

**WARRIORS OF PEACE: Inner City Youth Who Do Not Join Gangs
Explanations, Causes, and Public Policy Implications**

by

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B.A. Sociology, University of California, Berkeley
May 1993

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF CITY PLANNING

at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

June 1995

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the Westlake Planning District located in Los Angeles, California. It presents a case study of sixty-three low income inner city youth who have evaded gang involvement, and are currently attending one of the poorest schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), Belmont High School.

An historical portrayal of gangs in urban American society is presented, as well as a demographic profile of the Westlake District. The crime and demographic statistics were obtained from the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) quarterly reports, and the Los Angeles City Planning Department. Moreover, a portrayal of the neighborhood, and the youths' life stories are provided. Ultimately, a case study of Boston's City Year program is presented. In conjunction, public policies are proposed to alleviate gang involvement in American society, and more specifically, in the Westlake District. The major finding of this thesis is that inner city youth who do not join gangs have had a responsible adult role model who serves as a support base, and consequently, as a deterrence to gang involvement.

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Frank Levy

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without Professor Frank Levy. As my MCP program advisor and thesis advisor, I thank him for his encouragement, mentorship, and friendship. Throughout the development of this thesis, his helpful advice, and more importantly, his confidence in me were indispensable.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Langley C. Keyes, for his role as reader, and teacher for the past two years.

Also, I would like to thank all those who participated in this thesis, especially those sixty-three young men and women of Belmont Senior High School. At Belmont, the assistance of Ignacio Garcia, the vice-Principal, and Lew McCammon, head counselor, who sat and explained to me which classes to target is extremely appreciated. I would also like to thank the following teachers who allowed me entrance into their classrooms: Mr. Acosta (Geometry), Mr. Frank Ramirez (Math Analysis and Algebra 2), Ms. Saffan (US History 11), Mr. Ruddy Chavez (Honors English 10), Mr. Ted Oviatt (English 9, and Remedial English 11), and Mr. Anthony Velie (AP English).

I would also like to thank the professors who encouraged me to excel in college, and who supported my decision to attend graduate school at M.I.T. The following professors at the University of California, Berkeley deserve special thanks: Professor of Sociology, Martin Sanchez-Jankowski, who initially sparked my interest in urban sociology, and more specifically, on the sociology of gangs after taking his advanced sociology seminar during my senior year. Also, sociologists Neil Fligstein and Robert Blauner, who always served as great mentors, and sources of encouragement. Melanie Hahn, who helped strengthen my writing skills, thank you. And to Professor William K. Muir, warm gratitude for his encouragement during my senior year as well. While taking his seminar course on poverty and public policy, he encouraged me to take a step beyond the classroom, and to conduct "field work" in the true meaning of the word. To all my professors, once again, thank you.

However, I am most appreciative of the support my family has given me this past year, and throughout life. To my father, Armando Mejia Jiron, whose encouragement and sacrifices have taken me this far. To my brother, Armando Xavier, who introduced me to the field of urban planning, and who has been an incredible source of support. To my mother, Angelina, whose insights have taught me to think and formulate my ideas much more critically. And to Chantel Zepeda, who for the past six years has always been very understanding and committed to our long distance relationship, especially so when she was at Yale, and I was at Berkeley. However, this inconvenience dramatically changed last year when she began her Masters in Public Policy studies at nearby Harvard University. Thank you all for your support and love.

Finally, to all the friends I met at M.I.T. these past two years, thank you for the memories, and interesting conversations, especially to my close group of friends of Deanna Santana, Ricardo Miranda, Jeorgette Theophilis, and Armino Goncalves. *Muchas Gracias* for the friendship, encouragement, support, and advice you extended me.

R.R.M.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The pressures in today's ghetto are apparent in considering the situation of gangs and schools. The problems are apparent every time a young person walks to school, which often requires crossing gang turf. People who are not members of a gang are prey for the gang. Openly affiliating with the gang and wearing its insignia provides the greatest security in the area. But becoming safe outside the school means becoming marginal in the school's academic efforts (From: George E. Peterson's Urban Labor Market and Job Opportunity).

1.1 Thesis Objective

The purpose of this thesis is to find out how low-income inner city youth residing in the city of Los Angeles' Westlake planning district evade gang involvement. To find the answer to this complex question, I conducted an open ended survey at the local secondary school: Belmont High. The school is considered one of the best inner city schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), due to its "disciplined" student body, and high number of students who attend four year colleges and universities. For example, in the past six years, seventeen graduating seniors have gained acceptance to an Ivy-league university, or a top flagship state university such as Berkeley. In fact, according to the school's 1989 academic profile, thirteen students gained acceptance to Berkeley that year. This is quite an accomplishment for any school in California, whether it be public or private.

Given the success of some of these inner city youth, my thesis attempts to explain and understand how the youth included in my sample have been able to "beat the odds" in a gang-infested neighborhood. After all, the area under study has the reputation of having one of the highest crime rates in the city of Los Angeles. According to the most recent crime statistics released by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), there were eighty-nine homicides in 1994 in the Westlake district and its surrounding neighborhoods (*Los Angeles Times, February 2, 1995*). LAPD's Rampart Division has jurisdiction in the Westlake area, and the neighborhoods surrounding Belmont High, which include Echo Park and McArthur Park. Given the relatively high level of crime in the neighborhood, my thesis attempts to find out the factors that distinguish inner

city youth who *do not* become involved in gang activities from those youth *who are* involved either as peripheral, or hard core gang members.

My thesis will attempt to compare and contrast the theories which I have selected to concentrate on with my empirical findings. However, since my thesis is *not* about youths who join gangs, but about those young people who have been so fortunate as to *escape gang involvement*, I will contrast the theories with the explanations given by my representative sample of sixty three students. By employing this method, I am essentially testing the validity of the theoretical arguments. Moreover, throughout the thesis, I will use portions of each theory as a framework to access the empirical evidence. Based on the empirical evidence, I found that youth who *do not* join gangs have been raised in low income households that are not remarkably different from those of their counterparts who are gang members, but what sets them apart is that they have had a stronger parental support base, and utilize education as the main mechanism for upward mobility. The empirical findings of this thesis support sociologist Joan Moore's definition of gangs. According to Moore, gangs are a byproduct of the following factors:

Institutions develop where there are gaps in the existing institutional structure. *Gangs* as youth groups develop among the *socially marginal adolescents* for whom *school and family do not work*. Agencies of street socialization take on increased importance under *changing economic circumstances*, and have an increased impact on younger kids, whether they serve as beeper-driven flunkies for drug-dealing organizations or are simply recruited into an increasingly adult-influenced gang. Just how the specifics of *economic restructuring* play out from city to city and how the specifics affect subcultural groups is a matter for future research (My emphasis, Moore:1991:137-138).

On the other hand, youth who join gangs, use an alternative and rational mechanism to "make it" in American society. As sociologist Mercer Sullivan asserts in his book, *Getting Paid: Youth, Crime, and Work in the Inner City*, gang involvement and other criminal endeavors are utilized by many low income youth to attain the amenities that society has denied them. In the inner cities of America, *getting paid* is a phrase

that essentially “equates crime with work” (Sullivan:1989:2). Given the lack of opportunities available to young males who are ill-educated (i.e. high school dropouts), delinquency is one of the few remaining mechanisms they can utilize to “get over”. That is, to defeat the social institutions (i.e. schools and the primary labor market) that block poor minorities from attaining upward mobility. As Sullivan states:

“Getting Over” means beating the system, a rigged system in which one is unlikely to succeed by competing according to the rules (Sullivan:1989:2).

Throughout history minority males have encountered employment barriers in the labor market. However, the contemporary situation is remarkably different than it was during the 1950s. Indeed, John Hagedorn’s urban restructuring thesis espoused in his book *People and Folks: Gangs, Crime, and the Underclass in a Rustbelt City*, explains much of what has taken place in post-industrial cities such as Los Angeles. Indeed, the disappearance of manufacturing jobs has had a negative effect on poor minorities living in the inner city. My thesis will attempt to critically evaluate and compare the gang theories with the empirical evidence I have obtained, and answer the following questions: Can gang involvement in post industrial cities such as Los Angeles be explained by lack of manufacturing jobs as Hagedorn asserts? Is gang involvement based on a calculated and rational decision as Sanchez-Jankowski argues, or are gangs composed disproportionately by youth who are members of dysfunctional families as Diego Vigil asserts? Perhaps, its a combination of weak family structure, and a lack of manufacturing jobs that leads to “delinquent involvement” as Anderson contends in *Streetwise*. This thesis will attempt to do justice to these four theories, that in some instances compete with each other. At the same time, I will give voice to the experiences of those youth whom I surveyed in Los Angeles. After all, it is these “warriors of peace” who are best suited to answer the questions this thesis postulates: Who *does not* join gangs in the inner city, and why?

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The proliferation of gangs across America's inner city has received a significant amount of attention in recent years. In fact, the city of Los Angeles is often referred to as the "gang capital of the world". For the most part, gangs traditionally have operated in poverty stricken communities. However, this is not to say that there are not any gangs in lower or middle class communities. According to sociologist Daniel Monti's book, *Wannabees: Gangs in American Suburbs and Schools*, gangs operate very effectively in the middle class suburbs of St. Louis. Although the level of commitment suburban youth have towards gangs is not as extensive as it is among poor *barrio* and ghetto neighborhood youth, the delinquent activities in which they engage are highly similar (Monti:1994). Therefore, irrespective of social class position, all Americans have a reason to be genuinely concerned with crime, and youth delinquency in particular.

1.3 Methodology

Data were obtained from the following sources: (1) Review of the gang literature, more specifically, ethnographic studies conducted for the most part by sociologists, anthropologists, and criminologists. These studies served as my theoretical resources. Although my thesis is not about youth who are gang members, I utilize this literature because it addresses to a certain extent who does not join gangs in the inner city. *Moreover, many of these books explain in detail the reasons why youth decide to join gangs, and these assertions will be contrasted and tested with my empirical findings.* I should also point out that my findings are about a particular neighborhood in Los Angeles. Therefore, the findings in this thesis are not meant to either explain or offer solutions to the "gang problem in America".

As I will explain in this thesis, defining gangs is a complex problem and open to interpretation. In fact, gangs are defined very differently in the West and East Coast.

(2) A survey was conducted during the month of January 1995 at a senior high school in Los Angeles: Belmont High. Although formal interviews were not allowed by the

Assistant Principal, Mr. Ignacio Garcia, the surveys were utilized as an alternative method of data acquisition. Moreover, the survey asked forty open-ended questions that much to my surprise two-thirds of the students responded in great detail. I distributed ninety surveys to nine classes at Belmont High, and received sixty-three of them back. I decided which classes to target with the help of the Head Counselor, Mr. Lew McCammon. We sat in his office for about three hours going over the school roster of teachers. Before we began identifying which classes I would target, I informed Mr. McCammon that my goal was to target a random sample of classes, that is, honors, regular, and remedial. His assistance was extremely helpful and crucial.

Once a list was compiled of the possible classes I could target, I decided to approach eighteen teachers. Mr. Garcia, the vice-principal, suggested that I contact the teachers by writing them a note and placing it in his/her school mailbox. Fortunately, I received a 50% response rate, and nine teachers contacted me at home. I explained over the phone to each teacher the purpose of my request. Within two to three minutes it was agreed that I would introduce myself at the beginning of each class period, and ask for ten volunteers to participate in the survey per class. The nine classes that participated in the survey were: (1) Remedial English 11, (2) AP English 12, (3) Honors English 10, (4) Regular English 9, (5&6) Regular U.S. History 11(2 classes), (7) Math Analysis (grades 11-12), (8) Geometry (grades 10-12), (9) Algebra 2 (grades 10-12). Once again, much to my surprise (after all there were forty detail open ended questions) in each class there were always at least ten volunteers who were willing to participate in the survey.

Fortunately, as I said before, I received sixty-three surveys, thus, I obtained 70% of the surveys I handed out. (3) My third source was two phone interviews. I spoke with Officer Ed Gomez who is stationed at the Rampart Division, he suggested that I contact the LAPD's Public Affairs Department. I took his advice, and spoke with Officer Magee of the Los Angeles Police Department Public Affairs Division. He recommended that I obtain the crime statistics I needed from the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) Quarterly Crime Reports. Also, I spoke with Marge Nichols who is the Director of

Research Projects for the Los Angeles Chapter of the United Way. (4) Census Data was obtained from demographic reports compiled by the City of Los Angeles Planning Department. Originally, I contacted the Planning Department to obtain these reports, but I was later informed that the most recent reports were also available through the City of Los Angeles Public Library, evidently they were available, and I proceeded to photocopy many of these reports. Finally, (5) the author's experiences growing up in the Echo Park District which is adjacent to the Westlake District (where Belmont is located) has provided numerous "life experiences" and "insider-outsider" lenses to analyze and view the social and economic problems of the neighborhood(s).

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter two presents both a theoretical and historical analysis of gangs in urban American society. I will rely on the most recent theories that explain the gang phenomenon since some of the "older theories" may no longer be relevant. Those works that are considered classics in the literature will be mentioned, but will not be the focus of this thesis. The objective of this chapter is to provide background information on the existence and persistence of the gang phenomenon in urban American society during the last sixty years, with a special focus on the last twenty years.

Chapter three describes the Belmont High School target area, the Westlake planning district, its crime problems, and demographic characteristics. This chapter presents a profile of the school, the ethnic/racial breakdown, and economic background of many of the students. Moreover, besides utilizing the demographic statistics of the City of Los Angeles Planning Department, this chapter will present in as much detail as possible the type of crime problems that exist in the neighborhood and surrounding communities. The LAPD's Quarterly Crime Reports will be the primary source of information that will facilitate this analysis.

Chapter four will explain the results of the survey. A demographic breakdown of the students who participated in the survey will be presented. Also, it will attempt to integrate as many responses as possible, especially when they either confirm or dispute some of the major theoretical arguments in the literature. Thus, this chapter will provide a broad view of some of the mechanisms that low income youth utilize to avoid gang life. I will do this by giving “voice” to as many experiences as possible. However, I will try to avoid giving overlapping responses.

Chapter five will present a synopsis of one of the most successful national service programs in the country, Boston’s City Year, a youth corps program. This non-profit organization has been effective in reaching out to “troubled inner city youths”, as well as suburban youths who are undecided about their future. The main goal of this chapter is to propose some public policies to alleviate the U.S. gang problem in communities such as those in the Westlake Planning District. The proposed policies will be based on the recommendations that the students provided in the survey.

Chapter six offers a conclusion to the case study, and offers some final thoughts about the existence of gangs in urban American society. Finally, the major lessons learned from the case study will be highlighted and discussed.

The Appendix provides a glimpse of the neighborhood surrounding Belmont High School, and of the school itself.

Chapter 2: History and Theory of American Gangs

No unity exists among law enforcement agencies on a definition of a gang, though the broadest interpretation seems to be on the West Coast and the narrowest on the East Coast. These differences make it difficult to assess more precisely what the so-called youth gang problem actually looks like. What would be called a gang in some cities, such as Los Angeles or Chicago, is not seen as a gang in other cities, such as Washington D.C., or New York. According to an article in Social Science Review, officials have sometimes changed their definition of what constitutes a gang, as they did in Chicago, in order to reduce gang violence and gang homicide figures (From: Clearance Lusane's Pipe Dream Blues: Racism and the War on Drugs).

Introduction 2.1

The presence of gangs in urban American society has been extensively documented since 1928 with the publication of *The Gang* by University of Chicago sociologist Frederick Thrasher. In essence, there has been a spectrum of opinions on gang research, and delinquency for more than sixty years. To solve the severity and persistent nature of this social phenomenon all those who are preoccupied with the implementation of social policy, such as, urban planners, community activists and social workers, should be in the forefront proposing approaches that can be utilized to alleviate the social and structural underpinnings of gang involvement. However, before any policies can be implemented, it is crucial to have a theoretical understanding of the sociology of gangs.

My initial reading of the “gang literature” illustrates various theories to explain gang activity across urban centers. Given the vast amount of theories which exist on the subject of gangs, I have decided to concentrate on four of the most recent theories in my thesis. These theories are: (1) Martin Sanchez-Jankowski's organizations' theory, (2) Diego Vigil's multiple marginality theory, (3) John Hagedorn's urban restructuring theory, and (4) Elijah Anderson's synthesis of the behavioral and urban restructuring schools of thought.

2.2 Gangs as Organizations Theory

Although gangs have operated throughout urban communities for more than sixty years, the manner in which they behave, their goals, and organization has changed. Thus, some of the pre 1970s theories may no longer be applicable. Moreover, most of these so-called “gang theories” are in actuality delinquency theories. Sociologist Martin Sanchez-Jankowski makes this exact point in the first chapter of his award-winning book, *Islands in the Street*. He writes:

The sociological literature on gangs offers a number of theories, but a close look at each of these indicates that they are really theories about delinquency and not theories about gangs per se (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:21).

Before engaging in an analysis of what constitutes a gang, it should be said that a collectivity of individuals engaged in crime, is not a gang. Many people think that a number of youth engaged in petty theft are part of America’s so-called “gang problem”. Indeed, Sanchez-Jankowski points out that what most people regard as a gang is nothing more than a “crew”. He explains that these entities are “organized solely for the purpose of committing crime”, and thus, they “lack the formal infrastructure to be a gang” (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991: 29).

To fully comprehend America’s gang problem we need to understand that gangs are organized by age cohorts, and levels of command. Sanchez-Jankowski contends that gangs are structured in three manners: (1) vertical/hierarchical, these types of gangs have a well defined structured of command with a “president, vice president, warlord, and treasurer”. In such gangs, “authority and power were related to one’s place in the line of command”. These gangs are organized in the same manner as any corporation. (2)horizontal/commission gangs have different leadership positions, but “none of the officers were ranked in a hierarchical order”. Collective decisions are made by all the members who are “officers”, that is, those who are not members of the rank and file. Finally, (3)“influential model” gangs do not have formal titles, or positions. Instead,

decisions are made by a few individuals who are regarded as possessing certain exceptional qualities. Essentially, power and decision making in these gangs rests on “charismatic authority” (Sanchez-Jankowski:1994: 64-66). In the past, gangs have been defined as a collectivity of local community youth engaged in a variety of activities. For the most part, however, the focus has been on the delinquent activities of gangs. This was the focus of gang research in the late 1950s when Albert Cohen’s book, *Delinquent Boys* was published. After all, it was Cohen who postulated that blocked opportunities in society led many low income youth to join gangs.

2.3 The Controversy in Defining Gangs

Gangs have existed in the United States for over one hundred and fifty years, and have usually been thought to be a group, any group for that matter, that threatens society at a particular point in time (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:1). However, Frederick Thrasher’s *The Gang*, was the first book written on the subject when it was published in 1928. It was Thrasher who postulated that “no two gangs are alike” (Thrasher:1929:36). Moreover, he also “did not believe that gang(s) caused delinquency and crime” (Thrasher:1929:introduction). Also, he argued that gangs “(1)emerge from poor and socially disorganized neighborhoods; (2) that boys join them because there is a lack of opportunity to do other things; (3) that the boys who do join gangs lack skills and the drive to compete with others for jobs; (4) that gangs are differentiated by age; (5) that gangs facilitate delinquency” (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:3). Thrasher’s definition of gangs is clearly apparent when he writes:

The gang 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 (Thrasher:1928:46).

Contemporarily, Joan Moore who is one of the leading experts on the sociology of gangs, contends that most “community-oriented sociologists” do not equate gang

involvement with delinquency. These sociologists borrow a lot from Thrasher who did not define gangs solely in terms of delinquent activities. Therefore, according to the *community-oriented school* of thought, gangs are defined as follows: “[a] group whose members meet together with some regularity, over time, on the basis of group-defined criteria of membership and group-determined organizational structure, usually with some sense of territoriality” (Huff:1990). Moreover, one aspect of Thrasher’s research that is often overlooked is that most of the gang members in his study were ethnic white immigrants. Jerome Skolnick makes this point in a recent article he wrote in the *American Prospect*; he writes:

Of the youthful Chicago gangsters of the 1920s, few were of Latino, African, or Asian descent (Thrasher counted only 7.2 percent as “Negro”). Located in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, the Chicago gangs were composed of children of European immigrants-- mostly Poles, Italians, and Irish, along with Jews, Slavs, Germans, and Swedes (“Gangs in the Post-Industrial Ghetto”, Winter:1993).

Therefore, the perception that African Americans, Latinos, and Asians are gang members is a recent historical development. Although gangs have existed in the United States for quite a long time, the definition of what constitutes a gang and what is peculiar about them, has been debated by social scientists, law enforcement, and the public at large. It seems that everybody has a definition of who is a gang member, or what a gang looks like. Moreover, delinquency, as I will explain in this chapter, is not what gangs are all about. Relying solely on this variable has been a fundamental barrier to understand what is unique about gangs.

All social forms of collective behavior cannot possibly be construed as constituting a gang. On the one hand, it is necessary to have a clear definition of gangs, because if we fail to do so, any collective behavior will continue to be perceived as being “gang related”, as the media has labeled it. Having a clear definition will facilitate all those who are concerned with the “gang problem” to implement remedies via public policies. Having a clear definition will also facilitate a clear delineation of other

phenomena that occurs in low income neighborhoods that may be crime related, but may not be committed by gangs or its members.

On the other hand, this does not mean that in order to understand the gang phenomenon stringent definitions of gang formation should be implemented. Sociologist Ruth Horowitz contends that if a strict definition is utilized to explain gang formation, social scientists will limit the conceptions of gangs (Huff:1990:42). Also, we must consider a very important question, who will define gangs and for what purpose(s)? Police departments may have one definition of gangs, as they rightfully should, while social scientists have another. Thus, which definition will be more credible, and disseminated to the public? This becomes an even more problematic question when we consider that one organization may have various conceptions of gangs. For example, the police departments of Chicago and Los Angeles have different views of gangs. Cheryl L. Maxson and Malcolm W. Klein contend that gangs in Chicago are defined by the police department according to a *gang motive* definition, whereas, the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) definition is much more inclusive, and is applied to anything that the police department views as *gang related*. Thus, the number of gang incidents is statistically higher in Los Angeles than it is in Chicago, as a result of the definition that is employed by the city's law enforcement agency (Huff:1990: 74-80).

There does not exist a clear definition within cities across the United States of what constitutes a gang. It seems that even those who are employed to reduce their numbers, most notably, police departments, do not collectively agree on what it is that they are trying to eradicate, or at least ameliorate. Therefore, it appears that trying to construct a social science definition of what gangs are will not accomplish much, because it will limit our conception of gangs. Perhaps, implementing a theory of gangs will prevent academicians from advancing any new theories that will shed light into this very complex social phenomena. As Albert Cohen contends, it may be too early to propose a *grand theory* of gang formation. He points out that it may be too early to propose any theory that will explain how all gangs function given the diversity of gangs across the

country (Huff:1990:21). Moreover, whose theory would social scientists propose that the academy employ? Undoubtedly, an enormous amount of academic jealousy would ensue.

Ruth Horowitz clearly documents that having a concrete definition of gangs may not be productive because it may lead to a definition that neglects considering some aspects of gangs that have not been looked at before. She also believes that there must be some flexibility in the number of theories that exist of gangs, because this “may encourage refocusing the questions and the development of new understandings” (Huff:1990:43). Perhaps for public policy purposes it would be helpful to have a broad definition of gang formation, however, this theory in itself would be flawed, because it would neglect differences among gangs according to age, race, or geographical location. Therefore, in order to propose any *grand theory* of gangs more studies are needed that are comparative in nature, perhaps even along gender since most studies of gangs focus on the male actors, and often ignore the women who are part of gangs. Sociologist Anne Campbell is the leading proponent of this theory. Campbell argues that this has occurred because the “female delinquent has been depicted as isolated and inept, and also because there exist a myth that girls do not form strong same-sex friendships” (Huff:1990:163-165).

2.4 Multiple Marginality Theory

Whereas Sanchez-Jankowski views gangs as organizational units whose purpose is to combat the lack of opportunities that the low income community has to offer its residents, other researchers argue otherwise. James Diego Vigil’s *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California*, indicates that gangs and its members are a collectivity of individuals who join these organizations because they have been led by social circumstance to do so. For example, Vigil contends that gang youth are those with the most fragile problematic life histories. Vigil’s documents that these youth come from

poverty stricken families whose transition to American urban society has been very difficult (Vigil:1988:9).

On the one hand, Sanchez-Jankowski sees social organization in the neighborhoods where gangs operate, and perceives gang members as rational decision makers. Thus, low income youth join gangs because it provides them with the greatest amount of economic opportunity in their socially disfranchised communities. On the other hand, Vigil contends that gang involvement, and the formation of gangs is the result of social disorganization in poor communities. Vigil views the formation of gangs as a byproduct of the creation of a subculture that tends to afflict those youth who are experiencing the greatest amount of social ambiguity.

For Vigil, social factors are the most important variables which can be utilized to explain gang formation. He contends that racism, and discrimination in the schooling system, and society at large negatively affect poor minority youth. Vigil goes on to say that gang youth have problematic identities, because they usually have grown up in dysfunctional families and living situations. Thus for Vigil, economic, ecological, and socio-psychological factors are the causal variables that should be looked at to explain the persistence of gang involvement for almost four decades in areas such as East Los Angeles (Vigil:1988:9). As we can see, low income youth seek gang involvement as a mechanism to deal with many of the daily problems of poor communities. For Vigil, social factors are the most useful explanations of gang involvement, such factors include: “stressful family situations, weak social control in the low income community, income inequality, racial discrimination, residential segregation, poor school performance, little parental supervision, and distrust of law enforcement” (Vigil:1991: Foreword). Hence, he labels all these social factors “*multiple marginality*. Vigil’s gang theory goes beyond utilizing single cause explanations of gang formation as most sociologist who have written on the subject, therefore, his theory encompasses variables that have oftentimes been neglected in previous studies (Vigil:1991: introduction).

More specifically, Vigil contends that gangs, particularly Chicano gangs, were formed and became a solid institution in East Los Angeles after World War II following an altercation that took place between Zoot Suit Mexican youth of the 1940s, and navy servicemen. After this incident, many of these Mexican youth whom were merely sporting a popular style of dressing, became associated by the media as gang members, something that to this very day still seems to be popular within our circles of mass communication. This mislabeling intensified gang involvement among Chicano youth, because they continued occupying a marginal position within mainstream American society (Huff:1990:119). Thus, for Vigil, alienation and racism are the ultimate causal variables for the continuity of gang involvement and formation among East Los Angeles youth. But, for Sanchez-Jankowski, the gang is a byproduct of a particular social order that exists in the low income community.

The aforementioned theories demonstrate what Albert Cohen and Ruth Horowitz have argued regarding gang definitions. Cohen, summarizes this complex question, whether we know what gangs are, when he asserts that all gang researchers seem to agree in one point, that is, that gangs are “collectivities” (Huff:1990:9). However, Sanchez-Jankowski asserts that all collectivities cannot be equated with gangs. In order for a collectivity to be considered a gang it needs to have some form of structure. Leaving the definition of gangs open to interpretation can be useful, because it allows other researchers to focus on aspects of gangs that have not been sufficiently explored. The confusion that has emerged when one discusses gangs is that almost everyone associates gangs with only one of their operations, violence or drugs.

In summary, Sanchez-Jankowski asserts that gangs provide and engage in activities that are not solely related to violence. Essentially, the media has distorted the gang phenomenon. In actuality, what the media describes every night in the evening news may not be gangs, but “crews”. The objective of these entities is to commit crimes. If anything, crews are similar to “wilding gangs”. These gangs are composed of five to ten individuals, and their sole purpose is to terrorize and commit random acts of violence

(Cummings and Monti:1993:66-67). While they may appear to be gangs these groups of youth lack the formal infrastructure to be classified as a gang. The collective behavior of these groups is not that of a gang, but of the concept of *ganging* which is a form of “ad hoc collective behavior”, and common among youth who are involved in the preliminary forms of gang formation (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:29).

2.5 Urban Restructuring Theory

John Hagedorn's *People and Folks: Gangs, Crime, and the Underclass in a Rustbelt City* addresses gang formation within the context of underclass theory, but argues that this theory is not comprehensive, because it does not address the *social disorganization* of these communities. For example, Hagedorn is critical of the civil right's movement zeal to end segregation. He feels that the end of segregation negatively affected industrial cities, and more specifically, the city of Milwaukee. Hagedorn argues that the busing of children outside of the black community, “reduced the ability of parents to participate in the schools and help control the emerging youth gang problem” (Hagedorn:1988:137). Similar to Elijah Anderson and William Julius Wilson, Hagedorn also believes that during the industrial 1950s the black community was relatively socially and economically stable and organized because it was composed of various groups that served as role models to the communities' youth .

Certainly, low income youth joined gangs in America's urban industrial bastions during the 1950s, but the major difference was that these youths “matured out” of gang life within a couple of years. Contemporarily, gangs are not composed only by youth, but by older members in their 20s and 30s, because these individuals do not have the option to take well-paying manufacturing jobs. The restructuring of the secondary labor market has had an adverse effect on the lives of those who are not college graduates. Thus, Hagedorn states, “we found that the overwhelming majority of the male gang members were not maturing out of the gang, but were unemployed, uneducated, and still involved with the gang as young adults” (Huff:1990:242).

Hagedorn's analysis, as we can see, relies heavily on deindustrialization and underclass theory. Unfortunately, one of the few remaining options for inner city youth is to take poorly paid jobs in the service-based sector of the economy. Hence, these youth as Sanchez-Jankowski contends, "base their decision (to join gangs) on a rational calculation of what is best for them"(Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:40). Rather than taking poorly paid jobs, some gang youth decide to enter the underground drug economy to maximize their limited opportunities. Additionally, there exist other criminal endeavors open to gang youth, such as the extortion of small business owners within low income communities (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:122).

In summary, as we can see, Hagedorn contends that deindustrialization is the major culprit for the expansion and maintenance of gangs. Thus, he states, "in the absence of good jobs the hustling outlook is entrenching itself among poor minority youth". Moreover, Hagedorn also agrees with William Julius Wilson's contention that race-based public policies (i.e. affirmative action), do not have a direct impact on the lives on poor ghetto and *barrio* youth. Hagedorn states, "the aspirations of the middle class within the black community are seen to have little relevance for an underclass struggling to survive" (Hagedorn:1988:141). This indicates that to solve the problem of gang youth in urban American society, policies that ameliorate economic disadvantaged will be more helpful for poor minority youth than race-based policies.

I have addressed and concentrated on much of Hagedorn's analysis on the connection of the urban underclass and gang participation. However, as I mentioned earlier, he is also concerned with social disorganization in the ghetto. He contends that busing was a harmful policy, because it undermined another ghetto social institution, its schools. Children no longer went to schools in the area, and this facilitated them to do as they pleased since they were no longer under constant supervision, and the new schools "had no relationship to the neighborhoods and were ineffective for both education and social control" (Hagedorn:1988:138). Moreover, Hagedorn convincingly argues that in the 1950s social control mechanisms were stronger in inner city black communities. Thus, youth involved in delinquent activities were easily reprimanded, and "they were

often held responsible (for whatever wrongdoing) by parents and other older people on their block". Tragically, the gangs of today are not merely "corner boys" that the community is familiar with, but "we have a gang(s) whom frightened residents do not know and so the police are called when trouble erupts" (Hagedorn:1988:147).

Hagedorn's theory, as we can see, postulates that the youth gang problem has increased due to deindustrialization, and the out migration of middle class role models who provided social organization in the ghetto. Clearly, the exodus of working and middle class blacks from the ghetto has had adverse effects on young people.

2.6 Behavioral/ Urban Restructuring Synthesis

The ethnographic data in Elijah Anderson's *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community*, supports the so-called underclass theory of gang formation. Anderson's analysis, I would argue is a combination of the behavioral school's interpretation of the underclass (Lawrence Mead), and the economic restructuring theory (William J. Wilson). Although, Anderson's book does not directly relate gang formation to the transformation of the secondary labor market, his findings provide some important insights. For example, in the introduction of his book Anderson states, "many who have difficulty finding work in the regular economy become even poorer and may join the *criminal underground*, which promises them huge financial rewards" (My emphasis, Anderson:1990:introduction). As we can see, rather than specifically making reference to gangs, Anderson prefers the term "criminal underground". Evidently, Anderson makes the same mistake that other social scientist make when they write about gangs, they incorrectly associate gangs solely with one of their endeavors; crime.

Anderson's chapter three in *Streetwise*, "The Impact of Drugs", exemplifies the economic restructuring theory construed by William J. Wilson. According to this theory, young black males attend inner city schools that provide them with rudimentary skills, and live in neighborhoods where manufacturing jobs are no longer available. It is in these dilapidated neighborhoods where opportunities are scarce that the underground

drug economy is utilized as an alternative source of employment. Service jobs do not pay enough for families to be maintained, and poor blacks (young males in particular) utilize this market to demonstrate that they are “making it” in American society.

Anderson clearly demonstrates this when he writes:

[W]hereas the older generation of local men were able to work in the regular job market and earn wages that allowed them to live much like the American middle class, the changed economy has made this extremely difficult for the younger generation. Largely unskilled and with serious educational deficiencies, the youth of today are left to participate only at the lowest level of the emerging service-oriented economy. In response, many have become attracted to the underground economy of crime and drugs (Anderson:1990: 81).

Although Anderson gives credence to deindustrialization theory in some parts of his book, in other parts he agrees with the behavioral school of thought. Similar to Lawrence Mead, Anderson believes that joblessness had led many of these youth to engage in *dysfunctional behavior*. In chapter four, “Sex Codes and Family Life among Northon’s Youth”, Anderson explores the relationship between drugs and sexual promiscuity. According to Anderson’s ethnography, the high levels of unemployment among young minority males has led to the an alternative method of manhood in the ghetto, whereby playing *sex games* and “scoring” with as many women as possible is perceived as a mark of “manhood”. Tragically, this behavior has the potential of increasing welfare dependency in many of America’s ghettos. Anderson’s behavioral thesis is apparent when he writes:

[T]he lack of family-sustaining jobs denies many young men the possibility of forming an economically self-reliant family, the traditional American mark of manhood. Partially in response, the young men’s peer group emphasizes sexual prowess as proof of manhood, with babies as evidence (Anderson:1990:112).

Tragically, these same young men sometimes hook their female friends on drugs in order to extract money from them. Once this has been accomplished, they introduce them to the underworld of prostitution. Hence, as Anderson documents, the ghetto

“coke-whore” emerges when “the dealer may get the young women to try the highly addictive crack, then encourage her to prostitute herself to get more, sending her out on the street” (Anderson:1990:88). One of the behavioral traits identified by the behavioral school in its definition of the underclass is drug addiction. As we can see, Anderson’s theoretical analysis is a combination of the Wilson and Mead thesis.

Another example, Anderson uses of underclass behavior is welfare dependency. He characterizes welfare dependent women awaiting for their monthly check on “mother’s day”, the day welfare checks arrive. Anderson argues that many of these women buy expensive clothing for their newborn children. Anderson quotes one of the children’s grandmother who states: “next time my check come, I’m gon’ buy my baby this, I’m gon’ buy my baby that”. Anderson further states, “and that’s exactly what they will do, expensive stores, too. The more expensive the better” (Anderson:1990:125).

Clearly, one can see from the aforementioned statements that Anderson relies heavily on the theoretical writings of Anthropologist Oscar Lewis. Similar to Lewis’ notion of a “culture of poverty”, Anderson also believes that “persistent poverty affects norms and ghetto culture, such as the high value placed on children” (Anderson:1990:127).

According to Anderson’s thesis, babies in the low income community have become status-symbols. However, he acknowledges that dysfunctional behavior is a byproduct of the lack of economic opportunities in America’s inner cities. Oscar Lewis also considered the structural factors that generate poverty. However, he focused on an earlier set of structural changes, the displacement of agricultural workers by industrialization. Therefore, both authors are cognizant of the adverse effects that structural economic changes have had on the black community. Anderson’s book is a micro-analysis of Wilson’s *The Truly Disadvantaged*. Both books stress decadence of the families that remain in the inner cities as a cause of social disorganization, and the undermining of the sense of “community” that existed in the industrial ghettos of the 1950s.

In the aforementioned paragraphs I tried to lay out a systematic understanding of the urban underclass, and have attempted to include both conservative and liberal

interpretations. After all, there is much to be learned from both sides. But one may ask, how does the underclass theory relate to the study of gangs in American society? The best way to demonstrate that underclass theory is relevant to the study of gangs is illustrated in Walter B. Miller's article, "Why the United States Has Failed to Solve Its Youth Gang Problem", when he writes, "the formation of gangs is a response by alienated minority youth to the unavailability of legitimate employment and potential for fulfillment in their local communities" (Huff:1990:279).

It should be stated that Sanchez-Jankowski's theory differs from the theories of Wilson, Anderson, Hagedorn, and Huff's edited book *Gangs in America*, because it disputes the *social disorganization* and underclass theories of gang formation. As I stated previously, Sanchez-Jankowski believes that low income youth join gangs as a result of a very calculated decision, and unlike other gang theorists he believes that the character of the individuals who join gangs is a much more fundamental issue to consider. Sanchez-Jankowski writes:

[M]y theory differs significantly from most others, including those associated with underclass theory, in that they attend too exclusively to the social environment (emphasizing social disorganization) and focus insufficiently on the interrelationship between the gang as an organization and gang members as individuals (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:23).

In summary, the four theories I utilize present competing explanations of gang formation. The comments of the students who participated in the survey will either confirm, or refute these theories. As I previously stated, Hagedorn's theory focuses on the restructuring of the secondary labor market and its impact on the lives of low income youths. The thesis of this theory is that a decrease in manufacturing jobs has led to increases in gang involvement. However, as I will later show, many of the youth who completed the survey I administered at Belmont High feel that joblessness has nothing to do with gang involvement. Sanchez-Jankowski's theory focuses on gangs as organizational entities, and emphasizes rational decision making. Indeed, some of the survey respondents feel that joining a gang is a personal decision, and that gangs are selective, and therefore, do not admit every single person who wants to join a gang.

Moreover, Anderson's study is a synthesis of the urban restructuring and behavioral schools of thought. Some of the respondents in my sample think that young people who join gangs are members of dysfunctional families. Finally, Vigil focuses on the socio-psychological aspects of gang involvement. This theory possesses some similarities with Anderson's theory, but emphasizes racial discrimination more so than Anderson. As we can see, these four theories offer different perspectives about gang involvement. The comments of the survey participants confirm three of these theories, however, to different degrees. The fourth theory, Hagedorn's urban restructuring theory has been challenged the most by the empirical evidence. However, I should point out that these four competing theories: rational choice, multiple marginality, urban restructuring, and dysfunctional behavior while being very distinct, can be proven at any one point with empirical evidence. For example, we can imagine a set of survey responses or observations that could clearly prove one right and the others wrong. Therefore, the reader should not assume that the responses I obtained are definitive, and that they explain the situation of all inner city youngsters throughout the country.

I have given the above discussion of gang formation theories, because I feel that without them the thesis would be incomplete, and also to let the reader know what the debates are going to be about in chapter four where the empirical evidence will be discussed at length. To fully understand the responses given by the youth who participated in the survey, and who *are not* gang members, it is crucial to have some knowledge of what the "gang literature" has to say about youth who join gangs in the inner city. As previously indicated, this thesis will test these theoretical assertions with the empirical evidence gathered in Los Angeles. However, I should indicate that while it remains important to interpret what the youngsters' say, and what theories their comment's support, it is very difficult to distinguish among competing theories given that my sample was not sufficiently large.

The goal of this chapter has been to identify the complexities of gang formation in post-industrial urban American society.

Chapter 3: Los Angeles' Westlake Planning District

In contrast to the Eastside Latino community, the Latino population of South Central and Westlake has a higher ratio of immigrants, more recent immigrants, and more immigrants from Central America. South Central and Westlake Latinos are also poorer than Latinos residing in East Los Angeles and tend to have lower levels of home ownership (From: Latinos and the Los Angeles Uprising, 1993, The Tomas Rivera Center, Claremont Graduate School).

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a demographic profile of the Westlake district. Social problems in the district and city will be discussed as well. The discussion of crime in the district will be based on the crime statistics compiled by the Los Angeles Police Department, and more specifically, the Rampart Division's crime data. I will look at the racial/ethnic composition, education, average income, and poverty rates in the district. Moreover, given that a large portion of the Latinos who live in the Westlake district are of Central American descent, I will present an historical analysis of Central American migration to Los Angeles.

Table 3.1

1990 Latino Origin Population at the State, City, District, and Regional Level:

	State of California	City of Los Angeles	Westlake District	South-Central	East Los Angeles
Central Americans	8.4%	22.6%	44.1%	19.0%	5.2%
Mexican Americans	80.3%	67.5%	48.4%	75.2%	92.4%
Other Latinos	11.2%	9.9%	7.5%	5.8%	2.4%

Source: Latinos and the Los Angeles Uprising: The Economic Context, The Tomas Rivera Center, Claremont Graduate School, 1993.

3.2 Labor Market Restructuring in Los Angeles

Los Angeles is a changing city. In the last two decades, it has become an important international center in the economic restructuring that is taking place on a global scale. First World capital and technology and Third World labor have been brought together within the city to form a complex economic system combining new high tech industries and financial services, traditional manufacturing firms, and an expanded service sector (Sassen:1989:146). According to Edward Soja and his associates at the UCLA Urban Planning School, the restructuring of Los Angeles was made possible by a variety of economic and political factors. For one thing, its geographic location, between the old economies of Europe and the rising economic powers of the Pacific, has made it attractive for many corporate headquarters to relocate there and transform the city into a major financial control center. In addition, favorable redevelopment policies enabled many corporations during the 1980s to secure office space at low cost, and this also gave them the incentive to relocate their headquarters to Los Angeles (Soja, et al.,1983; Sassen: 1989).

Indeed, while the rest of the U.S. was experiencing a decline in some economic sectors, Los Angeles was adding jobs. Employment growth primarily occurred in technologically-advanced manufacturing sectors based on aerospace and electronics. However, not all jobs being created were in high-paying, managerial or technical fields. Thousands of low-wage jobs in the restaurant, hotel, garment, and janitorial fields also developed as the demand for supportive services increased. By the end of the 1980s , then, the internationalization of Los Angeles had generated an expansion of very high income and low-wage jobs. This in turn, segmented the local labor market further, and intensified the polarization between the affluent and the poor (Soja,et al,1983; Sassen:1989; Davis:1990).

It is in this economic context that many of the families of the youth whom I surveyed arrived in Los Angeles. Given the changes in the Los Angeles political

economy, many of these immigrants quickly found themselves taking low-wage, low-skilled jobs. Due to their lack of legal documentation, many of these immigrants, regardless of class or previous occupation, experienced downward social and economic mobility. But before discussing this issue further, a demographic profile of the area, and its social environment will be presented. I should point, however, that the data I utilized has been compiled by planning district(s). An alternative methodology would be to analyze the data using census tracts.

3.3 Crime in the Westlake Planning District

According to the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) most recent crime statistics, the Westlake district has one of the highest crime rates in the city. LAPD has four bureaus in the city, and within each of these entities there are four or five police precincts. LAPD's Rampart Division has jurisdiction in the Westlake district. In the past four years, the Rampart Division has been notoriously known for having one of the highest crime rates in the city, and among all LAPD divisions. Throughout the city of Los Angeles, there are 18 police divisions. In 1992, the Rampart Division had the highest crime rate in the city.

Table 3.2

1992 Crime Statistics for the Westlake Planning District:

	Total	City Rank
Homicides	138	2
Robberies	4,084	1
Assaults	4,754	1
Burglaries	4,087	2
Auto theft	5,265	3
Total offenses	25,805	1

Source: Los Angeles Times, City Times Section, pp.16, June 6, 1993.

3.4 Central Americans in the Westlake District

Central Americans were one of the major immigrant groups to arrive in Los Angeles during the late 1970s and 1980s. A major point of entry for many of these immigrants has been the Pico-Union neighborhood in the Westlake District. These immigrants were for the most part *political* immigrants; that is, they had come to the United States escaping political persecution and violence in their homelands. Unfortunately, for many of them, especially those from Guatemala and El Salvador, the U.S. government refused to grant them refugee status since these countries were in “good” political relations with the U.S. The denial of refugee status to some Central Americans meant that many of them remained undocumented in the U.S.

Table 3.3
Westlake Planning District 1990 Racial Composition:

	White	Hispanic	Black	Native American	Asian
Westlake	6,956	85,678	3,099	270	11,524
CityWide	1,299,604	1,401,063	454,289	9,774	320,668

Source: Los Angeles City Planning Department, Population Estimate and Housing Inventory, October 1,1993.

The majority of Central American immigrants have been incorporated into the secondary and informal labor markets. Their lack of legal documentation has limited sources of job referral and, therefore, confined these immigrants to predominantly low-wage occupations (Wallace:1986:668; Wallace:1989:247). This has created a situation in which disadvantaged Central Americans are forced to compete for low-wage jobs with other disadvantaged immigrant groups. A large number of the most recent Central American immigrants engage in informal economic practices in order to generate extra income. For instance, it is common knowledge that several people in the Westlake District are street vendors. The majority of the immigrants working in the informal

economy of *street vending* are female. In a recent City of Los Angeles study on street vending, it was found that most street vending is done by immigrants and ethnic minorities. For Central American immigrant women with children, for instance, vending is a small business that provides an important source of economic support for their families, and a dignified means of survival. In the streets of Pico Union, vendors sell products that range from clothing, costume jewelry, toys and music cassettes purchased from wholesalers in downtown, to mangos, corn-on-the-cob, and other foods prepared at home. However, until recently, these activities were considered illegal and subject to a maximum penalty of six months in jail and/or a \$1,000 fine (City of Los Angeles, 1990).

Because most street vendors usually locate in front of or next to some business establishments, merchants have complained and become one of the more vocal opponents of street vendors. Interestingly, these business owners who complain are, for the most part, also Central American or other Latino immigrants. This generates, then, internal conflict within the community and weakens the economic advancement of the entire group. Thus, we can see that Central American immigrants have transformed some aspects of the urban economy of Los Angeles by creating *informal* enterprises. Moreover, it is clear that most of these immigrants have resorted to these illegal activities to earn a living because only few of them have the required legal documentation to secure jobs in other sectors of the economy.

In terms of occupational characteristics, these immigrants are more likely to have worked in white collar jobs than Mexican immigrants. However, this occupational experience does not automatically transfer to white collar jobs in Los Angeles (Wallace: 1986). For example, the most recent statistics point out that a disproportionate number of the residents in the Westlake district are employed in blue-collar occupations. After all, the average household income in the district is the lowest in the city of Los Angeles. A recent report by the City Planning Department indicates that the “average incomes range from [a low of] \$21,179 in the Westlake Planning District to a high of \$194,898 in Bel Air-Beverly Crest” (City of Los Angeles, Planning Report, 1991).

Table 3.4 Westlake Planning District 1990 Average Income:

	Average Household Income	Wage/Salary Income	Self Employed Income	Personal Wealth Income*	Social Security Income	Public Assistance Income	Retirement Income	Other Income*
Westlake	21,179	22,460	10,593	4,730	5,733	6,022	5,365	4,104
City Wide	45,701	42,906	28,914	11,440	7,735	5,895	9,404	5,414

Source: Los Angeles City Planning Department, Socio/Demographic Statistics, April 1990. * "Personal wealth income" includes; interests income, dividend income, rental income. "Other income" includes; jobless benefits, VA payments, child support, alimony, military allotments, gambling winnings.

Two common characteristics among Central American businesses in the Westlake District are the small size (usually employing less than ten people), and their ethnic clientele. These two characteristics are shared with businesses organized by other immigrant groups. However, unlike Korean or Cuban businesses, Central American enterprises appeared to lack support networks. Unlike the adjacent Silverlake/Echo Park district, there are no chambers of commerce or business associations of any kind in the neighborhood, and there are no plans to create one in the near future. This is quite a contrast to the high number of such groups reported in the Korean, Cuban, and Vietnamese communities (Light and Bonacich: 1988; Portes: 1987; and Drury and Altman: 1989). Thus, although some business enterprises have emerged in the Westlake district, they appear to be isolated from one another, and vulnerable since they lack the organizational representation to voice their interests and concerns. Moreover, a large number of the businesses in the area were affected by the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. Indeed, an article in the San Francisco Chronicle reported that close to 60% of the 4,000 businesses destroyed by the riots were Latino-owned (Espinoza and DelVecchio: 1992).

Both street vendors and other entrepreneurs agree, however, that political empowerment is critical, and perhaps even a necessary precondition, for the future economic development of the Westlake District. Many have publicly lamented the fact

that Mexican-Americans , who possess some political power in the city, have not joined forces with Central Americans to ensure the latter's fair treatment by banks and government agencies. Indeed, a recent report released by the Claremont Graduate school, Latinos and the Los Angeles Uprising, indicates that tensions exist between long-time Mexican American residents and recent Central American immigrants. For example, the editor of the report, Occidental College Economics Professor Manuel Pastor Jr., writes:

More assimilated second and third generation and longtime Mexican-American residents sometimes feel they have little in common with the new immigrants. Moreover, like many other residents of this region, some working class Latino citizens worry about increased competition in the labor market from recent immigrants who are willing to settle for lower wages.

This indicates that unless something changes in the near future, Central Americans in the Westlake District will continue to struggle with their problems without the help of other groups. However, given that Pico-Union, one of the neighborhoods in the District, was one of the most damaged areas during the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, there is hope that city officials will start paying more attention to the problems affecting this community (Espinoza and DelVecchio: 1992).

Table 3.5 1990 City of Los Angeles/ Westlake Racial/Ethnic Demographics As Percent of Area Population:

	Whites non-Hispanic	Latinos	African Americans	Asian Pacific	Other
Los Angeles City	37.3%	39.9%	13.0%	9.2%	0.6%
Westlake District	8.7%	77.3%	3.1%	10.2%	0.7%

Source: Latinos and the Los Angeles Uprising: The Economic Context, 1993, Claremont Graduate School.

3.5 Street Gangs and Fear of Crime

Another major factor affecting economic development in the Westlake District is the fear of crime. The Pico-Union neighborhood in recent years has been plagued with gangs and drug pushers, who have in some instances mugged or killed people for no reason. This of course, affects the business climate and social relations of the area. First, it gives potential customers an incentive not to go to the area and to spend their money elsewhere. Second, it reinforces the bad image that the neighborhood, and its district already have in the city of Los Angeles. Ultimately, negative perceptions affect the value of existing businesses, (i.e. property devaluation's, redlining, and high cost of insurance) and discourages others from relocating there. And third, it forces business owners to change their business hours. Moreover, according to the most recent crime statistics released by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), in 1994 the Rampart Division had the highest crime rate in the Central Bureau.

Table 3.6

1993 & 1994 Central Bureau Crimes Reported to the LAPD:

	Homicides		Rape		Robbery		Aggravated Assault	
Central	28	30	43	54	1,665	2,313	1,164	1,377
Hollenbeck	69	72	66	65	1,393	1,455	1,914	2,010
Newton	78	102	70	90	2,039	2,398	2,328	2,683
Northeast	35	30	78	73	1,605	2,008	1,854	1,911
Rampart	89	120	109	108	2,964	3,752	3,586	3,970
City Totals	836	1,057	1,555	1,765	30,643	38,184	40,039	42,638

Source: Los Angeles Times, Metro Section, February 2, 1995.

***Bold numbers =1994/** Light numbers= 1993.

As we can see, the Westlake Planning District is one of the most socially disfranchised communities in the city of Los Angeles. It would be fair to say that while Westlake is one of the poorest and crime infested communities in Los Angeles, there are pockets of social organization.

Table 3.7
1990 Employment and Unemployment in Westlake/Los Angeles:

	Employment Participation Rate	Percent Unemployed
Westlake District	68.4%	11.8%
City of Los Angeles	67.3%	8.4%

Source: Los Angeles City Planning Department Report.

Two-thirds of Westlake residents are employed. According to the most recent statistics released by the City's Planning Department, the employment participation rate for Westlake stands at 68.4%. Clearly, this variable alone disqualifies the area as a so-called underclass community where high levels of welfare dependency exist. In the case of the Westlake area this is far from being the norm. However, this does not mean that everything in the neighborhood is perfect. After all, the unemployment rate of 11.8% remains considerably above the city's average. Also, the educational attainment of the area's residents is one of the lowest in the city. While only, 35.9% of Westlake residents are high school graduates, 67.0% of Los Angelenos have successfully completed high school (City of Los Angeles, Planning Report, 1991).

Undoubtedly, it would be foolish to think that the community does not need more social services and economic development. However, the Westlake District and its surrounding neighborhoods, such as Pico-Union, are unquestionably the most dangerous in the city of Los Angeles. Thus, given the high level of crime in this community, the question of this thesis remains unanswered, how do inner city youth living in a crime ridden environment evade gang involvement/delinquency? The following chapter will attempt to answer this question, by giving "voice" to responses provided in the survey I distributed at Belmont High, a secondary school located in the heart of the Westlake Planning District. After all, who is better qualified to answer this question than the youth themselves?

Chapter 4: “Little Central America’s” Warriors of Peace

Belmont High School is the pride of “Little Central America,” but with nearly 4,500 students it is severely overcrowded, and an additional 2,000 students must be bused to distant schools in the San Fernando Valley and elsewhere. Fully 7,000 school-age teenagers in the Belmont area, moreover, have dropped out of school. Some have entered the vida loca of gang culture (there are 100 different gangs in the school district that includes Belmont High), but most are struggling to find minimum-wage footholds in a declining economy (From Mike Davis: “In L.A., Burning All Illusions”, The Nation, June 1, 1992).

Introduction 4.1

As I explained in the introduction, the question of this thesis is: how do low income youth residing in one of Los Angeles’ poorest districts, the Westlake Planning District, evade gang involvement? Thus far, I have given an historical account of gangs in urban American society focusing on the most recent gang theories. I decided to focus on four recent theories, that is, those that have been postulated during and after the 1970s, because the older theories may no longer be applicable. Indeed, just as urban American society has gone through social and economic changes, there have also been demographic changes in urban communities as well. Whereas during the booming days of industrialization gangs were composed by youth who formed “neighborhood gangs”, or who were groups of “corner boys”, this is no longer the case. Therefore, the theories I utilize explain through a sociological framework the current situation of gangs in America’s inner cities, and three of them are confirmed by the empirical evidence. Moreover, I feel that a detailed discussion of the restructuring of the secondary labor market in the city of Los Angeles is necessary in order to understand the continuous presence of gangs in inner city neighborhoods, such as those of the Westlake District. The theories I discussed were the most relevant to contemporary socio-economic inequities.

In this chapter, I will attempt to interpret the responses that the students gave to the survey in as much detail as possible. Moreover, given the vast amount of information, I will utilize only the most representative responses to avoid overlapping responses.

4.2 Social Characteristics of the Sample

As I said earlier, I targeted a random sample of classes at Belmont High School. My primary objective was to find out how some inner city youth evade gang involvement, even though they live in crime infested neighborhoods/districts. The social science literature contains numerous ethnographic studies that examine why poor minority youths, males in particular, join gangs. However, a major flaw of these studies is that they never explain how and why other youth who live in these same neighborhoods *do not* join gangs, and attend colleges and universities. My thesis will attempt to answer this question. However, while the information I have obtained is valid, I am cognizant that it may not be *representative* of all poor minority schools in Los Angeles, or the nation. It could very well be that the sample I obtained was unique. Therefore, my thesis *does not* attempt to argue that what is true in the Westlake District is true for other communities, cities, or states. In fact, some of the findings that I will be presenting in this chapter contradict my own personal views on the formation of gangs and their persistence in urban American society.

As I indicated earlier, the research sample consisted of 63 students in an inner city Los Angeles high school. Belmont High is part of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The district is one of the largest in the state of California, and it is also a school district where the overwhelming number of the students are racial/ethnic minorities. In fact, according to the Los Angeles Unified School District's 1994 Ethnic Survey Report, most of the district's students are Latinos. The number of Latino students at Belmont High was even larger than at the district level. For example, while Latinos were 66.6% of all LAUSD students, they constituted 62.0% of all Senior High School students. However, at Belmont High, Latinos accounted for 85.9% of the student

body. Given that a large number of Central Americans live in the district, a large number of students at Belmont must be of Central American origin.

Table 4.1

**1993-94 Ethnic Composition Enrollment
at Belmont High and District Wide**

	Hispanic	Asian	Filipino	Black	White	American Indian	Pacific Islander
Belmont	85.9%	7.0%	4.6%	1.3%	1.0%	0.2%	N/A
LAUSD	66.6%	4.8%	1.9%	14.4%	11.6%	0.3%	0.4%

Source: LAUSD Information Technology Division, Fall 1994 Ethnic Survey Report and Belmont High School's 1993-94 School Profile.

The total number of enrolled students at Belmont High School during the 1993-94 school year was 4,297. Although 60% of Belmont graduates enroll in college, the school has a high dropout rate. I should point out that I was not able to obtain "official" school reports that document the number of students who dropout, but, nearly one-third of the entering class simply "disappears" by the time they should be in their senior year. I utilized the school's annual profile to arrive at my estimates. The following table clearly demonstrates my contention. However, it could be that some students who "disappeared" enrolled in one of the other local secondary schools in the area. After all, kids in poor neighborhoods tend to move around a lot, and so leaving Belmont is not indicative of leaving school altogether.

Table 4.2

Fall 1993 Belmont High School Enrollment:

	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade	Ungraded	Total
Belmont High	1187	1213	1036	778	83	4297

Source: Belmont High School 1993-94 School Profile, Los Angeles, CA.

On the other hand, at least 25% of the 1993 graduating class enrolled in four-year colleges and universities. This is a significant figure for a poorly-funded inner-city school. Given that a quarter of the class attends college, what distinguishes these students from their counterparts who have entered the *vida loca* (crazy life) of gangs?

As I indicated earlier, I distributed my survey to a random sample of classes at Belmont High. The following statistics present a breakdown of the race/ethnic and gender background of those who participated in the survey. The statements utilize in this chapter will be those that convey the views of most students in each class.

Table 4.3

Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

Race/Ethnic Composition

	Raw numbers	by % of total sample
Latino	47	75%
Asian	15	24%
Black	1	1%

Gender Composition

Male	33	52%
Female	30	48%

Race and Gender Composition

Latino Male	24	38%
Latino Female	23	37%
Asian Male	9	14%
Asian Female	6	10%
Black Female	1	1%

Source: Roberto R. Mejia, Survey administered at Belmont High School, Los Angeles, CA, January 1995.

Criminologist Elizabeth H. McConnell argues that research on gangs is highly questionable when surveys are administered. For example, she says that self-described gang youth who willingly participate in a gang survey may not be very *representative* of all gang youth. After all, there must be a major difference between youth who are willing to participate in a survey, or an interview about gang life versus those who do not.

This is evident when she writes:

It is acknowledged that gang members are probably the best source of gang data. This, however, may not be the case when conducting survey research. Survey research of gang members often exemplifies what Hagedorn refers to as “surrogate sociology”; that is, survey gang research in which the researcher uses “intermediaries to identify gang members and allow the researcher to gain temporary access to gangland”.

Collecting data from gang members following this methodology is problematic for social scientists. The problems begin with identification of gang members and escalate from there. It is difficult to know if those identified as gang members are in fact “average” gang members or if the identified gang members are a reflection of the identifier’s perception of gang members (McConnell:1994:259).

Essentially, how does a researcher, or anyone who is interested in delinquency know the level of commitment of the individual who participates in a gang survey? That is, how can he/she know whether the gang members are peripheral or hard core gang members? Therefore, any survey which targets gang youth is highly questionable and debatable. The same problem constrains those who conduct research on *non-gang youth*, as I have attempted to do in this thesis. How do I know that those students who participated in my survey are *representative* of all youth who are not involved in gangs at Belmont High School? However, this seems to be a less serious problem since they have less to hide than youth who are involved in gang activities.

Indeed, all gang research is potentially questionable. However, there exist exceptions. Joan Moore’s book *Homeboys* along with John Hagedorn’s book *People and Folks*, are two books that have been co-written with ex-gang members. The data these

researchers gathered is more credible than any other “gang studies” because individuals who actually participated in gang life conducted some of the interviews. Therefore, any study of gangs will contain potential flaws because, for the most part, researchers are at the mercy of the opinions of gang members who participate in the surveys or interviews. McConnel, and other gang researchers are highly skeptical of any study that claims to have been able to capture all the nuances of gang life within a short period of time, or without the assistance of an insider. Thus, she contends:

This leads one to question the data obtained from the gang member who is cooperative: Is there a difference in the kind of gang member who cooperates and the one who does not? Does one kind of respondent provide a different kind of data than the other? (McConnel:1994:259).

Therefore, given the time constraints embedded in this thesis project, I decided to focus on a population group that is not as difficult to reach, or befriend. Also, another advantage of focusing on inner city youth who *are not gang members* is that they daily interact with youths who are self-proclaimed gang members. Therefore, these youngsters must possess some “insider’s knowledge” of the intricacies of gang life. Indeed, McConnel clearly postulates the reason why I decided to focus on *non-gang* youth in my survey when she asserts:

It is suggested that survey research using other youths, those who know and interact with gang members, are a viable alternative to ethnographic designs in which data are collected from gang members. Youths who interact with gang members can provide *baseline data* on gangs. It is further suggested that *schools* are a logical place to find the youths. Survey research in schools provide researchers with a controlled setting with optimum access to a cross section of the local neighborhood’s youth population. Although one inherent weakness associated with the school--is acknowledged, this approach continues to deserve consideration (My emphasis, McConnel:1994:261).

Students who live in neighborhoods or attend school with gang members must, through their daily contacts, have developed a general level of understanding about gangs (From:McConnel:1994:264).

In what follows, I will attempt to explain in as much detail as possible the factors that distinguish these successful inner city youth from others in their planning district, and respective communities.

4.3 Knowledge of Gangs and Some Reasons For Not Joining Gangs:

When asked why gangs have existed in the U.S. for so long, an Asian female who is a member of a nuclear family, and is enrolled in AP.English at Belmont High responded:

America have always consisted of many different social classes. Obviously, the poor is over-looked by the rich. The youths in the poor sector is neglected and feel abandon. This disappear and hopeless lead into the formation of gangs in which the youths receive supplemental support, etc. As long as the poor is overlooked by the rich, there will always be the presence of gangs [sic].

Clearly from the aforementioned statement, this young lady perceives the formation of gangs as the byproduct of economic inequality in society. She attributes the existence of gangs to the persistence of poverty in communities such those in the Westlake district. Her comments would support Mercer Sullivan's theory of inner city crime. Essentially, according to Sullivan, some inner city youth are involved in delinquency because it facilitates economic mobility in an environment where employment opportunities are scarce. This is clearly apparent when he writes:

I have argued that youth crime for gain must be understood in economic terms in at least two senses: that of the individual youth as an economic entrepreneur, and that of the inner-city neighborhood as an economic environment shaped by structural economic transformations of worldwide scope. If a young male's actions are not seen within this structural context, *they appear irrational*, and it becomes easier to conclude that street crime is only the product of low intelligence and defective personality and not a response to existing economic incentives. (My emphasis, Sullivan:1991:231).

A Latino male who is a member of a nuclear family earning \$15,000 or below, and who is also enrolled in the same class as the last respondent, but was once involved in his neighborhood's gang writes:

I was once involved in a gang, most of my friends are gangsters. However, now that I'm not in the gang, I'm able to retrospect and see the reasons why I joined it: loneliness, to build an image, to build up my self esteem. Now, some gangsters are my friends and I use them to protect myself [sic].

The comments of this youth would validate Sanchez-Jankowski's theory of inner city youth joining gangs in order to receive physical protection (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:44-45). As I indicated earlier, the statement also supports Jankowski's notion that youth can "mature out" of gang involvement. Moreover, the respondent also states that the main reason that led him toward gang involvement was boredom. Thus, he writes:

Loneliness was perhaps, the major factor that led me to "kick it" with gangs. Due to my parents' job I remained unsupervised, home alone everyday, thus, I seeked company and the easiest available was the company of the homeboys in the neighborhood. This is no longer. Now I'm able to stand up by myself, with an specific (in development) identity without the need of gangs [sic].

As we can see, this part of the response would have more in common with James Diego Vigil's contention that family problems play a stronger role explaining gang involvement than calculated rational decisions as Sanchez-Jankowski asserts. After all, this was a major finding revealed in Vigil's book *Barrio Gangs*. He writes:

The degree of youth's involvement with a local gang appears to be associated with the status of his or her *family* (My emphasis, Vigil:1991:27).

An Asian female who is a member of a female-headed household earning between \$15,000- 25,000 feels that the provision of high-paying jobs would not be an

effective policy to diminish gang involvement in the neighborhoods of the Westlake district. This was quite a surprise for me to find out given that 45-47% of those who completed my survey have worked during their high school years. Perhaps having a job deterred some of these youth from gang life. The respondent writes:

Jobs usually don't help much from deterring youths from gang life because gang members usually join at an age before they are allowed to work. Besides, if a kid can earn substantially more money illegally, the temptation would be overwhelming [sic].

The comments of this respondent confirm Sullivan's assertion that there is no correlation between employment and youth delinquency. However, he states that this has become more likely since the 1970s, he writes:

Inner-city teenagers who have serious economic problems and are prone to criminal activities do not necessarily commit crimes less often during the times when they are employed. [However], more recent studies of *the relationship between crime and employment rates have shown a stronger relationship since unemployment began to rise in the 1970s* (My emphasis, Sullivan:1991:5).

Apparently, this young lady feels that providing "good paying jobs", that is, jobs that pay \$20 an hour would not deter youth from participating in gangs. She feels that ultimately drug dealing has higher profits. However, I would argue that this respondent overlooks two critical factors: (1) that not all gang members deal drugs, and (2) the level of commitment of gang members. She fails to distinguish, as most police departments, between peripheral and hard core gang members. Categorizing all gang members as hard-core gang members has very damaging effects, because it increases the level of commitment of those who are peripheral members. In fairness to her statement, this respondent may not be familiar with how gangs operate.

There were other youth in my sample who did not fit the profile of "good students", and who were categorized by school officials as marginal students. Most of these individuals were enrolled in remedial courses. The following statements

are representative of students enrolled in Popular Literature, a remedial 11th grade English course.

A Latino male who is a member of a nuclear family asserts:

I was involved in gangs. I was jumped in when I was in 6th grade. I was from West Side (W-S) RockWood St. Lil' Cycos. I think after a while I thought to myself, I can die saying a name of a street. My life is so special for any street name to die for [sic].

Clearly, this young man left gang life because he felt that his life was in danger. However, what is not clear is his level of commitment to his gang. That is, we never know whether this young man was merely a peripheral, or hard core gang member. Moreover, the young man never explains the consequences he faced after leaving his gang. Although he claims that he is no longer a member of the gang, he finishes his statement by writing his *gang placa*, that is, the name of his ex-gang. Thus, he writes in blocked gang writing: W/S ROCKWOOD STREET LOKOS-X3. Essentially, this means that he was/is still affiliated with the Rockwood Street gang, and that he lives in the west side of the street. "Lokos" is Spanish slang for Crazy.

The respondent's statement would validate Sanchez-Jankowski's notion that some gang members disassociate from gang involvement because they are fearful of death (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:60). However, it should be clear that being fearful of death is probably compatible with many different aspects of life, and is not the exclusive domain of gangs. While this an important point, the main element of Sanchez-Jankowski's theory is that joining a gang is a rational decision. This is clearly evident when he writes:

What I did find was that individuals who live in low-income neighborhoods join gangs for a variety of reasons, basing their decisions on a *rational calculation* of what is best for them at that particular time. Furthermore, I found that they use the same calculus (not necessarily the same reasons) in deciding whether to stay in the gang, or, if they happen to leave it, whether to rejoin. (My emphasis, Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:40).

It is very interesting that the respondent is a member of a nuclear family, thus, this validates Sanchez-Jankowski's contention that some youth who are involved in gangs have been raised in stabled nuclear households (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:39). Moreover, the respondent's recommendation for youth to avoid gang involvement is to avoid "friends" who are involved in gangs. He writes:

I recommend to first of all not hang around with them. Then you start liking the parties and girls, etc. Later on you'll be in a gang. So just don't hang around with them. It's better to just stay away from them. Get other friends [sic].

As we can see, this respondent views gang involvement as a socialization process, whereby young males join gangs because others in their neighborhood are members. This young man's contention would have more in common with Vigil's *multiple marginality* theory than with any of the three other theories discussed in this thesis. However, Sanchez-Jankowski would be critical of the comments of this respondent, and would argue that gang involvement is a rational calculated decision made by the gang member, in conjunction with the needs of the gang he/she wants to join, and has nothing to do with the social environment where one grows up.

Among many of my respondents there seems to be a strong belief that the reason many of their peers became gang members is due to familial problems. For example, an Asian male enrolled in an honors math course, and whose combined family income is \$15,000 or below writes:

Gangs are like viruses. They multiply by the additional of new members. Gangs exist because of the kids who doesn't have a strong family environment. The gangs are like a family to them [sic].

From the above statement, we can infer that the respondent feels that gangs are joined by young people whose parents do not supervise them or enforce rules in the home. The respondent feels that implementing more social programs can ameliorate gang involvement in his neighborhood. He writes:

Social programs sounds like the solution to make. Locking them up in prison is too costly and sending them to rehabilitation centers doesn't really work. Social programs can help gang members meet people with a promising future.

There are others who feel that high wages are not a panacea for the eradication of gangs. The comments of a Hispanic female who is a member of a female-headed household earning \$15,000 or below, and who is enrolled in a Geometry class represents this group:

Help youth with high wages it's not a good idea. Job training and community help for young people would help more that a high wages [sic].

The comments of this respondent appear confusing. While she is in favor of job training and community development programs, she does not think that high wages will ameliorate the lure of gang involvement. The only plausible explanation is that she makes a distinction between high wages and job training programs. Perhaps she associates high wages exclusively with "professional careers", such as medicine or law.

Another Hispanic female who is a member of a female headed household making \$15,000 or less, and who is enrolled in the same Geometry class contends that she did not join a gang because female gang members are limited to two roles within gangs that she finds abhorrent. She indicates her strong belief against gang involvement in the following statement:

The reason I didn't get involved in gangs was because I would be putting my life in danger. Most gangs [want] a female to join [so she can] either put-out or get beat up [sic].

From her comments, we can see that she perceives females as being necessary for gangs because they are utilized by males for sexual relations, or to exercise control over them by physically abusing them. The aforementioned description of female involvement in gangs resembles Elijah Anderson's description of the ghetto communities in his book,

Streetwise. Moreover, it looks like her decision against joining a gang was a rational decision as described by Sanchez-Jankowski. Indeed, this young lady calculated more disadvantages than benefits in gang involvement.

There are others, however, who think that better job opportunities in the labor market would deter some youths from joining gangs. Contrary to the notion expressed by other respondents, a Latino male enrolled in AP English who is a member of a nuclear family earning \$15,000 or below writes:

I believe that better jobs would deter them [gang members] for a while. People or rather gang members of course would always return. They would miss the mischief [sic].

This young man wrote that throughout his life he has had an incredible amount of interaction with gang members growing up in the *barrios* of the city of Los Angeles. He depicts his neighborhood in the following manner:

My neighborhood is full of gangs. Every night there are drive-by shootings and muggings. And of course there is the graffiti [sic].

As others who responded to my survey, this individual had the “unique” opportunity to grow up amidst gangs his entire life. Their ability to have been able to avoid gang involvement is a victory in itself. Moreover, this young man said that he did not join gangs because:

Gangs have always been something which I did not like. Although I had friends that are gang members, I never cared to join a gang when they asked me to.

He states that he escaped gang involvement because:

All one gets in gangs is trouble if not death!! . I have seen many of my friends shot and killed. Many of them are in jail.

Therefore, his ability to avoid gangs was based on his numerous experiences growing up in the neighborhood, and seeing his friends die at early age. The case of this survey participant is not unique. Indeed, the sociological literature indicates that some youth in the inner cities and *barrios* of America invest in education, or athletic involvement as an alternative to gang involvement. The comments of one of the youth interviewed by Sanchez-Jankowski are representative of *rational decision*:

No, I don't want to join any gang. I know you can make money by being in, but frankly I don't want to take the risks of being killed or something. I mean some of the dudes in the gang make a whole lot of money, but they take some big risks too. I just don't want to do that. I want to get out of this neighborhood, so I'll just take my chances trying to get out by *studying* and trying to go to *college*. I know there are risks with that too. I mean even if you go to college don't mean you going to make a fortune. My cousin went to college and he started a business and it failed, so I know there is risks that I won't make doing it my way, but at least they *don't include getting shot or going to prison* (My emphasis, Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:60).

As we can see from the quote above, and the comments made by some of the youth who responded to my survey, the likelihood of early death is a major deterrence for gang involvement. Consequently, to stay gang free some youth investment in human capital skills, or athletics. Clearly, this is an effective alternative mechanism that some youth utilize across America's ghettos and *barrios* to avoid gang involvement. This is especially the case among youngsters who had strong adult role models as they were growing up. Indeed, this is one of the most important factor identified by those who participated in my survey. Clearly, there are other opportunities for inner city youth besides gang involvement. This assertion, however, does not mean that there exist enough economic, or social opportunities across America's most poverty stricken communities. Certainly, this is far from being the case in the Westlake District, and its surrounding immigrant neighborhoods. Simply put, social and economic opportunities arise only when the "right" structural mechanisms support their emergence. I have identified three structural variables that can ameliorate delinquency in the inner cities: (1) a strong primary and secondary labor market, (2) vast educational opportunities at all

levels, and (3) the cooperation of financial institutions to invest in America's most poverty stricken cities and neighborhoods.

Some of my respondents described their school as fairly safe even though they knew that there were "problems" inside school grounds. For example, when I asked one of my survey participants, an Asian male from a nuclear family earning between \$15,000 -25,000, and who is enrolled in an Algebra 2 course, how he would describe his school and neighborhood; he responded with the following statement:

I think my school is very safe and so is my community, but once a while you can still hear gun fire. In school I don't feel any danger even though some students carry gun its for show [sic].

This statement is quite troubling because it appears as if my respondent has become accustomed to seeing at least some students carrying weapons on school grounds. It is not surprising that at an inner city school weapons would be carried, but what surprises me is the nonchalance expressed by the respondent. Unfortunately, throughout American society, it has become second nature for some youth to witness the presence of guns in their respective urban, and to some extent, suburban school campuses. Moreover, according to a recent story by Los Angeles' major Latino newspaper, *La Opinion*, a young Latino male who is a student at Belmont High School was shot, presumably by rival gang members, near the school campus. The individual managed to carry himself inside the school, and asked for administrators to call for a county ambulance that took him to the University of Southern California (USC) Hospital (*La Opinion*, February 23, 1995). Therefore, as we can see, as any poor urban school, Belmont High is not immune to the everyday violence that plagues our inner cities. Even though, the school is a "good" school compared to others in Los Angeles' inner city, it still faces many social problems as well.

Interestingly enough, one of my respondents, who identifies himself as an immigrant Latino male, raised in a female-headed household, argues that he was able to escape gang involvement, because:

First of all I think that its a big waste of time. Gangs don't bring any good. The only thing you can find in gangs is death and problems. I really want to be someone in life. I came to this country to have a better future not to ruin my life[sic].

This assertion supports Joan Moore's contention that immigrant youth are less likely to participate in gangs than second generation Latinos, and more specifically, Chicanos in East Los Angeles. She asserts in her new book, *Going Down to the Barrio*, that:

The substantial influx of culturally conservative Mexicans into these communities; in the two neighborhoods we study, Mexican-born children generally stay away from the gangs (Moore:1991:132).

Although Moore's observations are pertinent to the East Los Angeles communities she has been studying for the past twenty years, they may not be relevant to the neighborhoods of the Westlake Planning District. After all, according to some Los Angeles gang experts, the fastest growing gang in the city, *Mara Salvatrucha (MS)*, is composed of recent Central American immigrant youths residing in Pico-Union, a neighborhood located in the Westlake Planning District.

The same respondent contends that he has been able to avoid gang involvement, because his mother provided him enormous support and encouragement. He writes:

My role model is my mom. Because even though she's a lady. She has handle us. My brothers and I in a good way. She thought us principles [sic].

This respondent, as others in my sample, contends that he avoided gang involvement because a responsible adult provided him with support, guidance, and encouragement. Thus, some youth who are not members of nuclear families can do relatively well throughout life, and in school, if there is at least one adult who can provide some direction in the lives of youth who have "fragile identities", to borrow a term used

in Vigil's *Barrio Gangs*. This adult role model may be either a teacher, a close/distant relative, or adult working at the local community development organization.

Moreover, as has been indicated in many social science studies, there is a higher probability for a young person not to succeed in life, if they are raised in a female headed household. However, according to Sullivan's ethnography there is a higher correlation between crime and family abuse, than there is between the presence of a father and involvement in crime. He writes:

In La Barriada and Projectville a majority of youths in each clique had not grown up with their fathers continuously present, but *the few who had become just as involved in crime as the others*. At the neighborhood level, however, the lack of adult men officially attached to households did make a difference by contributing to a weakened social control environment... Other studies, including many surveys, have also found that *the lack of a father in the household contributes far less to delinquency than do family abuse and neglect* (My emphasis, Sullivan:1991:220).

One of the respondents, a Hispanic female enrolled in a regular U.S. History class, and raised in a nuclear family earning less than \$15,000 writes:

No I haven't get involved in gangs, but I was almost was getting in to it. But I wake up and see that I wasn't doing the right thing. If I would get in that gang, I wouldn't be here and school. And learning good things everyday [sic].

It is very interesting that an overwhelming number of the students who responded to the survey, attribute their ability to avoid gang involvement to a strong parental support base, or to individual choices. This scenario gives both the Vigil and Sanchez-Jankowski theories support. For example, an Asian male enrolled in a ninth grade regular English class, and who is a member of a nuclear family earning less than \$15,000 contends that she was able to avoid gang involvement in her neighborhood because:

Well, because whenever I was little, my parents disciplined me about gangs. My parents said gangs uses drugs and do drive-byes [sic].

Clearly, from the above statement, we can see that some low income parents inculcate in their children to avoid gangs because the only thing that these entities facilitate is violence and drug addiction. However, gangs are not the only organization within the low income community that *facilitates* delinquency. As I have previously mentioned, *crews*, and *wilding gangs* are solely organized to commit violence and delinquent acts (Monti:1991: 66-67).

On the other hand, there are some youth for whom gang involvement is avoided because they are *religious*, and for whom gangs are antithetical to their value system. Indeed, one of the survey participants, a Latino male enrolled in a Math Analysis course, and who is a member of a nuclear family earning \$15,000 or below contends that religion is a very important aspect of his life. He writes:

My parents always taught me the right way. Also I always know what was good or bad and I knew that was wrong. I don't know why tough. I just knew. I started to attend to church at the age of 12 so maybe that help me use common sense on what was good or bad [sic].

A second respondent, an Asian male from a nuclear family earning below \$15,000 also attributes religion as a fundamental aspect of his life. This young man grew up in Alabama, and has adjusted to his new Los Angeles community fairly well. He states:

There are several reasons why I didn't join gangs. I think the first is probably because I wasn't exposed to a gang environment. The second, is because gang life is just not for me. I am a Christian. I strongly believe that committing sinful acts is wrong [sic].

Both of these responses are a variant of solid parental guidance and support. Indeed, religion and the presence of a positive adult role model gives *non-gang* youth a sense of who they are. Vigil argues that youngsters who *do not* have good family relationships are the most likely to find gang involvement attractive; he writes:

Many families and their children experience acute poverty and limited social mobility opportunities in these barrios, and thus, over time, there developed an underclass with its own set of problems. It is from among these children that the youth most intensely involved in the gangs tend to come. As members of a persistent underclass within the Mexican American population, those youths come from households with even lower incomes than those of other barrio families and *a higher incidence of stressful family situations* (My emphasis, Vigil:1991:5).

Clearly, this young man has deep religious convictions, and feels that environmental factors lead to gang involvement. Therefore, his assertions resemble most closely theories espoused by the ecological school of thought, which consider environmental factors as crucial causal variables to explain gang involvement. The following statement provides a synopsis of this school of thought:

Ecologically oriented researchers referred to those areas as “interstices” because they were socially marginal spaces of the city. It was here, they asserted, that patterns of social disorganization sprouted and flourished (Vigil:1991:18).

On the other hand, the respondent’s statement also validate Sanchez-Jankowski’s theory. That is, while the environment provides the *possibilities*, and in some instances may facilitate gang involvement, it does not guarantee gang involvement among inner city youth. According to the Sanchez-Jankowski youth gang involvement is based on a *rationally calculated* decision, independent of other factors. He writes:

[T]he decision to join a gang is based on the belief that it is best for him or her at that particular time to be a gang member. Because the decision has been made in a *calculated manner*, gang members resist outside attempts to convince them that gang membership is detrimental to them--they have already considered that possibility. This is not to suggest that in considering their options they have not miscalculated, and that they will not later tell some interviewer that they regret their bad judgment. It is simply to say that at the time when they made that judgment, they considered their options (My emphasis, Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:29-30).

Another respondent, who is also a Latino male, enrolled in the same Math Analysis course writes:

I believe my moral standards (religion) helped me to avoid getting involved in gang activities. I also believe my parents have provided everything I need like understanding, love, trust, and many other things [sic].

This same respondent appears to have some historical knowledge of gang involvement among Latinos, and more specifically, among Chicanos in the city of Los Angeles. When asked why gangs have existed in the U.S. for such a long period of time, his response was one of the few that showed some historical knowledge; he writes:

First gangs began as a source of protection for Latinos radicaded here known as *pachucos*, later fights for control and now for territory, drugs, and many more things (my emphasis) [sic].

Diego Vigil presents an historical account of the origins of *pachucos* in Los Angeles. Essentially, these individuals were the forebears of contemporary gang members, more specifically, among Chicanos in East Los Angeles. These young men were part of the second generation of Mexican-American youth during the 1930s and 1940s. They were also known as Zoot Suitors, as previously mentioned, after a popular style of dressing that they gave notoriety. Also, they spoke a hybrid slang known as *calo*, that was a mixture of Spanish and English (Vigil:1991:6). To this day, Latino youth in Los Angeles can be heard speaking *calo*. Thus, the slang has spread beyond the confines of the East Los Angeles *barrios* to other Los Angeles' communities, that may be composed of Central Americans, Mexican nationals, or a combination of both.

Given that both of the Latino young men, whom I just quoted were enrolled in a course that aims to prepare them for AP.Calculus, I wondered how they had been able to achieve so much given their families' modest income. When I looked over some of their responses, I noticed that when I had asked how they were able to avoid gang involvement in their neighborhood, they wrote:

Well there are gangs around my neighborhood but you can only join a gang if you want to join it. It's not like they go after you and force you to join. And I chose not to be involved with them. I thank Christ for that [sic].

There are two very interesting aspects about this statement. For one, the young man is consistent in his responses. Once again, he attributes his ability to avoid gangs to the importance of religion in his life. He also validates Sanchez-Jankowski's notion that gangs should be looked at as organizations. That is, gangs do not "admit" everyone as a member. Similar to fraternities across college campuses, gangs are selective, about whom they admit. However, he also validates the notion that gang involvement is ultimately an individual decision, that is, a rational decision, as Sanchez-Jankowski argues. For example, Sanchez-Jankowski documents in *Islands in the Street*, that:

Deciding whether or not to join a gang is never an individual decision alone. Because gangs are well established in most of these neighborhoods, they are ultimately both the initiators of membership and the gatekeepers, deciding who will join and who will not (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:47-48).

Moreover, some of my respondents feel that being involved in gangs is a dumb decision. For example, a Hispanic female from a family earning between \$15,000-25,000, whose parents are undergoing a separation writes:

I was never interested in joining a gang. My parents always taught me gangs were bad and from what I saw myself, it looked like a dumb life to want to have. Kids feared them, teachers hated them, and I really didn't like the way they dressed I figured I had better thing to do than that [sic].

This respondent utilized a rational decision to avoid gang involvement. That is, she did not perceive any benefits in being involved in gangs. According to Sanchez-Jankowski, there are several reasons why some youth join gangs. He identified the following factors: (1) material incentives, (2) recreation, (3) a place to refuge and

camouflage, (4) physical protection, (5) a time to resist, and (6) commitment to community (Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:40-47).

My respondents did not join gangs based on the following three reasons: (1) religion was a very significant part of their lives, (2) gangs are very selective of their “potential members” , and therefore, they were not interested in having “them” join their organization, and finally because (3) they had good relationships with at least one “responsible adults”, that is, an “old head”. In turn, this contributed to the enforcement and abidance of rules within the home.

4.4 Why Do You Think Some Of Your Peers Join Gangs?

Another respondent, a Latino male from a nuclear family, who is enrolled in a regular ninth grade English class says that even though he was involved in gangs, he eventually left the gang. Thus he states:

Well I am a former gang member. I decide to get in a gang because of my friends. I would feel left out when they use to go out and look for trouble [sic].

This individual attributes gang involvement to a process of socialization. Therefore, this argument has a lot of similarities with Vigil’s concept of street socialization. According to Vigil, Chicanos in Los Angeles have many “role models” within their neighborhood(s) who are/were gang members. The exposure to this daily “social reality” influences entrance into early gang involvement, thus, Vigil states:

Peer pressure, as well as emulation of older models, also plays a significant part in guiding most gang members into such roles (Vigil:1991:53).

The statement of another respondent, an Asian male from a nuclear family earning between \$15,000- 20,0000; who is enrolled in an Algebra 2 class contends that the reason some youth join gangs has to do with the following factors:

It's because a lot of teenagers have a lot of problem financial, family, they thought joining the gang can change their life. They're wrong. Being a gang members is like you went inside the bottle and then you can't get out anymore.

This argument is very close to Vigil's notion that family factors can not be ignored as a causal variable to explains gang involvement among inner city youth in Los Angeles, and more importantly, among Chicano youth residing in East Los Angeles' *barrio* communities. Vigil clearly presents this argument when he states:

Gang members generally share a background of family stress, lack of success in and subsequent alienation from school, and disinclination toward many conventional pursuits of childhood and adolescence (Vigil:1991:87-88).

Vigil's analysis of gang involvement places more emphasis on familial characteristics than other ethnographers who conduct gang research. For example, Sanchez-Jankowski's theory of gangs places more emphasis on the gang as an organization, and views gang youth as rational decision makers, who maximize their limited opportunities in America's ghettos and *barrios* through the illicit activities that the gang can facilitate. However, Vigil contends that:

[T]he gang is a force of attraction that provides many *family-type functions*. The gang has become a "spontaneous" street social unit that fills a void left by *families under stress*. Parents and other family members are preoccupied with their own problems, and thus *the street group has arisen as a source of familial compensation* (My emphasis, Vigil:1991:90).

Similar to Vigil's analysis, one of the survey participants, a Hispanic female enrolled in an Algebra 2 class, and who is a member of a nuclear family earning below \$15,000 contends that gangs provide their members with the following support-base:

A feeling of being another member of a *family*. Loyalty. Importance and being loved, and accepted of being who you are or try to be. Also some guys look for girls they can have, to become popular (My emphasis) [sic].

This respondent also believes that the reason the “gang problem” has not been solved in her community, and across American society, is due to government neglect. This young lady is quite aware, as most middle-class suburban children, that social problems are solved most effectively through the political apparatus, and consequently, via public policy reforms. Thus, she writes:

Gangs have existed in the United States for so long because they are not that important to the government and they don't pay that much attention to the problem.

Some of my other respondents believe that although family problems are a causal variable for gang involvement, they contend that racial discrimination plays a greater role in the calculus utilized by some inner city youth to join gangs. Thus, an Asian female who is a member of a nuclear family earning below \$15,000 writes:

Gangs have existed in the United States for so long because people always want to belong be recognized by others. With many different ethnicity in this country and prejudice its hard to communicate with others *outside of your race*. That's why gangs are usually of just Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, etc. (My emphasis) [sic].

Vigil contends that racism is a very important variable that oftentimes is overlooked to explain why some inner city decide to join gangs. He exemplifies this assertion when he writes in *Barrio Gangs*:

Many of the participants in this study describe their school experiences in terms of insensitive treatment at the hand of teachers and administrators and *overt racial antagonism* with non-Chicano peers. One result of this was to reinforce ethnic identification, often with a sense of alienation (My emphasis, Vigil:1991:58).

Some of the previous responses validate the assertions that James Diego Vigil, Joan Moore, Mercer Sullivan, and Martin Sanchez-Jankowski espouse in their respective theories of gang involvement. Indeed, some individuals think that gang involvement is caused by racism and family problems, thus this validates Vigil's theory. Others think that young people join gangs because they have made rational calculated decisions, as Sanchez- Jankowski asserts. Still other respondents believe that the lack of manufacturing jobs has had an adverse effect in low income communities, because it has prevented gang youth from "maturing out" of gang involvement, and thus, has increased the presence of young adults in gangs, this is John Hagedorn's main argument in *People and Folks*.

4.5 Would Better Jobs Deter Youth From Joining Gangs?

According to John Hagedorn's thesis in *People and Folks*, there has been an increase in inner city youth joining gangs due to the restructuring of the secondary labor market. He relies most heavily on sociologist William Julius Wilson's book *The Truly Disadvantaged*. According to this theory, the disappearance of good-paying blue-collar manufacturing jobs has had a negative impact on the residents of the inner city, and males in particular. The exodus of these jobs, along with working and middle class families from the ghetto has diminished social institutions in these communities, and increased the homogeneity of the residents. Seeing social isolation in their communities, and the lack of good paying job opportunities, some youth *rationaly* turn to crime, and its underground economy to maximize their marginal economic status in society. This is clearly evident when Sanchez-Jankowski writes:

The derelicts on the street, the women and men dependent on public assistance, and the men and women (including possibly their fathers and mothers) who have taken jobs in secondary or informal labor markets that lead nowhere *represent to many young people those who have succumbed to the environment. All of this leads to a determination among some of the young not to succumb, but to survive.* Like Hobbesian men, [these individuals] come together and organize on the basis of wariness, fear, and mistrust (My emphasis, Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:25).

Thus, it is in this grave economic predicament that many of America's inner city youth find themselves. However, as I indicated earlier, the communities of the Westlake Planning district do not fit the traditional description of the so-called "urban underclass". Simply put, the employment participation rate in the district is not "low enough".

As I indicated earlier, an overwhelming number of those who responded to the survey argued that better-paying jobs would not deter gang involvement in their respective communities. For example, a Hispanic female who is enrolled in an 11th grade U.S. History class writes:

No I don't really think that high paying jobs would be the point. But it all depends on us, if we want to be a gang is because we want to. The gangs doesn't really have anything to do with the jobs.

These comments are those of a Hispanic young lady whose nuclear family earns below \$15,000 annually. Her social and political ideology, if it were to be classified, would be closer to the ideology espoused by those who consider themselves politically conservative. Therefore, political ideology, at least in this case, is independent of socio-economic status.

Other respondents agree with the premise of this statement. For example, a Latino male who is enrolled in a regular History class, and who is a member of a female-headed household earning below \$15,000 argues that better paying jobs would not deter gang involvement in his neighborhood. He writes:

No because any gang could say why work for any wages when we could get it for free. But some gang member would work for \$20 an hour. So they could get the good stuff [sic].

This respondent has provided a very rational response. That is, why would an ex-gang member decide to take a job, instead of continue his "fast" lifestyle? A possible response may be because he/she has "matured out" of gang involvement. On the other hand, it could be that if "good paying jobs" had been available to begin with,

that some inner city youth would not have considered gang involvement as an alternative to “get paid”, to borrow a term used by sociologist Mercer Sullivan.

There are some respondents, however, who feel that better jobs would ameliorate the proliferation of gangs in our inner cities, and other economically disfranchised communities. For example, a Latino male who is also enrolled in the same regular History class as the last respondent writes:

I think that providing jobs that pay \$20 an hour is a good idea because a lot of the gangsters get involved in gangs for economic problems.

Unlike other respondents, this student perceives gang formation as a byproduct of economic inequality. Her response validates Sanchez-Jankowski’s notion that some inner city youth are rational decision makers who decide to join gangs, because it facilitates the economic rewards that they are denied by living in poor ghetto or *barrio* neighborhoods.

Another respondent also agrees that better jobs would ameliorate gang involvement in her neighborhood. A Hispanic female enrolled in Math Analysis, and who is a member of a nuclear family earning below \$15,000 writes:

I believe that better paying jobs would help youth to stay from joining gangs. As I said before, I believe that if young people have less time to spend on the streets, gangs would decrease. A big problem right now in society is that young people can’t find jobs in which they can spend their free time.

The statements of this young lady support James Vigil’s notion that some inner city youth join gangs because they are socialized to do so by their friends and others who live within close proximity. This school of thought, relies heavily on *ecological factors* as the causal variables for gang involvement among some youth, and particularly among Chicanos in Los Angeles.

There are other respondents who do not attribute gang involvement to either economic inequity, or ecological factors; instead they focus on the amenities that the

gang as an organization can provide. For example, a Hispanic female enrolled in a Math Analysis course, and whose nuclear family earns between \$15,000-25,000 contends that better jobs would not alleviate the presence of gangs in her community; she writes:

No, there would still be gangs and no matter how high the wages went there'd still be gangs. *It's not an economic problem, but a moral problem* (My emphasis) [sic].

Similar to some of the earlier responses obtained, this respondent considers the lack of ethical values as the causal variable for gang participation in her community. As we can see, this statement would be very close to the stance of many conservative policy makers. Perhaps, the utilization of religion and ethical values by some inner city youth has led them to escape gang involvement in their respective communities. However, if we accept this answer we assume that those youth who are not involved in gangs are somehow more ethical than those who are gang members. From the responses obtained in this survey, this is not something which can be tested or proven. Moreover, it is a very common practice among some Latino gang members to have tattoos of the Virgin Mary on their back, or other visible part of their body. Clearly, this practice is indicative of Catholic allegiance among gang members. Therefore, we can not conclude that youths who are not gang members are *more religious than gang members*.

Some respondents think that some gangs lure youth into their organizations because they provide the social amenities that are missing in their neighborhoods. An Asian male, who is a member of a nuclear family earning less than \$15,000, and who is enrolled in an honors English course writes:

No. I doubt higher paying jobs would stop youths from joining gangs. The majority of youth who join gangs do so in order to be either *cool* or to escape problems at home (My emphasis).

There are some respondents, however, who feel that the provision of good paying jobs will not ameliorate gang involvement, because youths who are involved in gangs have already been inculcated with the “wrong values”. It appears as if some of my respondents do not think that individuals who have been involved in gangs can reform themselves. This is apparent when an Asian male enrolled in a ninth grade regular English class writes:

No, you don't need a job for youth to not join gangs. They will be worse because after their job they would get the money and buy drugs. Like I said all you need is good parents [sic].

A Latino male enrolled in an honors math class, and a member of a nuclear family earning less than \$15,000 writes:

No. I don't think that good paying jobs would prevent some youth from participating in gangs. In this case I think not. Even if they earned \$40 an hour they would still join gangs. The matter here is not money but reputation, popularity, and *mainly girls* (Emphasis in the original) [sic].

As we can see, many of these youngsters believe that even if ex-gang members held good paying jobs that these individuals soon enough would resume their “old habits”. What these statements illustrate is that most inner city youth who are not involved in gangs, feel that even if good jobs were available gangs would continue to exist in their respective communities. Indeed, these responses question the validity of the thesis espoused by sociologist William J. Wilson, and Hagedorn.

The major findings of this chapter are the following: Inner city youth who do not join gangs in the Westlake planning district *believe* that (1) religion has been very important for them, (2) personal decisions drive gang involvement, (3) education is utilized to “make it” in American society, (4) weak family structure facilitates gang involvement, and (5) good paying jobs will not eradicate gangs in urban America.

Moreover, a large number of the students who responded to this survey, argued that they did *not* think that the provision of higher paying jobs would be an effective public policy to combat the presence of gangs in their respective neighborhoods. In order to test the significance and validity of this assertion, I quantified the number of students who are either (1) currently employed, or (2) had worked during their vacations. I should point out that Belmont High is on a year-round schedule, and therefore, the school always has a good number of students enrolled throughout the year.

Table 4.4

Employment Record of Participants by Race, Gender, and Race & Gender:

	Number of survey participants	Working (Percent)	Non-Working (Percent)
Latinos	N=47	45%	55%
Asian-Americans	N=15	47%	53%
African-Americans	N=1	0%	100%
Male	N=33	39%	61%
Female	N=30	50%	50%
Latino Male	N=24	42%	58%
Latino Female	N=23	48%	52%
Asian Male	N=9	33%	67%
Asian Female	N=6	67%	33%
African American Female	N=1	0%	100%

Source: Roberto R. Mejia, Survey administered at Belmont High School, Los Angeles, CA, January 1995.

From the results of the table above, we can see that a large percentage, 45%-47% of the students *who are not involved in gangs* work or have held a job during their high school years. Therefore, the credibility of some of the responses that “good paying jobs” will not ameliorate gang involvement is questionable, especially given that the youngsters who argued that work would not solve anything were not in gangs themselves, and so they are not experts; and may not be familiar with gang alleviation policies.

Perhaps the reason why the youths in my sample have avoided gang involvement is because they were able to secure a job. According to the empirical evidence, the following table represents a breakdown of the number of student who work according to *age*. I should point out that those students who are 15 years and younger were thrown out of the calculations, because these students are too young to work. Nine of the ten 15 year olds were enrolled in an English 9 class, the other student was enrolled in an Algebra 2 class. Moreover, a large number of the students were 17 years old at the time they completed the survey in January 1995. Therefore, there are only a few 18 year olds in my sample. Given that many of the youngsters in my sample work, this indicates that the implementation of “job programs” can ameliorate gang participation among some youngsters in the Westlake District. This will be an issues that I will explore in the next chapter.

Table 4.5

Employment Record by Age:

Age	Number of Survey Participants	Working (Raw numbers)	Non-Working (Raw numbers)	Working (Percent)	Non-Working (Percent)
16	N=20	8	12	40%	60%
17	N=29	15	14	52%	48%
18 and over.	N=4	4	0	100%	0%

Source: Roberto R. Mejia, Survey administered at Belmont High School, Los Angeles, CA, January, 1995.

The answers provided by my respondents have confirmed or negated the four theories I utilized in this thesis. That is, elements of three theories have been validated by the empirical evidence. For instance, James Diego Vigil’s *multiple marginality* theory has been confirmed. Indeed, numerous youth who participate in gangs have familial problems. On the other hand, as my empirical evidence indicates, those youth who *do not join gangs* have associated with at least one “responsible” adult role model while growing up. Also, what we really know is that youngsters who do not join gangs appear not to

have many problems in their households. I would argue that this factor in conjunction with others, identified earlier, facilitates gang avoidance in the Westlake Planning District. Sanchez-Jankowski's organizations theory has also been confirmed. All youth in the inner city can not be gang members. After all, gangs are selective about who they admit. Additionally, some youth utilize school, or sports to "make it" and achieve upward mobility. The empirical evidence overwhelmingly illustrates that the youngsters who participated in my survey have made *rational decisions* not to join gangs, however, there is little evidence from the surveys whether they could have joined gangs if they had wanted to or not.

Unlike the previous two theories, the Hagedorn *urban restructuring* thesis has been challenged the most. A majority, but not all of my respondents feel that "good paying" jobs, defined by the author as jobs paying \$20 an hour, will not eradicate gangs. Finally, the behavioral component of the Anderson thesis espoused in *Streetwise*, has been confirmed by some respondents. Some of the students feel that youths who are involved in gangs come from dysfunctional families. Vigil's multiple marginality theory also support elements of the Anderson thesis. Indeed, as we can see, the various theories I utilized in this thesis have been supported, or refuted by the responses given to the survey I administered at Belmont High School.

If good paying jobs are not the answer to the "gang problem" across our inner cities what are the solutions? That is, what can the prudent policy analyst recommend? This will be the topic of the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Public Policy and Gangs: An Oxymoron?

The measure of success in any crime bill is the reduction of crime, not the proliferation of prisons. Jobs, education, opportunity and attentive adults give an injection of hope to youth who have ceased to care. Hope is the only antidote there is to crime-- the most glaring of despair's symptoms. What the Gingrich team calls "pork" is but the most meager attempt at preventing crime from happening at all. No get-tough approach will ever fill with hope a young person stuck in his or her own despair. This no-nonsense assault, then, is utter nonsense to those in this community who know more about the complexity of crime and its root causes than the 104th Congress ever will
(From: Father Gregory J.Boyle, Los Angeles Times, Metro Section, January 6, 1995).

Introduction 5.1

The goal of this chapter is to present public policies that can ameliorate the proliferation of gangs in the Westlake District. I will present an overview of the City Year national service program as an alternative to gang involvement among "at risk" inner city youth, and I will also provide some ideas for a policy program whose goal will be to decrease the presence of gangs in the area. A major problem of most sociological gang studies, such as those I have used for this thesis is that they do not prescribe public policy solutions to the "gang problem". These books postulate excellent theories, but they are very weak when it comes to solutions. Given the dearth of social policies to the gang problem, this chapter's ambitious goal is to provide some preliminary solutions.

5.2 Boston's City Year

According to a study conducted by Businessweek in 1993, the United States "spends some 90 billion a year on the entire criminal-justice system" (December 13,1993). It has been asserted throughout this thesis that gangs should not be associated with only one of their domains, crime. However, it can not be denied that gangs and its members *are* involved in criminal activities. Therefore, anyone who is interested in reducing gang involvement should consider the enormous amount of money that the federal government spends to control crime. The approximate figure is \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year to imprison a young adult (Businessweek:1993:73). This is the same amount of money it costs to send a young person to a selective private university such as M.I.T. for one year. In fact, this amount exceeds by \$7,000 dollars the cost of attendance

for one year at a top flagship state university. Given this situation, one must question why policy makers are more willing to incarcerate America's youth, rather than educate them? Moreover, imprisoning a young person for life has tremendous consequences for the rest of the population because an additional tax payer is lost. In fact, "imprisoning a 25-year old for life costs a total of \$600,000 to \$1,000,000. So putting someone in prison for life puts a huge financial burden on the next generation-- just as a big burden budget deficit does" (Businessweek:1993:75). What are some possible alternatives to this scenario? What can politicians, and the electorate do to correct these misguided public policies?

A possible alternative is to implement a youth service program throughout the country that would be modeled after City Year, a program that began in 1987 in Boston. The program was founded by two Harvard Law School graduates Alan Khazei and Michael Brown. The impetus for creating the program was to bring together "young people from all social classes" who "should devote a year to helping others, both to provide low-cost civic improvements and to break down the cubicles of race and class in this country" (The Boston Globe, May 10,1990). This is one of the most successful programs targeting both low income and middle class youth to restore the physical and social infrastructure of communities in need. Indeed, there is much to learn from a program that miraculously is able to bring together young people from different social class backgrounds working toward a common goal. An article written for Parade Magazine summarizes the uniqueness of City Year; it states:

Identifiable by their "uniform" of red windbreakers, these hardworking young people were members of an "urban Peace Corps" in Boston called City Year. Unlike other "job corps", however, this program brings together former *gang members* and college youth who are willing to pitch in . They ride cross-town subways to work in schools, housing projects, parks and institutions that lack government resources (My emphasis, Parade Magazine, July 18, 1993).

This is an entirely true analysis of the City Year program. On March 15, 1995. I was fortunate enough to observe the work that these remarkable young men and women do to ameliorate social problems in Boston. I observed a group of six individuals who were obviously from different racial and economic backgrounds build a playground for a day care center in the Boston area. Seeing these young men and women work together gives hope to anyone who questions the goal of a society that is able to transcend color and ethnic prejudice. More specifically, however, what makes this program great? Some possible reasons to consider are: (1) the program has been entirely privately financed. Recently, the federal government has started to contribute about 25% in funds through the National Service Act (Parade, July 18, 1993), (2) the high amount of monetary support of corporations and foundations in the city/region where the program operates, (3) the mutual obligation covenant of City Year, and most importantly its ability to (4) bring together a diverse group of young people. As Professor Garry Orren of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, who has taken two years of sabbatical service at City Year states:

At City Year we teach these kids that they are a resource, not a client--that they have to give something to get something back” (Harvard Magazine, January-February 1993).

Some of the benefits that the program provides are the following:

(1) a \$100 weekly stipend, (2) a \$5,000 ‘public service’ grant after nine months, and (3) to give something back to those in need. However, there are also obligations that are part of these rewards. For example, all the approximately 300 participants must meet by 8:30 in the morning every weekday in the open plaza in front of the Federal Reserve Bank in downtown Boston. After a few minutes of calisthenics, they huddle in groups of about six participants to discuss their daily activities, and take the local Boston subway system, the “T”, to their various sites (New York Times, June 19, 1991, author’s own observations on March 15, 1995). Also, each participant is required to (4) register to vote,

get a library card, write a resume, and learn tax preparations, and earn a GED diploma if they are high school dropouts.

The selection process is very selective. In 1994, approximately 1,600 individuals applied for the 308 available spots. According to a member of City Year's admissions committee, applicants are informed that receiving acceptance to the program is like receiving a permanent job. As part of the selection process, all applicants are required to go through either a personal or phone interview. Also, applicants are required to be between the ages of 17 and 23. Those who do not fit into this age group cannot participate in the program. A major criterion for being selected is for the applicant(s) to have an interest in making systemic change in urban American society. That is, the applicant must show in his/her application that they want to ameliorate economic and social inequity in poor urban communities. In addition, there are other hard to measure intangibles that the committee looks at critically. For example, an applicant who has had a less than spectacular school record is oftentimes admitted if he/she can show either through the interview, or application essay a genuine concern in making a difference in society, or in the amelioration of society's most pressing social policy dilemmas (author's notes, March 15, 1995). Also, a lot of emphasis is placed in accepting an economically, socially, and ethnically diverse class. For example, in terms of demographics, it is estimated that the participants are: 51% male; 49% female; 34% black; 14% Latino, 7% Asian-American (USA Today, December 17, 1992). Currently, City Year has expanded to the following cities: Chicago, IL; San Jose, CA; Columbus, SC; and Providence, RI.

Although the skeptic may question the possibility that a service program can ameliorate and reach gang involved inner city youth, I will utilize the comments of a young lady who was an ex-gang member in the Roxbury community of Boston, and the statements that an ex-gang member made to a Parade Magazine reporter to substantiate my argument. Both of these individuals participated in the City Year program in Boston as well.

5.3 Jennifer, City Year Alum, Ex-Gang Member:

During my tour of the City Year headquarters in Boston, I was invited to a roundtable discussion with some staff members, current participants, and sponsors. This roundtable discussion allowed me the opportunity to ask a couple of questions to Jennifer, a current City Year participant. This young lady grew up in Roxbury, one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the Boston area. She has recently left “gang life” because she did not want her child to lead the same lifestyle that had taken her to become involved in gangs. Also, a series of familial circumstances led her to “escape” Roxbury to a safer part of Boston. I asked her a very direct question during the roundtable discussion. I said, if you were a public policy analyst and someone asked you to do something to solve the “gang problem” in your city what would you recommend?

Jennifer argued that gang involvement begins when parents do not supervise their children sufficiently. She said that the children and youth who were able to avoid gang involvement in her community, were those who had a stable family background. Her statement validates James Diego Vigil’s multiple marginality theory. Also, it validates the responses that numerous students gave to the survey I administered in Los Angeles. Very similar to the aforementioned theory, Jennifer believes that when problems in the home arise that young people seek neighborhood friends as an “alternative” family, where they are able to discuss their problems.

Another lure of gang involvement is that it provides fast money. It took Jennifer a while to realize that dressing her baby boy with the most expensive clothes did not mean that she was a good parent. In fact, she came to this conclusion when her child was taken away by the Department of Social Services (DSS), after she was arrested for drug possession and distribution. Her home was “drug raided”, because law enforcement officials believed she was selling drugs. According to her, this was all true. While she served time in prison for a couple of months, she realized that there was more to life than

material resources and “fast money”, that is, drug money. The shooting death of her child’s godfather also sent her a signal to leave gang life. These assertions validate Sanchez-Jankowski’s notion that some youth escape gangs because they are fearful of death. This is certainly the case in Jennifer’s case.

Moreover, she attributes her decision to finally leave her “female gang”, after discovering City Year. This program provided her an “alternative gang”. That is, a support team that showed her that she could do something to better her life and those of others in communities such as Roxbury. In conclusion, she stated that her policy recommendation was to create and support other programs such as City Year, that can show young people, particularly inner-city youth, that there are “alternative gangs”. That is, organizations and group of individuals who can provide an introduction to a world beyond the confines of America’s inner cities (author’s notes, March 15, 1995).

As Jennifer’s case study has indicated, City Year can replace the functions of gangs. Indeed, while there is no one causal variable for gang involvement, the need of friends is something that all youth seek. If youth are provided more opportunities to interact with others like and unlike themselves, this can potentially show them that this world stretches beyond the confines of their disadvantaged, or privileged lives; and allow them to appreciate their commonalties instead of their differences.

5.4 James Roisten, City Year Alum, Ex-Gang Member:

According to a 1993 article by Parade Magazine, James Roisten, 24, volunteered and served on the staff of City Year. James was a *gang member*, when a local neighbor gave him the phone number of City Year. At first, he encountered some difficulties interacting with the suburban youth who were part of the program. He recalls that when he first went to the Boston headquarters of City Year, he:

Walked in their door in my gang attire and with a real tough attitude
(Parade, July 18,1993).

After a couple of months participating in the program, this self-proclaimed *gang member* began changing his ways, and was transformed into a civic-minded young person. In fact, not only did he begin to notice that he was changing, but also his neighbors and friends. In fact, he explained to the reporter from Parade Magazine that his metamorphosis occurred in the following manner:

During my first months at City Year, he adds, every evening I would go back to my neighborhood. All my *gang friends* told me, 'You can't change. You're down with us.' I wasn't sure of myself. I never imagined working in education. I had been thrown out of three high schools. But those little kids at the school were the biggest thing that ever happened to me. By the third or fourth month, my friends, said, 'Wow! You're changing. They started asking if they could join City Year (My emphasis, Parade Magazine, July 18, 1993).

Indeed, this synopsis illustrates that a national service program such as City Year can have a direct impact in the lives of our so-called "most troubled youths". As Father Gregory J. Boyle whom I quoted at the beginning of this chapter has indicated, "hope is the only antidote there is to crime".

5.5 The Socio-Economic Costs of Incarceration:

At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted from a 1993 analysis conducted by Businessweek that indicated that it costs about \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually to incarcerate a young person. The financial costs of participating in a program such as Boston's City Year, or a similar program such as the Los Angeles Conservation Corps is \$20,000. Cost-benefit analysis tells us that it's prudent to minimize costs, in order to maximize benefits. In the case of crime policy, it is more sensible to invest in job corps programs and educational funding than in the creation of more prisons. As reporter Scott Shuger of the Boston Globe indicated in an article about City Year in 1993:

[C]onsider that aforementioned estimated corps costs of \$20,000 per participant per year. Many of the at-risk youth that corps are designed to accommodate are now ending up in the criminal justice system where the current annual costs per participant are at least that high. Not to mention the other measurable costs of criminality: the lost income and added welfare costs for the families of victims and incarcerated perpetrators, the extra dollars spent by businesses, schools, and other institutions in loss-and violent-prevention ... [I]n other words, the incremental cost of even expensive programs as youth corps is nowhere near \$20,000 per person (Boston Globe, February 7,1993).

Indeed, the aforementioned statement communicates a simple message: Pay now or pay later. The American tax payer will inevitably have to come to this conclusion soon enough. Rational policy makers who are truly concerned with crime policy, have to venture beyond slogans, and propose real solutions to one of the most difficult social policy dilemmas this country must confront. The consequences of benign neglect are overwhelming. Our great nation, cannot remain competitive in today's *world economy*, if a significant number of its inhabitants remain poorly educated, and possess only but the most rudimentary skills to function in the labor market, and continue to feel alienated from the rest of society.

Table 5.1

City Year Alum's: What Are They Doing Now?

4-Year Colleges	2-Year Colleges	Vocational Programs/Part Time	Working	Could Not Be Tracked.
40%	8%	8%	32%	12%

Source: Boston Globe, April 29,1992.

5.6 Public Policy and Gangs:

In the following section, I will present some public policies that can be implemented at the local, state, or federal level to alleviate and prevent gang formation. The policy recommendations will be based on the suggestions provided by the students themselves. In this chapter I will also present *an alternative policy program* to gang involvement in the Westlake District. The last question in the survey I distributed at Belmont High School focused on public policy solutions. The question asked what the respondent would do if the mayor gave him/her one million dollars to solve Los Angeles' gang problem. The following responses were the most representative of each class.

A Hispanic female enrolled in an 11th grade remedial English course answers:

Let ex-gang members talk to gangsters and future gangsters and make them see there is always something better out there for them.

Similarly, an Asian American male student enrolled in an honors math class, who said that religion has been very important in his life, writes:

If I receive a million dollars by the mayor of Los Angeles, I would use that sum of money to fund youth programs that get former gang members to teach new generations of youths the consequences of joining gangs [sic].

This recommendation has already been attempted in Los Angeles. A program called Los Angeles Youth Gang Services (YGS) employs reformed ex-gang members to conduct youth outreach. The philosophy of this organization is that young people who are involved in gangs are more likely to feel at ease working with those who have been through their experiences than with traditional social workers.

A Hispanic female enrolled in a 9th grade remedial English course replies:

Create a rehabilitation place where all young people who feel lonely, or are involved in drugs and gangs can go to receive help.

This recommendation would be favored by some social workers who believe that the provision of substance abuse counseling is an effective approach to ameliorate gang involvement. However, the effectiveness of a program such as this one would be hard to measure, because those participating in the program may not be representative of all gang members. Perhaps, these individuals are not the “truly hard-core” gang members, and therefore they may be more willing to join a rehabilitation program than their colleagues.

A Hispanic male who stated in chapter four that he had been involved in his neighborhood’s gang, Rockwood Street, and who is also enrolled in remedial courses answers:

I would help by making new laws which would only apply to gang members and no one else [sic].

This proposal is favored by some judges and attorneys who believe that the implementation of alternative sentences for young offenders would decrease the number of young people who are incarcerated at an early age. In fact, in California the number of youth incarcerated has reached sky-rocketing numbers, especially among Latino and African American youth (please see table below).

Table 5.2**Composition of California Youth Authority Facilities**

Ethnicity	No. of Youth Incarcerated	%
White	1336	15.1
Latino	3900	44.0
African-American	2883	32.5
Asian	479	5.4
Native American	56	0.6
Philipino	94	1.1
Pacific Islander	83	0.9
Other	32	0.4
TOTAL	8663	100

Source: California Youth Authority, June 30, 1994.

Instead of sending young people with non-criminal records to prison, the law enforcement communities may want to consider sending these individuals to so-called “boot camps” where they can be rehabilitated. Another plausible alternative is to require some youngsters to participate in community service programs, such as City Year.

A Hispanic female enrolled in a regular 11th grade U.S. History class writes:

If the mayor would give a million dollars to solve the Los Angeles' gang problem I would create programs for them so they can express their feelings and so they can see that somebody cares about them [sic].

Evidently this young lady feels that a good solution to the proliferation of gangs is the creation of counseling and recreational centers. Similar to the response of a previous respondent, she feels that young people need someone who is willing to listen to them. Moreover, organizations like the YMCA/YWCA offer recreational programs in such area as Fine Arts and physical education where young people can display their creativity. Creating more effective partnerships with these non-profits may reduce the number of young people who decide to join gangs in the inner city.

Another respondent, an Asian male enrolled in a 10th grade honors English class favors a policy that increases the number of law enforcement personnel in Los Angeles. He writes:

I would help to build a lot of neighborhood watches in each community that I think has a lot of gang activities. Then I would strongly give some of the money to enforce more *cops* in different areas where there is heavy gang problems (My emphasis) [sic].

The policy proposed by this respondent is the status quo policy across many cities throughout the country. The effectiveness of this policy must be questioned given that gang related deaths have not declined in cities such as Los Angeles although this has been the favored policy of most politicians and local law enforcement departments. In fact, the most recent statistics compiled by the Los Angeles Sheriff Department indicate that in Los Angeles County gang related deaths have not decreased throughout the years despite the enthusiastic enforcement of this public policy (please see table below).

Table 5.3
Gang Related Deaths, Los Angeles County, 1980-1993:

Year	Deaths
1980	351
1981	292
1982	205
1983	216
1984	212
1985	264
1986	328
1987	387
1988	452
1989	554
1990	690
1991	771
1992	800
1993	719

Source: Los Angeles County Sheriff Department

On the other hand, a Hispanic female who is enrolled in an Algebra 2 class favors the provision of employment opportunities as an alternative to gang involvement. She relates:

I would make a speech to the gang community and tell them to please paint each and every building back to its original color for \$10 to \$15 dollars an hour.

Perhaps upgrading housing conditions, and other physical infrastructure problems in neighborhoods where “urban decay” is common, or where it is spreading would be a good source of employment for some of these young men and women. Local non-profits, and other employers involved in the “rehabilitation process” could give priority to gang, and ex-gang members when hiring employees.

A Latino male enrolled in a regular 9th grade English course replies:

I would make a sports recreation center for gangs members that want to get out [sic].

A possible approach to implementing this policy would be to create a year round sports league that would organize sports tournaments with other neighborhood youth. Awards such as T-shirts with the name of their neighborhood, or sports team would be distributed to all participants. After all, as some of the participants of City Year, and those who completed my survey indicated, it is imperative for young people to have the option of belonging to “alternative groups” to diminish their interests in gangs.

A Hispanic female enrolled in a regular math class argues that her solution to the gang problem would be the implementation of a broad set of public policies. She writes:

I would create special homes, *more good paying jobs*, special night schools for those girls who had babies at an early age. What I would do in those night schools is put a special day and night care for those who want to look for jobs or get an education. Also, more social programs or clubs so children can get involved in them and not gangs (My emphasis) [sic].

As we can see, the previous respondent favors a holistic set of policies to alleviate gang involvement. Given that gangs are not homogenous entities, the most effective policies will be those that are diverse, complex, and overlapping. Moreover, the availability of jobs may dissuade some youths who are contemplating gang involvement. After all, my survey revealed that 45% to 47% of the students have a job, or have worked at some point during their high school years. Perhaps the reason why the youngsters in my sample did not join gangs, and are basically “good kids” is because they had a good support base, a concerned adult and a job.

To cut down on gang membership, non-profit community development organizations may want to increase the number of recreational facilities available for young people. After all, according to some sociological theories, some inner-city youth join gangs because few *recreational opportunities* exist in the inner-cities. This is clearly evident when Vigil writes:

A contributing factor, as the life histories and my observations verify, to a dependence on street peers for social support is *the lack of other community outlets for recreation and social events*.East Los Angeles still has a low level of parks and recreational programs. The area has one of the lowest numbers of parks compared to other city locales, and those that do exist are overcrowded. (My emphasis, Vigil:1991:43).

Consequently, given that social service and government agencies provide few recreational activities, some youth join gangs because, at least the gangs provide “fun things to do”. This is clearly evident when Sanchez-Jankowski writes:

The gang provides individuals with *entertainment*, much as a fraternity does for college students or the Moose and Elk clubs do for their members. *Many individuals said they joined the gang because it was the primary social institution of their neighborhood--that is, it was where most (not necessarily the biggest) social events occurred.* (My emphasis, Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:43).

The lack of recreational services has an adverse impact on the lives of inner city youth. For example, a Hispanic female, who is enrolled in an honors math class believes that to solve the gang problem in her neighborhood the following must be done:

I'd build more centers where young children could hang out after school and during vacation so they wouldn't have to be on the streets. I'd also start new programs to teach kids about the dangers of gangs and violence.

Clearly many of the survey respondents feel that the availability of recreational programs, or places where one can play and have fun can ameliorate the lure of gang involvement for some young men and women. A good example of an effective recreational program that has dissuaded inner city youth from joining gangs is the Egleston Square Youth Program. Through the provision of an athletic center along with counseling, some youth in the poorest section of Jamaica Plain have been able to stay away from gangs.

A second Hispanic female enrolled in a regular U.S. history class views poverty as a causal variable in the formation of gangs. Her policy prescription is to ameliorate inequality in society; she writes:

If the mayor gave me a million dollars to solve Los Angeles' gang problem, I would use the money to help my community, and help *poor people*, and help in every way possible (My emphasis).

According to the statement of this young woman, ending economic inequality will make social conditions better for those in her community, and consequently, will diminish the number of young people who are involved in gangs. Her comment basically

reiterates the statement that a policy analyst made toward the end of Sanchez-Jankowski's book, *Islands in the Street*. This individual who works for the city of New York writes:

You know, I've thought about a lot of the questions you asked me today. There's very few that I really haven't thought about. To solve the gang problem in this country, there is just so much that would need to be changed. There are just so many areas of everyday life that would need to be changed; *there's inequality*, there's incompetence, there's corruption. All these years I've put in and I just don't know where to start. (My emphasis, Sanchez-Jankowski:1991:321).

Based on the statements of these two individuals, and numerous academicians and so-called "gang experts", gangs are a byproduct of economic inequality. This thesis, however, challenges this notion and has attempted to show otherwise. Despite living in poor neighborhoods the youngsters in my sample are able to overcome the odds, and are succeeding in an environment where few children know educated adults. Therefore, it cannot be argued that poverty alone generates gangs. It appears as if poverty in conjunction with other variables, such as: familial problems, urban restructuring, and individual choices best explain gang participation.

Moreover, public policies that are designed to combat the presence of gangs need to be sensitive to the differences among gangs, and the level of commitment of its members. For example, how hard is it for a youngster to change his/her behavior and leave gangs? In the Westlake District, how many gang members are dedicated to remaining in gangs no matter what and how many will drift away if they are presented with a better alternative? While it is virtually impossible for me to know the answers to these questions, they can help me identify the components of an anti-gang program in the area.

The following factors could be part of an anti-gang involvement program in the Westlake District. The program would be community based, controlled, and managed:

- ◆ The identification by school counselors and administrators of “at risk” students attending junior and senior high schools in the district .
- ◆ The provision of recreational activities, such as sports leagues throughout the District.
- ◆ The facilitation of counseling from ex-gang members to those who are classified as wannabee and peripheral gang members.
- ◆ The provision of counseling services from college students who live in the community. These individuals would also provide assistance with college tours, and applications.
- ◆ The provision of after-school tutoring programs.
- ◆ The implementation of a job corps program that would place young people in temporary jobs throughout the city. For example, some youngster could work in offices doing filing and photocopying. Others could be employed in hospitals, and in other service-based jobs within the larger metropolitan Los Angeles area.

The program would be financed through government grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and by soliciting contributions from the private sector, as the City Year program has done throughout the Northeast. The program would be evaluated by arriving at rough estimates (before the program began operation) of the number of youngsters in the Westlake District who were associated (at whatever level) with gangs, and then seeing what happened to those individuals over three to five years. Alternative evaluation methods would be implemented to test the validity of the initial method. Longitudinal studies could be conducted with the participant's approval. In this way, local "players", i.e. city councilmen/women, community organizers, urban planners, and local businessmen/women would obtain empirical evidence about the positive, or negative results of the program.

However, the policy program should also be sensitive to the ethnic intricacies of gang involvement. For example, the reason(s) why immigrant Latino youths form gangs is different from the experiences of second or third generation Chicanos, and that of African-Americans as well. Geographical factors should also been taken into account when assessing the implementation and effectiveness of gang alleviation policies.

Chapter 6: Conclusion:

The gangs, the drugs, the senseless violence are attractive only because children of the black community and children of poverty, regardless of race-- have been made to feel like nothing, like worthless objects, like dirt stacked on top of other generations of dirt. Through no fault of their own, these questions nag them from deep within the soul, and the gangs at least give them something to which they can belong, something that gives a meaning to existence (From: Herb Cawthorne's , San Diego Tribune, November 3,1988).

6.1 Concluding Thoughts and Major Findings

The passage of President Clinton's crime bill in 1994 brought to the forefront the American people's preoccupation with crime policy. Unfortunately, when most Americans think of crime they instantly equate urban regions with youth gangs. Moreover, the mass media perpetuates this view with television shows such as "Cops" and "America's Most Wanted". There is not a day without the evening news bombarding their audiences with information about the latest "gang shooting" in the inner city. Given the recent preoccupation with the American crime problem, and the perception that all inner city youth are "gangsters", I embarked on this thesis project. Indeed, as my data indicates there are a substantial number of low-income youth who evade gang involvement despite the negative influences that permeate their daily lives.

The major findings of this thesis are the following: The inner-city youth who participated in my survey did not join gangs in the Westlake Planning District because: (1) religion has been very important for them, (2) they made a personal decision(s) to avoid gang involvement, (3) educational "success" has been utilized to "make it" in American society, (4) they have had at least one good relationship with a "responsible adult", (5) and most surprisingly, a large number felt that "good paying jobs" would not eradicate the gang problem in their respective communities. This assertion, however, has been questioned by the author, because 45%-47% of the respondents work or have held a job in the past. I believe that the securement of a job has been a major factor in deterring these youths from joining gangs.

While these findings are important they are *not conclusive*. In order to tease out further my findings, I would need to conduct a comparative ethnographic study, and I would need to target youngsters who are entrenched in the world of gangs. After all, my thesis has overwhelmingly only looked at the “good kids”. However, I think that the purpose of this thesis has been accomplished, that is, to test the explanations given by four academics as to why inner city youth join gangs. I have turned this question on its head, and have concentrated on why inner city youth *do not* join gangs. If the findings of this thesis are not entirely convincing, I ask the skeptic reader to conduct his/her own empirical research with low-income inner-city youth before disputing my findings, and assertions.

The eradication of the urban gang phenomenon will take many years. After all, gangs have operated in “zones of transitions”, to borrow a concept first used by the Chicago School of Sociology, for over sixty years. Holistic public policies can ameliorate the “gang problem”. However, the implementations of government policies alone will not solve this great nation’s most pressing socio-economic dilemmas. Parental values and the restoration of our social institutions must be vigorously enforced and encouraged as well. A potential criticism of this thesis will be that perhaps the young men and women of Belmont High School are not *representative* of all inner city youths, or of an inner city community. While this is a valid criticism, all that I can say is that these individuals are clearly residents of low-income neighborhoods. Therefore, something beyond economics is going on in the daily lives of these “warriors of peace”. That “something”, I truly believe, is the presence and encouragement of a responsible adult, that is, an “old head” to borrow a term coined by Elijah Anderson. I avoid “family” as a variable, because some of my respondents are not members of nuclear families. Indeed, what appears to be most important is the presence of at least one “responsible” adult role model rather than of a traditional family. That adult can be either a parent (either mother or father), a close relative, a teacher, or a responsible adult member of the community.

My case study, moreover, has compared and contrasted *sociological* gang theories with the empirical evidence I obtained in Los Angeles. The four “gang theories” I have

presented in this thesis are only but a handful. Certainly, there are other theories in the literature that can either confirm or negate the findings of this thesis. As I said earlier, these theories differ from one another to the extent that they attribute gang formation to different variables. For example, Vigil considers social, ecological, and educational marginality as the factors that generate gang involvement, thus he construes a theory that he calls *multiple marginality*. Sanchez-Jankowski contends that *rational decision* making must be taken very seriously in any analysis of gang formation, moreover, he argues that gangs must be viewed as organizations; that is, entities that screen out potential members, and who are selective. On the other hand, Hagedorn argues that there is a correlation between gang involvement and the loss of manufacturing jobs, especially in industrial cities, particularly in the Midwest. Finally, Anderson synthesizes the labor market restructuring thesis (i.e., Hagedorn:1988 and Wilson:1987) and the behavioral thesis (i.e., Lawrence Mead:1992, and Charles Murray:1984). He demonstrates through the empirical evidence gathered for *Streetwise* that economic restructuring and “behavioral problems” have affected the people and neighborhoods of Philadelphia. Elements of both theses are confirmed in his book, and in my empirical research.

One of the goals of this thesis has been to test the validity of the theories with my qualitative findings. Indeed, the main thesis of three theories were confirmed, whereas, Hagedorn’s urban restructuring theory was least confirmed. Moreover, a good number of the responses confirmed the Vigil and Sanchez-Jankowski thesis the most. For the author, this has been quite surprising given that these two theories attribute gang involvement to opposing factors. Essentially, the *multiple marginality* theory considers ecological and social conditions as central to any explanation of gangs, whereas, for Sanchez-Jankowski the individual is the unit of analysis, and therefore, rational decision making and the needs of gangs as organizations are the explanatory factors. A possible way to reconcile the differences among these four competing theories may be by synthesizing them into one theory. That is, it may be that all of the theorists are correct to a certain extent. For example, it may be that Vigil’s *multiple marginality* explains the circumstances that

shape a youngster's world view (i.e. utility function) in a way that makes it *rational* (Sanchez-Jankowski) to join a gang, thus, both decisions are right. Moreover, Hagedorn's urban restructuring theory may also be correct, it could be that the lack of blue-collar jobs in the inner-city is throwing more families into multiple marginality situations, so that is right, too. Consequently, behavioral problems (Anderson) may develop as a result of familial problems that are caused by economic insecurity.

The academic success of some of the youths who live the Westlake Planning District is, if anything, an interesting story. Given that virtually all of those who participated in this study live in low-income neighborhoods where gangs proliferate, their ability to avoid "gang life" is a success in itself. I hope that the goal of this thesis has been accomplished. That is, to show how inner-city youth evade gang involvement when virtually everything is statistically not in their favor.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Ignacio Garcia, vice-Principal, Belmont High School.

Ed Gomez, Officer, Los Angeles Police Department, Rampart Division.

Marge Nichols, Director of Research Projects, United Way Los Angeles.

David Marquez, City of Los Angeles, District 1 Planning Deputy.

Officer Magee, Public Affairs Division, Los Angeles Police Department.

Lew McCammon, Head Counselor, Belmont High School.

“Jennifer”, City Year Roundtable Discussion.

“Randomly Selected Students”, Belmont High School.

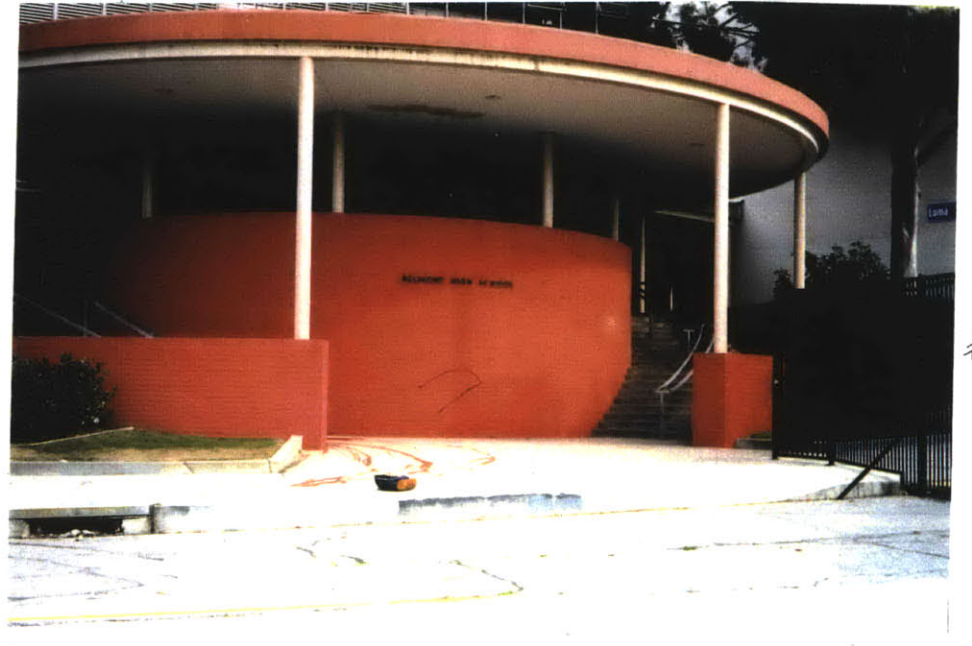
PHOTOS OF BELMONT HIGH SCHOOL AND WESTLAKE PLANNING DISTRICT

The following photos were taken in January 1995 when the research was conducted in Los Angeles; they represent the Belmont High School area, and the First Planning District. To identify the picture, please refer the number adjacent to it.

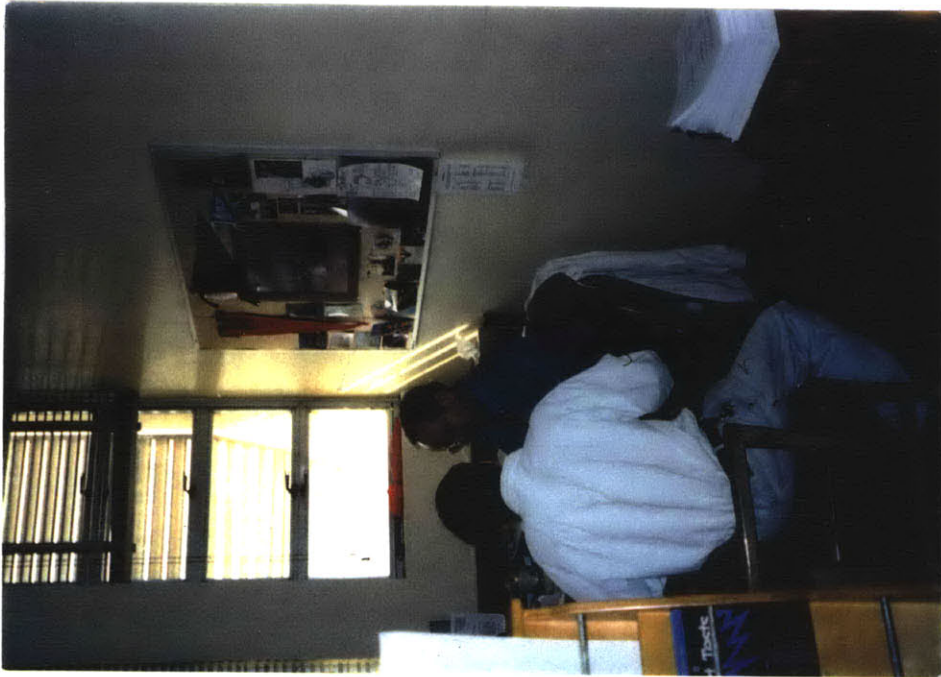
- #1: Students at Belmont High's library getting acquainted with computers.
- #2: Belmont High's entrance.
- #3: Belmont High's College Counselor, Michael Thorpe, speaking with a student inside his office.
- #4: Front view of Belmont High School and of its football field.
- #5: Boarded house near Belmont High on Beverly Boulevard
- #6: Offices near Belmont High sprayed with graffiti.
- #7: Second boarded house near Belmont High on Beverly Boulevard
- #8: Entrance to Pico-Union District.
- #9: Gated entrance to Belmont High.
- #10: View of Beverly Boulevard, located two blocks away from Belmont High.
- #11: Community surrounding Belmont High, and the school's gated entrance.
- #12: Back entrance to Belmont High and surrounding neighborhoods.



#1



#2



#3



#4



#5



#6



#7



#8



#9



#10



#11



#12

MAPS OF WESTLAKE PLANNING DISTRICT AND LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT (LAPD) STATIONS

The following maps represent the Westlake Planning District, and of the police stations within the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD).

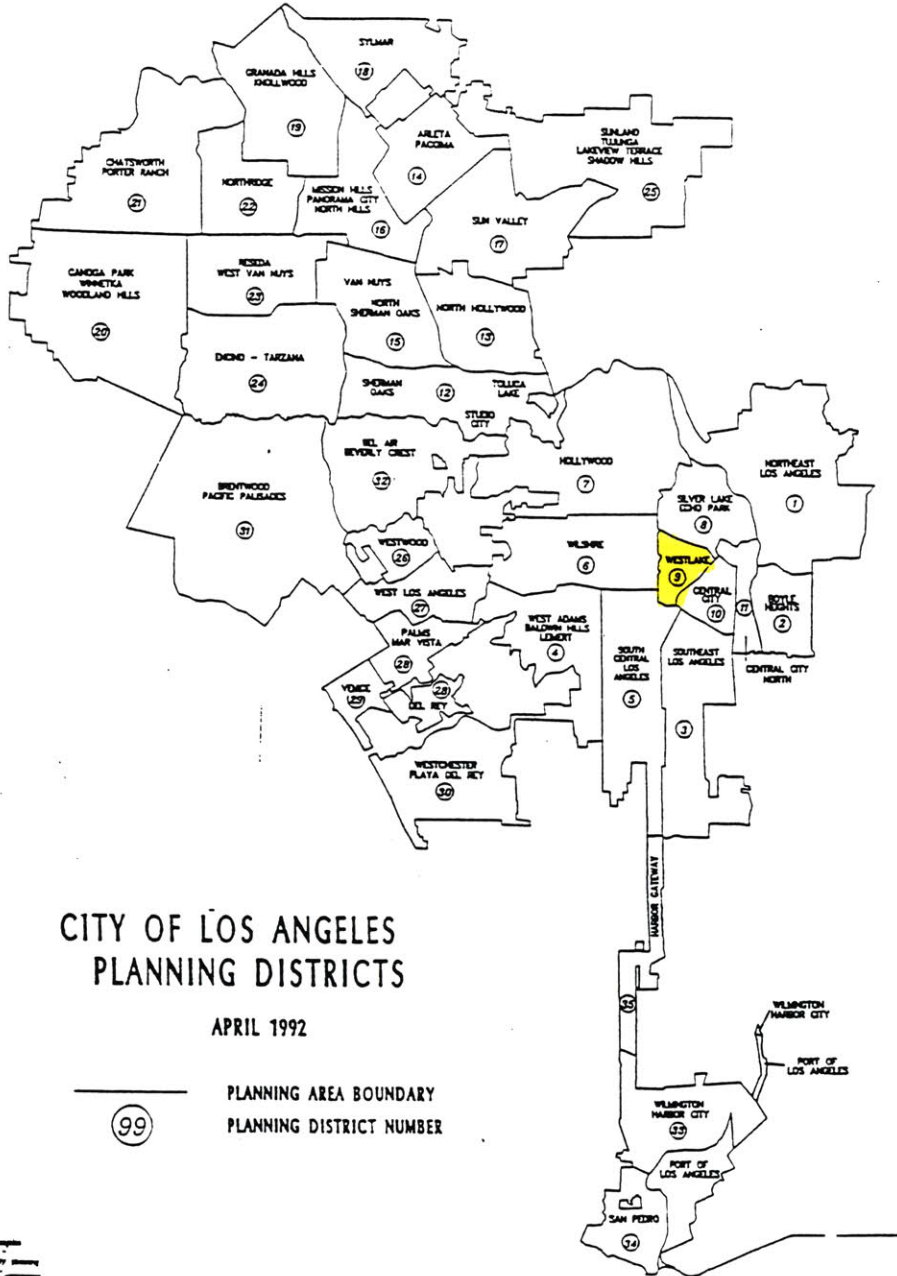
#1: Map of the City of Los Angeles Planning Districts. The Highlighted #9 signifies the area under study.

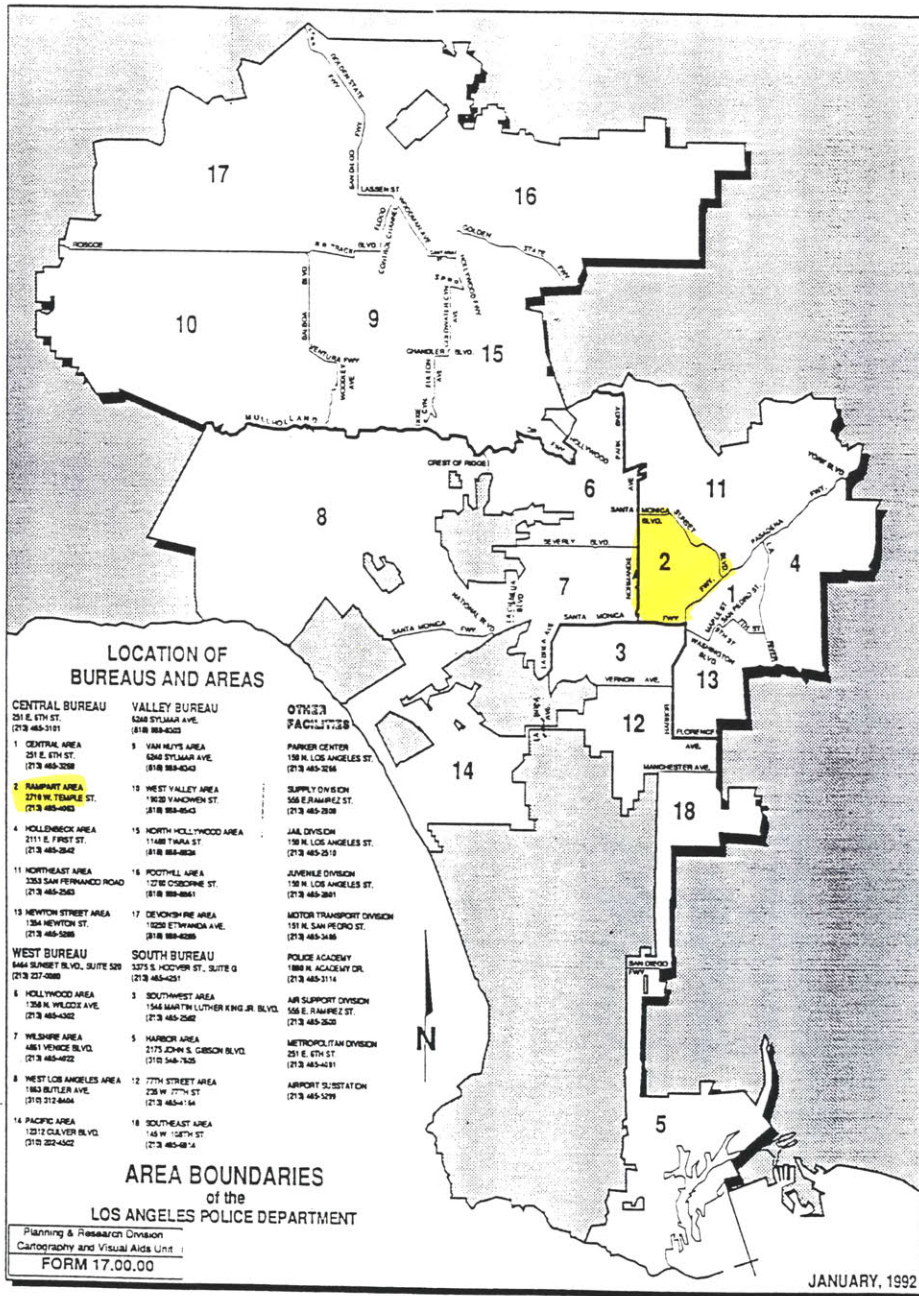
#2: Map of the location bureaus and area boundaries of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). The highlighted #2 represents the Rampart Division which has jurisdiction over the Westlake Planning District.

#3: Map of the Rampart Area, which is patrolled by the policemen/women of the Rampart Division.

CODED MAP

MAP 1





LOCATION OF BUREAU AND AREAS


- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| CENTRAL BUREAU
251 E. 8TH ST.
(213) 485-3131 | VALLEY BUREAU
6388 SYLMAR AVE.
(818) 888-8502 | OTHER FACILITIES |
| 1 CENTRAL AREA
251 E. 8TH ST.
(213) 485-3288 | 9 VAN NUYS AREA
6260 SYLMAR AVE.
(818) 888-8543 | PARKER CENTER
190 N. LOS ANGELES ST.
(213) 485-3258 |
| 2 RAINBOW AREA
271 N. TOWNE ST.
(213) 485-4053 | 10 WEST VALLEY AREA
1920 FANCHOW ST.
(213) 888-8543 | SUPPLY DIVISION
568 E. SHAWLEE ST.
(213) 485-2938 |
| 4 HOLLENBECK AREA
2111 E. FIRST ST.
(213) 485-2842 | 15 NORTH HOLLYWOOD AREA
1148B TIANA ST.
(818) 888-8828 | JAIL DIVISION
190 N. LOS ANGELES ST.
(213) 485-2519 |
| 11 NORTHEAST AREA
235 SAN PERRANCO ROAD
(213) 485-2569 | 16 FOOTHILL AREA
12785 COBBLE ST.
(818) 888-8861 | JUVENILE DIVISION
190 N. LOS ANGELES ST.
(213) 485-2891 |
| 13 NEWTON STREET AREA
134 NEWTON ST.
(213) 485-5288 | 17 DENVER AREA
1020 E. WANDA AVE.
(818) 888-8288 | MOTOR TRANSPORT DIVISION
191 N. SAN PEDRO ST.
(213) 485-3486 |
| WEST BUREAU
844 SANBET BLVD., SUITE 528
(213) 227-0888 | SOUTH BUREAU
3275 S. HOOPER ST., SUITE G
(213) 485-4291 | POLICE ACADEMY
1880 N. ACADEMY DR.
(213) 485-3114 |
| 6 HOLLYWOOD AREA
1346 N. WELLS AVE.
(213) 485-4382 | 3 SOUTHWEST AREA
1346 NORTH LUTHER KING JR. BLVD.
(213) 485-2582 | AIR SUPPORT DIVISION
506 E. RAMBLER ST.
(213) 485-2622 |
| 7 WILSHIRE AREA
481 VENICE BLVD.
(213) 485-4922 | 5 HARBOR AREA
2175 JOHN S. GIBSON BLVD.
(213) 346-7425 | METROPOLITAN DIVISION
291 E. 8TH ST.
(213) 485-4281 |
| 8 WEST LOS ANGELES AREA
183 BUTLER AVE.
(213) 312-8868 | 12 77TH STREET AREA
228 W. 77TH ST.
(213) 485-1144 | AIRPORT STATION
(213) 485-5299 |
| 14 PACIFIC AREA
1212 CULVER BLVD.
(213) 282-4562 | 18 SOUTHEAST AREA
148 W. 127TH ST.
(213) 485-4814 | |

AREA BOUNDARIES
of the
LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT

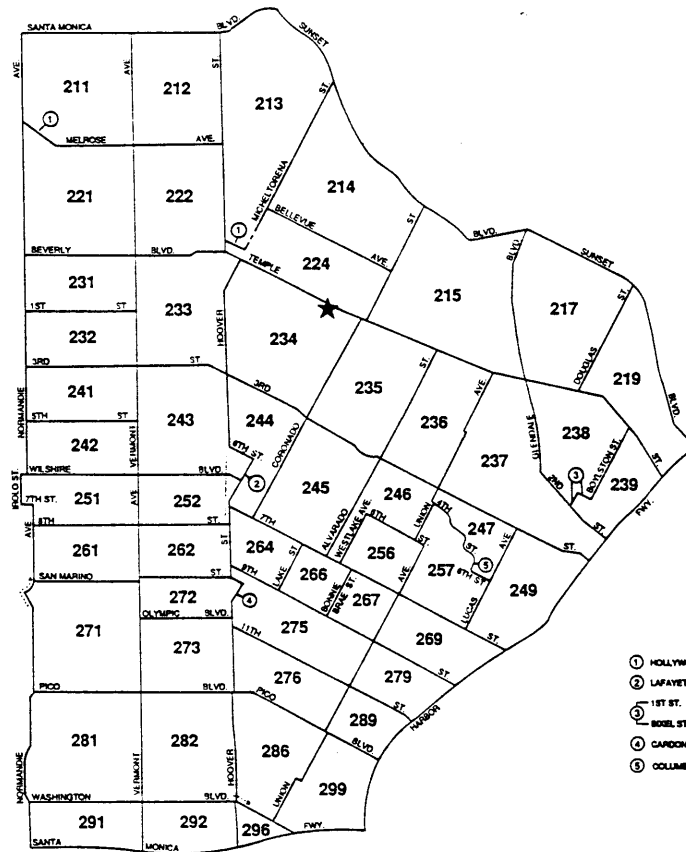
Planning & Research Division
Cartography and Visual Aids Unit
FORM 17.00.00

JANUARY, 1992

Reporting District Map of
Rampart Area



Cartography and
 Visual Aids Unit
 Planning and Research Division, L.A.P.D.
 ★ 2710 W. TEMPLE ST. JANUARY 1992



- ① HOLLYWOOD FWY.
- ② LAFAYETTE PARK PL.
- ③ 1ST ST.
- ④ BOSEL ST.
- ⑤ CARDOONDELET ST.
- ⑥ COLUMBIA AVE.

PLANNING & RESEARCH DIVISION
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