

HISTORY OF THE CRIPS AND BLOODS

Black street gangs are not a new phenomenon. They have existed in the Los Angeles area since the early 1920s when they were usually comprised of family members or friends. These early gang members were involved in limited criminal activity, mainly to provide money but also to promote their "tough guy" image.

As the years passed, more gangs were formed with much larger memberships and a greater level of criminal sophistication. In the decade between 1955 and 1965, a significant increase in gang activity was noticed in the south-central Los Angeles area and in Compton, a growing suburb south of Los Angeles. This increase in gang activity was linked to the alliances formed for protection by youths in one neighborhood from rival gangs in another neighborhood.

At that time, these gangs were actually territorial groups and not

"gangs" as we know them today. There often were confrontations between them, but the violence rarely took the form of shootings or stabbings. Most of these fights occurred at parks and parties or after high school activities, especially athletic games.

Because of the Vietnam War, the years between 1965 to 1969 saw a notable decrease in Black street-gang activity. Other contributing factors to this trend appeared to be increasing popularity of Black awareness and the progression of the Civil Rights Movement. Many Black youths became involved in social movements tied to civil rights issues or were drafted into military service.

The Crips began in south-central Los Angeles sometime in 1969 or



Indoctrination into the gang lifestyle starts early. This 5 year-old homeboy has already learned his gang's sign.

1970. There are several explanations for the origins of this gang that can be at least partially documented. One of the most popular stories is that the gang was named after a horror movie, "Tales of the Crypt," which featured Vincent Price as its star. A second explanation is that the name Crips was derived from a street gang called the "Cribs," supposedly a splinter group from the "Slauson" street gang. This gang was, during the early 1960s, the largest Black street gang in terms of geographical area in south-central Los Angeles.

Another story, supposedly from an original Crips gang member, is that the term "crips" began because one of the members was handicapped. The word "cripple" became, in abbreviated form, "crip." Early members often carried walking sticks or canes as means of visual identification.



Two couples, all affiliated with a Blood gang, throwing hand signs out in their neighborhood.

A more recent explanation for the gang's name indicates it developed when the first Crips were looking for a name to call themselves. They wanted a name that would indicate they were the toughest thing in the world, and they came up with Superman. The only substance which could kill Superman was Kryptonite. Therefore, using phonetic spelling, the Crips were named.

The first Crips gang activity reportedly began in 1969 at Washington High School in southwest Los Angeles. Other Crips gangs were forming throughout south-central Los Angeles and Compton at the same time. These early gangs began to extort money, commit assaults and robberies and generally terrorize local high school campuses. The Crips traveled to other areas and committed crimes, and early on earned a reputation for being dangerously violent. Youths who were confronted by the Crips had to fight, run, attempt to seek help or be forced to give in to the extortions, robberies and assaults. Many youths in these neighborhoods formed other gangs to protect themselves from the violence of the Crips.

An early gang which formed for protection from the Crips was a group of youths who lived on Piru



A group of Crips are just "kickin' it"—flashing hand signs and posing for the camera. Ages of members in this group range from 14 to over 20.

Street in Compton. They named themselves the "Compton Pirus" and were the first Blood gang to be formerly recognized. Even now, 20 years later, Compton "red" gangs are known as Pirus. Other red gangs have various names but all refer to themselves as Bloods. The Compton Pirus quickly made a name for themselves and established their reputation as tough and violent.

The Pirus became powerful and were successful in confrontations with various Crip gangs until the late 1970s. By then, the Crips began to greatly outnumber the Piru and Blood gangs and maintained this steady growth rate to their present ratio of three Crips gangs to one Blood gang.

After the solidification of these two gang organizations, many other unaffiliated gangs in the Los Angeles area began renaming themselves and associating with either the Bloods or the Crips. These gang activities grew to huge proportions in the 1970s, and most neighborhoods during this time claimed allegiance with one of the main gangs. Because of the increased proliferation of both gangs, more criminal gang activities became evident. Gang confrontations increased the number of fire arms and the sophistication of weapons being used in assaults against each other. The era of the drive-by shooting was born, bringing with it a dramatic increase in assaults and homicides.

Crips are identified with the color blue, probably derived from Washington High School's colors. The term "cuzz," short for cousin, is



Their faces obscured by their red bandannas, these Bloods flash hand signs for the camera.



These guns are part of a cache of recently confiscated weapons. Pictured are an assault pump shotgun; assorted long arms; a Russian AK-47 with folding stock; M-16s; AR-15s; breech-loading double barrel shotguns and pump shotguns, many of them modified or sawed off; and a World War I military rifle.

used by the majority of gang members. Cuzz is also an old slang word used among Blacks. There are numerous individual sets of Crips gangs, some of whom are not friendly with other gangs.

In contrast, Bloods wear red, the color first adopted by the Compton Pirus. Most early members lived near Compton High School whose school colors were red and white. Like the word "cuzz," "Blood" is an old slang word which served to identify Blacks. The obvious connection between blood and red made it a natural

choice for the gang name. Most Blood gangs show a great deal more unity than Crips, probably due to the fact that they are usually outnumbered by the Crips.

Most Black street gangs are non-traditional groupings that contain no formal structure. Older members, usually referred to as "shot callers" or "original gangsters," have developed the reputation for violence and having more access to drugs and money. These older members use various methods to manipulate younger members, often called "baby gangsters," to sell drugs and become involved in various assaults on other gangs. Within each separate gang, there are always members who do not associate with each other but still are considered affiliated because of gang membership.

The increase of gang violence in the past several years, has risen to alarming proportions. This violence has steadily progressed from fist fights or other physical confrontations to outright warfare in which Uzi's, Mac-10's and other fully automatic weapons are now commonplace. Today in Los Angeles, the weapon of choice is the AK-47 assault rifle with a multiple-round clip. The fast shooting, larger caliber weapon greatly increases the probability of causing traumatic injuries

and death.

Recent research has shown that much gang violence is cyclical in nature and often begins as a result of a minor incident. Retaliation occurs with deadly force in the attempt to uphold the gang's violent image. This retaliation goes back and forth until the gang members are arrested or police activity becomes intolerable. Most gang violence is random, spontaneous, and often committed while members are under influence of alcohol and/or drugs. By its very nature, gang violence is therefore nearly impossible to predict or prevent.

Thus far, few solutions have been presented to halt the growth of street gangs in California and other states. Many law-enforcement agencies are sorely lacking in manpower and the necessary weapons needed to deal with gang violence. Most efforts of law-enforcement agencies are aimed at containment rather than prevention. Because the main goal of these gangs is to obtain money, usually by the selling of rock cocaine, they will continue to expand their scope of operations throughout the nation in search of safer areas of operation and greater profits. ★



Older gang members indoctrinate younger members at an early age. This child is 5 years old.