil Disturbances*, 20.

¹¹⁵ California Advisory Committee, *An Analysis of the McCone Commission Report*.

¹¹⁶ Los Angeles County Probation Department, *Riot Participant Study: Juvenile Offenders* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Probation Department, 1965), 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Stiner, “Something More Precious Than Freedom.”

climax for me was actually witnessing white policemen rolling up their car windows and racing out of our community.¹¹⁹

The Watts Uprising quickened the process of radicalization among LA street organizations, catalyzing political mobilization. As the smoke from Watts cleared, Ron Everett emerged as the man best positioned to assume the leadership of this growing militancy. Born and raised in Parsonsburg, Maryland, Everett came to Los Angeles to attend college after graduating from Salisbury High School in 1958. High school in Virginia well prepared the young man for his future role of political leadership. At Salisbury, an all Black high school, Everett studied under 46-year principal, Charles Chipman, a Howard alumni who conducted graduate studies at Penn, Chicago and Heidelberg.¹²⁰ The fourteenth child of Addie and Levi, Ron Everett and his siblings were known as the local “smart folks,” exceptionally bright and hard-working students.¹²¹ After graduation from Salisbury, Ron joined his brother Chestyn, who was working in Los Angeles as a teacher after receiving degrees from Howard and John Hopkins.¹²²

Studying at Los Angeles City College, where he would go on to become student body president, Ron began to develop a far greater interest in Africa, studying African History and Kiswahili. In 1963, Everett began going by the name Ron Karenga, reflecting this burgeoning interest in African culture.¹²³ In the fall of 1965 Karenga and several colleagues consolidated these beliefs into the formation of the US organization. Arising out of a study group called the Circle of Seven, which met at the Aquarian bookstore, the organization took the name US, meaning “us Blacks” as opposed to “them white people.”¹²⁴ US politics was rooted in cultural nationalism, the belief that there are essential aspects of Black culture that are unique to Black people, therefore the path to Black liberation is a cultural project in which Black people must reclaim their collective African identity. Karenga, who initially served as the group's Chairman, would go on to assume leadership of US after the group's founder, Hakim Jamal left the group.¹²⁵ By the Spring of 1966, US members could frequently be seen adorned in t-shirts emblazoned with Karenga's face.¹²⁶

The US movement enjoyed success in Los Angeles, especially amongst petty-bourgeois college-going Blacks. Many early US members, in fact, were Pasadena City College students, encouraged to join the ranks by Clyde Daniels-Halisi, cofounder of the campus Black Students Union. Ron, who had begun to go by the name Malauna, Swahili for Master Teacher, taught his followers a brand of cultural nationalism. “The Negro is made and manufactured in America,” Karenga argued. “The fact that we are Black is our ultimate reality. We were Black before we were born.”¹²⁷ “We say the Negroes main problem in America is that he suffers from a lack of culture. We must free ourselves culturally before we succeed politically”

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹²⁰ Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

¹²¹ Brown, *Fighting for US*. 8-9.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 38.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Maulana Karenga, *The Quotable Karenga*, ed Clyde Halisi and James Mtume (Los Angeles: US Organization, 1967).

Stripped from their African lineage, the essentialist idea of an essential Black culture was appealing to many youth of the Watts generation. Those who embraced the teachings dedicated themselves to Karenga with a religious fervor. One of his followers exclaims:

I can remember myself before Maulana showed me the path of Blackness. I was so sick no one but Maulana could have saved me. Running around with no identity, purpose or direction. Maulana gave me an alternative to this white system. Now I don't have to wear some shark skin suit I had to buy from a Jew, I can wear my Buba. I no longer have to want those stringy haired, colorless, white women. Now I can look at them and say, "get back devil." Every time I see a beautiful Black sister with a natural, and can appreciate her beauty, I say, "all praises due to Maulana." And whenever I celebrate Malcolm's birthday instead of some dead slaveholding devil named George Washington, I again thank Maulana.¹²⁸

Karenga's disciples came primarily from the relatively more affluent west side of Los Angeles, further accentuating the existing class antagonisms between west and east side youth. "I was a 'Gladiator' from the West Side of Los Angeles," George Stiner, a prominent US member recalls. "Bunchy, a 'Slauson' from the East Side. Interestingly, mostly Slausons had joined the Black Panthers (whose headquarters were located in Slauson territory) while a majority of Gladiators became US "advocates" or joined the Simba Wachanga."¹²⁹

In large part, Karenga's attraction was due to his utilization of the militant rhetoric which mirrored the sentiments decreed by the Watts generation. His actions however, failed to capture the spirit and imagination of the rank and file radicalized street contingent. While the masses of youth in cities coast to coast were in the streets, entrenched in battle with the military apparatus of the United States government in the aftermath of the Martin Luther King Jr. assassination, Karenga was enjoying the comfort of the California Governor's Mansion in a meeting with Ronald Reagan. In spite of his ultra-radical public image, Karenga also received accolades from the notoriously racist LAPD Chief of Police Thomas Reddin, whom he also met with.¹³⁰

Despite insisting "the white boy can't create a culture for Blacks,"¹³¹ when the price was right, Karenga could be found building coalitions with some of the most reactionary sectors of white Los Angeles. In fact, Karenga received funding from Kent Lloyd and Kendall O. Price, heads of a Mormon cultural training program which sought to assist Black people by having them reflect on their inferior value system. Assistant Professors of Public Administration at USC, Lloyd and Price publicly declared Negroes "were cursed anciently and therefore cannot hold the [Mormon] priesthood."¹³² The belief in a Black damnation that "can be changed only through revelation to the prophet of the church" seemed not to conflict with Karenga's cultural nationalist stance. Karenga, in fact, served as an adviser for Lloyd and Price's cultural adjustment project.¹³³ These precarious relationships would cause many locals to accuse Karenga of opportunism. "Ron has a strong personal interest in exploiting the fear of violence

¹²⁸ Karenga, *The Quotable Karenga*, 1.

¹²⁹ Stiner, "Something More Precious Than Freedom," 4.

¹³⁰ Byron E. Calame, "Black Enigma," *Wall Street Journal*, Jul. 26, 1968, 1; Ray Rogers "In the Wake of Dr. King's Murder," *Los Angeles Times* Apr. 19, 1968, 1.

¹³¹ Karenga, *The Quotable Karenga*, 7.

¹³² Quoted in John Dart, "Mormons Set Training of Negro Executives," *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 24, 1968, 18

¹³³ *Ibid.*

without actually using it,” charged a local civil rights activist.¹³⁴ This accommodationist chicanery precluded Karenga from establishing a significant following amongst the hardened street youth, who would turn their gaze northward to Oakland for a genuine militancy. The consequences of this northward gaze would become manifest in the formation, of the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense.

Although the Black separatism advocated by both Karenga, and by Malcolm during his time with the NOI, was a reasonable response to white supremacy, it risked accommodating racism as much as challenged it. Karenga’s vision fought Black oppression but in ways that could never offer a true avenue out of it. US’ cultural nationalism constituted an aspiration to assert Black humanity but in a way that failed to challenge the material and political bases of Black oppression. It is not surprising therefore, both that Blacks would find solace in Kwanzaa-like escapism, and that George Bush’s White House would encourage such dreams.¹³⁵

Conclusion

By the mid-1960s, Blacks in California, and in fact across the entire nation, had been exposed to a wide range of ideologies, philosophies and institutions designed to liberate Black people from white supremacy and its continued legacies in the United States. In the late 1960s, however, many in the community began to question the value of a cultural alternative that was comfortable with white racist organizations. The racial order of Watts in 1965 lay in stark contrast to the beginnings of Los Angeles. That history, which starts with the original Black *pobladores*, is a history in which Black people in L.A. enjoyed a range of freedoms not typically found in the United States under Anglos elsewhere. But it was a set of freedoms that was not to last. Although relatively few Blacks migrated to Los Angeles in its early days as an American city, the spread of anti-Black racism soon established an American racial order that dramatically altered the landscape of possibilities for the Black population. During this period Blacks remained small in number, concentrated in residential areas that were fast becoming ghettos, and remained subject to the surveillance and threat of both the state and white citizenry generally. Inequality, discrimination and violence were daily experiences. By the mid-20th century, however, the promise of opportunities offered by wartime industry quickly brought hundreds of thousands of Blacks westward, and the Black population of L.A. exploded. With this population increase—and the increased hostility and discrimination of state condoned racism—came the rapid emergence of a Black ghetto in Los Angeles and youth in the 1940s formed social clubs in a response to white violence. As the ghetto matured, segregation became institutionalized and in 1965 thousands of frustrated Black people took to the streets in a demand for justice. As American troops occupied Watts and the surrounding area, the casualties suffered would lead to a political awakening among club members and a massive restructuring of existing organizations.

Malcolm and the Nation of Islam established themselves in the context of a growing Black community, a growing Black working class, and a politicization created by the Civil Rights Movement nationally. Within these dynamics, Black youth began to develop alternatives

¹³⁴ Calame, “Black Enigma.”

¹³⁵ On December 19, 2003, 43rd President of the United States, George W. Bush, issued a statement entitled *Presidential Message: Kwanzaa 2003*. In his exaltation, Bush states, “celebrated by millions across the world, Kwanzaa honors the history and heritage of Africa. This seven-day observance is an opportunity for individuals of African descent to remember the sacrifices of their ancestors and reflect on the Nguzo Saba. Kwanzaa’s seven social and spiritual principles offer strength and guidance to meet the challenges of each new day. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/12/20031219-3.html>

to the gangs. The direction these youth would eventually take was unclear. The growth of the Nation attracted large numbers of young Black men that would otherwise have become gang members. The development of cultural movements like US began to challenge the NOI for the hearts and minds of these youth however. Blackness was thus at something like a fork in the road. Would it develop in a political direction, or a kind of apolitical cultural nationalism that was as likely to accommodate oppression as to resist it? After all, Karenga, the Nation of Islam, and indeed the Slausons, all had cultural as well as political manifestations. They all for instance, were developing styles of dress that were distinctive and challenged the white mainstream. So we see all these things that are in place. The question is, could a movement develop? Although the heightened military repression of the Watts Uprising did not preclude radicalism, it was different from the assassination of members of the Black Panther Party in that the repression of Watts was both more widespread and it did not target a political leadership class. Whereas the repression at the time of Watts helped to create the Panthers in LA, the repression a few years later helped to destroy them. The difference is not that white supremacy was less severe in one period or the other, or even less murderous, but that the forms that repression takes, shift in its ever-evolving dance with resistance.

CHAPTER 3 REVOLUTIONARIES BEEN GANGSTA

Nigg[a]s were getting it together and what I saw forming was an army, not yet conscious of what it was destined to become.
-Eldridge Cleaver¹

In no period was the location of the roots of Black radicalism in the soil of Black criminality clearer than with the rise of the Panthers in the 1960s. In the wake of the 1965 Watts Rebellion young men began to abandon the territorial differences that had become part of the established norm of street organization culture in favor of organized Black radical politics. The Black Panther Party would come to reflect these aspirations, serving as the vanguard of the youthful movement. As a result of this process of radicalization, Black-on-Black violence in Los Angeles would come to a virtual standstill. A much deadlier violence was lurking in the shadows, however. The state would utilize systematic, repressive political violence to smash the Black Panther Party and their influence in Los Angeles. Still, state repression alone does not fully explain the demise of the Panthers. Just as the creative resources of Black criminality nurtured Panther radicalism, so to did they compromise it. To be clear, the murderous state apparatus was the primary source of the eclipse of Black radicalism, but the ways that Black youth internalized white supremacy and became its unwitting agents played a crucial if secondary role.

The Black Panther Party

The Black Panther Party played a leading role in galvanizing the radical political impulse of Black youth in Los Angeles. Formed in Oakland in October 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party advocated armed self-defense. Rejecting cultural nationalism, the Panthers articulated a vision of liberation that challenged both racial domination and capitalist class oppression. Whereas Malauna Karenga argued that “today in Afro-America there is but one class, an oppressed class,” Minister Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party advocated a class struggle as the means to the liberation of the oppressed Black masses. “Under the present system, under capitalism,” Newton argued,

they will [not] be able to solve these problems [of housing, unemployment, self-determination, justice, and imperialism]. I don't think Black people should be fooled by their come-ons, because everyone who gets in office promises the same thing. They promise full employment and decent housing; the Great Society, the New Frontier. All of these names, but no real benefits. Black people are tired of being deceived and duped. The people must have full control of the means of production.²

The commitment to public ownership of the means of production does not, however, explain the role of the Panthers in transforming the consciousness of Black America. The militant armed resistance of the Panthers to state repression and the equally militant but far more

¹ Eldridge Cleaver, *Target Zero: A Life in Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 125.

² Quoted in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 64.

greatly armed state assault on the Panther leadership shaped the rise and the eventual eclipse of Black radicalism in Los Angeles. The Panthers gained notoriety in Los Angeles and throughout the United States with the armed storming of the California Capitol on May 2, 1967. The Panthers had already initiated armed patrols to monitor the illegal activities of the Oakland Police Department. In response California lawmakers proposed legislation aimed directly at disarming the Black Panther Party. In protest, a group of 30 armed-Panthers entered the Capitol in Sacramento.³

Although the Sacramento action earned the Panthers worldwide press, the streets of Oakland remained the focal point of the Panthers radical resistance to state repression. No less than the action in Sacramento, a confrontation with Oakland police in the early hours of October 28, 1967, earned the Panthers the admiration of Black youth. At 4:51 a.m. police officer John Frey spotted a tan Volkswagen belonging to Huey P. Newton at the corner of Seventh and Willow Streets. Like other Oakland police, Frey was equipped with a list of the twenty cars, identified by police as belonging to members of the Black Panther Party. Frey was joined by Patrolman Herbert Heanes, and the two officers pulled the Volkswagen to the curb. What happened next, has been the topic of heated debates in courtrooms and history books. What is certain, however, at 5:03 a.m. Officer Heanes' frazzled voice muttered over the police radio waves, "940B!," police code for officer down. Back-up units arrived on the scene to find Heanes slumped in the seat of his car, seriously wounded. Frey lay in the street, soon to die from his wounds. Just after 5:30 a.m., Huey Newton hobbled into Kaiser Hospital's emergency room, a bullet in his thigh, four in his abdomen. Whereas Malcolm had only daydreamed of armed actions against police, Huey and the Panthers convinced Black youth that they really would respond to the police by whatever means necessary.

The Panthers growing reputation as the vanguard of armed Black struggle was not, however, the only crucial outcome of the two 1967 incidents. As a result of the action in Sacramento Chairman Bobby Seale was arrested, leaving Minister of Defense Huey Newton in sole defense of the Party. Then, the October 28 Oakland incident resulted in Minister of Defense Newton's being jailed to stand trial for kidnapping, assault with a deadly weapon and murder.⁴ With Huey and Bobby incarcerated the Party was without formal leadership and in danger of collapsing.⁵

Sowing the Panther Seed in L.A.

Eldridge Cleaver took over the Party's day-to-day operations. Before joining the Panthers Cleaver had spent considerable time in prison, where he wrote *Soul on Ice*. The book established him as America's preeminent revolutionary gangster, Black organic intellectual.⁶ Under Cleaver's leadership, the Party confirmed its commitment to organizing street youth. Cleaver who grew up in Los Angeles and knew first hand the culture of its street organizations,

³ Bobby Seale, *Seize The Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, [1971] 1991).

⁴ Michael Newton, *Bitter Grain: Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party* (Los Angeles: Holloway House, 1980).

⁵ It was not until the police assassination of 17 year old Lil' Bobby Hutton on April 6, 1968 (two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.) that Party membership would surge. These murders galvanized the public and large numbers of youth joined the BPP. With the incorporation of SNCC members such as Jamil Al-Amin (formerly H. Rap Brown) and Kwame Toure (formerly Stokely Carmichael) the BPP was able to expand nationally by combining SNCC's existing organizational foundation and its own message of armed self-defense to capture the imagination of a generation of youth disillusioned by the integrationist ideal.

⁶ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1999).

played a crucial role in launching the Panther's L.A. chapter. When prominent BPP member Earl Anthony approached Cleaver about establishing a chapter in Los Angeles, it seemed like the viable time. With Huey languishing in jail, the Party was in need of widening the support for their campaign to secure his release. Receptive about Anthony's suggestion, Cleaver stationed him in Los Angeles where he quickly established a branch of the Huey P. Newton Legal Defense Fund.⁷

Rather than being an effort to expand the Panthers influence, Earl Anthony's proposal to open an L.A. Chapter was part of an effort by state authorities to create dissension within the group and destroy it. Unbeknownst to Cleaver, Anthony had been working for the FBI the entire time he had been a member of the Black Panther Party.⁸ "[The FBI] told me to ask Cleaver to transfer me to Los Angeles," Anthony reveals, "to start a chapter down there, where I could be an independent leader inside the Panthers."⁹ With Cleaver's approval, Anthony began organizing in Los Angeles in November of 1967, transplanting himself there in January 1968.¹⁰

Anthony's FBI handlers told him to propose forming the L.A. chapter in hopes of raising his popularity so that he would be primed to secure a leadership position in the Party. Anthony's influence in Los Angeles would ultimately be minimal however. Building on his role in Los Angeles the FBI ordered him to write an account of his experiences as a Panther. Panther leaders however, were becoming increasingly suspicious of Anthony's activities and removed him from an active role in the organization.¹¹ Once again, state repression both threatened and dialectically nurtured Black radicalism. Free from the hindrance of FBI informant Early Anthony, the Party in L.A. began to flourish under Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter. Leader of L.A.'s largest street organization, the Slausons, Bunchy would become the cornerstone of the Black Panther Party in Los Angeles.

A Panther in L.A.

Anthony's excommunication opened the door for Carter, Eldridge's personal choice to lead the Party in L.A. Cleaver had become close friends with Bunchy while the two were incarcerated at Soledad and had been urging him to join the Party since Bunchy's release from prison in 1967.¹² Before his imprisonment, Bunchy, like many young men his age was a seemingly amiable youth. After graduating from Fremont High School he took up work at a department store in downtown Los Angeles. "According to Bunchy, he was so pretty that it brought tears of envy from other men's eyes when they saw him," Cleaver recalls.¹³ Living up to his reputation as a ladies man, Bunchy could often be found cruising his red and black MGB through the streets of LA. "When he got that car, you couldn't touch him with a ten foot pole," his brother Bernie recalls.¹⁴ His appeal with women was bolstered in part, by his reputation as head of the Slausons, Los Angeles' largest street organization.

Bunchy's carefree lifestyle would soon change however. He was sentenced to four years

⁷ Elaine Brown, *Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 113-115.

⁸ Earl Anthony, *Spitting in the Wind: The True Story Behind the Violent Legacy of the Black Panther Party* (Malibu, CA: Roundtable Publishing, 1990); Kenneth O'Reilly, "Racial Matters:" *The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1989).

⁹ Anthony, *Spitting in the Wind*, 44.

¹⁰ Brown, *Taste of Power*: Anthony, *Spitting in the Wind*.

¹¹ Earl Anthony, *Spitting in the Wind*.

¹² Cleaver, *Target Zero*.

¹³ Cleaver, *Target Zero*, 116.

¹⁴ Jasmyne A. Cannick, "Interview with Bernie Morris" *The Los Angeles Sentinel* Mar. 28, 2010.

at Soledad Penitentiary for the armed robbery of a Security Pacific Bank. His transformation from “gang” leader to revolutionary began with his conversion to Islam during his Soledad stint.¹⁵ Apprehensive over his politicization, his transformation was not readily embraced by his mother. “I remember my first introduction to the Nation of Islam,” his brother recalls, “was when Bunchy, and our brothers John and Glen came into the house one day and declared no more pork! It drove my mother insane. Here she was trying to feed a family of ten on a limited budget where there was no room to be selective about what was for dinner. It was utter chaos.”¹⁶

Upon parole from Soledad, Bunchy went to San Francisco to reunite with his old friend Cleaver. When Bunchy arrived, Cleaver argues, he refused to join the Party because of his disapproval of Huey Newton. “What’s wrong with you, Eldridge?” Cleaver remembers Bunchy asking. “Have you gone out of your motherfucking mind? Don’t you know a poo-but when you see one? Let’s not get hung up with these college boys?”¹⁷ After Bunchy’s denunciation the two old friends agreed Bunchy would wait a few months before making a final decision.

By the time Huey was arrested for the Frey murder, Bunchy had made his decision and gave his full allegiance to Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party. As the head of the Slausons, Bunchy realized Huey represented the ideal combination of characteristics necessary for the achievement of Black liberation. On the one hand, he had the aggression, the fearlessness, the natural instincts that keep a criminal out of jail. On the other hand, he had the consciousness and the sense of connection with the Black community and its struggles that prevented him from falling deep into the pit of nihilism. “Huey Newton,” Bunchy argued,

Was able to go down, and to take the nigg[a] on the street and relate to him, understand what was going on inside of him, what he was thinking, and then implement that into a PROGRAM and a PLATFORM. . . Into the BLACK PANTHER PARTY. . . This is the genius of Huey Newton.¹⁸

“You have to understand that Bunchy, he didn’t have the same fear that I had,” his brother Bernie remembers. “He was a very proud strong young man, and by this time, he had been arrested and incarcerated whereas a person like me who had not been involved in any of that kind of stuff was scared.”¹⁹ In the aftermath of Huey’s arrest, Cleaver made his voyage to L.A. where he witnessed Bunchy’s newfound commitment firsthand. At the time, Bunchy’s mother had found him a job at a Teen Post on Central Ave. “From Bunchy’s point of view,” Eldridge argues, “it was a good deal, because it provided him with a cover for his parole officer’s eyes, and at the same time it provided him with a physical facility in which he could begin to organize.”²⁰ Once Anthony was removed, the Teen Post would help to fill the ranks of the Southern California chapter. Cleaver reveals his excitement while on his visit to the Teen Post:

Bunchy took me upstairs to a room, where I was surprised to find waiting for me about a dozen niggers with every kind of gun you could imagine. . . on the roof, where I could see on each surrounding rooftop that he pointed to, a brother with a rifle on sentry duty. .

¹⁵ Brown, *Taste of Power*.

¹⁶ Brown, *Taste of Power*.

¹⁷ Cleaver, *Target Zero*, 115.

¹⁸ Quoted in Roderick D. Bush, *We Are Not What We Seem: Black Nationalism and Class Struggle in the American Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 197.

¹⁹ Cannick, “Interview with Bernie Morris.”

²⁰ Cleaver, *Target Zero*, 124.

. As I walked out the door, Bunchy's troops formed lines on both sides of me and walked along with me, their guns at the ready.²¹

This militaristic posture witnessed by Cleaver was more than a simple performance. This soldierly spirit was rooted in Bunchy's experience as head of the Slausons and became a central component of Panther politics in L.A. Flores Forbes, a prominent member of the Southern California chapter remembers, "because of the military posture of this organization, the BPP had embraced the street gang-style of discipline popularized by Bunchy Carter."²²

In large part, Bunchy's success as a leader relied on his ability to popularize the image of the revolutionary amongst the youthful members of Los Angeles street organizations. Known as the Mayor of the Ghetto, "Bunchy had a reputation that was preceded only by the one Huey P. Newton had," Forbes recounts.²³ With his background as the former head of the 5,000 strong Slausons, this charismatic twenty-five year-old was able to unite virtually all of the Black gangs in Los Angeles. "Niggers were getting it together and what I saw forming was an army, not yet conscious of what it was destined to become," Cleaver remembers.²⁴ In theory, the BPP was to serve as the vanguard of the Black Nationalist Revolution, providing the necessary example of revolutionary activity for the masses of poor Blacks, especially young disaffected gang members. This strategy would lead to the L.A. Panthers rapid growth, as 50-100 new recruits enlisted into the chapter per week.²⁵

Formally serving as the Deputy Minister of Defense for the Southern California Chapter, Bunchy Carter would propel the party's popularity in L.A. as they would soon compete with US and establish their dominance in Los Angeles. This popularity was due in large part to Bunchy's ability to cast himself as an outlaw resisting the false authority of the state. The popular appeal of this renegade image amongst the colonized masses is a point Fanon makes vividly clear:

The people make use of certain episodes in the life of the community in order to hold themselves ready and to keep alive their revolutionary zeal. For example, the gangster who holds up the police set on to track him down for days on end, or who dies in a single combat after having killed four or five policemen, or who commits suicide in order not to give away his accomplices-these types light the way for the people, form the blueprints for action and become heroes. Obviously, it's a waste of breath to say that such-and-such a hero is a thief, a scoundrel, or a reprobate. If the act for which he is prosecuted by the colonial authorities is an act exclusively directed against a colonialist person or colonialist property, the demarcation line is definite and manifest. The process of identification is automatic.²⁶

Under Carter's leadership the Panther Party spread like wildfire throughout Los Angeles, establishing branches in Santa Ana, San Diego, Pasadena, Pomona, Venice Riverside and Santa Monica.²⁷ Much of the chapter's work was targeted at community development through their survival programs such as the Breakfast for Children Program. With Panther popularity

²¹ Cleaver, *Target Zero* 124-125.

²² Flores Forbes, *Will You Die With Me? My Life and the Black Panther Party* (New York: Atria Books, 2006), 72.

²³ Forbes, *Will You Die With Me*, 25.

²⁴ Cleaver, *Target Zero*, 125.

²⁵ Brown, *Taste of Power*.

²⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 69.

²⁷ *The Black Panther Black Community New Service* May 31, 1969.

spreading, Hollywood soon beckoned and the financial support from celebrities further enabled the Party to increase their organizing capacity.²⁸ With these successes, the L.A. Chapter became highly active, bringing the ire of the federal government.

The Empire Strikes Back

The possibilities for Black radicalism are never independent of the forms and levels of state repression. As the Party's momentum in Los Angeles grew, so did the state's repression, forcing Black youth into an unpredictable dance with oppression and resistance. In March of 1968, Bunchy Carter's brother Arthur was murdered, making him the first in a long line of Panther martyrs.²⁹ Later that month, police would also murder LA Panther Anthony Coltrane in Watts.³⁰ With the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and "Lil" Bobby Hutton in April of 1968, the Black Panther Party rose in popularity as membership around the country swelled. This rise in popularity would bring with it the attention of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI and lead Hoover to label the Black Panther Party as the "greatest threat to the internal security of the United States."³¹ Through his now infamous Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), Hoover set out to destroy the Black Panther Party.³² In a 1967 letter issued to FBI headquarters, Hoover described COINTELPRO as an "endeavor to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters, and their propensity for violence and civil disorder."³³ His tactics would include the use of undercover informants, the exacerbation of conflicts existing between competing revolutionary organizations, torture, death threats and assassinations.³⁴

In the case of Bunchy Carter and the L.A. Panthers, Hoover and the FBI would concentrate on the use of informants and the exacerbation of existing conflicts with other Black organizations.³⁵ In his 1967 letter, Hoover emphasizes "[n]o opportunity should be missed to exploit through counterintelligence techniques the organizational and personal conflicts of the leaderships of the groups and where possible an effort should be made to capitalize upon existing conflicts between competing Black Nationalist organizations."³⁶

With the installation of Earl Anthony in Los Angeles, the Panthers in southern California were infiltrated from the onset. Between August 1968 and December 1969, however, national and local agencies increased their offensive against the Los Angeles Chapter of the Black Panther Party, resulting in more casualties than any other chapter. The attacks began with the murders of "Little" Tommy Lewis, Steve Bartholemew and Robert Lawrence in Watts on August

²⁸ Brown, *Taste of Power*.

²⁹ Cannick, "Interview with Bernie Morris."

³⁰ Newton, *Bitter Grain*.

³¹ Winston Grady-Willis, "The Black Panther Party: State Repression and Political Prisoners" in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press [1998] 2005), 366; Huey P. Newton, *War against the Panthers: a Study of Repression in America* (New York, Harlem River Press, 1996); O'Reilly, "Racial Matters."

³² Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party*. (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004); Grady-Willis, "The Black Panther Party."

³³ J. Edgar Hoover "Memorandum to Special Agent in Charge, Albany New York Aug. 25, 1967" reprinted in *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan* ed William L. Van Deburg. New York : New York University Press, c1997), 134.

³⁴ Grady-Willis, "The Black Panther Party"; Newton, *War against the Panthers*; O'Reilly, "Racial Matters."

³⁵ O'Reilly, "Racial Matters."

³⁶ Hoover "Memorandum to Special Agent in Charge."

5, 1968 by LAPD officers Rudy Limas and Norman Roberge.³⁷ After being pulled over at a service station at 4314 W. Adams Blvd., the young Panthers managed to wound the two officers before being slaughtered.³⁸ The increased repression politicized a vast array of disaffected youth, accelerating their alliances. Along with the large number of whites in attendance of the funeral for eighteen year-old Thomas Lewis, was a large contingent of Brown Berets, one of them serving as a pallbearer.³⁹

The year 1969 would bring a tsunami of State repression leveled at the Black Panther Party.⁴⁰ The year began with the killing of Frank “Captain Franco” Diggs in Long Beach on January 1.⁴¹ In May, the LAPD launched a two-week offensive that resulted in the arrests of 42 Panthers. On May 15, J. Edgar Hoover released an internal memo reading “The Breakfast for Children Program represents the best and most influential activity going for the BPP and, as such, is potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for.”⁴² On September 8, police raided the Breakfast for Children Program in Watts. Many of the young children who ate at the program would later go on to fill the ranks of the first generation of Crips and Bloods in Los Angeles. On October 10, Walter Toure Pope was murdered by the LAPD. Finally, on December 8 the LAPD raided Panther headquarters in an attempt to murder Geronimo Ji Jaga.

Tensions Build With US

As both the Panthers and US grew in popularity, the FBI developed strategies to curtail their influence in Los Angeles. The exacerbation of existing conflicts between the two groups became the preferred tactic of suppression. On November 25, 1968, J. Edgar Hoover issued a memo stating:

a serious struggle is taking place between the Black Panther Part (BPP) and the US organization. The struggle has reached such a proportion that it is taking on the aura of gang warfare with attendant threats of murder and reprisals. In order to fully capitalize upon BPP and US differences as well as exploit all avenues of creating further dissension

³⁷ Anthony, *Spitting in the Wind*; Brown; *Taste of Power*; Newton, *Bitter Grain*.

³⁸ Roy Harris & Dick Main, “2 officers Shot, 3 Men Slain,” *Los Angeles Times* Aug. 6, 1968, 0_1.

³⁹ William Drummond & Ray Rogers, “Negroes, Mexican-Americans Drill at Funeral of Panther” *Los Angeles Times* Aug. 11, 1968, FB.

⁴⁰ In 1969 with the systematic killing of 43 members of radical Black organizations and the mass caging of hundreds of political prisoners such as the New York 21, J. Edgar Hoover had unleashed his COINTELPRO, a campaign that would eventually crush the Black Panther Party and would end with the vicious murder of 21 year old Chairman Fred Hampton and 19 year old Defense Captain Mark Clark by the Chicago Police Department on December 4. On April 2, NYPD arrested 21 members of the New York Chapter of the BPP charging them with a variety of crimes including conspiracy to blow up the New York Botanical Gardens. The defendants would spend the entire duration of their trial incarcerated (nearly two years) before being acquitted by a jury of all charges after less than 30 minutes of deliberation. One of the central figures in the framing was New York undercover detective Gene Roberts. Roberts, who also infiltrated Malcolm X’s inner circle was Malcolm’s bodyguard the night he was assassinated at the Audubon Ball room in New York City on February 21, 1965. *All Power to the People!: The Black Panther Party and Beyond*, DVD, directed by Lee Lew Lee, (New York, NY: Filmmakers Library, 1996).

⁴¹ Newton, *Bitter Grain*.

⁴² Quoted in Newton, *Bitter Grain*, 108-109.

in the ranks of the BPP, recipient offices are instructed to submit imaginative and hard-hitting counterintelligence measures aimed at crippling the BPP.⁴³

The history of the Panther/US conflict is complex.⁴⁴ The two organizations were primarily made up of local young women and men who had grown up in each other's company.⁴⁵ Despite ideological differences, in Los Angeles, paths crossed and work overlapped. Early on, members of the two groups formed several formal coalitions and frequently built informal relationships.⁴⁶ "In the beginning the Panthers and US worked together," Karenga remembers.⁴⁷ One space where members of the two groups coexisted was Karenga's alma mater, UCLA.⁴⁸ US member Bobette Muminina Azizi Glover and Panther Elaine Brown were roommates at the campus, where, Brown, Bunchy Carter, John Huggins, and Geronimo Pratt had enrolled in 1968.⁴⁹ Watani Stiner, an US member, remembers UCLA as a place where the two organizations frequently fraternized:

[we] debated politics, studied together, and socialized. In the evening, members of both organizations recited poetry and gathered around the piano while Elaine composed and sang songs of struggle. Late at night, Tawala, Sikia, Stadi and I would occasionally steal our way up the elevator to play strip poker with Elaine and her roommates. Tawala and Elaine in particular had a teasing, flirtatious relationship.⁵⁰

Despite these partnerships, ideological differences and competition between the groups opened the door for the FBI's plot to dismantle Black radical politics in L.A. As mutual suspicions between the groups escalated into skirmishes, the FBI intervened, capitalizing on the antagonisms by sending both US and the BPPP a series of anonymous letters and caricatures intended to instigate violence between the groups.⁵¹ In a memo to FBI headquarters, the Special Agent in Charge of the Los Angeles office wrote:

The Los Angeles Division is aware of the mutually hostile feelings harbored between the organizations and the first opportunity to capitalize on the situation will be maximized. It is intended that US Inc. will be appropriately and discreetly advised of the time and location of BPP activities in order that the two organizations might be brought together and thus grant nature the opportunity to take her due course.⁵²

⁴³ Memorandum from FBI Headquarters to 14 Field Offices 11/25/68; Quoted in Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents From the FBI's Secret Wars Against Dissent in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 130.

⁴⁴ For a detailed account of the feud between US and the BPP see O'Reilly, "Racial Matters."

⁴⁵ Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

⁴⁶ Watani Stiner, "Something More Precious Than Freedom" (San Quentin: San Quentin State Prison, 2005, photocopies).

⁴⁷ Quoted in Kenneth O'Reilly, "Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972" (New York: The Free Press, 1989). Watani Stiner also recalls, "at first, the Panthers and Us coexisted relatively peacefully." Stiner, "Something More Precious Than Freedom," 4.

⁴⁸ Brown, *Taste of Power*.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Fighting for US*; Stiner, "Something More Precious Than Freedom."

⁵⁰ Stiner, "Something More Precious Than Freedom," 7.

⁵¹ O'Reilly, "Racial Matters."

⁵² Memorandum from Los Angeles Field Office to FBI Headquarters, 5/26/70, Quoted in *Supplementary Detailed*

The promotion of violence between the two groups resulted in several murders of Black Panther Party members throughout Southern California.⁵³ UCLA, the mutual stomping ground for both organizations, was the sight of the attack that would strike at the heart of the Party. “UCLA was fast becoming a hotbed of tension between Us and the Panthers,” US member Watnai Stiner recalls.⁵⁴ FBI encouraged hostilities came to a head on January 17, 1969, as both groups assembled to debate over who would lead the emerging Black Studies program at the campus. To the dismay of many students, Charles Thomas, Karenga’s nomination for head of the program, was backed by campus officials.⁵⁵ When the Black Student Union, which included Panthers amongst its ranks, organized a series of meetings to debate the nomination, the Black Panther Party was invited. At the January 17 meeting held at UCLA’s Campbell Hall, both US and BPP members were in attendance. With tensions between the two groups running high, a disagreement broke out between US member Harold Tawala Jones and Panther Elaine Brown.⁵⁶ As Bunchy came to Brown’s rescue, shooting erupted. Bunchy Carter and John Huggins were killed in the melee.

Folktales and scholarly accounts have interpreted the incident in various, often times conflicting ways. Although Karenga was absent on that fateful day, some argue he was nothing more than an FBI informant, serving as a proxy for the calculated murder of Carter and Huggins.⁵⁷ Others defend Karenga, affording him the same victim status as the Panthers.⁵⁸ What is certain, is that the state took an active role in encouraging the bloodshed. In fact, the United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities commonly known as the Church Committee, a U.S. Senate committee established to investigate the intelligence gathering practices of the CIA and FBI, concluded:

FBI officials were clearly aware of the violent nature of the dispute, engaged in actions which they hoped would prolong and intensify the dispute, and proudly claimed credit for violent clashes between the rival factions which, in the words of one FBI official, resulted in "shootings, beatings, and a high degree of unrest."⁵⁹

Whether or not the shooting happened on January 17, the FBI was convinced, Bunchy Carter had to be neutralized. What is also for certain, that although both organization were heavily infiltrated, the overwhelming bulk of the FBI’s efforts in Los Angeles were targeted at

Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans Book III Final Report of The Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities United States Senate April 23 (under authority of the order of April 14), 1976. 1-2.

⁵³ O’Reilly, *Racial Matters*.

⁵⁴ Stiner, “Something More Precious Than Freedom.”

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Brown, *Taste of Power*; Stiner, “Something More Precious Than Freedom.”

⁵⁷ For accounts of Karenga’s alleged involvement see Anthony, *Spitting in the Wind: Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, Agents of repression: the FBI's secret wars against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, [1988] 2002); M. Wesley Swearingen, *FBI Secrets: An Agents Exposé* (Boston, South End Press, 1995).

⁵⁸ See Brown, *Fighting for US*; Stiner, “Something More Precious Than Freedom.”

⁵⁹ Quoted in *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans Book III Final Report of The Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities United States Senate April 23 (under authority of the order of April 14), 1976.*

the Black Panther Party.⁶⁰ The state, in fact, was happy to have cultural nationalism. Hoover's November, 1968 memo makes clear that although he considered the Black Panther Party a threat, he did not mind the presence of US. After all, it was the BPP that he identified as the "greatest threat to the internal security of the country" in September '68.⁶¹

After the shooting, Panthers, including Melvin "Cotton" Smith, who would later be identified as an FBI informant, rendezvoused at John and Ericka Huggins' apartment on Century Boulevard.⁶² Led by Detective Captain Lucey of the 77th Division station, 150 police surrounded the apartment. Immediately, police snatched Geronimo and Nathaniel Clark in the driveway as they packed their cars in preparation to flee Los Angeles. "All you motherfuckers come out or we'll blow their heads off!" police demanded of the occupants.⁶³ As the four women inside huddled on the floor in an attempt to protect Ericka Huggins' newborn baby, shotgun-wielding police burst into the room. "You motherfuckin' bitches get up!"⁶⁴ Ridiculing Elaine, the officers spewed, "you're the oldest whore of the pink pussies, so you might be the one with the biggest hole."⁶⁵ Within hours of the murders of Bunchy Carter and John Huggins, police were hauling Panthers off to jail. The day of her widowhood, Ericka and her baby were taken captive by police while US members were free to walk the streets.⁶⁶ In the aftermath of the UCLA murders, in fact, over 75 Panthers were rounded up in raids throughout Los Angeles.

The murders of Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter and John Huggins illuminate the ways in which the state undermined revolutionary political nationalism with the use of cultural nationalism. A cultural nationalism which reflected a thirst for liberation, but one that will always remain a pie in the sky without providing a concrete analysis of oppression or ways to address it.

Daryl Gates, SWAT and the Final Surge Against the BPP

Special Weapons and Tactics

While the Panthers were treading the waters of counterinsurgency, struggling to stay afloat, Daryl Gates, future Chief of Police in Los Angeles, was busying himself plotting the assault that would finally drown the Panther menace. "The Panthers" Gates argued, "were modern-day mountebanks, a rabble-rousing street gang with a bit of Che Guevara political savvy."⁶⁷ Gates was convinced ridding Los Angeles of the Panther nuisance required a fresh approach, free from the inhibitions of liberal sensibilities. "Although we viewed the Panthers as a criminal gang," he recalls, "the police were working hard to establish a better relationship with the black community. Unfortunately, we were guided by some pretty unenlightened ideas, one being that we needed some special way to reach a minority."⁶⁸ With the FBI's backing, Gates

⁶⁰ Earl Anthony, for example, claims the FBI "said they were tired of the 'Panther shit, and the FBI had worked out a deal with Karenga where they would supply US with weapons and a master plan to destroy the LA Black Panther Party.", 51.

⁶¹ Quoted in *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans Book III Final Report of The Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities United States Senate* April 23 (under authority of the order of April 14), 1976.

⁶² Brown, *Taste of Power*.

⁶³ Quoted in Brown, *Taste of Power*, 168.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, *Taste of Power*, 169.

⁶⁶ Five members of US would eventually be indicted for the murder with three receiving convictions. See Stiner, "Something More Precious Than Freedom."

⁶⁷ Daryl F. Gates with Diane K. Shah, *Chief: My Life in the LAPD* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 117.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

was able to override departmental concerns of community relations and actualize his vision of a more repressive campaign.

Gates' experience during the Watts Uprising served in his development of new tactics to attack the Panthers. "Because of my role in Watts," he recalls, "I became—improbable as it sounds—LAPD's resident expert on riots and a national expert on riot control. . . I realized again as I had during Watts, that we were going to have to devise another method.⁶⁹ This new method would be found in the counterinsurgency campaigns of the US military. "Without official authorization," Gates recalls,

we began reading what we could get our hands on concerning guerilla warfare. We watched with interest what was happening in Vietnam. We looked at military training, and in particular we studied what a group of marines, based at Naval Armory in Chavez Ravine, were doing. They shared with us their knowledge of counterinsurgency and guerilla warfare. In time our little group came to include some brilliant tacticians.⁷⁰

This "little group," was Gates' response to the Panther menace—SWAT, a breakthrough in urban police assault tactics. SWAT officers, many of whom served in Vietnam, attended guerilla warfare training sessions at Camp Pendelton. Learning from both Marines and Delta Force, the Army's premier elite counter-terrorism unit, SWAT was intended to function as an occupying army.⁷¹ "The streets of America's cities had become a foreign territory," Gates argued. "Urban riots signaled one kind of disorder, but we also had civil rights actions, sit-downs, and student uprisings and protests of every kind. . . these were miserable people; pot-smokers, college dropouts, wayward and lost human beings."⁷²

The Assault on Central Avenue

SWAT, which "operates like a quasi-militaristic operation," would be baptized in its inaugural action on December 8, 1969 when Gates deployed his new unit in a raid on Panther headquarters.⁷³ After securing a warrant, 400 police officers converged on the Central Avenue office. In the wake of the brutal assassination of Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton just four days prior, however, Panther's were prepared.⁷⁴

As the LAPD surrounded the office, armed with AR-15 automatic rifles, helicopters, tear gas and dynamite, Panthers settled in and resisted the barrage for several hours.⁷⁵ With the battle raging on, Gates' men, "worked on devising new tactics. They considered asking the fire department for shape charges—explosives used to blow open a hole from the skylight or roof so

⁶⁹ Ibid., 109.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 109.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 110.

⁷³ Ibid., 115.

⁷⁴ On December 4, under the directive of the FBI, Chicago Police led a massacre of Panthers assassinating 21 year-old Deputy Chairman Fred Hampton along with Defense Captain Mark Clark. Hampton, drugged with secobarbital by undercover informant William O'Neal, slept through the entire event as the police fired over 100 bullets into Panther headquarters at 2337 W. Monroe at 4:00 a.m. As he lay sleeping next to his eight-and-a-half month pregnant wife Akua Njeri (formerly Deborah Johnson), Hampton was killed by a bullet fired through his head at point blank range by Officer Willie "Gloves" Davis. See O'Reilly, "*Racial Matters*."

⁷⁵ Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of repression: the FBI's secret wars against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, [1988] 2002).

firemen can get their hoses inside a burning building. But the intelligence didn't have a diagram of the Panther's top floor."⁷⁶

Unable to drop explosives into the building from the roof, Gates recalls,

SWAT said, "Well, we need a grenade launcher." LAPD did not have a grenade launcher. Only the military had them. They were tantamount to a rocket device today, capable of firing a mortar shell that would blast a hole in the building. SWAT hoped the fire blast would scare the Panthers out. If it didn't, two or three more blasts would surely kill everyone inside. . . I called the marines at Camp Pendleton to ask if we could borrow their grenade launcher. The commanding officer said, "You're going to have to get permission from the Department of Defense and probably the President of the United States." This would take time. And Camp Pendleton, just north of San Diego, was a two-hour drive from Los Angeles. The officer must have read my thoughts. "We'll get the equipment together and put it on the road," he said, "so you'll have it if you get permission." I called Mayor Sam Yorty next and asked if he would make the call to Washington. My words seemed unreal. Anytime you even *talk* about using military equipment in a civil action, it's very serious business. You're bridging an enormous gap. The Pentagon got back to us within the hour. We had permission to use the grenade launcher.⁷⁷

Prepared to blow the Panthers to smithereens, the assault came to an end as the Panthers decided to surrender once the press had arrived.⁷⁸ "In a nondescript military vehicle parked on a side street nearby," Gates recalls, "sat one very frightening military grenade launcher. Primed and ready to blast the house to kingdom come."⁷⁹

The LAPD wounded six Panthers and captured seventeen in the siege. But for their decision to surrender, those barricaded in the office might have very well been victims of a domestic bombing authorized by the Pentagon. Even more dismaying, the LAPD obtained its warrant under the false testimony of Sergeant Raymond Callahan to Municipal Court Judge Antonio Chavez.⁸⁰ Even further, one of the Panthers held up in the office was Melvin "Cotton" Smith, head of Panther security and third in charge, who doubled as an FBI informant and provided police with a detailed diagram of Panther headquarters.⁸¹

The Caging of Geronimo

The final blow against the Los Angeles Chapter of the Black Panther Party came with the framing of Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt on murder charges. Raised in Morgan City, Louisiana, Pratt came to Los Angeles in August 1968 after serving in Vietnam where he earned 18 combat decorations.⁸² Sensing his impending martyrdom, Bunchy Carter left an audio tape recording

⁷⁶ Gates, *Chief*, 121.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

⁷⁸ Churchill, *Agents of repression*.

⁷⁹ Gates, *Chief*, 123.

⁸⁰ Churchill, *Agents of repression*; Kit Kim Holder, "The history of the Black Panther Party, 1966-1971: A curriculum tool for Afrikan-American studies" (EdD diss., University of Massachusetts, 1990), 52-53.

⁸¹ Churchill, *Agents of repression*.

⁸² Churchill, *Agents of repression*: Jack Olsen, *Last Man Standing: the Tragedy and Triumph of Geronimo Pratt* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

naming Geronimo as his replacement.⁸³ Early on, the FBI labeled Geronimo a “Key Black Extremist,” and began devising plans to liquidate him.⁸⁴

After a failed assassination plot and several attempts to secure indictments on Pratt, police and FBI agents were finally able to remove him from the streets on December 4, 1970, by framing him for the murder of a white schoolteacher, Caroline Olsen in Santa Monica.⁸⁵ Former FBI Special Agent M. Wesley Swearingen asserts “several agents on the racial squad knew that Pratt was innocent because the FBI had wiretap logs proving that Pratt was in the San Francisco area several hours before the shooting.”⁸⁶ Swearingen in fact, points out that there were “a total of three wiretaps known to the FBI with information that placed Pratt in the San Francisco area before, during, and after the murder. . . and yet the FBI withheld this information from the court and the jury.”⁸⁷ Even further, Julius Butler, the state’s key witness who testified that he had heard Geronimo confess to the murder was an FBI informant.⁸⁸ Despite all of these facts, Geronimo was convicted of first degree murder on July 28, 1972.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Under the leadership of former Slauson Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter, the Black Panther Party’s short-lived reign all but ended gang in violence Los Angeles. With the cessation of gang violence and the Party’s community service through their survival campaigns, one would assume that Bunchy and the Black Panther Party became the recipients of government accolades. As we have seen, the story ends tragically however. With the Black Panther Party standing as “the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States,” J. Edgar Hoover’s COINTELPRO launched a particularly barbaric campaign of neutralization leveled at the L.A. Chapter. Treating the Black ghetto as an internal colony, SWAT leveled the crushing blow to the Panthers. The attack on the Panthers consisted of a two-pronged strategy. In addition to the military repression, there was a simultaneous need to both recruit Black agents in the projects of repression, and to foster alternatives to the Panthers project. State assassinations and the encouragement of US as a cultural alternative of the Panthers decimated radical Black politics in L.A.

The precarious traversal between the poles of resistance and criminality left the Black Panther Party vulnerable to the leviathan of State repression. “Neither Us nor the BPP,” Watani Stiner recalls, “was able to transcend its organizational arrogance. The re-emergence of the competitive gang/turf mentality had created the opening for the penetration of the FBI’s counterintelligence program, COINTELPRO, into both organizations.”⁹⁰

If the rise of Black political radicalism was nurtured in the culture of Black criminality, so too did the murderous repression of Black radicalism set the stage for the rebirth of Black

⁸³ Churchill, *Agents of repression*.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Churchill, *Agents of repression: Olsen, Last Man Standing: Swearingen, FBI Secrets*.

⁸⁶ Swearingen, *FBI Secrets*, 86.

⁸⁷ Swearingen, *FBI Secrets*, 87.

⁸⁸ Churchill, *Agents of repression*, Akinyele Omowale Umoja, “Set Our Warriors Free: The Legacy of the Black Panther Party and Political Prisoners” in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* ed Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press [1998] 2005). 424.

⁸⁹ While awaiting trial, Pratt’s eight months pregnant-wife, Saundra, also a prominent member of the Los Angeles BPP chapter was murdered. Pratt was notified of her death by Sergeant Raymond Callahan, the same officer that deliberately provided false testimony in order to secure the search warrant for the raid on Central Ave. “We just identified a Jane Doe at the morgue,” Callahan told Pratt. “Your wife’s dead. So’s your baby.” Olsen, *Last Man Standing*, 93.

⁹⁰ Stiner, “Something More Precious Than Freedom,” 9.

gangs. The draconian measures of systematic murder and imprisonment of Panther leadership would produce a void in revolutionary ideology, leaving the next generation of rank and file gang members vulnerable to the dangers presented by the celebration of criminality.

CHAPTER 4 NOT QUITE PANTHERS

We must grow tough, but without ever losing our
tenderness.

-Che Guevara¹

The argument presented in this chapter challenges current explanations for our understanding of the motivating factors behind the formations of the Crips. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the Black Power movement had a tremendous influence on youth in Los Angeles. At the height of Panther popularity, police repression and violence, a younger generation was on the sidelines, listening, watching, and waiting their turn. Too young to play a significant role in the development of Black power politics in the late 1960s, many of these youth began forming their own organizations, adopting the style and imagery of the Black Panther Party. In fact, one of these organizations, the Crips, developed in Bunchy Carter's neighborhood, the epicenter of Black Panther politics in Los Angeles. Central to the formation of these organizations were some key individuals.

Raymond Washington

Born in Texas and raised in South Central Los Angeles near 76th and Wadsworth Streets, Raymond Washington is credited as the founding father of the Crip organization. Soft-spoken, short and stocky, standing 5 foot 8 and eventually bulking up to 215 pounds, Raymond was known as a tough kid and a talented athlete in the neighborhood. With three older brothers, he learned to handle himself with his hands at a young age. His younger brother Derard remembers, 'I never saw my brother lose a fight, except to my older brothers when he was real young. But when he got older, he could even take them.'²

Washington's talent for hand-to-hand combat served him well in creating the Crips. In 1969, while attending Fremont High School at the age of fifteen, Raymond began organizing some of the kids in his neighborhood into an organization initially called the Baby Avenues or Baby Cribs. Ronald Antwine, a Blood from Watts admits his youthful admiration for Raymond emanated from watching him "take his shirt off and fight his ass off all day long."³ Raymond's reputation of being able to "bring it from the shoulders, like Mike Tyson in his prime" was due in part to his aversion to guns.⁴ "I can go back and remember one night me and him got together and he didn't know I had a little sawed-off shotgun," original Crip⁵ and Baby Avenue member Greg "Batman" Davis recalls of Raymond.

And I said, "Raymond, I got a shotgun," like that. And I pulled it out my pants and I ain't never see him that angry. He was in an uproar. He took the gun, threw the gun in

¹ Quoted in Leila Khaled and George Hajjar, *My People Shall Live: Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (Toronto: NC Press, 1975), 58.

² Quoted in Michael Krikorian, "Tookie's Mistaken Identity" *LA Weekly*, Thursday, Dec. 15, 2005.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ I refer to the original members who formed the ten man Baby Cribs as "original Crips" while I use the term "first generation" Crips to refer to those who joined the various Crip sets between 1969 and 1979. These terms are for the purposes of this work only and do not accurately reflect the categories and concepts of created by Crips themselves. e.g. OGs and BGs.

the sewer. Then I looked at him I said, “Man, why you throw my gun down there man?” After then I would never tell Raymond that I had a gun.⁶

“Raymond believed,” first generation Crip Robert Jones argued, “a real man don’t need no gun.”⁷

Raymond Washington’s status as a street fighter was surpassed only by the reputation of his moral character. He was known as a warmhearted individual who protected the kids in his neighborhood from the bullying of outside gangs. “He liked to fight,” his brother Derard recalls, “but if he liked you, he’d treat you so well.” Remembering his brother as “a Robin Hood type a person, stealing from the rich, giving to the poor,” Derard points out that his brother, “was really a goodhearted person. He was really kind to elderly people.”⁸ Even former L. A. County Sheriff’s gang investigator Curtis Jackson remembers Raymond as “very approachable,” stating, “I had no trouble talking with him.”⁹

Raymond’s mother Violet Samuel remembers of her child, “Raymond didn’t go out of his way to fight or do anything bad, but if someone came to him, he would protect himself. And he was well-built. He tried to protect the community and keep the bad guys out.”¹⁰ This respectful manner and sense of obligation to his community coupled with his toughness appealed to the youth of his neighborhood. Raymond quickly gained the respect and admiration of neighborhood kids leading many to join the Baby Cribs. Jimel Barnes another of the founding members of the Cribs remembers, “Raymond had so much power over the youth, Black people, it was incredible.”¹¹

This chapter challenges the common view that Black gangs arose out of a set of pathologies unconnected with earlier political struggles.¹² The argument offered here, however, is that, inspired and influenced by the Black Nationalist politics of the era, Raymond and the other youth who formed the original Cribs emulated the militant stance promoted by local radicals. In fact, Washington’s recipe for the formulation of the Baby Cribs borrowed from the pots of both Bunchy Carter’s Black Panther cadre and the spirit of the Watts Uprising. Watts, in fact, served as a cornerstone, instilling the audacious rebel bravery with which these original Cribs viewed and carried themselves. First generation Crip Danifu Bey recalls, “the spirit that the Cribs were created [in] the climate of the Watts Riot . . . Black people being awakened to

⁶ Quoted in *Gangsta King: Raymond Lee Washington: the Definitive History of the Cribs and the Man Behind the Gang*. DVD, directed by Robert Stack et al., (2003; Port Washington, NY: BKoch Vision).

⁷ Robert Jones, interview with author, Los Angeles, August 28, 2010.

⁸ Krikorian, “Tookie’s Mistaken Identity.”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Yusuf Jah and sister Shah'Keyah, *Uprising: Cribs and Bloods Tell the Story of America's Youth in the Crossfire* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 151.

¹² Even scholars that reference the earlier existence of the Panthers treat the Crip youth as incapable of forming a coherent political response to their own conditions. See for instance Alonso, “Out of the Void” and Malcom Klein’s interview in *Gangsta King*, 2003. Although Klein is aware of the relationship between the Panthers and the Cribs, he argues in the wake of desegregation, “a lot of middle class people from the inner-city were able to move out. And with them they took their middle class organizations, their middle-class organizing capacities, and so on. Leaving in the inner-city, those who were less capable of doing those things, and the gap has been filled, in part, by the emergence of street gangs.” While Klein asserts the humanity of middle-class Blacks, he does so in a way that reinforces notions of the subhumanity of the Black poor. The argument thus, does more to reproduce ideologies of racial domination than to challenge them.

freedom and tired of being treated like slaves . . . the spirit of self-determination.”¹³ Central to this spirit of independence was the role of violence as a legitimate tool of political resistance. “A lot of the different rituals that were involved in the rebellion still were playing out even after the rebellion was over, like the spirit of looting and lawlessness and the ability to strike fear into the neighbors,” Danifu argues.¹⁴

Former Baby Rabble Rouser and founding member of the Brim Blood Army, General Robert Lee elaborates on the role the Watts Uprising played in the formulation of this generation of street organizations, no less than it had in the organization of the Panthers themselves:

I’ll never forget it. It was hot, I was on Slauson and Denker, there was about ten of us walking down the street, and we saw these fires popping up from everywhere, ambulances and police flying up the street; we didn’t know what was happening. So when I got to the pad, my mama said, “Come in here, boy, there’s a riot going on.” I looked at the TV and saw all of these brothers cutting up. Moms said, “Go to bed.” I went to the bedroom, went straight out the back window, and got straight into it. I had to be nine or ten then. I went out there and started breaking into jewelry stores and liquor stores, looting, drinking and throwing Molotov cocktails at everything I could see. By the end of this time, the police started killing ten- and eleven-year-old young brothers; they were blowing their heads off. Then brothers started to see where white people were coming from, mainly the police. That’s when they realized there was no longer a need for us to fight each other. That’s when the Gladiators, the Businessmen, the Ditalians, and Blood Alleys came to peace. They weren’t going to fight each other anymore. That was from August ’65 to the end of ’68. There weren’t any gangs fighting each other at that time. Everybody came together. It was a Black thing.¹⁵

The lesson about organized political violence provided by Watts would play an instrumental role in the development of early Crip culture and ideology. Danifu argues, “the Crips and other gangs were being nurtured in that type of environment where Black people were basically rebelling and expressing themselves.”¹⁶

No less than the Watts Uprising, coming of age in the shadow of the Black Panther Party had a profound influence on Raymond Washington. Raised on the street where Bunchy Carter lived, Raymond admired and emulated the Black Panther leader, whom he knew first-hand as a teenager.¹⁷ In fact, original Crip and Baby Avenue member Greg “Batman” Davis offers, “a whole lot of us knew about the Panther Party coming up. . . That was something that I just wanted to be a part of. And plus the way they dressed, that kind of turned me on. With the tam tilted and all that, that was cool, I liked all that.”¹⁸ Davis and many other Black youth of his generation cut their political teeth while eating at the Black Panther Party’s Breakfast for Children Program.¹⁹ Indeed, as a young child Davis even sold *the Black Panther* newspaper.²⁰

¹³ Danifu Bey, interview by JR Valrey, *P.O.C.C. Block Report Radio* Los Angeles, CA, November, 2005.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jah, *Uprising*, 123.

¹⁶ Bey, interview.

¹⁷ Alonso, “Out of the Void”; Krikorian, “Tookie’s Mistaken Identity.”

¹⁸ Stack, *Gangsta King*.

¹⁹ Bey, interview; Brown, *Taste of Power*; Stack, *Gangsta King*.

²⁰ Greg Davis, *This is the True Story of an Original Gangster*, <http://gregbatmandavis.com/about/>

The fact that the Baby Cribs originated in Bunchy's neighborhood was a source of pride for early Cribs. Danifu Bey exclaims, "the Cribs, we come from a neighborhood of the leader of the Black Panther Party which was a neighborhood called the Slausons . . . Our neighborhood was the neighborhood where Bunchy Carter came from." From Bunchy and the Black Panther Party, "we were taught that we had the power to develop our own destiny" Danifu exclaims. From the beginning, Raymond modeled his organization after these lessons. Danifu remembers "a lot of the examples we got from Bunchy and John Huggins and Geronimo and others, the Freeman brothers." "A lot of us couldn't be official Panthers because we was too young, so we had to be baby Panthers," he also recalls. "I wanted to be a Panther," Greg Davis exclaims, "but it wasn't going down. My mother wouldn't let me be one." Unable to become official Panthers, the Baby Avenues patterned their organization after the BPP. Danifu describes how their dress code was patterned after the Party. "We continued to emulate you know, like the shoes that the Black Panther Party wore, you know the biscuits the Malcolm X shoes and the black leather coats and the afros," he declares. "The terminology we learned as we was trying to imitate the older brothers all went into the formula of making up what they called the Cribs organization."

The Black Panther Party also stood as a model of Black masculinity for the Baby Avenues. "Until Huey Newton, H Rap Brown and others demonstrated what manhood was on a military level," Danifu argues, "Black people really weren't known to express themselves in a dignified political sense." Violence served as a legitimate and central component to this articulation of Black manhood. "Our neighborhood was quite regimented and quite militaristic" Danifu offers. "With the amount of information we had as young people, junior high school children and high school children and BSU members, with that type of education which wasn't much, but it was enough to take us on into another era of developing our own social militaristic formations."²¹

It is not enough however, to note that the Panthers were a source of the militarized masculinity of early Cribs. The Panthers themselves had drawn on earlier street organizations in developing that very masculinity. Here, too, the relationship between political radicalism and street organizations is dialectical rather than unidirectional. As Flores Forbes, a central figure in the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party points out, "the BPP had embraced the street gang-style of discipline popularized by Bunchy Carter."²² Bunchy's assertion of a "street gang-style" identity resonated with the younger generations and established itself as the ideal expression of Black manhood. As Danifu believes, "before then mostly Black people were more docile, even though in their hearts they were men."²³

With the Panther's popularization of this disciplined militancy and defiant stance rooted in revolutionary nationalist²⁴ politics, Raymond's toughness and message of community guardianship positioned him as a leader amongst his neighborhood peers. Those that joined his ranks were inculcated into a program which stressed respect for elders, community service and neighborhood protection and insulation. His influence gave his peers a sense of pride as they assumed the role of vicegerents of the community. Members provided sentry duty for the

²¹ Bey, interview.

²² Forbes, *Will You Die With Me*, 72.

²³ Bey, interview.

²⁴ Ultimately Huey P. Newton would develop the concept of intercommunism and the Black Panther Party would call for a struggle that moved beyond the limits of national liberation. See Huey P. Newton *To Die For the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton* (New York: Writers and Readers, 1995) and Erik H. Erikson, *In Search of Common Ground: Conversations with Erik H. Erikson and Huey P. Newton* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973).

neighborhood at large, receiving the approval of many elders in the community.²⁵ “Couldn’t nobody come through and snatch purses, break in no cars or nothing like that cause it was like a community thing, you know? The guys in the neighborhood protected that neighborhood,” stated Greg Davis. Taking their name from an already established older organization called the Avenues, whom Raymond had been a part of until his fight with a prominent member, Raymond named his original group of ten the Baby Avenues, or Baby Cribs.²⁶

The fact that children were being initiated into the fold of Black radical politics brought the ire of local and federal authorities, a response that would have a profound effect on the young Cribs and their ideology. On May 15, 1969, J. Edgar Hoover set out to eradicate the Breakfast for Children Program which was nurturing the bodies and minds of Black youth like Davis and Bey. In an internal FBI memo, Hoover worried that the Breakfast Program “represents the best and most influential activity going for the BPP and, as such, is potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for.”²⁷ Under these orders, police stormed the Watts Breakfast for Children Program on September 8, 1969.²⁸ Americans tend to see policing as a reasonable response to Black criminal activity. What the FBI campaign against the Panther program to feed hungry Black children makes clear is that the FBI and the American state more broadly were committed to repressing not only Black radicalism but any Black efforts to create descent communities. Rather than trying to build on the aspects of youthful Black activity that would seem unobjectionable (protecting old ladies from purse snatching, maintaining respect for elders in the neighborhood), police sought to crush any Black organizing. Police activity, more than any indigenous ideology or pathology, set the stage for the transformation of the Panthers into the Cribs.

The web of police terror even caught those among the first generation of Cribs unfamiliar with the Black Panther Party. Stanley Tookie Williams, a first generation Crip from the West Side recalls:

In spite of my being the most inconspicuous-looking “black youth walking.” Two white cops jumped out of the car with their hands poised on their guns and demanded I stand still. One cop asked, “Are you a Panther, boy?” At the time I didn’t have a clue what he was talking about. I knew nothing about the revolutionary group called the Black Panthers. I thought the fool was trying to call me an animal, so I responded, “Of course not!” His rough pat-down search was a legendary law enforcement procedure known to virtually all black males living in South Central, involving undue intimate contact in the groin area. Preparing to leave me, smiling, the cop said, “I’ll be watching you, nigger.” This was his attempt to instill fear of the law in me. I feared neither the law nor him-only his gun.²⁹

²⁵ Krikorian, “Tookie’s Mistaken Identity.”

²⁶ Alex Alonso, “Out of the Void: Street Gangs in Black Los Angeles,” in *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities*, ed Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón. (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Krikorian, “Tookie’s Mistaken Identity.”

²⁷ Quoted in Judson L. Jeffries and Malcolm Foley, “To Live and Die in L.A.” in *Comrades: a Local History of the Black Panther Party*, ed Judson L. Jeffries. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.), 278.

²⁸ Reginald Major, *A Panther is a Black Cat* (Baltimore, Black Classic Press [1971] 2006).

²⁹ Stanley Tookie Williams, *Blue rage, Black redemption: A Memoir* (Pleasant Hill, CA: Damamli Publishing, 2004), 57-58.

Early Crip Ideology

With the neutralization of the Black Panther Party, the conceptual framework that they had provided to youth to interpret and understand the multiple streams of domination shaping their lives in Black Los Angeles dissipated. In an atmosphere of declining possibilities for organized radical political action, the Baby Avenues' forms of resistance began to deteriorate rapidly. In the absence of Panther ideology, militancy became simple machismo; communalism morphed into tribalism; and revolutionary warfare gave way to internecine violence. Early on, this violence in the Crip imaginary took on a flavor distinct from the overtly revolutionary role it played in Panther ideology.

Although this first generation of Crips failed to articulate a well-conceived social justice component to their violence, they were aware that it was political in nature. Initially, the emerging gangs consciously targeted violence at white residents of Los Angeles. "When Hoovers first started out," one original member would recall, "we were against white folks. We went down there to Griffith Park near the zoo, where they had a little money. We used to go in the wishing wells and take the money out in front of them, slap some of them upside the head and take their wallets, that's what we were doing." For Red, the amount of money acquired was not the only motive. Challenging white supremacy itself was an equal motivation. "With the Hoovers, our basic thing was going in the white neighborhood doing things. I had a homeboy, he and I personally went to some white people who were still living in our neighborhood, and we kicked in their door, ran up in there, and took their guns, their money, and everything else, and eventually they moved out."³⁰ "There was a lot of strong antiwhite feelings in my community," Leibo, a Crip from the East Side recalls. "Like if some of my OG homies caught white people in the hood, it was over for them. I actually saw them drag white people out of their vehicles, and out of their places of business. If we had white people living in the hood, they would run them out of the hood."³¹ As Red and Leibo's comments make clear, Crips understood that domination was occurring in their lives and that their actions demonstrated a conscious contestation of that domination.

The Black Panther Party had articulated a program that understood, even if not fully, the complex, far reaching and multi-faceted nature of their oppression. Clearly identifying the institutions and institutional practice involved had enabled them to develop clearly defined strategies of resistance. Conversely, Crips lacked a similar framework and program. This in turn limited their understanding of what constituted "resistance" to actions such as slapping white people. The development of these forms of "resistance" must be situated in relation to the declining political capacity of ghetto residents, state actions and economic conditions. These dynamics shaped the formation and expression of early Crip ideology. With the military defeat of the Black Panther Party, the state increased its propensity to exploit the trends of reactionary violence and therefore played a significant role in the shaping of Crip culture and activity. In particular, Crips turned increasingly from superficial acts of anti-white violence or use of violence to challenge Black agents of white domination. Instead, Black-on-Black violence came increasingly to characterize Crip activity.

At first, the Black-on-Black violence advocated by Crips was symptomatic of class cleavages that had been simmering in Los Angeles for decades. Red explains:

³⁰ Jah, *Uprising*, 53-54.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

When Crips started out, we were taking leather coats, because at that particular time the east side of Los Angeles was on a lower poverty level. If you lived on the west side, you were considered living better off than how they were living on the east side. That's going to always be there, the east side not living like the west side. . . if you look at it now, all of the houses on the west side still look nice. Then everything from Vermont back east starts looking shabbier. That's just how it is. There are little pockets that are nice, but basically as you go back to the east side, that's where things start to look run-down. . . the houses look shabby, haven't been painted in a while, you know, from living on a lower income. So if you were living across Vermont, you were considered as having a little something. The Crips started on the east side, and they were taking people's stuff from the west side.³²

Robbing well-to-do Black youth for leather jackets would become an activity for which first generation Crips would become notorious.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, future Crip Robert Davis came to Los Angeles at the age of nine in 1968. Raised in a two-parent household, his parents left Cleveland after his father lost his job in a machine tool factory. With cousins already living in Los Angeles, Robert's family settled along the east side. After his initiation into the brutal reality of ghetto Los Angeles, Robert joined the Crips in 1974 at the age of fifteen years old. For Robert, robbing leather jackets reflected a wider conflict with west side youth he perceived to be members of the Black elite. "We used to lay them down," Robert recalls of these class antagonisms. For Robert, these actions were linked to the shame he experienced as a result of his childhood poverty. "I remember I was always embarrassed of being broke as a kid . . . I can remember going skating as a kid and being ashamed of my clothes. Going out with my homeboys and being scared to talk to the girls cause of the way I looked."³³

The Black Panther Party had offered an ideological explanation of the oppression of Black youth. State repression left the Crips unable to formulate a political program responsive to the discrimination and exploitation they were still facing. Instead, that oppression produced a sense of shame and a need to lash out at targets the Panthers would have deemed secondary. For Fanon Black-on-Black violence is a step towards the achievement of racial consciousness. For the young Crips however, robbing slightly more privileged Blacks constituted a step in the erasure of racial consciousness. Later, as Crip Black-on-Black violence would lose even the veneer of class struggle, shame and self-loathing had become hegemonic.

One incident in particular reveals the shame manifested in an outburst against Black youth that Robert believed to be privileged.

I remember this one time we went out with these females I was with my homeboy Dee, he hooked up the girls. They was from the west side you know. And we went to out with them but I remember we went to Tams after, you know. Just chilling getting something to eat. The girl was like kind of, I don't know like, "oh you're from the east side, you're this, you're that." So, you know, I was already kind of like, you know, "Oh this bougie broad" whatever, whatever. So we at the spot getting something to eat and they had all these cats from the west side. And I remember just, you know, that's when they had the leather jackets, you know and here we was with biscuits and they, I remember they was

³² Ibid., 53-54.

³³ Robert Davis, interview with author, Los Angeles, December 23, 2010

like dressed like, you know trying to play the part but not really living it. Like trying to like, you know, dressed like gangsters but they wasn't really about it. You know what I'm saying? So like, trying to get fame and everything off of our name, you know. But not really living it. And I remember just like being upset just like look it, who do these cats think they are like, you know what I'm saying? Like, man, you know my cousin had just been killed, we really living this. You know what I'm saying? And you out here, you know you privileged you don't come from the same background, you don't have the same problems but you want to get all the popularity and all the good stuff that go with it but you not really living it. You know what I'm saying? And I remember just like looking at them with anger and just rage. You know what I'm saying? We had to move on them, you know? Yeah, like uh, this one cat talking all this shit like he hard and wooh, wooh, wooh, wooh, wooh you know but, you can tell, you can spot the fake ones, so we had to get them.³⁴

Robert's descriptions of his feelings of inadequacy as a child reveal the extent to which his participation in the Crips was rooted in relations of inequality. The fact that Robert was conscious of his poverty, even if only on an instinctual level, suggests that scholars who attribute these forms of violence to the alternative value systems of underclass culture fail to recognize the complex ways in which these youth participate in their environments as potential moral social actors and not merely as expressions of forces beyond their understanding. Robert sensed his injustice, even if he was unable to identify its source.

Compton Crip Ricardo Johnson also recalls the sense of shame produced by poverty and the violence that it generated toward slightly more affluent Black youth. His mother migrated to Los Angeles from Dallas, Texas in 1957 and secured a job in the garment industry. Raised in a single-parent household, Ricardo was born in Los Angeles in 1962 and grew up primarily in Compton. There he could never forget his low standing. At school, he recalls,

we used to have these handball courts, you know. And they used to make us stand out there on the court, you know, when we got in trouble. At recess time they would have us standing out there on this line at the courts and you would have to be out there on punishment the whole recess and just watch everybody else play. . . There was this little girl, Gladys, she was like the teacher's pet, right. I used to be in love with her ass, but I ain't never tell nobody. Well, shit, we was out there standing on the line like we always was and she came up fucking with me. We used to wear them crocus sacks [shoes] back then, right. And my shit was all holey and shit. So she came up and was like "Ha Ha, you can't even afford wino shoes!" I used to like her, so I was ashamed that my shoes was all fucked up. You know? I felt like something was wrong with me cause I was poorer than everybody else. But when recess was over, we used to have to line up outside the class before they would let us in. Well when we was lining up, I seen my homeboy Scooter coming in from recess with the dodgeball, so I got the ball from him and threw it at old girl. I hit her in the back of the head.³⁵

Poverty and economic relations alone, however, do not explain the alienation and shame of the Black youth who would form the Crips. State institutions also played an essential role.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ricardo Johnson, interview with author, Fontana, CA, December 27, 2010.

Robert tells of an encounter with the LAPD which played a crucial role in his developing sense of injustice. Robert and some of his cousins had just left a family celebration in honor of his grandmother.

We rolling down Central and I didn't even see them coming man but they got us; I don't even remember how. But they pulled us over, said we didn't use the turn signal. You know when we changed lanes. Said we didn't use the turn signal for long enough before we changed lanes. That's the kind of bullshit they use. You know they automatically, straight man, with guns out and everything. Get us out the car one by one. I must have been only ten, eleven years old. I was a little kid you know. "Where you from?" Automatically, you a gangster and all that. They cuff us, fuck up my cousins a little bit, and threaten to take all them to jail for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Telling me they going to take me into, you know what you call it? You know, put me in a group home. But here my cousin is like man, "I go to school, I play basketball" and he telling them, he steady telling them, like "we coming from my Grandma's party!" Like thinking, they'll see, "oh these is good kids, we messing with the wrong people." But no, to them a nigga was a nigga, I remember like really, that thought staying with me. Like here's my cousin trying to do something, you know he was a square. But they don't, you know it's all the same to them. So like what's the point of even trying man if they going to do this to you anyway. It's all some bullshit, that here you go, you work hard, you try to be something, but they still doing to you what they want. Just fuck with you or whatever. Like I really thought at that point that they would see "they on our side." Or something "These are good kids."³⁶

State violence imposed on Robert as a young man shaped his decision to become a Crip. As he experienced police harassment, he began questioning notions of equality. He became convinced that Black people's behavior had no bearing on the degree to which they were accepted by white America. The longstanding African American project of respectability and racial uplift had been exposed in his mind as a bankrupt strategy.³⁷ The contradiction between claims that America was a land of opportunity and the experience of unyielding racial oppression left Robert "full of anger" and "always pissed off as a kid." For Robert, this cocktail of shame, anger and alienation manifested itself in acts of violence against a readily available symbol of an unjust society, the Black bourgeoisie. Robert's seemingly incompatible streams of consciousness, delinquency and perceived injustice both emanate from the same source, his alienation.

In addition to police aggression, schooling played a vital role in Robert's alienation. He started to feel that school and police were interrelated institutions serving the same purpose. Working in conjunction with the police, school presented an illegitimate force in his life. "Here they are telling you to stay in school and the police steady on your ass. . . I started to really understand then that it was some bullshit, school was some bullshit." Moreover, Robert was not the only first-generation Crip who saw schools no less than police as an oppressive state institution.

Future Compton Crip Ricardo also experienced school as the sight of degradation by teachers and other school authorities:

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ On the politics of respectability, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

We'd be out there [on the line], we had this one [teacher] he was a straight Nazi. I never had his class or nothing. I don't think I ever even knew his name, but I remember he used to always be wearing these sunglasses. He used to patrol the line you know, make sure you wasn't talking cause we wasn't allowed to talk when we was out there. But he used to make us face the sun. He'd be always yelling, "turn around." You know, if we was trying to put our back to the sun. His ass always had on sunglasses, but he making us face the sun. I hated his ass. . . That shit reminded me of prison. When I went to the pen that shit was just like school. . . He was just like the [prison guards].³⁸

Writing about his own childhood a generation before the young Crips were coming of age, Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver suggests the interplay of class conflict and state oppression in school. A migrant child who fled Arkansas, Cleaver suffered as a Black child in a Los Angeles elementary school:

Mrs. Brick was my teacher and she looked like Betty Grable. All the cats were in love with her. We'd rub up against her and try to peep under her dress. We'd dream about her at night. She had a fine ass and big tits. She dressed sexy. I used to get a hard-on just looking at her. She knew that we wanted to fuck her, to suck her tits. One day when we were returning from the music room, Mrs. Brick marched the whole class up the stairs. I liked Michele Ortaga then. She was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. Her skin was white as milk and she had long black hair. She was very delicate, very feminine—even at that titless, shapeless age. What I liked about her was that whenever I looked at her she would blush, turn red from the neck up. Her ears would glow. I was the only boy who could make her change colors. While we were waiting at the top of the stairs that day, I found myself opposite Michele. I had been conscious of her beauty all afternoon. During music period I'd been staring at her. I said to her: "I love you, Michele."

Her neck caught fire, the red flames lit up her ears. "I hate you!" Michele hissed at me. We traded words back and forth. For some forgotten reason, I wound up saying: "Your mother is fat as an elephant." Michele, hurt and embarrassed, burst out in tears. Mrs. Brick came to see what was happening. Michele told her I had called her mother an elephant. Mrs. Brick turned to me with flame in her eyes, and I could see a hatred that frightened me. "You black nigger!" she snarled, and slapped my face. It sounded like a shot going off in my ear—the words, I mean—I don't think I even felt the blow. Her words brought tears to my eyes.

From that day on, Mrs. Brick still looked like Betty Grable. She still had a fine ass and nice tits, she still dressed real sexy, and she still kept me with a hard-on. But my feeling for her was no longer the warm desire of the lover. What I felt for her was the lust/hatred of the rapist. I felt about the same for Michele. I could still make her blush, but between us there was a deep abyss into which something of us that was bathed in sunlight had fallen forever.³⁹

³⁸ Johnson, interview.

³⁹ Cleaver, *Target Zero*, 17-18. The role of school in brutalizing Black youth was not confined to Los Angeles. When future activist Sonny Carson was first incarcerated in the early 1960s as a youth he was struck by the degree

Black youth of an earlier generation like Eldridge Cleaver were able to develop the first hints of political resistance to their brutalization. Cleaver and his young classmates had developed political consciousness and creative measures to reject schools as an illegitimate force of domination. "Each morning," he would recall,

all classes lined up at eight A.M. sharp to pledge allegiance to the flag as it was run up the pole. "I hedge all-allegiance to the rag of the Disunited States of America and to the republic for which it falls, many nations, divisible, with liberty and justice for some." This was how we used to say it.⁴⁰

The youth that would form the Crips also tried to resist, but in ways that held little promise of political transformation. Ricardo remembers, "we used to be out there doing dumb shit, making shadows like this. You know? Putting your hand like this making like it's your dick. Making dick shadows, stupid shit. You know when you're little that kind of shit is funny."⁴¹ Forbidden to speak, Ricardo and his classmates made shadows as an act of dissent challenging the sadistic practice of forcing children to stand and face the sun. Ricardo's reference to the elementary teacher patrolling the line as a "Nazi" is more than a playful use of language. By using such terminology and drawing parallels to his experience in prison, Ricardo makes concrete the nature of the forces responsible for his dehumanization. Thus, his shadow spectacle was more than the impulsive actions of a pathological child. While standing on the line was an attempt to subdue his freedom and creativity, making "dick shadows" was an exercise in resistance. In the face of this intimidating ritual of humiliation, the boys were, however, limited to playful objections.

In sum, the aggression of these first generation Crips was rooted in the same sense of brutalization faced by Black youth a generation earlier that would steer that hostility into filling the ranks of the Black Panther Party. Detached from a coherent ideological framework of resistance however, the essence of Crippen became a rebellious lawlessness rather than collective subversive political activity. Ricardo Johnson's description of an encounter with police as a teenager illuminates the depths to which his experiences with the state shaped his alienation and anger:

We was drinking and we was going back to the store or getting something to eat, I don't remember exactly, but we was walking through the parking lot. We walking through the shopping center and we see the police. We already knew they coming to fuck with us.

to which the rural prison in which he was confined resembled a residential school. "If you looked closely you'd see bars on all the windows, just like in schoolhouses." Indeed, he concluded, "for my first nineteen years, the school houses were the prisons, and the prisons were the prisons posing as schoolhouses, and the many sides of genocide continued to perpetuate itself, in whatever form." The very entry into the school system in kindergarten, Carson later argued, was "the most dangerous period for black people, because this is when it starts—the mechanism for submission to the most sophisticated type of oppression that victimizes black people. . . . Certainly not then, but years later, I began to perceive of this as the most magnificent kind of programming that's ever been devised by any system in the history of mankind. For then it begins. White, white, white, white . . . white, white, white, all through the years. . . . This then was the beginning of my miseducation." Mwlani Imiri Abubadika, *The Education of Sonny Carson* (New York: Norton, 1972), 157, 11-12.

⁴⁰ Cleaver, *Target Zero*, 22.

⁴¹ Johnson, interview.

By then I was use to it. But they way on the other side of the parking lot though, but we knowing they about to swoop. So as they coming, we like “let’s walk into the store.” There’s a grocery store right there. So as we’re trying to walk, walk fast but not make it too obvious. Just to get away from them. It’s not like we did nothing but just, we don’t want to get hassled so just trying to walk away. So we going, we walking towards the store and right as we get in front of the store they pulled right up behind us. But we can get into the store before they get out the car. We already see it. So we dip to go in the store. As soon as we walking right in the door they like, “Hey! Freeze!” So we go up in the store like man fuck this. We go in, we walk in like come on man let’s go and buy something like we just minding our own business or whatever, like we didn’t even hear them. So we go in, I grab a soda. And we talking like man fuck them, let’s just buy this and just go on about our business. I didn’t think they was going to come in the store, right. We, I thought they’d be waiting for us when we come out, so fuck it, let’s walk around and shop or whatever. So we walking and talking and we coming around one aisle to come in the next aisle and not even thinking they came in the store. But when we come around the aisle, Bam! Like we damn near bump into them, like we walk right into them. They grab us, like “get the fuck, get the fuck, you didn’t hear me say stop motherfucker.” In a low voice so nobody in the store can hear them, throwing us up against the aisle, on the groceries and everything. You know? Shit falling off the shelves and shit. So um, you know they talking a gang of shit, “motherfucker, when I tell you to freeze, you freeze motherfucker.” Talking a gang of shit, off top you know. So, we like man, “what the fuck is this all about? We ain’t even do shit.” And they talking shit, like “bring your black ass outside, motherfucker!” So, I got the soda in my hand, I’m like man, “I’m finna buy this.” You know, like just like that. I said finna, like “I’m finna buy this.” You know? And um, cause it was two cops. The Mexican one, one was Mexican. He was like “I’m finna buy this.” Making fun of me, like I’m ignorant or something. So, you know, I had a little courage, I was drinking, I had a little bit of courage. So I’m like, you know this motherfuckers like straight, you know what I’m saying? You supposed to be an official. Like you supposed to be serving the people and here you are degrading me. I’m supposed to be a citizen, you supposed to work for me and you degrading me. So you know, you just tired of that shit, so I just man, I just blurted out “Fuck You!” Man, as soon as I said it, man, they just jumped on me. Yeah we right there in the grocery aisle, everything, just bam, slam me against the aisle, shit falling down and shit. They choking me and shit. Handcuff us, get my homie, handcuff us. Drag us out the motherfucking store. There’s people looking and shit. They making a scene, it’s like middle of the afternoon. They drag us out the fucking store. And they car, I guess what happened they had pulled up and just jumped out the car, so the car is right there in front the store they open the back door throw us in the back of the car, right? Pull off and shit, go behind the motherfucking store, the shopping center, there’s like an alley way. They go behind the motherfucking stores so nobody can see us in the alley way. They open the back door, take me out the car, leave my homeboy in. They get me against the hood, but facing them, so the Mexican one, he choking me, right. But I’m like this, like I’m facing him with my back against the car on the hood and he’s like choking me, pushing me backwards onto the fucking hood like “motherfucker you don’t fuck with me. We don’t play that shit.” They got my homeboy in the back seat, he spooked. So they, take him out the car, they question us. They must have had us out there in the alley like twenty

thirty minutes. They take me, tell me they taking me to fucking jail for resisting arrest, but I didn't even fucking do nothing though. They throw me back in the car, I don't even know what the fuck is going on. The whole time this motherfucker is jabbing me with the fucking stick and shit. Talking shit the whole way. I thought I was going to jail, but the motherfuckers take me and drop me off in the middle of fucking nowhere out by Richland Farms.⁴²

Ricardo's comment "I'm supposed to be a citizen" reflects a sense of injustice and a capacity to spot contradiction. His growing frustration with Apartheid conditions suggests that his decision to become a Crip was to some degree a conscious act. Shaped but not determined by his increasing sense of inferiority, this decision partially alleviated his feelings of alienation. As a Crip Ricardo believes that his experiences with Black-on-Black violence was partly due to the mystification of social processes, arguing "at that age you just rebelling, you don't even realize exactly what you mad at. . . . As I got older I started to realize that the same people that had me living broke and fucked up, had me fighting my own people. It's like divide and conquer. You know what I'm saying? They be having us fight each other as a way to be distracted from what's really going on." With this realization, Ricardo demonstrates an ability to critically examine the ideological and structural forces at work in his life. Ricardo, is more than a receptacle for oppressive social forces.

Revealing an empathy for his "own people," challenges the underclass conceptions of early Crip formation and propagation. Carrying their organizing capabilities along with them as they fled South Central Los Angeles, white and middle-class Black flight left an ill-equipped Raymond Washington unable to negotiate the forces of deindustrialization, so the line goes. Lacking social and political capital, Raymond's creation of the Crips was a futile attempt to relive the fairytale of the Black Panther Party, many scholars argue. Ricardo's comments however, counter this simplistic narrative. Although the means he adopted to challenge the forces of his brutalization reveal a level of internalization of these very same forces, his ability to create challenges to the forces of domination operating in his life uncover the complex manner in which oppression and agency operate. The Crip's constant dance with dehumanization and resistance is in actuality, a crafty articulation of the possibilities of human expression under such repressive circumstances.

Like Ricardo, Darrell Carter became a Crip as an apathetic youth with an emerging frustration over the conditions of his life. Darrell also attempted to mediate the forces of a racist Los Angeles social order. Born in 1962, Darrell came to Los Angeles with his mother and stepfather from Tallulah, Louisiana in 1967. Growing up near Broadway and 70th streets, Darrell became a Crip sometime around 1976. No less than was the case with other future Crips, confrontations with the police played a central role in forging Darrell's identity as a Crip:

We was walking down the street. They just jump out the car on us. I guess they was jumping out on people all day, we didn't know at the time, we figured it out later cause

⁴² Ibid. Not only is Richland Farms far from his home but also is in the territory of a different street organization. Forcing Black youth to cross territorial lines was and is a common police practice, seemingly intended to exacerbate tensions and increase violence. In their 1974 study of the Kitchen Crips at Freemont High School, Huley and Pettie found a popular "method that police use in trying to correct a boy is by picking up a boy on the street and if nothing is wrong, to release him in rival territory – that of the (Acey Ducey's) or (Pirus) – where gang members are liable to catch and beat him." Joseph Huley and Lawrence Pettie, "The Life Styles Five Black Gang Members: An Exploratory Descriptive Case Study of the Crips" (MSW thesis, San Diego State University, 1974), 29.

everybody in the hood was talking about it. But um, they just jump out on us. Man, like five six deep! Just straight, don't even ask no questions. Man guns drawn, handcuff us. We was walking by the, over this little like over pass, freeway overpass. And they cuff us and slam us up into the little gate. Making you look. Like they going to push you over onto the freeway or something. And they was talking hell of shit. But I remember I was like "man what? A brother can't even walk down the street? A brother can't even walk down the street?" Like basically saying like man, we just, we not doing nothing. We just coming from playing basketball. We not doing nothing. We not bothering nobody and here you jump out the car on us, handcuff us, don't even tell us what's going on. And I remember it was this one, he just started dancing. You know when I was like, "a brother can't even walk down the street?" He started dancing around like a monkey, scratching his head like a monkey, like this. And then he started saying, like mocking me, "a brother can't walk down the street! A brother can't walk down the street!" Like basically, not basically like straight calling me a monkey. . . I felt just angry, like we not even doing nothing we out here playing basketball. I'm walking down the street with this girl minding my own business. Here you go jump out the car. Immediately, not even confrontational, but with guns drawn. Handcuff us, threaten us. To throw us out on the freeway and you dancing around calling me a monkey. . . I just remember like man, hating them motherfuckers. Like, man, I, man, like just hate, just angry. Just like man I wish I could just fuck these motherfuckers up. You know? How would you feel? You minding your own business and somebody just come, like a slave? You literally are walking down the street trying to get from point A to point B. And here come somebody not only stopping you but guns out threatening to kill you and then just like, calling you a monkey like you're not even a human being. You know what I'm saying? And throwing your female around any kind of way, and then um, just un-handcuff you, just make you go on about your business like nothing happened. Like, and then you supposed to just go on just living. You know we was coming from basketball. Now I'm supposed to just go home and just like nothing happened and just be a normal human being. Of course that's going to fuck you up.⁴³

Despite being deeply marked by the barbarity of American racism, Darrell, in his chronicle, combines demoralization with an acute commitment to struggle to "be a normal human being." Again however, the repression of the Panthers had left Darryll without a political outlet for his discontent. "You be tired of [the police] fucking with you all the time," he would recall. "I was constantly mad as a kid." He too turned to violence. Crippen provided Darrell with a means to both reject his debasement and fulfill his desire for recognition. Stating, "I wasn't with all that punching the clock, working for white people," and "as I fought back, I learned they had to respect you." As a Crip, Darrell's anger over his alienation frequently found its articulation through violent means. Yet his expression of violence does not define him as a person. Violence was an articulation of a need, the need to be acknowledged as a human being.

Moments of a Coherent Self

The alienation and need for recognition felt by the youth who would become Crips did not always result in violence however. They were able to think beyond the limits of their immediate circumstances in ways that challenge the caricatures of Crips in both the mass media

⁴³ Darrell Carter, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, October 24, 2010.

and academic writings. Fishing, cooking, raising tumbler pigeons, building model cars, raising dogs, collecting fish and playing chess were all topics of discussion during several interviews. One participant, Norman Bradford, even enjoyed horticulture, proclaiming, “I got a green thumb,” as he proudly gave me a tour of his garden.⁴⁴ These sorts of activities cut across generational lines and for these men serve as an affirmation of a state of being which reaches beyond the internalization of their inferiority. Even decades of police violence could not erase the desire of Black men like those who formed the Crips for the joyful activities of every day life. Anthony Harris interrupted our interview about Crippling to console his crying granddaughter by signing *Elmo’s Song*. Gently kissing away her tears, he boasted, “she loves watching Sesame Street with granddaddy.”⁴⁵

Throughout his narrative, Darrell also describes moments of leisure that are no less central to his identity than the violence that is often seen as the be all and end all of the lives of Black gang members. For Darrell, no activity provided more tranquility than flying kites. “It all started,” he would recall, “with my godfather. He took us out to the beach when I was like nine or ten. Me and my little brother. I’ve loved doing it ever since then.” Activities like gardening and kite flying were not, however, merely forms of relaxation. For young Black men confined in America, they constituted a Utopian dream of a different life. The fact that Darrell could imagine flying away as a kid is a resounding proclamation of a possibility beyond his brutalization. Providing firm evidence that his humanity was never completely consumed by his circumstances. “As a kid,” Darrell explained, “I used to imagine flying away and I don’t know, its just always been an escape for me. Whenever I’m out there it just feels like I’m in another world, all my problems are gone. I almost feel like it’s me up there in the sky.”⁴⁶

Pathological men incapable of creative expression do not build pigeon coops with the care and attention of an artisan or daydream while flying a kite. They certainly do not sing *Elmo’s Song* in the company of strangers. These moments of tranquility do not simply suggest a sabbatical from the regular activities of gang life. Rather they are part and parcel of the experiences and struggles of these men. They are an articulation of an existence beyond the internalization of their oppression in which their creative capacity affirms their possibility to be human. It is an affirmation that provides them with the possibility of struggle and justice. It is this sense of contradiction that drives their existence. Whereas violence fulfilled a desire for recognition, kites provide the moment for a possibility of a coherent self. The ability to see themselves from within—without the veil of oppression. Without this contradiction there is no fracture, these men are simply pathological. These moments provide an insight into the complexities of the lives and consciousness of these men. They have found ways to humanize themselves in the worst situations. Darrell’s imaginative spirit demonstrates his ability to think outside the ideological and structural violence that has defined him. Darrell is double consciousness embodied.

Crip Expansion

Crip expansion from their original territory on the east side of South Central Los Angeles to the frontiers of the west side, Compton and Inglewood brought a rising conflict with other organizations. As the Baby Crips transformed into the Crips their original vision of community development modeled after the Black Panther Party began to evaporate. Lacking a coherent

⁴⁴ Norman Bradford, interview with author, Los Angeles, May 17, 2010

⁴⁵ Anthony Harris, interview with author, Pomona, CA, August 14, 2010.

⁴⁶ Carter, interview.

political platform, self-protection gave way to a mentality of domination as Crip expansion led to violent clashes with other organizations and the gang crusades of the 1950s celebrated their rebirth. Much like the Huns twenty years earlier, Crips expanded their territory through the absorption of smaller organizations and forcing their members to join Crip ranks. Engaged in territorial expansion Raymond Washington expanded Crip membership by fighting leaders of other organizations and taking control of their members. “Once he put the guy on his back, everyone else would join up and follow him” LAPD Detective Wayne Caffey recalls.⁴⁷

This initial period of gestation in the early 1970s was accompanied by rapid economic decline in South Los Angeles. In 1972 the unemployment rate for Black teenagers age sixteen to nineteen in the area was at 62%.⁴⁸ Union membership in Los Angeles also declined, falling from 37% in 1955 to 28% by 1970.⁴⁹ Part of a larger national pattern, the assault on unions of the 1970s resulted in the restoration of sweatshop conditions in Los Angeles as workers rapidly lost the ground they gained over the previous twenty years.⁵⁰ The shift from industrial production and manufacturing to the service sector had devastating consequences for Los Angeles as factories abandoned workers by the thousands.

One of those youth who joined the Crips during this period was Stanley Tookie Williams. A well respected leader among youth on the west side, Tookie’s merger helped the Crips grow considerably. As Danifu recalls, “in 1971 when Tookie and Raymond Washington formed the alliance, that enabled other little street gangs to come under that umbrella.” A dynamic leader, Danifu remembers “when we grew up, the brother was our Huey Newton in the neighborhood.” He “was special to the community, like when you had Huey Newton, he had the kind of charisma of Huey Newton in our neighborhood. And he was more like a protector and he was a body-builder type so he was real intimidating to the police” Danifu champions. Similar to the influence of Raymond Washington, Tookie’s following was implanted in his ability to garner the respect of his peers. “Even though he was a child, a young man, he was a king already,” Danifu remembers. Akin to Bunchy Carter and Raymond Washington, Tookie’s popularity with his comrades brought the wrath of the LAPD. “They were always on his case, all the time,” Danifu protests.

His whole life as a young man you know, as soon as he got out of junior high school, his whole life has been under the eye of the LAPD. . . They was trying to make sure they didn’t have any more Huey Newtons. . . They were not trying to let Tookie develop into what he has developed into now, on the street. . . A person with that type of charisma reaching the level of mental and political development that he reached on death row.⁵¹

Tookie’s courage and mannish swagger reflected early Crip identity. Jimel Barnes, an original Crip recalls, “from the day I met Tookie we started going to every concert. . . We would bully police, move police, move people out of the way. So kids saw us and they could identify with that.”⁵² Still, this flamboyant bravado retained and maintained undercurrents of community service. Jimel remembers,

⁴⁷ Quoted in Michael Krikorian, “Tookie’s Mistaken Identity” *LA Weekly*.

⁴⁸ Rosenzweig, “Gang Violence Linked to Desire for Notoriety.”

⁴⁹ Ruth Milkman, *L.A. Story: Immigrant Workers and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Bey, interview.

⁵² Jah, *Uprising*, 153.

On the positive side I felt we would be able to unite the youngsters and get all the brothers to come together and get more into a positive Black situation. I wanted to get the youngsters involved in sports: football, boxing, things like that. I saw a positive and a negative aspect. I had both thoughts going at the same time.⁵³

Danifu links these progressive tendencies to Crip genealogy, “the Avenues was a subset of the Slausons. . . From the baby Cribs, Crip evolved out of that. [We] attempted to bring all the youth together. Crip was more a unification of all the gangs in the city.” Although Crip ideology was imbued with this history, community activism primarily stagnated at the rhetorical level as violence more frequently manifest in concrete forms.

Notoriety for Violence

The early spatial diffusion of the Crips organization brought increased police and media attention and an ever increasing notoriety. This infamy was due in part to a growing hysteria which was disconnected from any concrete actions of actual Crips. The first incident for which Crips would take the blame came in November of 1971 after a thirteen year-old Black boy died while in custody of the Monrovia Police. After police concluded the death was a suicide by hanging, Black youth took to the streets and set fires. After a white youth was shot by sniper fire, battles between white and Black youth broke out on the campus of Monrovia High School and white residents and school officials blamed violence on the presence of outside agitators. Black students organized themselves and the skirmishes continued fueled in part by the Socialist White People’s Party distribution of leaflets reading, “Let’s get Blackie back to Africa.” As the battles between students raged on, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article naming the outside agitators as Crips.⁵⁴

The next incident occurred on February 28, 1972 with the murder of white military veteran N.J. “Ozzie” Orr on 109th and Figueroa Streets. Orr, who was twice wounded during tours of both Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima, was attacked by fifteen to twenty boys and girls aged ten to seventeen years old as he visited a Black friend from work who had recently been laid off. Police would blame the Crips, arguing they were “spreading like an octopus.”⁵⁵ After the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article echoing the police summation of the attack, Crips gained the attention of the national media.

Yet Crip youth argued the media attention was unfair, insisting that they were innocent and undeserving of the increased publicity.⁵⁶ After police admitted they had no evidence of Crip involvement in the N.J. Orr murder, the *Los Angeles Times* retracted their original summary, and issued a statement reading “Crips who seem to be making an earnest effort to mend their ways, are bitter that the mass media accepted the first version without further investigation.”⁵⁷

In the face of this demonization Crips toiled to enhance their public image, working with youth counselors to organize dances, concerts, martial arts classes, and food and voter registration drives.⁵⁸ Counselor Alton Trimble worked closely with Crips at Washington High

⁵³ Ibid.,152.

⁵⁴ Lee Austin, “Monrovia High Mirrors Racial Tensions of City” *Los Angeles Times* Apr. 2, 1972, SG_C1.

⁵⁵ Frank del Olmo, “L.A. Area Terrorized by Marauding Youngsters” *Los Angeles Times* Feb. 8, 1972, 3.

⁵⁶ Jerry Cohen, “Black Youth Gangs: Is Threat Overestimated?” *Los Angeles Times* Mar. 19, 1972, F1.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Frank del Olmo, “‘Street Counselor’ Ready With Helping Hand for Youngsters” *Los Angeles Times* Mar. 19, 1972, F1.

School assisting them in their community service efforts. Crips also took part in weekly meetings at the Teen Post building at 8500 South Broadway. Headed by youth counselor Lonnie Wilson, the Teen Post provided a platform for Crips to bring their grievances over issues confronting youth in their communities. The most common issues were police abuse and the lack of recreational activities for youth.⁵⁹

Despite these efforts for acceptance, violence between Crips and other organizations increased. By the time Thomas Earl Ellis was shot in the back while standing on the corner with friends on August 5, 1972 he became the fourth murder in South Central in a three day span. Policed identified Ellis as a Crip and blamed his death on the retaliation of rival gang members.⁶⁰ On November 10 of the same year, five teenagers were shot at a pep rally before a Jefferson and Los Angeles High School football game. Again, police blamed the shooting on gang rivalry attributing it to the growing animosity between the Crips and Acey Duceys.⁶¹ Less than three weeks later, on November 29, fifteen year-old Lloyd Rice was murdered in Compton reportedly over a feud between the Crips and the Piru Street Boys.⁶² The next day, four juveniles were arrested after a drive-by shooting of two youth at a dance at Dorsey High School.⁶³ Concerns of the escalating violence of 1972 would crescendo on December 13 as police recovered a sawed-off shotgun and two pistols from student lockers at Mt. Vernon Junior High School. Again, Crips were fingered as police reported the weapons were being stored for a war between the Harlem Crips and the Blackstones.⁶⁴

This increase in violence garnered the attention of police and school officials resulting in increased repression and criminalization of the Crips organization. The abounding fear led Crenshaw High School officials to bolt their doors shut during school hours.⁶⁵ In an even more arduous show of force, armed guards began patrolling the campuses of several high schools.⁶⁶ The militarization was welcomed by the Los Angeles School Board as they set aside \$180,000 for the security lock down of fifteen city schools. While school officials scattered to get a handle on the escalating problem, the LAPD launched a systematized offensive aimed at breaking the back of the Crips and other youth organizations. Police Chief Edward Davis formed a 100 man-task force for the explicit purpose of liquidating street organizations. The task force saturated the streets of Los Angeles, looking for loitering Black children, what they argued was a sure sign of gang activity.⁶⁷ In fact, Division Captain Harry Holmes issued a communiqué to central city business owners to report “any groups of young blacks in the area. These are people between the ages of 12 and 18, both boys and girls. One gang wears earrings and the other wears hats. When encountered in groups of more than two they are very dangerous.”⁶⁸ When community members raised concern that the effort may lead police to violate the civil rights of Black children, the police agreed but stood firm. Admitting, “sure, were gonna be stopping kids on the street when

⁵⁹ Cohen, “Black Youth Gangs.”

⁶⁰ “Four Youths Hunted in Gun Slaying of Boy, 17” *Los Angeles Times* Aug 5, 1972, A20.

⁶¹ “5 Teen-Agers Shot at Football Rally” *Chicago Tribune* Nov 11, 1972, 8.

⁶² “YOUTH KILLED IN RIVAL GANG FIGHT” *Los Angeles Times* Nov 29, 1972, A3.

⁶³ David Rosenzweig, “Guns Seized From Lockers at Junior High” *Los Angeles Times* Dec 13, 1972, 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ David Rosenzweig, “Gang Violence Linked to Desire for Notoriety” *Los Angeles Times* Dec 24, 1972, B.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

we find them traveling in groups and we're gonna ask them for identification and check out their business."⁶⁹

The Murder of Robert Ballou

The festering violence in Los Angeles caught the attention of the nation on March 20, 1972 with the murder of sixteen year-old Robert Brooks Ballou, a popular tackle on the Los Angeles High School football team. Ballou, the son of a lawyer, was attacked while leaving a concert at Hollywood Palladium with seventeen year-old friend Charles Foster. Walking along Sunset Blvd. as the two youth reached the corner of El Centro Street a group of approximately twenty young men and boys emerged from in front of a tire shop. Foster, a member of the Los Angeles High School track team reports that the group surrounded he and Ballou as one remarked "you have nice shoes and a nice coat."⁷⁰ Grabbing the two boys, the pack of youth demanded Foster surrender his leather maxi-coat. Unable to release the coat as the group held and beat Foster, Ballou charged to his rescue and was subdued and beaten to death. Two days later, the subsequent dragnet would round up nine youth, including five juveniles. Reportedly Crips, the majority of those captured were also students at Washington High School, and included track team members Conrad Williams and Ricardo Sims. In the wake of the arrests, fearing retaliation the Superintendent's office canceled a track meet between Los Angeles and Washington High Schools that was scheduled for the next day.

After the conviction of two juveniles, four young men would stand trial for the murder in the courtroom of Superior Judge William B. Keene. After three weeks of testimony a jury of seven men and five women deliberated for eight hours before finding eighteen year-old Ricardo Sims, nineteen year-old James Cunningham, twenty-one year-old Bobby Clear and twenty-two year-old Judson Bacot guilty of First-Degree Murder despite Charles Foster's failure to identify any of the young men as Ballou's attackers.⁷¹ In addition, Prosecutor Stephen Marks' courtroom performance secured two additional convictions of second-degree robbery against James Cunningham and Judson Bacot. News of the murder decorated an already pungent public characterization of the Crip organization as a marauding band of thugs. Throughout the trial, prosecutors and media agency framed the defendants in a simple contradistinction to the aristocratic son of a lawyer Robert Ballou. The facts however, suggest a more complex story. Like victims Charles Foster and Robert Ballou, Conrad Williams and Ricardo Sims were both prominent local high school athletes. Sims in fact, was one of the top track recruits in the country, setting both the 120-yard high hurdles and 180-yard low hurdles records earlier in the year. Sims' coach Ken Stumpf remembered him as having "exceptional abilities."⁷² Like so many of his Washington High School contemporaries however, Sims suffered from apathy, struggling to find a bond that would tie him to school. Stumpf characterized Sims as "the kind of guy who gets into binds at school, he doesn't always go to class and he sometimes just mopes around."⁷³ Although their lives suggest these young men played a complex game of tag with the forces of alienation and despair, Robert Ballou's murder firmly set in stone the simplistic notion

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ William Farr, "Teen-Ager Tells of Fatal Fight ' Over Maxi-Coat" *Los Angeles Times* Oct 4, 1972, A3.

⁷¹ Farr, "Teen-Ager Tells of Fatal Fight ' Over Maxi-Coat"; David Rosenzweig, "School Track Star, 8 Others Arrested in Fatal Beating" *Los Angeles Times* Mar 24, 1972, C1.

⁷² Rosenzweig, "School Track Star, 8 Others Arrested in Fatal Beating."

⁷³ Ibid.

of Crips as urban terrorists. Until today in fact, the image of Crips as a murderous mob of hoodlums prevails.

Bloods Formation

The Crip murder of Robert Ballou occurred with a veneer of politicization and class consciousness and the absence of institutionalization. One of the things that shows the power of self-hate prevalent among many of the young Black men of this generation is the enormous efforts that they went to, seemingly of their own volition, to institutionalize Black-on-Black violence. The existence of the Crips was no more sustainable than the existence of Superman without Lex Luthor or the Democrats without the Republicans. The Crips, needed a mirror image, an indistinguishable and yet mortal enemy. It was thus inevitable, that the Crips would give rise to the Bloods.

As Crips expanded into areas of Los Angeles outside of their original territory, tensions with organizations nonaligned with the Crip movement escalated. This intensification brought a spike in violence among youth. Twenty-nine students were murdered in Los Angeles between 1971 and 1972.⁷⁴ In 1973, this trend continued. Among the casualties were sixteen year-old Ellis Hughey and seventeen year-old George Easter, reportedly shot by three Crip students on the campus of Alain Leroy Locke High Schools on April 3. Easter would die, leading to a cycle of retaliation. These sorts of conflicts spread. In south central, Crips fused with the Brims. In Compton, the conflict was with Piru Brothers. In Watts, it was with the Haciendas. In the face of these growing conflicts, the Crips enemies joined to build an alliance that became the Bloods.

As with those in Raymond's Washington's neighborhood, many of the youth who would go on to form the Bloods participated in the Black Panther Party's Breakfast for Children Program. Robert E. Lee, later known as General, in fact, worked in the program. He recalls the influence the Panther Party had on him:

I was with the Black Student Union, and the Black Student Alliance. . . See, the militant thing was kicking out here for a minute. Black Panthers was everywhere, US, the Nation of Islam. To me, the Black Panthers did more for Black people than anybody in L.A. and the West Coast. . . Huey P. Newton, he talked that talk and walked that walk. . . I knew those brothers were down. They went gun to gun with the police, and the police backed up off of them. It showed us that we didn't have to be run over. . . I remember when fifty of us would be on the corner, one police car would pull up, and everybody would leave. When the devil would pull up, brothers that didn't even do a thing were breaking their legs, tearing their pants, and jumping over cars to run away. They would have their IDs on them and everything. It's just that white people have put that fear in them. Huey P. Newton stopped that. He said, "You have a right to stand here and talk to each other." . . . I know who made a difference, I saw for myself. It wasn't something I read in a book or heard somebody say, I saw what Huey did for the hood. Huey and Bobby, Eldridge Cleaver, and all of them back in the day, they were out there. They didn't sit behind a desk or just give a good speech, they backed their talk with action. To me Huey P. Newton was the greatest Black man that ever lived.⁷⁵

Despite forming their alliance in response to Crip aggression, these youth experienced an

⁷⁴James J. Kilpatrick, "Schools or Jungles?" *Los Angeles Times* Apr. 25, 1975, C7.

⁷⁵Jah, *Uprising*, 132-134.

identical brutalization as their Crip counterparts. Robert Lee, a founding member of the Brims Blood organization, recounts an encounter with police reeking of the same terrorism faced by first generation Crips:

We were going eastbound on Forty-ninth towards Harvard, the police just came out of nowhere and stopped us and started questioning us about some stuff that we didn't even know about. At that time I always had a smile on my face, I was always laughing. I was laughing when the police came, so he was like, "You have to stop laughing." I was steady laughing, and he put his pump shotgun in my mouth and said, "Smile now, nigger." . . . I was so young, around thirteen or fourteen years old.⁷⁶

Also as with the first Crip generation, school was a site of demoralization for these young men. Original Blood, George Stanford recalls an incident in high school when he was accused of cheating on an exam:

We didn't have enough books where you could have your own to take home with you. They had a class set. You would come to class, you could use it in class but you couldn't take it home, cause there wasn't enough books. . . . So we had a test and she let us do an open-book test. It's an open book test. How hard can that be? All you gotta do is look at the question, look in the index, find the page number and answer that shit. How much of a fucking test of my skills is this? It ain't like it's hard or nothing. This ain't no real test. But I got a hundred. On the test, I got them all right. It's not like it was even a real test! You giving us an open-book test so you must already think we retarded or something. Then, I get them all right and you accusing me of cheating. First off, it's open-book, what the fuck? The test itself is cheating. She pulling me aside the next day asking me how did I get all the answers right. Oh, cause other student's like me don't have those skills. I'm like, well what do you mean, other students like me? Like, what do you people even think of us? You think I'm too stupid to know how to look in a book to find the answers? It don't take no brain power to figure that shit out. Oh, well it's only cause you don't never pay attention in class. What that got to do with the test? You don't have to pay attention, it's open-book lady. . . . Man, that shit was a straight insult.

Like George, Ralph "Sugar Man" Nelson's miseducation played a formative role in his decision to become a Blood. By the age of seventeen, Ralph, a student at Centennial High School in Compton, was leader of the Piru Brothers. As with Raymond Washington, Ralph's childhood disposition seems to make him an unlikely candidate for gang leadership. Given the name "Sugar Man" by his grandmother because, she argued, he was "such a sweet baby," Ralph excelled at sports as a youth.⁷⁷ Similar to his Crip counterparts, however, Ralph struggled to find his way in school. Despite his athletic prowess, this disaffection even carried over to the football field. Paul Washington, Ralph's High School football coach, in fact, "really hated [him]. It was nothing Ralph did, you understand," Ralph's former junior varsity coach Willard McCrumby Jr. argued. "[Washington] wasn't being fair to the boy. Ralph came to school regularly, he carried a C average, and there just wasn't any reason he shouldn't be on the team." "The [coach] would

⁷⁶ Ibid., 135.

⁷⁷ Quoted in John Schulian, "Ralph Nelson Finds a Home With a Whole New Gang" *The Washington Post*, Sep. 27, 1975, E1.

only put me in on like short-yardage plays and then he'd pull me right back out again," Ralph protests.

For Ralph, the dejection he felt as a result of his tribulations in school led him to seek solace on Piru Street. "I wasn't scared of anybody, teachers or nothing. . . There were about ten other guys that lived on the street. If any of them had any problems, they came to me. We called ourselves the Piru Brothers." Like Raymond Washington, Ralph Nelson insists, "we weren't a gang or anything. We did a lot of things together. We weren't just fighting."⁷⁸

Ralph does acknowledge, however, the battles the Piru Brothers engaged in with Compton Crips at Centennial High School. "Finally, they pushed us too far," Ralph remembers. "They got one of our guys in the school cafeteria. I guess you could say we went berserk. It was a mess. They had guns. Maybe a couple of our guys did, too. That's how we wanted to chase them off our side of the world."⁷⁹

Without the prospect of playing college football, Ralph's possibilities of dignity were confined to his role as leader of the Piru Brothers. After graduating from Centennial in 1973, he landed a job in a doorknob factory making \$3.70 an-hour. Ralph's life was bound within this radius until a fellow Piru Brother informed him about tryouts for the Southern California Sun of the World Football League in Santa Ana while playing a pick-up game of football on Piru Street. With a shot at playing professional football, Ralph's luck would change. After one season with the Sun, Ralph was drafted to the NFL by the Washington Redskins.⁸⁰ After a brief pro football career he went on to work as a bus driver away from L.A.⁸¹

For George Stanford and others however, there would be no such escape. In the early 1970s, the feud between the Pirus and the Compton Crips raged on. As Crips throughout Los Angeles continued to exert their influence in an expansive acquisition of territory clashes with other organizations increased. As a result of these disagreements, several existing organizations, including Pirus, Brims and Athens Park, formed an alliance called the "Bloods" in 1972 in order to challenge Crip domination.⁸² Few like Ralph Nelson escaped, but for most there was no avenue of overcoming the racial dehumanization they had internalized.

The C.C.O and the Crip Constitution

As the clashes between Crips and Bloods intensified, many first generation Crips began to question the direction their organization had taken. Caught between the tidal currents of self-loathing and Black radical politics, in the early 1970s, central Crip figures pledged a revived commitment to the original principles of their founder Raymond Washington. In attempt to steer the organization back to these roots of resistance, members formed the Consolidated Crip Organization and drafted the Crip Constitution. As Danifu Bey remembers, "by 72, 73, we started to formulate constitutions and acronyms that begin to reflect our origin in the Black Panther Party. And from there, developed the CCO and the Consolidated Crip Constitution."⁸³

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Leonard Shapiro, "Redskins Add 'Real Plus' in Ralph Nelson" *The Washington Post* Apr 4, 1975, D1. Nelson's assistant coach on the Sun, Ernie Wheelwright, recalls, "I saw maybe two guys with the cuts this kid had. [Gale] Sayers was one of them. . . He had hustle and heart written all over him, and he'd do things that some of the big shots out of college wouldn't." Quoted in Michael Globetti "Ralph Nelson Is Looking Forward To A Second Childhood In Pro Football" *Sports Illustrated* May 09, 1983.

⁸¹ Globetti "Ralph Nelson Is Looking Forward To A Second Childhood In Pro Football."

⁸² Jah, *Uprising*.

⁸³ Bey, interview.

The new direction was reflected in the acronym “C.R.I.P.S.” Community Revolutionary Inter Party Service .

Seeking to expand their sphere of influence on Crip culture and ideology, the radicalized Crips of the CCO coalesced with existing Crip formations. The CCO became the dominant force amongst the imprisoned Crip population. Inside the walls, “the Crip Constitution,” Harlem Crip Colton Simpson points out,

maintains order and rules for the module. . . CCO ideology is attributed to the Black Panther Party. . . Smuggled books such as *Soledad Brother* by George Jackson, *Art of War* by Sun Tzu, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* . . . become our bibles. We’re our own nation run by our own laws and leaders within the system. The leaders set about educating us.⁸⁴

In the hole, I learn the CCO takes control of the module. They reorient the Crips and set out to establish the Crip name as positive and productive rather than malicious and destructive.⁸⁵

Sanyika Shakur recalls how the CCO’s discipline and commitment to education changed a friend from the streets:

His attitude changed tremendously. He had none of the old craziness that I remembered him for when we were growing up. . . His demeanor now was humble and sure, with an air of confidence. He was respectful to the point of being almost being silly. “Excuse me” and “please,” he’d say, and instead of thank you he’d say “asante,” which is Kiswahili for thank you. I was tripping out on his actions. Every morning he was the first one up, cleaning the cell, wiping the floor with a wet rag on his hands and knees! And each morning he’d say “Habari ya asubuhi”—good morning in Kiswahili. . . Throughout the day they’d speak to one another in Kiswahili over the tier. When they did so, the whole tier would fall quiet and just listen. They were upright, respectful, physically fit, and mentally sharp. They used “Afrikan” in place of “Black,” and never said nigger.”

[B]y reading about our Afrikan heritage I learned that the things my comrades were saying were right and that most of what I learned in school or in the ‘hood was wrong. Through our heritage I learned what it really means to be a Crip. A *real* Crip. . . We in the Consolidated Crip Organization, or C.C.O., believe that CRIPS means Clandestine Revolutionary Internationalist Party Soldiers. And with this knowledge of ourselves we believe we as a tribe have an obligation to our people. We don’t disrespect our people and we don’t fight against the United Blood Nation. . . which is the vanguard organization representing the Blood Nation. . . Crip is a bad word only because we have turned inward on our community, preying on civilians and turning them against us. We are our

⁸⁴ Colton Simpson, *Inside the Crips: Life Inside L.A.’s Most Notorious Gang* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), 90.

⁸⁵ Simpson, *Inside the Crips*, 219.

own worst enemy. So C.C.O. has set out to re-establish CRIP as a positive influence in our community.⁸⁶

Although the CCO and the return to Panther ideology transformed many Crips in the prison system, the organization lacked cohesion. With an already established Crip culture too far removed from Panther politics, the CCO's lack of a sophisticated politicization stifled their ideological development at the level of Crip, never reaching a more comprehensive racial consciousness. Ultimately, the CCO represents another instance of a failed attempt to radicalize. Might these things have been resolved if the state had not intervened, maybe, but they were not. In fact, the opposite occurred with the CCO unable to withstand increased repression from the state. As Tookie makes clear, "in the final analysis there were no winners, only disunity."⁸⁷

Conclusion

As Crips began to increase their numbers and expand their territory, the original vision of community development had become distorted and the internecine struggles had settled in. The original vision of Raymond Washington's Baby Cribs evaporated with the emergence of a Crip culture that increasingly borrowed from its own dehumanization. "Pretty much a different element came into being," Danifu remembers. Still, as Crips and Bloods began to resist racism by destroying their mirror image, they were always conscious, on some level, that their actions were in fact reactions to oppression. As Robert Lee testifies, "I never considered myself a gang member, I called myself a soldier in the Brim Army . . . because I felt I was a soldier from the hood. The police department is the biggest gang to me."⁸⁸

As more and more self-destructive tendencies began to assert themselves, Danifu and other Crip leaders attempted to rescue the ideology of the Black Panther Party. With increased police repression, however, Crip efforts to transform themselves into a political party went largely unfulfilled. An established Crip identity began to emerge in modes and forms that reduced and weakened the capacity and potential for these radicalized Crips to engage in transformative social improvements. Again, Danifu offers a precise explanation of the Crips:

Some structure that was developed and put on paper would give people better evidence of the origin of the group known as Crips but to make it simple, it's more like once they got rid of the leadership in the Black Panther Party, once they were chased out of the community, the development of the young people kind of like was stagnated. It was still in motion but the development was unable to be completed because the leadership had been removed or under runned.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Sanyika Shakur, *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993), 303-305.

⁸⁷ Stanley Tookie Williams, *Blue rage, Black redemption: A Memoir* (Pleasant Hill, CA: Damamli Publishing, 2004), 261.

⁸⁸ Jah, *Uprising*, 121.

⁸⁹ Bey, interview.

CHAPTER 5 THE RETURN OF THE SPOOK HUNTERS

We're gonna wage a war. There are a lot of faint-
hearted people in this nation that keep talking
about a war on drugs. We don't have a war on
drugs. Never have had a war on drugs.
But we do have a war here on gangs.
-Daryl Gates¹

After traversing the contours of alienation and political activism throughout most of the 1970s, in the burning embers of the decade, Los Angeles street organizations stood on the verge of a conflict approaching the magnitude of a Civil War. On August 9, 1979 the tempest of Black self-loathing returned home with full fury, claiming the life of Crip founder Raymond Washington. Blown away by the blast of a sawed-off shotgun on the corner of 64th and San Pedro Streets, Raymond was murdered by an unknown assailant. Still, many suspect that he died at the hands of an acquaintance. Raymond's murder and the caging of prominent leaders such as Tookie Williams disconnected young Crip and Blood organizations from the ideological groundings of their founders. Facing an ever increasing military suppression and drug saturation of Los Angeles, the early vision of Raymond Washington would give way to an atmosphere of fratricidal warfare as the 1980s unfolded.

From State-Sponsored to State Terrorism

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the Spook Hunters, a white paramilitary terrorist organization, functioned to violently enforce racial segregation in South Central Los Angeles in the 1940s and 50s. As Black settlements expanded, the Spook Hunters' passé forms of racial domination withered and the military campaigns against Black radical organizations in the 1960s and 70s consolidated the enforcement of Apartheid relations into the state's legal apparatus. The onus of control and suppression of Black political resistance was delegated to the military force of the National Guard, FBI, CIA, LAPD and LA Sheriff's Department. Beginning in the late 1970s however, these national and local police agencies, primarily the CIA and the Los Angeles Police and Sheriff's Departments, increasingly adopted the strategies of Spook Hunter private militia types to tackle the Black problem in Los Angeles. These tactics would be institutionalized into the state's legal and extralegal apparatuses, increasingly moving from state-sponsored to state terrorist tactics. The local and national government's proxy warfare against the Black Panther Party through its utilization of snitches, turncoats and infiltrators, gave way to the state terrorist tactics of arbitrary arrests, kangaroo trials, torture and political assassinations. Partners in crime, the Los Angeles police agencies rode shotgun with the federal government in their war against the Black Panther Party. Beginning in the late 1970s, the LAPD and Sheriff's Department would grab the steering wheel and take full control of the military offensive.²

¹ *Bastards of the Party*, documentary, directed by Cle Sloan, (Home Box Office, 2005).

² See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the war against radical Black political organizations in 1960s Los Angeles.

OSS and CRASH

With the creation of elite brigades specializing in the suppression of “gangs,” the campaign of terror that began with COINTELPRO entered the everyday “legal” policing practices of the LAPD and Sheriff’s Department. The first of these specialized squadrons formed with the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department’s Operation Safe Streets Program, or OSS. The brainchild of Sgt. Curtis Jackson, the OSS unit formed in 1976 with the rewarding of a one-year federal grant and was put into operation in 1979 after the program received County funding.³ More than a military tactical unit, OSS consisted of a three headed attack designed to cripple Los Angeles street organizations. In addition to the Sheriff’s specialized police task force, the Hard-Core Program established teams within the District Attorney’s office specializing in the prosecution of gang members. In addition, the Probation Department’s Specialized Gang Supervision Program granted reduced caseloads and greater authority to revoke probation of gang members to probation officers.⁴ Even further, Kenneth Hahn and the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors lobbied the California state legislature to bolster the OSS’ efforts, by unanimously urging them to enact laws to keep juveniles in custody longer through adult trial and sentencing practices.⁵

Together, these programs created a bureaucratic apparatus working to subdue street organizations through increased suppression, increased supervision and special circumstances sentencing. The Sheriff’s OSS elite military task force served as the frontline and most prominent tentacle in the offensive however, pillaging through entire communities. OSS military actions were not limited to on-duty operations. In fact, OSS officers were hired by Six Flags Magic Mountain to provide privatized security to “identify and turn away gang members.”⁶ Reminiscent of the imagery of South Africa’s Sun City, Sidney Rice, a Crip from Watts, recalls his first-hand experience with OSS at Magic Mountain:

My cousin had came down from [Las] Vegas so me and him took my little brother [to Magic Mountain.] We wanted to take [my little brother] up there, he was young so we wanted to take him. Just to have fun, so we drive up there. As soon as we got up to the gates they pulled us aside and searched us. Took our IDs and checked us for warrants. We had already bought tickets. After they saw we didn’t have no warrants they let us in. . . We hadn’t even been there that long and we walking through the area where you can play games, like carnival games. My little brother wanted us to win him a stuffed animal so we was trying to play the games. All of a sudden they came up behind us, like right behind us. Literally like two feet. Just standing there. Then finally, they pull us to the side. Search us. Ask us where we coming from, all that stuff. Look at our IDs again. Asking us a gang of questions. “Where you from? What set you claim? When’s the last time you went to jail?” We like, “man, we just trying to play games. Why you stopping us out of everybody here? They already checked our IDs when we came in.” They try to make us split up. “You guys can stay but you can’t walk in a group of more than two. It’s policy, so you guys split up.” So basically one of us got to walk separated from the

³ Valle, “New Attack Aimed at Gang Violence”; Freed, “Police, Sheriff Get Go-Ahead on Computers for Gang Work.”

⁴ Valle, “New Attack Aimed at Gang Violence”

⁵ David Reed “Policing Gangs: Case of Contrasting Styles” *Los Angeles Times* Jan. 19, 1986,

⁶ “Magic Mountain Beefs Up Security in Effort to Avert Repeat of Gang Violence” *Los Angeles Times* Jul. 9, 1985, OC_A14.

other two. We like, “man look at all these people up here.” Hell of white people in big ass groups and the three of us can’t walk together? “Why we can’t walk together? We a family.” We arguing with them, like, “this is racist.” They called more back-up and made us leave. We had paid to be up there. We wasn’t even there long and they made us leave.⁷

With the institutionalization of OSS, these sorts of incidents became commonplace in Los Angeles. Designed specifically to suppress gang activity, by its very nature, OSS criminalized Black youth. Like Sidney and his family, those who came in contact with OSS were guilty until proven innocent.

Not to be outdone, the LAPD established their own elite military unit designed, in the words of police chief Daryl Gates, with the “total suppression” of youth organizations in mind. CRASH, or TRASH as it was originally known, was the personal undertaking of Gates. The name TRASH itself, in fact, reflected Gates’ personal diatribe against inner-city youth. “We tried calling it TRASH” Gates recalls, “Total Resources Against Street Hoodlums—as a way of demeaning gang activity. But some activists in the community objected. It was unseemly, they said, to call our units TRASH because we were dealing with human beings out there.”⁸ The fact that these young men were human beings was beyond Gates’ conceptualization of Black and Chicano youth. Arguing in fact, that his deployment of an additional 1,000 overtime-paid officers into South Central was a necessary component of getting rid of the “rotten little cowards.”⁹

While OSS officers wore plain-clothes and attempted to disguise their efforts with the language of community safety, Gates’ strategy was blatantly aggressive.¹⁰ CRASH officers were ordered to arrest youth for the most minor offenses, with loitering or swearing in public a common offense of arrest for victims of CRASH.¹¹ Although CRASH instantly became infamous for its brutality of youth, the program enjoyed widespread support from city officials. When the *Los Angeles Times* reported gang members were testifying that CRASH officers had been kidnapping and dumping Crips and Bloods in rival gang territory, Councilman Robert Farrell fired back, “[t]hey’re not a juvenile division: they’re not out there to improve the quality of life. . . they have to spend all of their time knocking down crap.”¹² Daryl Gates who as a teenager had been a member of a gang that hunted down Chicanos that strayed into their neighborhood, had successfully instituted a new and improved, much more sinister version of the Spook Hunters—CRASH.¹³

⁷ Sidney Rice, interview with author, Pomona, CA, January 9, 2011.

⁸ Gates, *Chief*, 292.

⁹ John Johnson, “Night of the ‘Hammer’: Retaking the Streets of South L.A.” *Los Angeles Times* Jul. 3, 1989, 1.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the differing strategies of OSS and CRASH see David Reed “Policing Gangs: Case of Contrasting Styles” *Los Angeles Times* Jan. 19, 1986, V_A1; and Richard Valdemar, “LAPD’s CRASH vs. LASD’s OSS” *Police Magazine* December 21, 2010, <http://www.policemag.com/Blog/Gangs/Story/2010/12/LAPD-s-CRASH-vs-LASD-s-OSS.aspx>

¹¹ Reed, “Policing Gangs.”

¹² Reed, “Policing Gangs.”

¹³ Gates, *Chief*.



Figure 5:1 CRASH and OSS Patches¹⁴

CRASHing the Olympics

The awarding of the 1984 Olympics to Los Angeles intensified the assault on Black and brown young men. When Police Chief Daryl Gates traveled to Sarajevo to study their Olympic security plan, the police chief there explained, “arrest everybody.” At first, Gates felt the Constitution precluded such a plan in the United States. In his search for a way to rid the streets of this public nuisance created by the presence of Black and brown faces in close proximity to the Olympic venues, Gates had an inspiration—gang sweeps. In his autobiography, *Chief: My Life in the LAPD*, Gates readily admits the influence of Sarajevo’s practice of mass incarceration on the development of his strategy to circumvent the Constitutional rights of ghetto youth. Gates recounts the LAPD’s practice of ghetto occupation:

We built the “street thug factor” into our plan. Six weeks before the Olympics, we would send our gang details out to clean the streets around the Coliseum. We would run the gangs right out of the area with a few well-chosen words, and post enough police officers to discourage them from returning too soon.¹⁵

To build public support for the Constitutionally questionable strategy of mass arrest, police initiated a public relations campaign charging that Black gangs were planning to target Olympic visitors. In the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department Lt. Chuck Bradley charged that gangs were uniting in a plot to attack the city. “Warring factions are sitting down and talking about suspending operations during the Games,” Bradley wrote alleged. “What the Olympics is about to them is money—a lot of money—and their attitude is they’re going to go out and take what they can get.”¹⁶ At a public meeting, Cmdr. Myron echoed, “gang members are discussing such a truce and a threat is thereby posed to Olympic security.” In support of Myron and Bradley’s claims, the Sheriff’s Department released an official statement claiming:

¹⁴ Valdemar, “LAPD’s CRASH vs. LASD’s OSS” *Police Magazine*.

¹⁵ Gates, *Chief*, 241.

¹⁶ Kenneth Reich and Michael Seiler, “Police, Sheriff’s Olympic Security Chiefs Disagree on Threat Posed by Street Gangs” *Los Angeles Times* Oct. 14, 1983, OC3.

The Sheriff Department's Operation Safe Streets Unit has received information that some gangs and members of gangs have discussed a variety of activity they might engage in of a criminal nature. This department will continue to monitor and evaluate information relative to gang activity and its potential impact on the 1984 Games. We are confident that Southern California law enforcement agencies have the ability to develop information and have resources to cope with any disruptive activities.¹⁷

In Gates mind, Crips and Bloods could potentially be working as mercenaries for international terrorist organizations.¹⁸ "Gangs present a grave potential for terrorism," Gates had claimed.

If some group really wanted to disrupt the Games, all it had to do was recruit from the gangs, which already possessed enormous firepower and could, if necessary, go to the local gun shop and buy some more, including an arsenal of semiautomatic weapons. All the recruiter needed to do was pay gang members to commit a mindless act of violence—which is what gang members do on a regular basis anyway.¹⁹

In fact, evidence of gang links to terrorist organizations or even plans to disrupt the Olympics for any reason, was meager at best. LAPD Olympic Security planner Cmdr. William Rathburn acknowledged that the Olympic charges were grounded in "no substantial information."

For those who were able to avoid the dragnet, Gates turned to the Army engineers to fortify the Olympics from the community:

I insisted fences be built around the perimeters of the two Olympic villages at UCLA and the University of Southern California. . . USC bordered on South Central Los Angeles, a part of the city rife with crime. . . army engineers had worked out a plan to build fences with sophisticated sensors. If someone merely touched the fence, the actual location would show up on a screen. . . [I]t was possible to land a helicopter on either campus.²⁰

With the backing of the U.S. military, Gates' electronic fences turned the streets of Los Angeles into occupied Belfast.

Earl Hayes, a Crip from Los Angeles recalls being ensnared during the Olympic siege:

We rolling down Slauson [ave]. It's three of us in the car. They get behind us. We in a Cadillac so we already know. They get behind us so, "damn, they about to stop us." They pull us over. We sitting in the car. They like three carloads deep. They get us out the car. They pull us out at gunpoint. They on the bullhorn. Make us put our hands up. I had to turn the car off. Stick my hands up. Take the keys, stick my hand with the keys outside the window, throw the keys away from the car. Then we got to get out one-by-

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gates, *Chief*.

¹⁹ Gates, *Chief*, 241.

²⁰ Gates, *Chief*, 245.

one. With our hands up the whole time. Then they tell me back up. They got they guns pointed at me the whole time. It's three carloads with guns pointed at me. They got the ghetto bird [police helicopter] with the spotlight on us. With the dog barking and everything. With my hands up, I have to back up. Then they make me get down on the ground, face first. They handcuff us, each one of us. They do that one-by-one to each one of us. Then they throw us on the curve. Question us, where we from. I'm like, "why you stopping us?" They said I was following the car in front of me too close. That I was driving too close to the car and that's a violation. First of all, that was some bullshit. They just needed to make up a reason to stop us. Then, what does that have to do with where I'm from and if I'm in a gang or not? And why you pulling me out the car with guns and a dog if all I did was drive to close to a car? . . . They gave us tickets though. Impounded my car. Cited us and made us walk home.

The Olympic gang sweeps would result in the arrests of thousands of young men like Hayes and his friends in Los Angeles.²¹ In successive barrages, Gates would send as many as one thousand troops to snatch Black youth off the streets. The infamous Olympic gang sweeps popularized a model of control that would be utilized throughout the 1980s.

Operation Hammer

The hysteria promoted by the charges of Olympic disruption facilitated the implementation of the "gang" sweeps and mass arrests, a strategy that would be employed repeatedly even though the pretext was lacking. With the success of the Olympics siege, gang sweeps would become part of the LAPD's regular activities. Operation Hammer, one of the most brutal of these barrages, began in 1986. "I initiated Operation Hammer," Gates recalls.

This involved sending waves of as many as a thousand police officers into south central L.A. on an overtime basis for six months. We made hundreds of arrests. . . it was part of our "cultural awareness" program for gangs. "We have a motto: 'Travel is broadening. Just get the hell out of Los Angeles.'²²

Mike Anderson, an investigator with the South Bureau CRASH unit, illustrates the thinking behind operation Hammer's strategy: "What you're interested in, in the first couple of weeks, is keeping high visibility so you can keep the kids under control."²³ Under the institution of selective curfews, officers raided entire communities, sledge hammers in hand, breaking windows, smashing walls, destroying furniture, even busting apart toilets.²⁴ "Offenders" were captured and "processed" on-site, in LAPD mobile booking centers. Overflowing with Black bodies, the LAPD soon abandoned these mobile centers and began processing their prisoners of war in the more expansive and efficient parking lot of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.²⁵ Police seized "gang" property, whether or not the "suspect" was in violation of any laws. Cars

²¹ Dave Zirin, "The Ghosts of Olympics Past" in *China's Great Leap: The Beijing Games and Olympian Human Rights Challenges* ed Minky Worden (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008).

²² Gates, *Chief*, 293.

²³ Marita Hernandez and Sandy Banks, "Supervisors Call for Tough New Laws to Stem Gang Violence" *Los Angeles Times* Oct. 17, 1984, V1.

²⁴ Richard Winton and Patrick McGreevy, "Will L.A.'s Strategy to Battle Gangs Work?" *Los Angeles Times* February 11, 2007.

²⁵ Alonso, "Out of the Void."

were the favorite booty for the LAPD. Referring to the practice, “we’re taking their wheels and putting them on their heels,” CRASH officer Sgt. Rey Avalos bragged.²⁶ Eric Banks, a Crip from South Central Los Angeles recalls the seizure of his property in one of the infamous attacks.

Anything you had that they claimed was gang related, they would take it. Your clothes, anything. They even took my belt once. You know how we be wearing the belts with the letters on them? I had an [E], for my name. They straight took it, my belt. It was more to clown me, you know. Make me have to walk all the way home holding my pants up. They was like, “what’s this? You know we can take this? How you gonna hold your pants up now? Next time we’re taking your pants too.” . . . they would take anything, your hat, your jacket, anything.²⁷

Under Operation Hammer, police ransacked entire communities, arresting thousands of young men for simply being accused of being a gang member. In one siege, in fact, of the 1,453 individuals arrested, 1,350 were released with no charges filed.²⁸ Operation Hammer, of course, was only one campaign within a larger crusade. Others included the creation of the “Retake the Streets” special task force. Laying siege to a 50-block area surrounding Berendo Junior High School, complete with officers on horseback, Retake the Streets shanghaied 1,700 civilians in a single operation.²⁹ Ninety percent of the estimated 50,000 people arrested during the gang sweeps of the 1980s were released without charges.³⁰

The Institutionalization of CRASH Tactics

This war of aggression occurred amidst the backdrop of Los Angeles City and County officials cutbacks of funding for youth programs. In fact, youth gang counselors, paid only \$12,000 annually, were axed in favor of hiring gang specialist detectives at \$50,000 per year.³¹ “It’s an element of life that you’re going to have to learn to deal with,” Bell Gardens Mayor Allen Shelby argued. “One way to help was to give the money to police.”³²

As the war raged on, legislation continued to buttress police efforts. Again, James Hahn stood as the head cheerleader. With Ira Reiner by his side, the couple introduced a bill that would formally make mere gang membership a crime. The legislation also sought to legalize the already prevalent practice of property seizure by calling for the forfeiture of property acquired through gang-related activities. Even further, the bill also authorized civilians to file civil lawsuits against gangs.³³

²⁶ Johnson, “Night of the ‘Hammer.’”

²⁷ Eric Banks, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, August 17, 2010.

²⁸ David Maharaj Los Angeles Times Jul. 9, 1989 Crime Rise Triggers a New Sweep on Gangs, 1; Winton and McGreevy, “Will L.A.’s Strategy to Battle Gangs Work?”

²⁹ Leonard Greenwood, “1,700 Arrested in LAPD Anti-Drug Sweep” *Los Angeles Times* Aug. 14, 1985, C3.

³⁰ Frederique Krupa, “The Privatization of Public Space” (MA thesis, The University of the Arts, 1993).

³¹ Melinda Burns, “Bell Gardens to Fight Growing Gang Activity” *Los Angeles Times* Aug. 12, 1984, SE1; David Einstein, “County Drops Project From Budget Plans” *Los Angeles Times* May 15, 1983, LB6; Kevin Roderick “Future in Doubt” *Los Angeles Times* Feb. 3, 1983, D1.

³² Burns, “Bell Gardens to Fight Growing Gang Activity”; Einstein, “County Drops Project From Budget Plans”

³³ Paul Feldman, “Millions Spent; Hundreds Jailed, Youth Gang Wars Engulf Vast Efforts to Bring Peace” *Los Angeles Times* Nov 12, 1987, 1.

Further support for the OSS and CRASH Programs would come by way of grants for tracking purposes. Officers, who received no formal gang training or education, conducted “field interviews” to identify gang members who would then be tracked through the OSS and CRASH databases. The filing systems registered things like names, nicknames, gang affiliation and cars driven by suspected gang members. Young men were treated like cattle as their tattoos were cross-referenced by their body parts and logged into the filing system.³⁴ Prior to the grant of 1985, all of this information was kept on thousands of index cards that were collected and often organized in shoeboxes.³⁵ The Gang Reporting Evaluation and Tracking System, supported by a \$234,432 grant from the California Office of Criminal Justice Planning, enabled OSS and CRASH to consolidate their databases into a computerized system. Lt. Alan Chancelor, Head of Operation Safe Streets promised “it’s going to be magic stuff,” while Daryl Gates argued the grant would give police instant access to a database that allowed the “identifying, prosecuting and removing [of gang members] from the community.”³⁶

Funding for OSS and CRASH also allowed police to make massive improvements to their arsenal. In 1986 L.A. cops began trading in their traditional service revolvers for 9mm Beretta and Smith & Wesson automatics. The promotion of automatic weaponry by LAPDs top brass was part of the rapid institutionalization of CRASH and its accompanying logic of repression. As Gates recalls, “the new automatics went through the department like wildfire. Officers didn’t wait for us to purchase the new guns for them; they went out and bought their own. . . [T]he arms race had escalated another notch.”³⁷

The improvement of LAPD weaponry during the period went far beyond the distribution of new handguns to officers. The Batter Ram, a six-ton armored tank, complete with a 14-foot steel battering ram further buttressed Gates colonial war machine (see figure 5.2).³⁸ The Batter Ram turned the streets of Los Angeles into a scene from an old monster movie, allowing police to rip through residents’ homes like Godzilla on a rampage. Of course, the Batter Ram was Gates’ pride and joy. “Police Chief Daryl F. Gates was so proud of the event that he personally christened the new tank and then rode inside it, while cameras rolled, as it did its dirty work,” the *Los Angeles Times* reported.³⁹

The legend of the Batter Ram as a notorious device of destruction in the arsenal of the LAPD was quickly established in the streets of South Central Los Angeles. “We used to even have that song back then,” Eric Banks, a Crip from Los Angeles recalls, “Toddy T, the Batter Ram. They used to crash through peoples houses with that shit. Tear your whole house down.” Funding for CRASH continued to increase as the city council’s approval of a \$2.5 million grant in April of 1988 further boosted the LAPD’s arms race.⁴⁰

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ David Freed, “Police, Sheriff Get Go-Ahead on Computers for Gang Work” *Los Angeles Times* Jun. 4, 1986, V_A1.

³⁷ Gates, *Chief*, 296.

³⁸ Nieson Himmel “LAPD’s Battering Ram Roars Back Into Action” *Los Angeles Times* February 19, 1986.

³⁹ Quoted in Winton and McGreevy, “Will L.A.’s Strategy to Battle Gangs Work?”

⁴⁰ Alonso, “Out of the Void.”



Figure 5.2: Gates' Batter Ram CRASHing through the home of LA civilians⁴¹

As Gates' soldiers ransacked the ghetto, snatching youth from their communities, the Los Angeles area jail system began to experience serious overcrowding. By 1985, the Hall of Justice, with its 792 beds, held 1,581 inmates, while Biscailuz Center's 976 beds held 1,139 inmates. The 652 inmates at Mira Loma were crammed into only 400 beds, while the Los Angeles County Jail was operating at 6,000 inmates over capacity. "As a matter of fact," Chief of Sheriff's Custody Division James W. Painter pointed out, "we are struggling mightily just keep up with the clothing. We make our own clothing, and we keep adding shifts and adding machines. It's very difficult to keep up."⁴² Although their system was unable to accommodate the influx of prisoners, like the District Attorney's Office and Probation Office before them, the Los Angeles County Jail system instituted special procedures directed specifically at gang members. Crip and Blood inmates were forced to wear color-coded jump suits and separated for special handling along with the "juveniles, homosexuals . . . the old, the young, the mentally and physically ill."⁴³ Crip and Blood modules were created to hold those suspected of being members of the organizations. The policies of the jail system, probation office, and the District Attorney's office worked in concert with police efforts to criminalize and crush Black street organizations. Even further, as the LAPD and Sheriff's office expanded its arsenal creating an ever-increasing efficient bombardment of the ghetto, local and state officials worked to create legislation to suspend the civil rights of these youth, giving the police carte blanche in their colonial campaign.

Leibo, a Crip from Watts, illustrates how OSS and CRASH officers worked to asphyxiate Crip and Blood development:

⁴¹ Photo by Jack Guant, February 18, 1986 <http://framework.latimes.com/2010/10/26/lapd-battering-ram/>

⁴² John Kendall, "L.A. Gang Arrests Bring Problems of Street Violence Inside Jailhouse" *Los Angeles Times* Jun. 9, 1985, OC A6.

⁴³ Ibid.

“What hood are you from? Let me take your picture.” All the time they’re setting you up. They’d write their hood down, with their name, and they’d tack it on the board. Then they created OSS . . . and then the LAPD started CRASH. Knowing the intent and the direction of that idea was to lock up masses of Blacks, then they created the Crip module and the Blood module in the jails. . . . When I think about it, CRASH, OSS, they’re like the Gestapo. They’ve done some serious damage, they know how to destroy that unity. They kick up a lot of drama. They have intelligence, CIA information, and they can cause a rival gang war if they kill the right people and leave the right evidence around. They flipped the script on us. The police was so familiar with a lot of brothers from different neighborhoods that they would actually get out and talk to the brothers on the streets to set them up. . . . Think about OSS and CRASH; they have a lot of information. They have pictures of a lot of brothers too. They can just turn their portfolio over to the federal government and wreak havoc in the community.⁴⁴

DARE (to Put Children in Prison) and the School Buy Program

In addition to the elite units of OSS and CRASH, Daryl Gates instituted a series of accompanying snitch programs aimed at liquidating the influence of street organizations among school-aged children. Formed in 1983, DARE—Drug Abuse Resistance Education, was Gates’ underhanded strategy to infiltrate local school campuses. Sensing the public would uncover his dubious scheme, Gates recalls,

politicians and civil libertarians questioned the wisdom of putting police officers in the classroom, fearing we might turn L.A. into a police state. . . . As a result, I began to divert, without any authority to do so, a great deal of taxpayers’ money to the program—up to \$5 million a year. . . . Eventually, I convinced the City Council to pass a resolution supporting D.A.R.E.”⁴⁵

The DARE program allowed Gates to bring CRASH from the streets to the schoolhouse. Under DARE, police would visit classrooms, talking and playing with children during lunchtime and recess, encouraging them to snitch on one another.⁴⁶ Devon Booker, a Crip from Los Angeles, remembers his encounters with DARE officers as a child, “[the police] use to come to school and talk to us when was little. Try to be cool with you so you would like them. You know? When you a little kid, try to trick you into telling on [people].”⁴⁷

What Devon did not realize, that in addition to sending uniformed troops into schools, Gates had placed undercover agents posing as high school students to bust children. With his School Buy Program, younger police officers would enroll in area high schools, posing as students in order to infiltrate student circles. Gates recalls how the two programs worked to cause discord among children.

⁴⁴ Jah, *Uprising*, 188.

⁴⁵ Gates, *Chief*, 267-268.

⁴⁶ Margy Rochlin, “HIGH SCHOOL UNDERCOVER” *Los Angeles Times* December 27, 1987.

⁴⁷ Devon Booker, interview with author, Pomona, CA, December 28, 2010.

In time we found that D.A.R.E. made such an impact on some kids that they actually approached the undercover agents who were posing as students, and gravely warned, “Listen, you’ve got to stay away from that group you’re always with. They use drugs!”⁴⁸

Through DARE, the LAPD encouraged children to work as informers. With the School Buy Program, LAPD undercover agents worked to bust children directly by infiltrating high schools.⁴⁹

When the Law is not Enough

In addition to OSS, CRASH, DARE and the School Buy programs, Los Angeles police utilized extra-legal measures to terrorize young Black men in the 1980s. Born in Miami to Jamaican parents, Eric Banks moved to Los Angeles in 1982 at the age of thirteen. He recalls an incident in which he was beaten by CRASH officers:

We all in the hood kicking it. I run up in the homie house to use the phone. We had an alley way in the hood. We kicking it at one end of the alley, but the homie house is on the other end of the alley. You could get to his apartment through the alley. So I walk down to the other end to the house to go use the phone. As I’m going to the house, they coming down the alley. So they stop me before they even get to everybody else. They jump out the car on me, you know, the usual. “Put your hands on the hood” and all that. It was two of them in the car. They doing the usual questioning. . . They beat my ass though. Bust me in the head with the flashlight a couple times. I had a hat with the hood on it. [Y.C.C Yale College Crip.]⁵⁰ They like, “Oh yeah, you from Yale, huh?” I was like, “yeah, this Yale cuzz.” So they was like, “do they know that?” Trying to clown, you know what I’m saying. So I was like, “fuck you white boy.” They beat me down though, bust me with the flashlight, fucked my head up a little bit.⁵¹

Several study participants also reported being robbed by the LAPD. Devon Booker recalls an incident when police officers beat and robbed him:

We had a [motel] room. We in there drinking and shit, just kicking it. We had some little females in there. Me and the homie Mike, the homie James, plus two girls. We in the room, door just swings open. They come in, throw us on the floor, grab the homie Mike, start beating him with the stick. They search the room, they don’t find no dope, no nothing. They take the money and bounce. They fucked Mike up good, they choking him. He like, “man, we ain’t do nothing, we ain’t got nothing.” You know, what they going to do? We just got some weed. They going to take us to jail over some weed? One of them, he gets me up off the floor, puts me on the bed. Then he do like this, put the stick up against my neck like this. The girls is like “Stop! Stop!” . . . They didn’t touch the girls. They fucked us up though, stole our money. They dip in my pockets like, “yeah motherfucker, you think you bad? You ain’t heard of us?” That was the first

⁴⁸ Gates, *Chief*, 371.

⁴⁹ Michael Woodiwiss, *Organized Crime And American Power: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

⁵⁰ The names of street organizations have been changed to protect the anonymity of my participants.

⁵¹ Banks, interview.

time they had hit me. Cause I had heard that they was running around stealing people's dope. I heard, so I kind of already knew what they was going to do cause the homies was already telling me. They'll knock you with like a couple zips [ounces of drugs] or something. You get to jail, you might have had four but you look at your charges and now you only got one. But first time they ran up on me, I didn't have nothing, so they just took my money.

Arrests did nothing to alleviate the violence and humiliation. Gerard Clayton, a second generation Crip from South Central recalls being taken into custody at the Los Angeles County Jail:

When you get processed, they put you in this room. First, you have to get butt-ass naked. They throw all of you, like slaves, they throw all of you in this room. This little room and you got to strip down butt naked. You in there, like a hundred people at a time. Like right up on you, like dick-to-ass. Naked. Yeah, dick-to-ass-naked. And you got to take all your fucking clothes off, you in this room butt-ass naked. They give you some fucking nasty ass clothes that don't even fit and shit. You get processed then you got to go sit in this room. I come out of getting dressed, I go to sit in the room and it's a CO [Corrections Officer]. He like standing in the doorway, like taking role or something. So I go in the room, I walk past him. He's like "Hey! Say Excuse me!" So I was like, "ok." And I went and sat down. He was like, "come here." I'm like, what the fuck is wrong with this dude. So he takes me like two or three cells down, he looks, makes sure nobody's up in there. Takes me up in the cell and he's like, "put your hands down. Turn around. Face the wall." So I turn around to face the wall, I'm thinking he's going to search me and he grabs the back of my hair. Bam! Busts my head into the wall. Then, he's grabbing my hair, he's got his other hand shoved into my back like this, pushing me against the wall. He's like "motherfucker, you better show me some goddamn respect." He's all in my face, hell of close. He pushes my face up against the wall like, "I'll beat your ass motherfucker! You know who you're fucking with?" He was young too. I'm like man, I'll beat this motherfucker's ass, you know? But when you getting processed it's pigs everywhere. All up and down. When he takes me in [the cell], they don't even have to say anything to each other, they already know what's going on. So another one comes and stands in front [of the cell] so nobody can come in, nobody can see nothing. So if I would've done something, at least I was smart enough. If I would have hit him, the other one would have came in and helped fuck me up and they would have said I started it. I would have had an extra charge, assault on an officer or something.

Roderick Hall, a Crip from Pomona, describes in an account of his arrest how beat officers, corrections officers, and the district attorney's office work in concert to abduct young Black men from their homes and families:

It was me, William and Anthony, we walking, it's like the middle of the night. So we walking through these apartments and we see the ghetto bird [police helicopter] and the light flashing but we not even knowing what's going on. We walking back to the car, we coming through the apartments and we like walk right into them. They like, "freeze, get on the ground." Throw us down, face down, handcuff us. It was a gang of them too, it

was like, probably like five or six cars full. And they get us down on the ground at gunpoint. They surrounding us, handcuff us. Don't even say nothing. They throw each one of us in a separate car. We sitting in the cars, one pig gets back in the car I'm in. I'm like "man, what are you arresting me for?" He's like, "did I say you were getting arrested?" And that's all he said. He just drove off. I'm handcuffed in the back seat like "what the fuck is going on?" They take us to the police station, we still not knowing what's going on, nobody read us no rights, no nothing. I'm not even knowing what they arresting us for. They didn't ask no questions. I mean, other than talking shit while they got the guns out on us they really didn't even say nothing. So they throw us in separate cells, but we can hear each other. So we hollering back and forth, talking shit. So they get us out one-by-one, take us to this room, to question us one at a time. They didn't even ask nothing really. Basically when I came up in the room they was like, "do you want to talk? I was like, "no." Then they was like "are you from Harvard?⁵² You're not from Harvard too? Are you?" Cause them two was from Harvard. I was like, "no man, this Princeton on mines!" So then they like, shoot me back to the cell, I'm like, "what's going on? What am I under arrest for?" They didn't read me no rights. None of that stuff. When they questioned me, you know. They throw me back in the cell. The next morning, they get us out. They drive us to the county [jail]. Separate too, still separated. Each one of us in our own car. So I get to the county, I finally run into them and that's when I found out what I was arrested for. Cause when you get processed, you know when you go to the county [jail] you get processed. And as I'm getting processed they hand me a sheet of paper. I look at the sheet of paper, it says Armed Robbery, Drug Trafficking, Receiving Stolen Property and a gun charge. A gun charge. This is all the next day. When they arrested us they didn't say nothing, the whole time. "What we arrested for?" Nothing. And then, I get to the county the next morning and they hand me this sheet of paper and I got like four or five charges. This was like on a Thursday night, so we get to the county on a Friday morning. They can only hold you 72 hours, but Saturday and Sunday don't count. So we do Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. Tuesday we finally get to court. You know what I'm saying? They had us in different sections, so I didn't get to talk to them the whole time. And then finally when we shackled going to court, we finally get to talk. Like "damn, what's going on?" I guess they got to talk to the lawyer, the public defender came and talked to them. I didn't even get to talk to the lawyer. And they was like yeah, "they trying to get us to snitch on each other or plea down to a dope and a gun charge, and they'll drop the armed robbery." So we like, "man, fuck that, we fighting this shit." So we sitting in court all day. You sit in court from early in the morning until like five o'clock or something. Waiting to see the judge—hoping you'll see the judge. To figure out what's going on. Cause like the whole time, I still didn't know what was going on. We don't see the judge the whole day. I'm like, "fuck." I'll never forget, I was with this old cat. Cause they shackle you two-by-two. The cat I was shackled with, it was Christmas time and he had, they had him on a lick, armed robbery. He was trying to get some money for Christmas, to buy his kids some gifts for Christmas. So me and him, we shackled together. From when you get up in the morning to go to court, until you come back at night, you shackled together. You sitting like this, next to a motherfucker. Your cuffs, you got your own handcuffs and your own leg cuffs on, he got his own handcuffs, his own leg cuffs on. But then your

⁵² The names of street organizations have been changed to protect the anonymity of my participants.

legs, so my left leg is shackled to his right leg and my left hand is shackled to his right hand. You know what I'm saying? So we like this close to each other. So he telling me, "Man I'm just trying to get out on an OR [own recognizance]. I just want to holler at the judge so I can go home and see my kids for Christmas." That was his whole thing. So he telling me if you don't see the lawyer, it's good because they probably ain't got shit on you and after 72 hours, they got to charge you. If they charge you, they going to bring you in. They didn't bring me in the whole time so we get back to the county I go sit up on my bunk, I'm sitting there all night not knowing what's going on. Still, ain't nobody told me shit the whole time. They finally come in, probably like 10[pm] like "hey, roll it up." They call my name, I roll my shit up, I'm thinking they transferring me or something. They take me to drop my roll, I finally realize, like "fuck, I'm getting out." They process you, shoot you back another piece of paper, get you back your property. I get the paper like, "charges dismissed." I get a D.A. reject. But they had took my money, pigs took my money. I had like, cause I was working. I had like 300 and something dollars in my pocket and the police took my motherfucking money! So when I get my property back, I don't have my money. At the county I'm like man "what's up with my money?" They like, "you ain't got no money." He show me the paper like, "see you don't have no money." I'm like, "no man, I had like 300 something dollars." He said "well then they just stole it and didn't put it on here. You got to go back where you was arrested." So we go back, when I get out. The homies was out too, I talked to them. They like, "man, they took our money too." So we all go back up to the station. We had talked to a couple of the older homies. They was like "yeah, if you beat a case, you can get your property back. They got to give it to you." So we go up to the police station. We like, "we want our money back. Ya'll took our money." They was like, "you ain't getting your money!" We was like "what you mean? If we not charged, if we beat the charges how can you keep our money? We want our money back." They was like, "oh, when you're arrested for a crime, if you're a gang member, just because its dismissed by the judge, it doesn't mean anything. It also has to be dismissed by the gang intelligence." It has to go through two things, not just one. So if you get arrested, you ain't no gang member, you beat your charge. Bam, they give you your money back. But because you a gang member while arrested, then its got to go through the second person. Well we was like, "shit, we want to talk to him. Where's he at?" "Oh, he's on vacation." "What the fuck you mean, he's on vacation? Well when is he coming back?" "We don't know when he's coming back. Yeah he's gone. He went to Hawaii." Motherfuckers is playing with us, you know what I'm saying. So they basically just jacked us. They robbed us. Hit me for like three something. Hit the other homie for like four something, the other homie for another three. So they steal our shit. Over a thousand dollars they steal from us. Plant shit on us. I never even seen no gun, never seen no drugs. Yet I got a gun charge, armed robbery. Just think if I would've pleaded to that shit. Cause I was scared, I didn't know what was going to happen. I was like, "damn, what the fuck." And they telling you, you got five charges. If you plead to two, that shit sound good. You know what I'm saying? And I was young, I didn't know no better. If it wasn't for the homies telling me yeah we fighting that shit, I probably would have took the deal. It's a good thing I didn't get to court, I would probably still be in jail right now for that dumb shit. Then after all that, then they steal your motherfucking money.⁵³

⁵³ Roderick Hall, interview with author, Pomona, CA, January 7, 2011.

Analysis

As with earlier generations, this police violence and alienation played a formative role in the lives of the young men who would fill the ranks of the Crips and Bloods during the 1980s. Devon Booker, born in Los Angeles to parents who migrated from St. Louis, Missouri in the early 1970s, became a Crip a decade later. He recalls how his interactions with police shaped his understanding of the world:

“[The police] try to treat you like a bitch. Try to punk you. Degrade you. . . You can’t do nothing when they got you like that. You can’t fight back, nothing. Can’t do nothing but get angry.” Alienated, his anger over this brutalization would have a direct consequence on his decision to become a Crip. “When you’re treated like that, it’s only natural that you going to turn to the streets, where at least you’re accepted.”⁵⁴ Devon expresses a frustration similar to first generation Crips and Bloods.

Raymond Jackson, a Crip from Pomona, recalls how his childhood experiences with police shaped his consciousness:

The first incident I remember with the police was probably when my father went to jail . . . I was probably like five or six [years-old] . . . I don’t remember exactly what happened, somebody ran out of gas . . . they went to the, back when they had the full-service and they had a gas can and they asked the attendant to fill up the gas can and the guy I guess threw the can at my father and called him a nigger. My father hit him and knocked the dude out. My father was a Golden Glove Boxer, you know, growing up. So knocked the dude out I guess pretty easily and he came home and I just remember the police coming to the house and getting him. . . I was always scared of the police growing up I always was told to stay away from them, as far away from them as possible. . . I remember distinctly being at the front door . . . I remember the lay out of that house and I remember the front door at the front yard had this long walkway up to the door and I remember them handcuffing him and taking him down and my Mother holding the kids, holding us behind her. I remember that very distinctly, them taking my father away in handcuffs. . . I remember my sister crying.⁵⁵

Soon, Raymond would experience police terrorism on a more intimate level. He recalls being caught in the clutches of Operation Get Tough at eleven years old. An extension of the OSS Program to other parts of Los Angeles County, Operation Get Tough was sponsored by Supervisor Pete Schabarum and designed to follow youth from the moment they are identified by police.⁵⁶

We used to have back in the day, they called it a gang card. Which they actually had a file box they used to carry around a thing. They’d go in their trunk and get it and they’d look your name up. They’d get your ID and then they’d go through the box and see if your name was in this file, if it wasn’t then they’d put [your name] down. They’d ask

⁵⁴ Devon Booker, interview with author, Pomona, CA, December 28, 2010.

⁵⁵ Raymond Jackson, interview by author, Pomona, CA, February 22, 2010.

⁵⁶ Victor M Valle, “New Attack Aimed at Gang Violence” *Los Angeles Times* Jul. 1, 1982 SG1.

you what neighborhood you were from and what your name was. What's your nickname and all that.⁵⁷

Raymond's experiences with the police would go far beyond tracking however. He recalls the first time he was beaten by the police:

The first time I got beat by the police I was probably about, maybe thirteen years old. We was playing video games at a 7-Eleven. This game called Double Dragon. Like a Friday night, we were playing Double Dragon and we had to always get the older people to buy the alcohol so we had this girl that was going to get the liquor. There's a liquor store next door so my two friends was playing the game and they was giving me the money, so I went into the liquor store to give the girl the money and the people at the liquor store, the Korean lady. I guess she called the police and said I had a gun. I had a pager, so she called the police I guess. So they were playing Double Dragon, I'm standing there looking over their shoulder watching and I just remember, "Freeze nigger!" And I thought it was somebody playing, somebody from the neighborhood and I turned around and there's like ten cops, like this, with guns on us. So I got my hands up, my homies put their hands up. They drag us outside in front of 7-Eleven and they sit us on the curb. And we were in Covina, which is another city right? and they're asking us where were from and I'm telling them Pomona and I remember this cop just standing over me and he's "you dirty fucking nigger! Take your nigger ass back to Pomona!" and he's talking, but he's spitting intentionally. In my face, on purpose you know? All this spit coming down. And we're handcuffed, we can't do nothing. And so they take my two friends around the corner and you just hear, "Pow! Pow!" and they tell me later, they were slamming their head against the telephone, the telephone booth. You know? So this cop, he's spitting on me, he picks me up, chokes me a little bit, slaps me around. He goes around the corner to beat the other two. And this other cop comes and he starts trying to, basically apologize for the other guy, he's like "oh, he's not a bad guy, he just trying to scare you." This, this and that. And I was younger than everybody, so I was scared. I thought I was the next one to go around the corner. They get a call for a shooting. They take the handcuffs off, cause we never had no gun. They get in their cars and leave. That was the first time.⁵⁸

As with the youth who became the first generation Crips and Bloods, for Raymond, this type of hostility produced a growing sense of frustration with inequality:

The way they make you feel. Just like you're nothing and you can't do anything. You already feel like that already. Like, I remember being a kid and going to the store and they follow you around and ask you if you stole anything or whatever. And I just hated the feeling because it's just like on you, you know. You already feel like you get those looks in society when you're walking around. I remember that from a young age, just feeling strange. Not knowing what it was but feeling like people are staring at me. But when the police have you, it's like, you're in handcuffs. It's like the ultimate form of bondage almost. You can't do anything. Like, they have their hands on you. They can

⁵⁷ Jackson, interview.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

do anything they want. This guy's spitting in my face and there's absolutely nothing I can do. I just remember, I don't know, just frustration, anger, hatred.⁵⁹

Raymond's description of his feelings demonstrates that he was acutely aware of the forces of alienation and their relationship to police terrorism in his life. "You already feel like that already . . . I just hated the feeling because it's just like on you . . . just feeling strange . . . But when the police have you . . . It's like the ultimate form of bondage," he maintains. These are the forms of institutionalized brutalization the youth who joined the Crips and Bloods in the 1980s experienced. The Crip and Blood phenomenon represents a dignified response to the alienation and repression faced by children thrown to the wolves.

As with the first generation Crips and Bloods examined in Chapter 4, schooling played a central role in the alienation of the children who joined in the 1980s. Born in Los Angeles in 1970 Joe Witherspoon joined the Bloods in 1983. He captures his initial indifference to schooling:

Awe man when I was little like um kindergarten, first, second grade man it was, you know school was whatever, it was a, I didn't like getting up in the morning but you know like hey it's not like we we're doing much you know? Learning how to read or learning how to tie your shoes playing with play-doe, making shit, it was all right. Um it wasn't until like later on that as I started getting older. School started like I don't know man, I don't want to say I understood it as a racist institution. Um but it was definitely like, I felt alienated.⁶⁰

School, however, would go on to play a formative in his developing alienation:

Yeah man, well there was this white teacher right? And this was, I wasn't in the public school system, at that time, my Mom had me in the parochial, catholic private school in Long Beach. And um I remember this white teacher, right. She was racist as fuck man. And um she always picked on the Black students and she had a hard on for me, right and it wasn't like I was a bad kid at the time or you know I was a problem child in class or nothing and she would give directions and I would try to follow them but her shit was always unclear. So I would do it one way that I thought was her way, which it was her way and she'd be like no, you're doing it wrong. So then I'd do it another way which was my way which I thought was right and it was wrong. And then she was talking all this shit about like holding me back and keeping me back another year and I was like, why? What am I not performing in? And from then on like really my school experience up until I finished it was negative. . . And so, like from that point on I was just kind of like this school shit is bullshit.⁶¹

Humiliated, this incident affected Joe profoundly:

I remember feeling inadequate as a kid, because of that. At that point educationally speaking. And it just got progressively worse since I got older. . . My feelings of

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Joe Witherspoon, interview with author, San Francisco, CA, October, 17, 2010.

⁶¹ Ibid.

inadequacy towards school, towards like being intelligent. Even to this day. You know like, I just never felt capable succeeding in a school setting. Even today I still have difficulties accepting the fact that I'm intelligent enough to make it to where I've made it.⁶²

Not alone in his disillusionment, Raymond Jackson shares similar feelings toward school:

I remember developing into the idea that everything was bullshit, like everything you hear in school. You know, they tell you to do this and do that so you can become something, but I just remember thinking that it's just all bullshit, you know. That, and I wouldn't have used the word contradiction back then, but I remember thinking that it's all just a big lie. . . Everything.⁶³

This growing skepticism however, would lead to a critical examination of his miseducation and its relation to the other forces of domination in his life, and throughout the world. In turn, through this reflection, he developed a growing empathy for other subjugated human beings:

I remember, I can remember being a kid and looking at the news and seeing something about Africa and just being pissed off. You know, like, oh, that's how they treat us and you try to, like, anything I would see about Black people, I knew it was a lie because I see how they treat us everyday. And then they try to paint America as if it like was this great country or something. And I remember being conscious of that, it making me angry.⁶⁴

Not simply an oppressed product of their circumstances, Joe and Raymond demonstrate an ability to unveil the hypocritical pretext of their schooling. Their comments reveal a growing awareness of the artificial virtues promoted by American democracy. Through a critical examination of his positionality in the world, Raymond is unpacking the relations of power on a world scale. Moreover, his compassion is not confined to the level of analysis. He expresses a sense of solidarity with other human beings he feels have been victimized by the same forces of injustice. Raymond is demonstrating not only an ability to critically examine these forces, but a deep sense of connectedness to human beings on the other side of the planet. As with the previous generations of Crips and Bloods, however, his alienation and growing suspicion over his condition did not only manifest itself in the warmth of solidarity with the oppressed. For Raymond and his generation, self-loathing prevailed, as they became the purveyors of Black-on-Black violence during the 1980s.

Joe Witherspoon describes how his involvement with Black-on-Black violence was a consequence of the same frustration over his domination that caused him to question power relations:

Eventually what it did was, basically what it did was its like taking a pit bull right, you take a little puppy right and you start beating the shit out of it. Well what happens when

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Jackson, interview.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

it gets bigger, right? When it becomes an adult, well it becomes a vicious ass dog. And eventually when I started getting into like 16, 17, I became a vicious dog.⁶⁵

Joe describes his transition from a frightened child to a full-fledged Blood:

I remember when I had just first left private school and went into public school to live with my dad in Lynwood. There were moments and times, first of all, I was undersized. I was a pretty small kid. I wasn't a husky person like I am now. I was completely undersized. I was coming out of private school. Private school doesn't socialize you. Public school is like survival of the fittest. I was transitioning myself into that and that was difficult at first. . . I just remember I would get punked, I would get picked on in school. . . Once I got in high school, there came a point in time by my sophomore year that I had enough and I had grown into my own. I was no longer this little scared person anymore. . . there was a time when we were playing basketball man, and something happened where the ball went out of bounds, and I fucking threw the ball back in bounds or some shit, hit a dude in the fucking face with it and he got mad and pushed me to the ground. I wanted to jump back up and swing at him, but I just didn't. . . I felt pissed off man, I felt angry. I wanted to lash out. I wanted to just hurt, I wanted to fucking take this guy and rip his face off but I didn't.⁶⁶

Incapable of defending himself, Joe felt “anger and inadequacy. Like I'm less than a man because I'm not stepping up and handling my business.” In a search for dignity, Joe inverted his inferiorization while leaving intact the negative aspects of his dehumanization. Becoming a “viscous ass dog” was Joe's internalization, negation, and reinscription of the forces of dehumanization in his life.

Producing more than anger, Joe acknowledges feeling a great deal of anguish associated with his alienation, stating, “I felt like no one loved me.” Also enduring feelings of nothingness, Raymond Jackson reveals, “as a kid I would like cry myself to sleep every night.” The fact that these men experienced this sadness demonstrates they were aware that something in their lives was wrong. Both Joe and Raymond reveal as children, they desired to be loved and accepted. Dehumanized, this desire for dignity and respect was fulfilled through an ability to be tough.

As children, Joe and Raymond incorporated their brutalization into their notions of subversive resistance. The problem with most gang scholarship is that it views this reappropriation of the forces of dehumanization in their lives as a raw material. By proceeding from the conviction that asymmetrical power is unidirectional, scholars often fail to recognize the ways in which Crips and Bloods have worked to reorganize their dehumanization. As was the case with the first generation of Crips and Bloods, these young men illustrate a capacity to think beyond their positionality.

Conclusion

Although scholars have documented law enforcements actions against street organizations in 1980s Los Angeles, these frameworks view the actions of CRASH combatants and the states' offensive on Black youth as a necessary reaction to curtail gang violence fueled

⁶⁵ Witherspoon, interview.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

by the Rock Cocaine epidemic.⁶⁷ The problem with this assertion is twofold: First, the roots of both OSS and CRASH predate the introduction of Rock Cocaine in Los Angeles by half a decade. In actuality, these forms of policing emerged independently from the organized involvement of Crips and Bloods in the underground drug economy. Secondly, although scholars have aptly connected the government's role in drug distribution of cocaine in Los Angeles in the 1980s to the corresponding spike in gang violence, they fail to connect this criminal enterprise to the concerted efforts of government officials to prevent the rise of another Black Panther Party. Scholars attribute government drug trafficking to the actions of a few rogue officials, conceptualizing this odious venture as an isolated historical event, rather than as state efforts to retard the political development of radical politics among urban Black Los Angeles youth.⁶⁸ In doing so, these scholars moralize their conceptions of street organizations, reducing Black-on-Black violence to pathological and/or economic motivations. In actuality, OSS and CRASH contain their own justificatory criteria. That is, they are projects of Black control that simultaneously create the need for and legitimize Black containment. Yes, Crips and Bloods live outside of the law, a law that by its very nature impedes Black life.

An examination of the cartography of power in the lives of these young men captures with accuracy and nuance the consciousness of those who make up the Crips and Bloods. The erasure of the Black Panther Party from Crip memory left these youth with no alternative epistemology to resist Gates' forces of brutalization. In the 1980s, Black resistance, a constant invention of expressions of dignity, increasingly appropriated means from its own dehumanization. Black conflict with the mechanisms of dehumanization manifested in Black-on-Black violence. The mode of resistance in the face of state terrorism became fratricidal warfare as these young men battled the LAPD for the custodianship of anti-Black violence. In the aftermath, the purveyors of anti-Black violence became Black people, themselves.

⁶⁷ See for example, Alonso, "Out of the Void." Alonso argues "By 1980 gang violence fueled by drugs had increased to the degree that the Los Angeles District Attorney's office created the Hard Core Gang Division to prosecute gang members, and the LAPD established CRASH." Alonso, "Out of the Void," 155.

⁶⁸ For the U.S. government's distribution of cocaine in Los Angeles see Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998).

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

I am a gang expert—period. There are no other gang experts except participants.

-Monster Kody, Eight Tray Gangster Crip¹

[There are] a lot of ways to explain what the Crip phenomenon is, but I would say it's just a crude development of the Black Panther Party and militant movement that was not given a chance to fully develop because it had been tampered with.

-Danifu Bey, First Generation Crip²

I never considered myself a gang member. I called myself a soldier in the Brim Army . . . because I felt I was a soldier from the hood. The police department is the biggest gang to me.

-Robert Lee, Brim Blood³

California Department of Corrections inmate # C29300's death precession commenced at 11:59 pm, sharp, December 12, 2005.⁴ Herded by a five-guard regiment, inmate #C29300 was philosophical as he embarked on his godforsaken trail through the dilapidated 152-year-old halls leading to San Quentin's death chamber. "Though execution looms like poisonous toxins," he contemplated, "I do not fear death."⁵ Approaching the hatch to the green chamber, inmate #C29300's escorts handed him over to the death squad. Laying him on the gurney, three guards tied down his arms and legs, strapped his chest, shoulders, waist, knees, feet, and wrists, feverishly reinforcing the straps with tape.⁶ As a group of thirty-nine spectators settled into their seats, the circus began. For the next twelve minutes, a prison nurse clumsily prodded the inmate for a vein. At 12:21 am the death warrant was read and the administering of the poisonous chemicals began. Sodium pentothal, pancuronium bromide, and finally potassium chloride, discharged one-by-one into the man's veins, crescendoing in a lethal dose.⁷ At 12:35 am, inmate #C29300, Stanley Tookie Williams, one of the foundational members of the Crips, was pronounced dead, becoming the 1,003rd human being "legally" murdered by the United States since 1976.

Spectators were driven to speculate about the seeming lack of emotion with which Williams approached his death. *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Kevin Fagan imagined that

¹ Sanyika Shakur, *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993).

² Danifu Bey, interview by JR Valrey, *P.O.C.C. Block Report Radio* Los Angeles, CA, November, 2005.

³ Yusuf Jah and sister Shah'Keyah, *Uprising: Crips and Bloods Tell the Story of America's Youth in the Crossfire* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 121.

⁴ Kevin Fagan "The Execution Of Stanley Tookie Williams" *SF Gate* December 14, 2005.

⁵ Stanley Tookie Williams, "What I Would Do With The Rest of My Life" *Final Call* Dec 12, 2005.

http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/article_2324.shtml

⁶ Fagan, "The Execution Of Stanley Tookie Williams."

⁷ Jennifer Warren, "Watching the Death of Inmate C29300" *Los Angeles Times* Dec. 14, 2005.

the condemned man “shuffled” to his death, employing, whether consciously or not, a verb long associated with images of Black inferiority. Similarly prison guard Vernell Crittendon speculated “that living a life of inactivity and non-productivity makes some inmates desire the sweet taste of death.”⁸ And yet, Williams’ life and death tell a more complicated story of Black criminality and resistance.

In prison and facing the death penalty, Tookie sought to distance himself from a criminal persona and portray himself as a reformed person and a political activist. And yet, the turn to politics failed to change Williams’ fate. According to California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, the man who denied his clemency, Tookie’s execution was carried out not because he was a criminal or even a gang member but rather because he advocated “violence and lawlessness as a legitimate means to address societal problems.” Williams had dedicated a 1998 book to “Nelson Mandela, Angela Davis, Malcolm X, Assata Shakur, Geronimo Ji Jaga Pratt, Ramona Africa, John Africa, Leonard Peltier, Dhoruba Al-Mujahid, George Jackson, Mumia Abu-Jamal, and the countless other men, women, and youths who have to endure the hellish oppression of living behind bars.” The invocation of George Jackson, Schwarzenegger charged, “defies reason and is a significant indicator that Williams is not reformed.”⁹ The murder of Tookie Williams was thus yet another instance of the state seeing Black criminality as more useful to its interest than Black political engagement.

Politicians of both the liberal and conservative variety often decry Black criminality. Ironically the period leading up to Tookie Williams’ execution and funeral saw the kinds of Crip/Blood harmony that one would expect such politicians to welcome. Bloods, Crips and other Black youth had forged an armistice to protest Tookie’s impending execution. Even the gesture of prominent members of the Bloods, who had appeared on television offering their weapons to police in exchange for Tookie’s life, failed to sway Schwarzenegger.¹⁰ And with the death of the very person uniquely able to foster the political and social engagement of young Black men, the nascent intergang solidarity inevitably dissipated.

Throughout the forty-two years of the Crips’ existence, the tension between radical politics and criminality exhibited by each Crip generation ultimately lent itself to exploitation by the state. Still, this tension, and the state repression that fostered it, is not unique to the Crips. From the days of the Spook Hunters, young Black men in Los Angeles have been under siege. Resistance and criminality have made competing and complimentary claims on the young Black men who joined the clubs in the 1940s, the Businessmen in the 1950s, Malcolm and the Fruit of Islam in the early 1960s, the Panthers in the late 1960s, Raymond Washington and the first Crips in the 1970s, second and third generations of Crips and Bloods in the 1980s and 1990s, and on to the young Black men of our day. The tension between criminality and resistance reflects the interplay of the state and Black people themselves as they struggle to define and locate the color line. Whereas a system of class oppression inevitably focuses on the working lives of the oppressed and thus frequently on adults, the system of racial oppression focusing on the interplay of state violence and resistance to it inevitably highlights the role of those most exposed to state violence and most able to resist it. In the ghetto, this is inevitably young Black men. It is for this

⁸ Fimrite, Peter. “Inside Death Row” *SF Gate*. Nov. 20, 2005.

⁹ Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Governor of the State of California Statement of Decision Request For Clemency By Stanley Williams* December 12, 2005.

¹⁰ Robert, “Stanley Tookie Williams Vengeance or Justice” *ThuglifeArmy.com*
<http://www.thuglifeArmy.com/news/?id=2185>

reason that the rise of the Crips out of the ashes of the Panthers illuminates not so much gang mentality as the nature of Blackness in general.

If there has been continuity in Black racial identity, however, there has also been change. Although the expressed identities of the first generation of Crips contained themes of resistance and pride similar to those expressed by the Black Panther Party, growing invocations of gangsterism pointed to the declining power of political resistance in their understanding of Blackness. Original Crip culture had established itself as a practicable mode of resistance, but amid the military defeat of the Black Panther Party, Crips quickly began to stray from their original ideology.

The displacement of the Panthers by the Crips suggests that Fanon's vision of fratricidal violence as a transitional stage that leads to revolutionary political consciousness was overly optimistic. Fanon rightly argued that even Black-on-Black violence is saturated with both white supremacy and the effort to develop a human consciousness in opposition to it. The interplay of Black criminality and resistance demonstrates that much of Fanon's argument remains as applicable in the recent history of Los Angeles as it was in colonial Algiers. Still, this dissertation demonstrates that there is no inevitable movement or development of Black identity, as Fanon had imagined, leading in the end to revolutionary consciousness.

In the early years of Crip formation, as internecine warfare came increasingly to preoccupy Black youth, many prominent members attempted to return the organization to its original ideology. The creation of the Consolidated Crip Organization, which attempted to halt Crip-on-Crip violence in the prisons, was an early attempt to revive the politics of Black solidarity. As would happen so often, the hammer of the state crushed this effort. Regression into fratricidal warfare became the dominant component of street organization identity. The absence of consistent rules and governing structures became a hallmark of the Los Angeles streets and facilitated violence to a degree unimaginable in earlier days when Black street organizations obeyed a wider range of unwritten rules.

In the end, not only was Raymond Washington unable to transcend the void left by the destruction of the Black Panther Party, but the state was also able to successfully exploit many aspects of Crip culture and identity. Whereas in the 1970s Crip and Blood culture hung in the balance, the pendulum of Black identity swung away from radical political action with the murder of twenty-six year-old Raymond Washington on August 9, 1979. Moreover, police repression through agencies such as CRASH and the federal government's cocaine distribution escalated the campaigns of fratricidal warfare in the 1980s. Still, successive generations have never abandoned either the ability to articulate the forces of their dehumanization or the ability to imagine an alternative life beyond it.

Coloniality of Power in LA.

As noted in Chapter 1, in the years following the 1960s many scholars subjected the internal colonial model to sustained criticism. Suggesting a parallel between racial repression in American ghettos and the political regimes of European powers in what was then called "the third world," the internal colonial model had provided useful insights but in the end was ill-equipped to explain the continuing reality of racial oppression in a context lacking formal rules or laws framed in terms of race. Such was the case in post-Jim Crow America.

While suggesting the continued usefulness of the internal colonial model,¹¹ the history of Black Los Angeles also suggests the limitations of this model. A means of addressing these limitations while preserving the strengths of the internal colonial model is suggested by scholars of coloniality. They have argued that an enduring racialized system of domination and oppression has extended beyond the demise of Europe's formal colonial empires and is the defining characteristic of the global system of domination and oppression which has existed for the past five centuries. While scholars of coloniality have focused largely on the history of Latin America, this dissertation suggests the applicability of the theory of coloniality to the U.S. context. The concept of coloniality illuminates the continuities of domination amid the absence of the formal structures and institutions of colonial administration. An extensive literature has demonstrated that the creation of race as the central instrument of the dehumanization of the oppressed was at the heart of colonialism. Inevitably Blacks have both internalized their dehumanization and resisted it, an intricate and many faceted yet schizophrenic existence which has survived the elimination of formal colonial administrations, as well as slavery, and Jim Crow. Coloniality is thus central to an understanding of the historical experience of Blacks in Los Angeles.

Theories of coloniality offer a means of understanding the resurgent power of white racial domination in the wake of the Civil Rights victories of the 1950s and 60s. Rather than acquiesce to Black demands, Black advances and political incorporation, white supremacy took on new forms. Black gangs were both a response to those new forms and a means through which those new forms were generated.

From early Black migrants in the 1940s and 50s, to the Panther generation of the 60s, to the Crips and Bloods of the 70s and 80s, clearly there have been shifting experiences of racialized subjects over time in Los Angeles. These shifts, however, are a result of colonial relations and must uncover the ways in which colonial domination has shifted and transformed. From Spook Hunter-type private militia terrorism, to the state and state-sponsored terrorism of COINTELPRO; and from the mass kidnappings of Black youth by the CRASH occupying army, to the prison expansion of the past twenty years, coloniality has endured, organizing the lives of Black ghetto residents.

Colonial Culture and Consciousness

Gangsterism as Resistance?

This study confirms, challenges and extends many claims made by theoretician Frantz Fanon. For Fanon, colonial domination and its accompanying dehumanization is central to fully understand the consciousness of colonial subjects. The line between criminality and radical consciousness for colonial subjects is in many ways arbitrary. Once again, this is a point Fanon makes clear:

[T]he people make use of certain episodes in the life of the community in order to hold themselves ready and to keep alive their revolutionary zeal. For example, the gangster who holds up the police set on to track him down for days on end, or who dies in a single combat after having killed four or five policemen, or who commits suicide in order not to give away his accomplices-these types light the way for the people, form the blueprints for action and become heroes. Obviously, it's a waste of breath to say that such-and-such

¹¹ For a useful discussion of the need to redevelop the internal colonial model see Robert L. Allen, "Reassessing the Internal (Neo) Colonialism Theory," *The Black Scholar*, v. 35, #1 (2005).

a hero is a thief, a scoundrel, or a reprobate. If the act for which he is prosecuted by the colonial authorities is an act exclusively directed against a colonialist person or colonialist property, the demarcation line is definite and manifest. The process of identification is automatic.¹²

For the Bloods and Crips, it is clear that acts committed against the symbols of colonialism are understood as political. From the clashes with the Spook Hunters, the uprising of 1965 and 1992, the occasional murder of police officers or the beating and robbing of white citizens, both overt and nuanced acts committed against whites are considered political. Therefore the central question is not whether or not Crips and Bloods are conscious of their resistance vis-à-vis the colonizers, but rather how their consciousness is at play in fratricidal warfare, acts committed against themselves and other colonial subjects. It is also the question of how the process of dehumanization affects political consciousness, and how this consciousness operates in the context of intersubjective relations among the dehumanized.

Gangsterism is a theme in which many political leaders within the Black community found potential. As we have seen, for instance, in Los Angeles, Malcolm predated Bunchy. Former member of the Farmers street organization and Field Marshall of the Black Panther Party George Jackson recalled, “we attempted to transform the black criminal mentality into a black revolutionary mentality.”¹³ This was a strategy heralded by many Black thinkers. Walter Rodney, celebrated George Jackson as one, who in death “discovered that blackness need not be a badge of servility but rather could be a banner for uncompromising revolutionary struggle.”¹⁴ In his Open Letter to Angela Davis, James Baldwin commented:

In considering [Angela Davis] and Huey, and George and especially Jonathan Jackson, I began to apprehend what you may have had in mind when you spoke of the uses to which we could put the experience of the slave. What has happened, it seems to me, and to put it far too simply, is that a whole new generation of people have assessed and absorbed their history, and, in that tremendous action, have freed themselves of it and will never be victims again. This may seem an odd, indefensibly pertinent and insensitive thing to say. . . Yet, I dare to say it, for I think you will perhaps not misunderstand me.¹⁵

But history has revealed the vulnerability of this strategy. The state capitalized on the celebration of gangstersim through a two-pronged strategy. With military repression, there was a need to both recruit Black agents in the projects of repression and to foster alternatives to the Panthers project. Assassination by the state and the encouragement of US as a cultural alternative of the Panthers was the strategy utilized.

¹² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 69.

¹³ George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, [1970] 1994), 16.

¹⁴ Walter Rodney, “George Jackson, Black Revolutionary” *Maji Maji*. 5 (1971).

¹⁵ James Baldwin An Open Letter to my Sister Angela Y. Davis in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* ed. Randall Keenan (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 209.

Cultural Nationalism in L.A.

Another way in which Black Los Angeles has organized itself is cultural nationalism. For several decades, the Us Organization has been a prominent force in Black Los Angeles. Begging the question: why has apolitical accommodationist nationalism survived more than the Panthers? Cultural nationalism appeals to the masses and fills a real void because it is the heart of a heartless situation. There are limits to a cultural project that does not engage material inequality and political and social oppression, however. Cultural nationalism represents the aspirations of the oppressed, it is the opium, an expression of the aspiration that drugs you into accepting the antithesis of the aspiration.

Like the Black Panther Party, Karenga's US organization was also rooted in resistance to Black oppression but in ways that can never offer a genuine or realistic avenue out of it, constituting an aspiration to assert one's humanity but in a way that fails to challenge the important and underlying material and political bases for one's oppression. In this respect, cultural nationalism inevitably reinscribes oppression. As a solution to the problems facing the oppressed, it represents an inadequate response to the conditions of oppression.

US, the Panther, Crips and Bloods all have cultural projects, but what makes a cultural project significant is the purchase it gets you for creating the material reality of your liberation. Cultural nationalism does not inevitably voice political radicalism and scholars who imagine that cultural politics such as Hip Hop, are in themselves resistance, are as likely to legitimize accommodation as to further resistance.

Crips, Bloods and the Panther Legacy

First generation Crip Danifu Lil' Bunchy Carter" Bey argues, "with the emergence of Crip culture, pretty much a different element came into being."¹⁶ In the previous chapters, the reader will recall, we have uncovered the ways in which this "different element came into being." The historical context in which the self-destructive tendencies began to assert themselves, and Crip culture began to emerge in modes and forms which reduced and weakened the capacity and potential to engage in transformative social improvements have been revealed.

Caricatures of the Crips and Bloods, paint these young men as monsters, macho, self-serving thugs. Yet upon further inspection, as we have seen, this represents a gross oversimplification and reveals a failure to grasp the complexities. With an identity mangled by oppression, Raymond Washington's Crips served as a clarion call alerting the world to the brutalization faced by generations of young Black men. Their demands for respect and recognition, by any means, simultaneously articulated not only a sense of injustice, but an internalization of their dehumanization and a resistance to it. Crip and Blood culture both accommodated and resisted the forces of oppression. Still, with this fractured sense of self, study participants have demonstrated they are capable of imagining beyond their brutalization.

As Danifu argues, "what they call gangs, is probably not a good term to use because it feeds into what they want you to believe. . . you know, they try to criminalize everybody. When in actuality Crip was a reaction to oppression and what they crime was just rebellion."¹⁷ Danifu and others who have lived through the experience first-hand, have articulated a more sophisticated analysis than academics. We must, however, develop critical understandings that move beyond the romantic conceptions that argue Crips and Bloods represent the emergence of a new form of pure resistance. Although, history has shown that these organizations are disjointed

¹⁶ Bey, interview.

¹⁷ Ibid.

but not ruptured from Black Power Movement, as with all social movements, we must develop a schema which addresses the vulnerabilities of Crip and Blood Culture. Resistance, is never “pure.” As clairvoyants like Danifu have urged, we must confront the self-destructive aspects of Crip and Blood life without abandoning the potential of the culture to engage in transformative politics. The interrelation of domination and resistance has produced US, the Black Panther Party and the Crips. The challenge, therefore, is to uncover the relations between the development of revolutionary consciousness and the particularities of historical circumstances. As I have shown in the previous chapters, the development of consciousness is rooted in the specificities of history. Although Fanon heralded Black-on-Black violence as an inevitable precursor to revolutionary consciousness, for Black Los Angeles, fratricide was the successor of the most advanced form of revolutionary resistance. The Crip/Blood phenomena has been incubated in the increased state brutalization which has targeted and attacked more than the political leadership class, state drug distribution and the mass grave of the Black Panther Party. Under increased state terrorism, Crip/Blood tribalism superseded communalism and the anger and frustrations of Crips and Bloods subordinated their own political objectives.

What is clear is the state continues to fear and smash any potential to return to the ideals of Bunchy Carter. Tookie, in fact, was murdered in order to prevent the future generations of becoming anything resembling the Black Panther Party. It is in the states interested to both stunt revolutionary consciousness and foster the internalization of oppression. Through techniques such as chemical warfare through the distribution of cocaine in L.A. and CRASH terror units, the state has exacerbated Crip/Blood differences while discouraging radical political action.

Implications

For Fanon, race is the articulation that establishes inferiority and superiority in the colonial order, designating the colonizers as humans and colonized as non-humans. In California, like other colonial territories, this dehumanization has been an historical project. It was not inevitable, therefore, that Africans would become Black colonial subjects of the US empire. Necessarily, white supremacy was established through violent means. The burgeoning Black population of the 1940s was subjected to a racial violence that has yet to subside. In fact, the violence has increasingly been appropriated by the state, and manifested in policies such as COINTELPRO, CRASH and finally prison expansion. Since the days of the Spook Hunters, however, Black people have resisted. That resistance has primarily found its articulation in the obscure line between criminality and resistance prevalent among street organizations. For Fanon, colonial subjects necessarily must confront their dehumanization with the master's tool, through which their inferiority is always at work. Bloods and Crips, in fact, have confronted and struggled against the ways in which they have been colonized, in many ways, with the very same colonial diseases of misogyny and tribalism.

One thing that this dissertation makes particularly clear is that confronting dehumanization is a complex process in which both the accommodation and resistance of oppression are simultaneously at work. We know from this study that this interplay constitutes the consciousness of my study participants. Moreover, the historical relationship between the Black Panther Party and the Crips and Bloods illuminates how the interplay of criminality and radicalism in Black consciousness has influenced the evolution of political ideologies among young Black men in Los Angeles in general. Evolving political activism, state actions and economic conditions have shaped Black consciousness across a wide spectrum of young Black males. The Watts Uprising was associated with a kind of Black criminality and therefore the

assumption of white media and officials was that all Black participants were members of the lumpen proletariat. Likewise, this work's focus is on a certain subset. However, this identity encompasses many young Black males, some of whom are members of street organizations, and many who are not.

Focus on one trend inevitably obscures another. In highlighting the role of race, this study minimizes gender. Gender however, clearly is in play. While a thorough study of gender is beyond the scope of this dissertation, key issues have come to light that deserve discussion, in particular the entanglement of emasculation and racialization in the dehumanization of these young men. Many elements of Crip/Blood culture are primarily a result and expression of a racial identity, while many others could just as easily be said to be an overcompensation for their emasculation. To the extent that this is the case, issues of gender, ideology, representation and practice, deserve further study. This would also include an examination of the intersection of race and gender to examine prevailing conceptions of masculinity.

This dissertation engages social theory but it also engages a certain romanticization of Black youth on the part of academics. It seems reasonable to conclude that radical consciousness is not an historical inevitability. State interventions have effectively exploited weaknesses within countless movements. Therefore, Black social movements must take seriously the potential of particular forms of Black political consciousness to undermine Black freedom. This work has demonstrated, however, that the line between "political consciousness" and "internalized oppression" is unclear. From Stagger Lee to Tupac Shakur, outlaw culture and its refusal to allow the state to define its concept and strategy of freedom has proven one of the most dangerous, yet robust articulations of Black struggle. Still, in its negation of the state's legitimacy, it lacks affirmation of a coherent political alternative, making it vulnerable to the forces of the very state that it challenges.

Malcolm, the Panthers, and Us, understood well that colonial dehumanization was a central problem confronting Black liberation. The attempt of Bunchy Carter and the Black Panther Party to forge an alternative to this problem was annihilated by the state. In the ashes of the party, Crips and Bloods have attempted to assert their dignity in a constant creative process, simultaneously resisting and appropriating from their own oppression. Future liberation projects must take on the ethical obligation to develop the self and the ethics of solidarity. These young men have been objectified beyond their production value and therefore we must develop an intervention which addresses their dehumanization. Obliterated in their infancy, the Panthers were unable to develop such an intervention.

This dissertation makes critical contributions to social theory about race and particularly the ways in which racialization has shaped the consciousness and resistance of colonial subjects in Los Angeles. We must call for a liberatory project which engages the ontological to restore the human being's sense of self, both individually and collectively. For Black oppression cannot be simply reduced to labor exploitation. Colonial domination entails a dehumanization which is at the heart of Black suffering and the project of humanization must begin the process of Black healing.

The Meaning of Raymond Jackson

This work began with an account of Raymond Jackson's robbing of the *palatero*, an incident which the reader will recall contained both elements of criminality and solidarity. However, in order to understand the nature of those elements and their relationship one has to understand the whole historical trajectory from the first conquistador imaginings of California,

through the interplay of economic and political repression and resistance that shape contemporary Los Angeles. Raymond's discovery of his own humanity was discovered in the humanity of the colonial subject. A discovery that came through self-reflection and action. His material oppression, however, was still all around him. At the level of the individual, liberation must begin with reflection and the development of the self, leading to empathy and solidarity with humanity which in turn builds preparedness for material struggle. To be prepared to take on state intervention means to have cultivated the self to a degree that one does not fall prey to the tactics of divide and rule, to the vulnerabilities of the contradictions within movements, to succumb to the brutal repression of a state that will stop at nothing to extinguish the light of freedom, but steeled with the ethics of liberation and the solidarity of the people, a new human being can emerge bearing the torch of justice for all humanity.

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