

PLACAS

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's 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 that 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.

Hispanics 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 par-

ticular 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 impor-



"V CENTRO 14" Northern Hispanic street gang. "ZP" signify "Zapatta Park" in central downtown Sacto area.



Gang graffiti originally written in red by a Blood gang has been crossed out by a rival Crip gang. This is generally considered a challenge to fight.



Varrío Cinco — Mexican youth gang centered around 5th & Broadway.



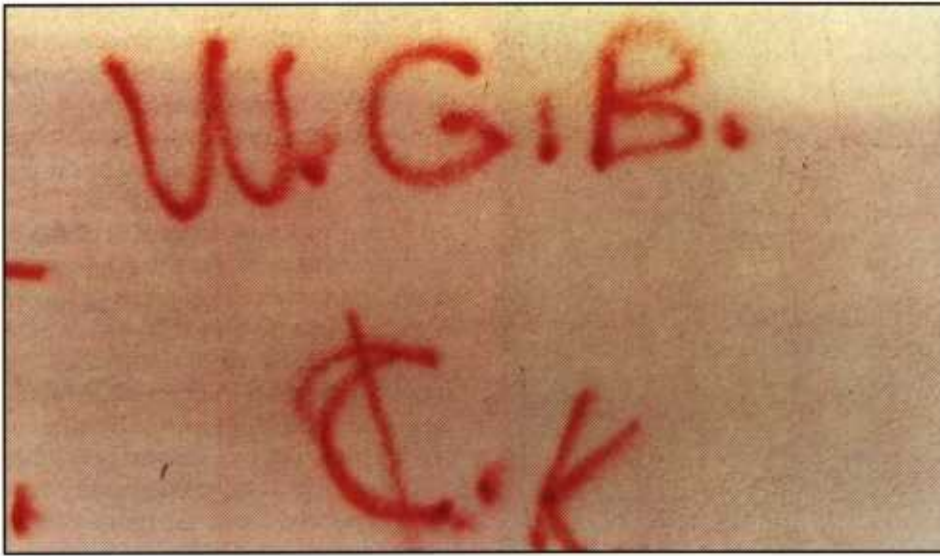
Varrío Broderick graffiti showing up in Elk Grove after a party.

tant, the members merely parts of the whole. Black graffiti, however, list the artist's name first, because he feels he is the most important. He writes the gang's name and the list of his "homeboys" after his name.

In the study of 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 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 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," "Jumbo," "Pelon," "Joker" and "Oso" are common street names for numerous gang members.

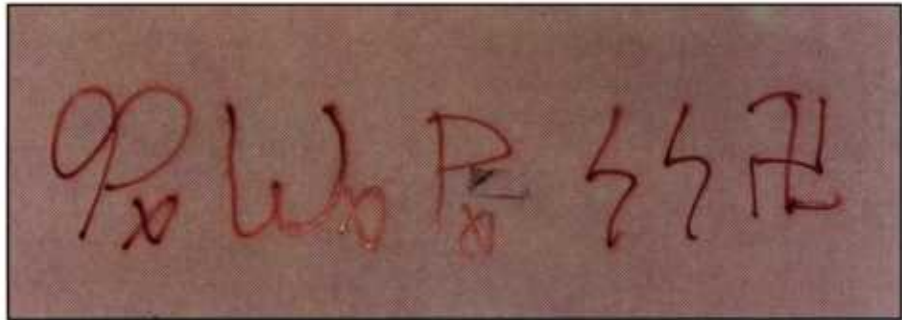
Placas also are studied to find out what's going on in the neighborhood. Detectives can tell when new members are added to the moniker list. Sometimes suspects who have committed assaults can be discovered by the way the graffiti are written and what they say. They also can ascertain which gangs and members are not getting along with an-



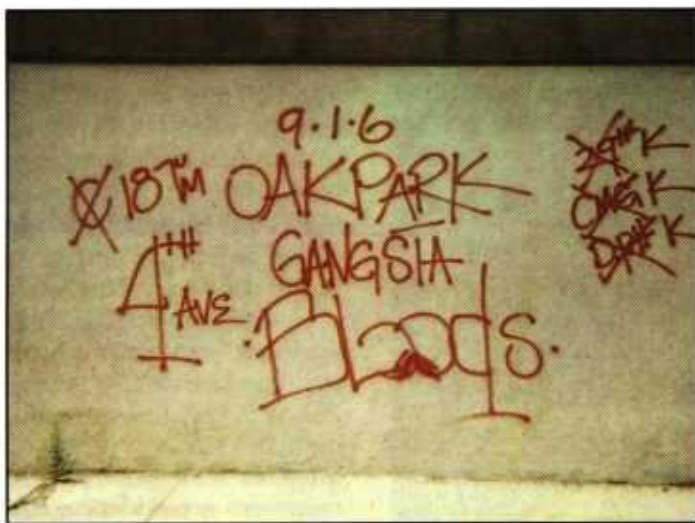
W.G.B. stands for West Gate Bloods, a Black street gang. The initials C.K. stand for Crip Killer.

other 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-enforcement 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



"Supreme White Power" a gang associated with white supremacy group. Witch is a spinoff of Skinheads.



These gang graffiti were written by an Oak Park Blood gang. Rival Crip gang names have been crossed out. The number 187 is a reference to the Penal Code section for murder. Including 187 in their graffiti represents the gang's attempt to intimidate other rival gangs.

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 your-self, 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 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 his buddies and told them to go out and look a this 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 understand-

able and typical fear for the average home owner. 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 an exception rather than a 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. ❀