

GANGS IN AMERICA - A DEADLY GAME

By James F. Pastor, Ph.D., J.D., and Nestor A. Toro
November 8, 2012

The reason for the prevalence of gangs—and associated violence—is more complex than most realize.



Photo illustration: Darnitra D. Jackson

In a south-side Chicago neighborhood, it starts as mere child's play. A toddler's tiny hands grow into tattoo-marked fingers depicting gang signs—such as an upside-down pitchfork or a “K” for killer. A lullaby morphs into vulgar “gangsta” rap about sex, drugs and guns. Learning ABCs changes into mastering special slang words with hidden messages. Childish scribbles hanging on a refrigerator become city walls covered in lewd graffiti.

Soon the game turns more dangerous. A secret invitation leads to a brutal initiation beating, and selling candy for school to trafficking crack. School buddies grow into drive-by partners inside a car with tinted windows, automatic rifles in hand.

Before the young player knows it, he is growing up too soon, trapped in a world of hustling, criminality, secretive behavior, aggression, lies, guns, drugs, violence,

anger, hatred, distrust, joblessness and abuse, where one's "respect" is all that matters—and disrespect results in death. It is as though he is caught in a virtual game in which "bad guys" become "good guys," and the only way of escape is to kill those around him.

While such a violent real-life "game" is incomprehensible to most, for the 1.4 million men and women in America's 33,000 gangs, it is the ultimate test of survival.

Nowhere is this more prevalent than on the streets of Chicago. By October 27, 2012, the Windy City had registered 436 murders, largely a result of gang violence—surpassing 2011's homicide total.

"A splintering of traditional gangs into smaller factions—known as crews or cliques—with ever-younger members desperate to prove their tough-guy credentials is fuelling a murder rate that makes swathes of Chicago more lethal than Afghanistan," *The Telegraph* stated.

"Even as violent crime has decreased in cities such as New York and Los Angeles, the murder rate soared here by 38 per cent in the first six months of the year. There were 259 murders in that period, with another 18 so far in July.

"This is a block-to-block war here, a different dynasty on every street,' said a dreadlocked young man heavily inked in gang tattoos who calls himself 'Killer'."

CBS News stated that in Chicago it is "like Beirut was in the 70s...It's war." *Fox News* called it a "city under siege." *ABC News* called it a "war zone."

According to *NBC Chicago*, among what are considered first-world cities, Chicago has the highest murder rate in the world. It has a 19.4 murder rate per 100,000 people, making it rank higher than even the metropolises of Mexico City and Sao Paulo.

Today, over 100,000 "gangbangers" roam Chicago's streets in 625 different groups. Police report that currently around 223 ongoing gang conflicts exist. Due to a "no snitching" culture, over 70 percent go unsolved.

Yet the Windy City is just a microcosm of America's growing gang problem. Across the nation, hundreds of thousands of young men and women are caught up in gangs. In some areas, this lethal game is the only world they know.

Authorities and those involved often blame poor education, a bad economy, poverty, joblessness, distrust of the government, and lack of opportunity to explain why gangs are becoming more prevalent. But the root cause and ultimate solution to this multifaceted problem comes back to something much more fundamental.

Culture of Violence

ABC News produced a series called "Hidden America: Don't Shoot, I Want to Grow Up." It featured segments addressing the growing violence in Chicago and focused on talking to gang members about the causes of it and how to reduce it.

Many of those involved were young repeat offenders who had committed terrible crimes, but all shared one commonality: how they were shaped by early influences, as the series showed.

"With stitches, staples, screws and a metal rod in his leg, 28-year-old Damien is lucky to be alive.

"Since he was just 9 years old, Damien has been involved with the Chicago Two-Six gang. He knows all too well the motto, 'Live by the gun, die by the gun,' after being shot six times four weeks ago after leaving a party in a rival gang neighborhood.

"Damien, known to his friends as Pacman, has been arrested more than 50 times. His most serious offenses occurred in 2001, for battery with a weapon, in 2002, for aggravated assault with a weapon and possession of a firearm, and in 2005, for receipt of a stolen possession.

"If you ain't got no job, you ain't got nowhere to go,' he said. 'After that, well, you're going to turn to the streets. The streets is calling you.'"

“I had nothing to do, I had no guidance,” he continued. “So I was raised to be knocked on the streets, running around, looking at the older guys, what they had that I didn’t have, and I wanted that.”

In such neighborhoods, gangs are a powerful, attractive and lucrative way to protect oneself. Each is organized and governed from the top down with various degrees of membership and status.

Another *ABC* segment stated, “Michael, known to his friends as Puppet, was initiated into the Two-Six gang when he was 13 years old.

“For initiation, Michael was beaten up by his fellow gang members but, he said, afterward, ‘everybody gives you a hug and welcomes you to the family.’

“Michael grew up with his older brother and sister and his mother. He said he ‘didn’t have a father really,’ and his mother was always working. He chose to join the gang because all of his friends who he went to school with and played sports with in the neighborhood were getting involved. Michael’s mother tried to get him involved with camps instead but, he said, he would always make his way back to his gang.”

“Today, Michael lives with his mother and sister but, he said, the gang is as much a part of his family as they are.

“I thought about leaving the gang before but I really can’t because this is a part of my family, too,’ he said. ‘Even though I have a good, loving family at home, this is one of my families that I’m with all the time, too. I spent Christmas with them, Thanksgivings with them. This is my family, too. I’m not going to leave on my family.’”

Both of the men interviewed cited different reasons for being in gangs, but each came down to wanting to belong and fit in to the environment around them.

In a sense, the gangs they joined became a type of replacement family.

Young to Old

Author Jorja Leap paints a vivid picture of how the gang world surrounds large numbers of America's boys and girls and pulls them into living a certain lifestyle in her book *Jumped In: What Gangs Taught Me about Violence, Drugs, Love, and Redemption*.

“Children play in the street, and even though it is summer and school is out, I keep wondering, *What are those kids doing up? They should be in bed; they should be asleep*, until I realize how idiotic this all sounds given the level of noise and confusion rising up from the street. I am struck by how strange it is that they are playing in the middle of all this, and I wonder if it's nothing out of the ordinary, just another summer night. Just another crime scene. A police helicopter flies noisily overhead. Four black-and-white patrol cars are parked at varying angles in the middle of the street, their headlights outlining three teenage boys lined up against a chain-link fence with their hands cuffed. The three adolescents appear so young, it looks like they haven't even started shaving yet. There is another boy. He resembles the other three children in every way except one. He is lying in a pool of blood and his body is being photographed and probed by members of the Los Angeles Police Department. He is nameless, unknown, and he is dead. I cannot stop staring at the body as the blood slowly spreads on the pavement. It is impossible to turn away. My heart is beating and I am thinking, *Whose baby is this? Whose brother? Whose grandson? He is frozen...dead. I am trying not to cry.*”

While soaking in the above scene, remember the author's words, “Children play in the street.” They are the ones seeing their fathers sell “white stuff” to make money. They see the guns that circulate in their homes and may even witness acts of violence committed by their parents. Such images have a way of sticking in young minds.

Children naturally look up to and respect the friends of their parents. In gang-prone neighborhoods, youngsters watch adults whom they consider family participate in criminal behavior that they themselves learned from their own parents—many of whom were also involved in gangs.

Due to this ongoing history, a number of gang rivalries have continued for decades. This means some members were not yet born when these feuds began and do not even know why they did. The result is intergroup warfare simply because “that’s the way it is.”

If a gang member with a child is sent to prison when his son or daughter is young, the child may grow up fatherless, making him more susceptible to seeking out the “thug” lifestyle. In turn, the boy himself may be killed or incarcerated when his own children are young.

When one or more parents are not in the picture, gangs provide a sense of purpose, with a certain reputation, plus attractive benefits such as protection, “job security” regardless of the economy, and even access to revenge.

In an environment in which relatives and close friends are routinely targeted, gangs promise an attractive combination of things no other organization, including their own families, can offer. Gangs, it seems, are above the law. As one infamous Chicago gang founder described it, since society had rejected him, he had rejected it, and instead created his own society.

How can you heal an environment built upon *multiple* generations of gang membership—and broken homes? How can you diffuse hatred when some do not know why they are fighting?

As each decade passes, the problems only worsen, becoming a veritable self-fulfilling prophecy with no easy solution.

Those living in violent neighborhoods would never say they enjoy constantly fearing for their lives. Beyond the bleak outlook, they still long for peace. The *ABC* series interviewed a female gang member who shared her dream for a city free of guns.

Why cannot mankind stop the hurt—and save future generations from experiencing the pain that a gang lifestyle often brings?

Evolving Climate

While the underlying motives remain the same, today's gangs are worse—much worse—than they were in previous decades.

Consider “flash mobs,” also known as “wilding.” Large groups of youths enter stores, taking anything and everything they desire. Multiple hundreds of these instances have occurred over the past three years.

This phenomena is a classic “in your face” move from young thugs to the larger society. The implicit message is “this is our store, this is our street, we will take whatever we want—and you cannot stop us.” It is one of the most blatant forms of lawlessness seen in “civilized” society.

In addition to such violence within gangs, increasingly bolder, more brazen criminals are breaking the “thin blue line” that separates civilized society from anarchy. Of course, this thin blue line is the police. As the most visible representation of government, they are the proverbial “canary in the coal mine.”

According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, firearms-related fatalities of police officers increased 70 percent from 2008 to 2011. While such deaths are not unprecedented, they are an indication of things to come. Brash gang members armed with assault weapons are shaping the criminal landscape of the future.

For example, in June 2009, an operation targeting “Sureno” gang members resulted in 36 arrests and 69 confiscated firearms. Authorities seized 14 assault rifles, 22 handguns, 16 shotguns and 17 rifles, including a Barrett. 50-caliber sniper rifle.

The lethality of these weapons is telling. The National Gang Threat Assessment warned: “Gang members are acquiring high-powered, military style weapons and equipment which poses a significant threat because of the potential to engage in lethal encounters with law enforcement and civilians.”

Combating brazen and bold gang members will result in much more “militarized” policing—meaning officers have to fight back using armored vehicles and assault weapons!

Heavier, more lethal weapons by gangs result in an “arms race with criminals.” Police will literally be forced to “arm up.”

Truly, it has become an all-out war.

Seemingly Unreachable Solutions

Law enforcement officials know that simply supplying officers with better weaponry and adding more boots on the ground cannot ultimately fix the gang situation.

“There is no one solution,” Chicago Police Superintendent Gary McCarthy told *ABC News*. “There is no way to reinvent the family structure that doesn’t exist so that you don’t have 13-year-olds in the street engaged in a gun battle.”

This notion was echoed by Mr. McCarthy in a *USA Today* article when he explained, “It’s really troubling when parents are not in control of their children...The problem is much bigger than just law enforcement. We accept our responsibility, but curing it is going to take...a lot more than just police work.”

Other people have their own ideas for solutions to the problem, as they expressed in the same article.

A 75-year-old man said young fathers must be more involved in their families. “I’m very intolerant of fathers who do not come out and participate,” he said.

Another elderly man, who volunteers with a non-profit group that helps young children learn to read, concluded, “If a child is successful in school, they have a chance to be successful in life...If they have not been taught by their parents, who may or may not be able to read themselves, what can they do?”

Andre Thurmon, pastor of St. Mark International Christian Church, who conducted the funeral of Heaven Sutton, a seven-year-old girl killed at a candy

stand during gang crossfire, stated that using violence is not the answer. “We need more community caring, more involvement, sterner rules,” Thurmon says.

The common solutions always involve revamping of huge building blocks of society: family, education, economy and government.

Yet none of these *completely* addresses the entire problem.

Larger Scope

While thousands feel trapped in gang life, mankind as a whole is burdened by a myriad of insoluble problems.

Historically, trying to tackle *just one* of the core issues of the gang problem has proven impossible for humanity. Trying to solve the education crisis, family breakdown, and increasing crime rates *simultaneously* has proven impossible—especially when one takes into account that the world is grappling with the worst economic downturn it has ever seen. There is simply not enough money to effect change.

Looking beyond the U.S. around the globe, mankind’s track record is clear. Famine is worse than ever, with veritable permanent pockets of chronic hunger in Ethiopia and Sudan. Diseases long thought gone are coming back, now drug resistant and more virulent. And war continues to vex the planet, with weapons more sophisticated, deadly and dastardly than ever before.

For thousands of years, these issues have festered and worsened. Gangs are just one example of this. While violence fills the streets of Chicago, it is also brimming in Los Angeles, Mexico City, London—EVERYWHERE.

For this reason, many are pushed into a world of, “Live by the gun, die by the gun.”

Oddly, this phrase is a corruption of the words of Jesus in the New Testament. **Matthew 26** records a passage in which Christ condemns violence: “...for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (**vs. 52**). Yet gang members see no other way. They believe they *must* “live by the gun.”

The Bible also foretold what would be the end result of man ruling himself. Passages in **Matthew 24:37** and **Genesis 6:11** reveal that after thousands of years under the governments of mankind, the entire earth would be “*filled with violence.*”

Obviously, this is coming to pass. The earth is becoming FILLED with violence!

An oft-overlooked passage adds to the picture: “...the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is *no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.* By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and *blood touches blood*” (**Hos. 4:1-2**).

In fact, according to the 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment, upwards of 85 percent of homicides are committed by gang members. In some jurisdictions, they are responsible for up to 90 percent of *all* violent crimes!

Hosea 4:6 states, “My people are destroyed for *lack of knowledge...*” Yes, gangs are a problem. They are often the ones pulling the trigger to the point that “blood touches blood,” but the *root cause* hidden behind a multitude of sub-causes is this: mankind lacks the true knowledge of how to live—including knowledge on how to develop properly functioning families.

Most refuse to believe that manmade governments are incapable of bringing *actual* solutions. They refuse to see that *their own* human nature gets in the way of true progress toward peace. Instead, most conveniently place the blame on easy targets like gang members.

But read carefully this blunt picture of the human nature in all of us: “Behold, the LORD’ s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.

“*For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perverseness. None calls for justice, nor any pleads for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity...their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed*

innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths.

“The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goes therein shall not know peace” **(Isa. 59:1-8).**

God is plain. The blame is on *all of* mankind. NONE calls for peace. NONE pleads for the truth. NONE knows the “way of peace.”

Due to this, humanity is separated—cut off!—from godly knowledge.

Where to Begin

When one backtracks to the core issues of the gang problem, a recurring theme appears: the importance of a proper family structure.

Broken homes fuel the gang problem. Therefore, to bring actual change, children must be correctly educated in the home by parents.

Yet fathers and mothers must have *godly* knowledge to do this—mere education and trying to put right behavior into practice will not miraculously solve the mountain of other problems already discussed.

Long-term manmade problems have been allowed to evolve and grow to the point that there is no simple solution. Therefore, the entire system necessarily needs to be removed and replaced with one founded on knowledge revealed by God.

Most feel the Bible’s sole purpose is to broadcast a message about salvation through Jesus Christ. While this is crucial, it misses the message Christ Himself brought constantly, found throughout the entire Book—that of “the kingdom of God.”

Kingdoms are traditionally ruled by kings and queens, which pass on the crown through lineage—through family. It should not be a surprise that the same is true of God’s kingdom.

Jesus Christ, known as the Son of God, will soon return to rule over the entire earth. He will remove the governments and systems of this world and replace them with ones based on the knowledge of the correct way to live.

In the context of these modern times, **Daniel 2** states, “the God of heaven [will] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all [manmade governments], and it shall stand for ever” (**vs. 44**).

Where does family come into play?

God wants all of humanity to learn to be like Him. As a Father, He wants all people to build His holy, righteous character—gain godly knowledge—and become His sons and daughters. Notice: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God [as true Christians], and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (**I John 3:2**).

These “sons of God” are to “possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever” (**Dan. 7:18**)—will “inherit the earth” (**Psa. 37:11**)—and shall be “kings and priests” (**Rev. 5:10**).

Together this God Family will teach true knowledge to all nations. In turn, mothers and fathers across the globe will teach their children the Creator’s way to happiness and peace.

“As the waters cover the sea”

Without God’s intervention, there is no hope. Lacking divinely inspired knowledge and acting contrary to His commands leaves a person hopeless against the violent game of gangs: “...Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return you now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, *There is no hope*: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart” (**Jer. 18:11-12**).

Yet hope for a city—and an entire world—without guns *does* remain for those who believe God’s words!

For now, the Creator is allowing mankind to try its own ways, so it can understand that without the proper knowledge of God’s Law, it is incapable of finding peace. Notice: “There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (**Prov. 14:12**).

The soon-coming SUPERGOVERNMENT ruled by the Family of God will usher in peace and replace all “ways of death”—such as gang life.

Under this soon-coming system:

- **Illegal weapons will be gone.** “And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither *shall they learn war any more*” (**Isa. 2:4**).
- **All will be given proper guidance.** “And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk you in it, when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left” (**Isa. 30:21**).
- **There will be long life and safe streets.** “Thus says the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof” (**Zech. 8:4-5**).
- **All grief will ultimately be taken away.** “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (**Rev. 21:4**).

Today, the earth *is* “FILLED with violence” and mankind *is* “destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Yet under the kingdom of God, all nations “shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be *full of the knowledge of the LORD*, as the waters cover the sea” (**Isa. 11:9**).

At that time, man’s most dangerous game of gangs will be over.

To learn more about these awesome prophecies and how violence will be done away, order a free copy of David C. Pack’s *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* This inspiring book explains how a perfect government—one not left to the devices, machinations and confusion of men—is coming. It will usher in

peace, happiness, unity, abundance and prosperity for every human being and every country on Earth. While such a vision may seem impossible, it will happen—and in your lifetime.

A world without gangs will soon be a reality!