



PLACAS

by Deputy Nancy Henderson

Gang graffiti, or "placas," have been around for as long as gangs have occupied a space in the urban landscape. Originally they marked the perimeters of a gang territory, the area a gang claimed as its neighborhood. Latin gangs, long known for their artistic and sometimes involved scenes of graffiti, began their decorative lettering and the tradition of public displays which seem to appear overnight on walls, fences, trucks, signs and any flat space accessible to them. Decades later, black street gangs began imitating this practice.

Hispanic graffiti can be distinguished by its flowing lines, often skillful composition and uniform height of the stylized letters. The colors are vibrant and the effect of the placa is graceful and three-dimensional. In contrast, black gangs relatively new to this particular

exercise in artistic process, create somewhat more crude renditions of the traditional Hispanic placas. The letters are uneven, the graffiti often lacks decorative borders and the composition of the message is different.

Hispanic gangs usually list the name of their gang first, followed by the "moniker list" of all the members of the gang. For them, the gang as a group is the most important, the members merely parts of the whole. Black graffiti, however, lists the artist's name first, because he feels he is the most important. He writes the gang's name and the list of his "home-boys" after his name.

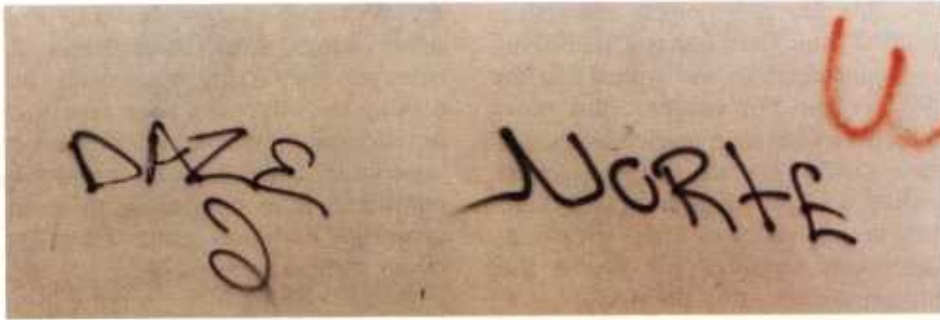
In studying this graffiti, law enforcement pays close attention to these lists of street names, or monikers, which systematically note all members of a particular street gang. Names surrounded



Graffiti written by Original Gangster Crip gang which originated in southern California. The red paint lines are probably a sign of disrespect by a rival Blood gang.



North 50's Crips originally were formed in the Los Angeles area but members of that gang have moved north. This graffiti indicates there are female members in the gang. Miss P. Loc and Shawnipoo are monikers of two female members.



The word "Norte" is Spanish for "north" and indicates the writer, probably Daze 2, is a member of a northern Hispanic youth gang. Daze 2 indicates there is another member of the gang with the moniker Daze.



An example of Sac Town Crips "crossing out" wall writings of Northside Piru's (Blood gang).



Classic example of one rival gang "crossing out" another gang's territory. "Crossing out" can often result in violent confrontations between the involved gangs.

by a border of clouds indicate the member has died. Occasionally one of the names will be crossed out. This usually indicates that member has "disrespected" his gang and has been kicked out. Or perhaps a member has not realized the scope of the criminal activity occurring within the gang and wants to be "jumped out." Being jumped out refers to the process of literally fighting your way out of the gang, if you can, and is the reverse of the jumping in process of initiation. For whatever reason, the member who is not in good standing is subject to constant harassment, physical assaults and other types of violence whenever he, and sometimes his family, appears in the neighborhood. Other gang members will be suspicious of him and assume he is giving away information about them to the police or other rival gangs.

Special units in the Sacramento Sheriff's and Police departments scrutinize placas to find out who is writing them and what gang he or she belongs to, backtracking from the moniker list in an attempt to put a real name to each of the monikers. This is a time-consuming and confusing job because many gangs make use of the same monikers. "Flaco," "Loc" or Loco," "Clutch," "Jimbo," "Pelon," "Joker" and "Oso" are common street names for numerous gang members.

Placas are also studied to find out what's going on in the neighborhood. Detectives can tell when new members are added to the moniker list. Sometimes suspects who have committed assaults can be discovered by the way the graffiti is written and what it says. They can also ascertain which gangs and members are not getting along with another gang or specific members, or which gangs are rivals. Most of the people who are writing these placas are proud of themselves and what they have done. They are not afraid of putting up their monikers so that everyone else who reads their signs also knows.

Citizens who live in neighborhoods where placas appear can assist law en-

forcement units in several ways. First, take a picture of the graffiti and call the appropriate agency and tell them about the graffiti. Second, paint over the graffiti as soon as possible. There are several city, county and state agencies that will come out and do it for you if you cannot do it yourself, such as Cal Trans and the street maintenance departments. These agencies are very responsive to citizen complaints of gang graffiti. Quick removal of the graffiti deprives the gang of the the public recognition and personal admiration that is so important to them, and causes some loss of status within the gang for the member who has called up all his buddies and told them to go out and look at his creation.

Normally citizens who have been the victims of gang graffiti need not fear any retaliation from irate gang members

who discover their placas have been painted over. Certainly this represents an understandable and typical fear for the average homeowner. But most detectives who have studied gangs and their graffiti indicate that the graffiti usually does not appear again. There have been a few cases where the placas have been repainted but this is the exception rather than the rule.

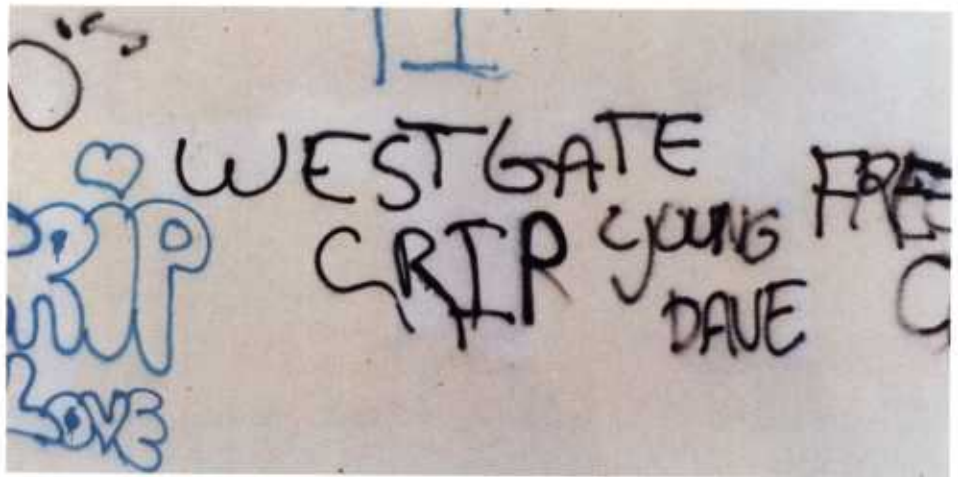
Neighborhood awareness and personal dedication to keeping our neighborhoods safe can help immeasurably in curbing the growth of ethnic gangs and the vandalism in which they are often involved. Gangs thrive on the

apathy and disinterest shown by residents of some areas in Sacramento. By promptly reporting vandalism and making the effort not to accept such practices as inevitable, all citizens can contribute their help to assist law enforcement in combating these increasingly common reminders of the ethnic gang movement. ★

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Varrio Garden Block Crips is a combination of an Hispanic youth gang aligning with a black Crip gang for mutual benefit to both gangs.



Westgate Crips, a South Sacramento gang, with a member named Young Dave. This would indicate there is probably another member of the gang named Dave and "young" is used to identify which Dave's name is on the wall.



Rollin 50's Crip gang originally from Los Angeles now operating in south Sacramento.