



# Southern New Mexico/Texas Gang Update 2010

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Edited by Robert J. Durán, Ph.D.; Seitu Porter Robinson, MCJ Candidate; Charlene M. Shroulote, MCJ and MPA; and Wesley T. Patterson, MCJ.

## Inside this issue:

Ciudad Juárez, Mexico	2
El Paso, TX	6
Anthony, NM	14
Las Cruces, NM	17
Doña Ana, NM	26
Special Thanks	30

## Overview of Project – Robert J. Durán, Ph.D.

It's been two years since my students participated in the first Gang Update that developed from a criminal justice class at New Mexico State University. Since this time several local youth lost their lives to gang violence in Anthony, El Paso, and Las Cruces. This loss of life was small in number compared to the thousands of individuals who were murdered forty-five minutes away in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. In 2010, Juárez was considered to have the highest homicide rate in the world. In a strange paradox, the U.S. border cities of El Paso and Las Cruces were considered to be some of the safest communities. News reporters described the low levels of violence despite severe hardships as a miracle. The level of poverty and lack of resources impact risk factors for which many would assume possibly higher levels of gang activity and violence along the U.S. side of the border. The fear of "spillover" violence and cartel activity has pressured many politicians to argue for a more secure and militarized border. Thus, the explanations for gangs along the United States and Mexico border seem to range on a continuum from a miracle on one hand to a hotbed for criminal activity on the other.

My goal with this update was to continue to provide an alternative source of information on gang activity by incorporating criminal justice students in the research process. I'm trying to develop future researchers who will pursue Master's and Doctoral degrees. The characteristics of many of the students who gathered these data are similar to the population they researched. I allowed the students to select a local geographic community to learn more about gang activity. The students went through the process of learning how to gather information regarding gangs from various sources. Every student was asked to provide a ranking of the seriousness of gang activity based upon their research on a scale from 1 to 10 with 10 being the most serious as to the level of gang activity in the area where they conducted data gathering.

It is important to note that although I am helping to guide students towards conducting research on gangs, most have only taken an introductory course in research methods. My graduate student editors heavily critiqued many of the sentences provided in this update and inquired about various sources of information. As the instructor, I maintained an online database so each group could post fieldnotes, pictures, observations, interviews, etc. for which they based their information. The goal was exploratory and many sources require additional data collection to verify. It is my hope this bulletin can spark curiosity into these issues which can later receive additional research focus.

In this second Gang Update, there were two unique contributions. First, there were two new geographic areas selected by the students: Ciudad Juárez and the town of Doña Ana. Second, increased emphasis was given toward crediting the individual who took each picture. Overall, I hope this work can provide some insight into local gang issues along the southern U.S.-Mexico Border.

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## Ciudad Juárez, Mexico – Research Team



Left to Right: Martin Rivero, Bernice Hernandez, Diana Hernandez, Felipe Robles, and Michael Wirz.

### Ciudad Juárez, Mexico – Bernice Hernandez

Based on the research that I collected on Ciudad Juárez, I learned that there are some gangs, but they are not as violent as the gangs in the United States. They are more like people just wanting to hang out with each other. I saw that most of the gang were teens from the ages of 12 to 17, and this is because they are not allowed in the clubs. Although we still have gangs in Cd.



Photo: Bernice Hernandez

Juárez, they are not as well known as the ones in the United States. Along with this, some juveniles are getting involved with the cartels and they are getting paid to be “sicarios” (the ones that go and kill the person they are assigned).

Another thing that I saw in the research was that we did not have gangs, but we have cartels. Even though they think that Barrio Azteca is a gang, they act more as a cartel than a gang. In my opinion, I will say that any gang that can get too much power is turning into cartels. Going back to Ciudad Juárez, they have the two most powerful cartels in all the Mexico Republic: El Cartel de Juárez, better known as La Linea, and El Cartel de Sinaloa. In addition to all of this, what is happening in Cd. Juárez right now is they are fighting to gain power as one of the biggest “fronteras”, because it is an easy way to pass drugs to the United States and it is one of the biggest populations because Cd. Juárez and El Paso look like one big city.

I did some research on the past of Cd. Juárez and how gangs were back in the day. I learned that back then there were gangs, but they were more like a barrio where all they would do is protect themselves and the neighborhood.

(continued on page 3)

## Bernice continued

However, they did fight against other barrios. All the clicas were together even though they would fight over dumb things like losing a game or fighting for a girl. There was a law that they will not fight with girls.

They respected the women and did not hit them during fights. The fights were only for guys, and if the girls wanted to fight they would only fight girls. I learned that back in the day they would fight using knives, bats, rocks, or just fists; they would not use a lot of weapons.

I would rank Cd. Juárez a 10 for having the most death and having cartels, but from living in Cd. Juárez I would say a 6 because where I live there is not that much killing. It can go up or down because I have a lot of friends that got killed, and also because sometimes you can be in the wrong place at the wrong time or just hanging with the wrong people and get killed. Since I have lived there most of my life, I will say that for gang activity I will give a 2. I come to this conclusion because I have seen how Cd. Juárez has changed through the past years, and sometimes it goes all the way to a 10 and the next year it can go down to a 1. However, if you ask different

parts of Cd. Juárez the rank will vary because not all the bad things happen throughout the entire city.

The solution for this has to be that one of the cartels completely seizes power over the others. To be honest, the government will not do anything. They just play with both cartels, and they are with both and at same time with none. They just want to have money either way. The other solution is to have a "revolution" against the government and the cartel, and unite as a "pueblo". To be honest, I do not see this happening. Also, having more jobs for those people that need them could help. I do not care if they sell drugs, not to be mean, but all we ask for are jobs and to be safe--to have the old city back, the one that never sleeps. This will happen when one of the cartels gains supremacy in Cd. Juárez Chihuahua, then we can talk about having a better government.



Photo: Bernice Hernandez

**"Another thing that I saw in the research was that we did not have gangs, but we have cartels."  
Bernice**

## Ciudad Juárez, Mexico — Diana Hernandez

About 30 years ago, there were no gangs in Cd. Juárez. They used to be called "barrios", which can be defined in almost the same way as gangs. The only difference was that "barrios" did not operate like gangs today. Some examples of the old kinds of gangs were: Refuego, Calaveras, PlayBoys, Chaveña, La Eme, Barrio Alto, Los Harpy 30, etc. They used to hang out where they tagged, the place in which they were commonly found.

Now street gangs are behind most murders in Juárez. Law enforcement efforts have made it more difficult for drug cartels to transport cocaine into the United States. For this reason, the increased patrols forced the cartels to find alternate routes that created a separate battle between Juárez gangs that are now hunting for additional income. The Aztecas and their rivals, the Mexicles and Artistas Asesinos (Artists Assassins), are now fighting for control of the retail distribution of drugs in Juárez. The Aztecas are linked to the Juárez Cartel, and the Mexicles and Artistas Asesinos are linked to the Sinaloa Cartel.

Nearly 5,000 people have been killed in Juárez since 2008.

The killings were initially part of a dispute between the Juárez and Sinaloa Cartels over who would control the drug-trafficking routes through the border city. Ravelo is a capo, or the leader of the Barrio Azteca gang's operations in Ciudad Juárez, just across the Rio Grande from El Paso. Barrio Azteca started as a Texas prison gang and has expanded to carry out crimes in West Texas and Juárez. The gang has also formed a strong alliance as hit men with the volatile Vicente Carrillo Fuentes drug cartel in Juárez.

Gangs in this particular area are very violent and well organized which leads the criminal justice system to experience more problems in its attempt to find and capture gangs. However, the criminal justice system in Juárez is very corrupt. The corruption leads to the problems and makes them worse than they are already.

(continued on page 4)



Photo: Bernice Hernandez



Photo: Bernice Hernandez

## Diana continued

I consider my research area (Cd. Juárez) to be a **9** (with 10 being the most serious and 1 the least serious) in terms of how serious the gang threat is. I reached this conclusion by comparing other research areas from my classmates, like El Paso, Anthony, Doña Ana, and others, which can't be compared to Cd. Juárez. There was not much difference between my perceived level of threat and the perceptions of the people I interviewed regarding gangs. The evidence is that this research area is already considered the most dangerous city not only within this area but in the world.

The drug cartels are violently taking control of the entire country of Mexico and using the Cd. Juárez border to gain

access to one of the most powerful countries in the world. What is happening now is that each gang (Barrio Azteca, La Linea, Artistas Asecinos) is being divided by different drug cartels: the rival cartels of Sinaloa and La Linea. The most recent news was that the Sinaloa Cartel already took control of Juárez, taking La Linea out of the "drug business," and leading Barrio Azteca and Artistas Asecinos to enter into being at the service of the Sinaloa Cartel. So, basically, a true war between drug cartels is a reality of life in Juárez.

**"From my research, I learned that the police in Juárez are controlled by the cartels through bribes...No officer can refuse to accept the bribe because if they do they are murdered."**

**Michael**

## Ciudad Juárez, Mexico — Michael Wirz

I have learned that gangs in Ciudad Juárez are small and they do not really have an effect on the city anymore. The cartels of Mexico are the true gangs in Juárez. These cartels are sophisticated organizations based on kidnappings, extortion, drug trafficking, and murder. The cartels in Juárez control everything you can imagine, including the police and politicians. They do not just intimidate the city, but they cause fear within a community stricken by severe unemployment.

On a scale of 1 to 10, I put the cartel problem in Juárez at a **10**. The amount of influence these cartels have on the community is unimaginable. From my research, I learned that the police in Juárez are controlled by the cartels through bribes handed down through the ranks. No officer can refuse to accept the bribe because if they do they are murdered. It is not like here in the U.S. where someone can choose to be crooked. In Mexico, you have no choice but to cooperate with the cartels. Officers must live by a saying: "plato o plomo," which means eat or die. You take the money from your superior officer and you go on your way. Now, I don't want you to get the wrong idea by me saying that all officers in

Juárez must take bribes because this is not necessarily a decision made of their own free will. If they don't they will be killed. There is no way to be a 100% legitimate cop in Juárez. Even though they can't be 100% legitimate it doesn't mean that they are not still trying to make a difference, it just means that they have to do it in a different way. A good officer in Juárez keeps contacts between the police and the cartels to make sure that everything is operating smoothly on both sides whenever anyone is arrested or a bust is about to occur. Every decision made by the officer must go through both the cartels and the police to make sure everyone is on the same page.

Not only do the cartels control the police, they also control the economy. Recently, over 10,000 businesses have closed due to extortion or death threats. The problem is that the extortion business in Juárez has been getting out of hand. There is no one to control the market of what a fair price for protection is, so what you have is a bunch of small time thugs extorting ridiculous amounts of money from businesses. Extortion in Mexico is not something that just suddenly occurred. It has been a part of life in Mexico for years, but recently the extortionists are asking for too much money, which is putting these people out of business. When the small thugs are not controlled, they are free to suck the city dry of everything.

(continued on page 5)



Photo: Bernice Hernandez

## Michael continued

When small businesses are closed down because of excessive extortion, thousands of jobs are lost in the rubble. The unemployment in Juárez is the biggest problem the city faces. Without legitimate jobs for people to pursue the only thing left is a job running drugs. The lure of the lavish drug lifestyle can get to anyone in a country where a decent income is hard to find. People in Mexico want to work, which is why there are so many illegal immigrants living in the United States. The problem is that the country of Mexico provides few opportunities for its people; so working for the cartels is sometimes the only option.

The terror these people must live with is unquestionable and until this conflict is resolved the people of Ciudad Juárez will continue to feel its effects. The reason

there is no control in Juárez is because of the massive drug war that has plagued the city for the past few years. You have the Sinaloa Cartel trying to take over the Juárez Cartel, causing a bloodbath in the streets of Juárez. When there is war in the drug world, there is little control over the soldiers. This is why there are people being murdered in public streets instead of the desert like before. There is no respect during war and it has shown its mark over the past few years. When you ask me how big of an effect the cartels have on Ciudad Juárez, the only response I can give is that they have instilled fear in the community by killing people in gruesome manners. The people of Juárez can't even call the police to report a crime for fear of losing their own lives.

## Ciudad Juárez, Mexico — Felipe Robles

As part of the class, I had the opportunity to present my experience of what is happening in Ciudad Juárez. Although I was born in El Paso, Texas, I was raised in Juárez. Who is better qualified to talk about what is happening than someone who has lived and seen how things are in Juárez?

As a matter of fact, many people knew what was going to happen way before it happened. I recall one day, as I was talking with my friend, a former Barrio Azteca gang member, that "a storm was coming," I did not know what he was talking about so I asked what he meant and he answered, "There is a storm coming pretty soon, many will die." After a while he explained to me that there will be a war for territory.

Like I said before, I did kind of know what was happening, but this class taught me that even the least amount of information can help to find out the truth.

## Ciudad Juárez, Mexico — Martin Rivero

I researched the Juárez gangs and the situation there is quite different from other places: even large cities in the U.S. As far as Juárez goes, on a scale of one to ten, the threat from its gang problem would be a 10 and people I interviewed also echoed

that sentiment. There is no simple solution to the problems in Juárez, and there is not one thing you can cover that will help without things being fought on several different fronts.



Photo: Bernice Hernandez

**"I recall one day, as I was talking with my friend, a former Barrio Azteca gang member, that "a storm was coming," I did not know what he was talking about so I asked what he meant and he answered, "There is a storm coming pretty soon, many will die."**

**Felipe**



Photo: Bernice Hernandez

## El Paso, Texas — Research Team



Left to Right: Jessica Dueñas, Marina Nava, Joshua Longenbaugh, Marco Flores, Diana Gomez, and Zamara Ortega. William González absent.

### El Paso, Texas — Joshua Longenbaugh

I learned a great deal about gangs in El Paso through the research I conducted. In my group, I was tasked with examining gangs in the jail from the corrections aspect of gang activity in El Paso. I spoke with my friend, who works as a corrections officer in the El Paso County Detention Center downtown. He was able to provide me with a great deal of information that I did not know about gangs. He told me that the biggest gang right now inside the jail is the Barrio Aztecas and they are the ones who



Photo: Jessica Dueñas

cause the most problems inside the jail. Due to the fact that they are so large in number and cause so many problems, all of the confirmed Azteca members are placed on lockdown and kept separate from the rest of the population. In addition, ex Barrio Azteca members are placed on lockdown because of the threat they pose. He stated that the Aztecas are always fighting with another gang known as the Paisanos, or Paisa's. They are the Aztecas' biggest rival inside the jail, and they were formed just to fight with the Aztecas. The Paisanos are tougher to identify because they do not have as many tattoos as the Aztecas, but they are still just as ruthless.

I learned how gang members get classified as gangsters inside the jail. The way this works is by a point system that is used to confirm gang members when they enter the jail. The system is based on a total of six points and inmates get points for things such as the number of tattoos. Also, gang intelligence officers interview each suspected gang member and this is another way that inmates earn points. Once each inmate has totaled six points they are classified as a gang member and they can be placed on lockdown.

(continued on page 7)

## Joshua continued

My friend told me that an inmate simply stating that they are affiliated with a gang is not enough to classify them as gang members; they need proof. The jail staff photographs each gang member and their tattoos so that they can incorporate it into a database.

Aside from the Aztecas and the Paisanos, he gave me a list of a few other gangs that are in the jail. On this list were the following gangs: Texas Syndicate, La Eme (Mexican Mafia), Aryan Brotherhood, Bloods, Crips, Sureños, and Norteños. I asked him if these gangs were big inside the jail, and if they caused a lot of problems. He told me they are smaller in number and they mainly keep to themselves. The final question I asked him was if he considered gangs to be a real threat inside the jail. He told me that he did not consider gangs to be a major threat and that although fights do break out; they are mostly prevented before they happen. He added most of the hard-core gangsters are on lockdown, and they try to keep gang members from different gangs separated.

If I were to describe gangs in this area based on all the data I have collected, I would describe them as being less violent and less popular than gangs in other cities. By this I mean they aren't well known, and the gang that seems to be causing a majority of the problems is the Barrio Aztecas. Gangs in El Paso seem to keep to themselves and there aren't drive-by shootings in the streets that we hear about happening in Los Angeles. Based on the data collected, I would rate gang activity in El Paso, on a scale of 1 to

10, at about a 7. The reason why I would put it at a 7 is because gang activity does exist in El Paso, and there are a vast number of gangs in the area; however, I don't believe that you will see gangs unless you really go looking for them. I have lived in El Paso all my life and not until recently, with all the violence happening south of the border, have I really heard much about gangs and gang activity. Another reason why I put gang activity in El Paso at a 7 is because of the Barrio Aztecas and all of the gruesome crimes they are committing in Juárez. Many of the Azteca members live in El Paso and simply travel to Juárez to commit their crimes. A vast majority of their leaders were recently arrested, which tells you they have a strong presence in El Paso.

I believe the people interviewed would agree with me that unless you go looking for gang trouble in El Paso you wouldn't find it. In addition, I believe that the only solution to gang activity in El Paso is to stop all the violence happening south of the border. El Paso has become the biggest city for the flow of drugs into the United States, and with drugs comes gangs. Many gangs have set up shop here in El Paso to gather the drugs and transport them throughout the U.S. I think that the only solution to the gang problem in El Paso is to limit the flow of drugs into the city and continue to crack down on the Barrio Aztecas.



Photo: Marina Nava

**“I have lived in El Paso all my life and not until recently, with all the violence happening south of the border, have I really heard much about gangs and gang activity.”**

**Joshua**

## El Paso, Texas — Diana Gomez

From the field research that I did in El Paso, I found certain areas that do have gang related problems. I have lived in El Paso all my life and did not realize there were so many different gangs. Within my neighborhood, I never had an encounter with a gang or any gang member. I have seen different areas around my neighborhood full of graffiti, but I don't recall seeing any suspicious activity that would make me believe that there were any gangs present.

I have heard some estimates of over 500 known gangs in the city of El Paso, but I don't know exactly where they are located. I would have never imagined that there were so many gangs in El Paso because I haven't been in-

involved with or victimized by gang members. I wish I would have been able to find out more information at the various high schools that I went to, but unfortunately they weren't as cooperative as I would have hoped. From the schools I visited, I learned that the Northeast part of El Paso was where there was more violence. There wasn't as much violence at the schools compared to the neighborhoods located around high schools.

The students I met stated that they were aware of who belonged to which gangs, but they didn't really want to talk more about...

(continued on page 8)



Photo: Marina Nava



Photo: Marina Nava

**“The only gang that is known, not only here in El Paso but also in the surrounding areas, is Barrio Azteca. They are the most violent gang in El Paso and have also been included in Americas Most Wanted.”**

**Diana**

## Diana continued

...what they knew since they were a little bit afraid of what might happen if they did talk.

In this particular area of El Paso, I would describe gangs as not noticeable. They are obviously present because of the research that was done, but they seem to be unnoticeable. The only gang that is known, not only here in El Paso but also in the surrounding areas, is Barrio Azteca. They are the most violent gang in El Paso and have also been included in Americas Most Wanted. They are related to the gangs across the border in Cd. Juárez and are tied to the drug trafficking that occurs here in the border towns. The other gangs mentioned in our presentation were not as known around town but only in the parts of the city where they are from.

As previously mentioned, I don't think gangs in the El Paso area are as dangerous as other gangs located in other cities. I see them as not having such a big impact on the safety of the city. So on a scale from one to ten, with ten being the most serious, I would rank El Paso gangs as a 4. I know this is a pretty low number, but there is a presence of gangs in the city, they just don't cause as much damage. I reached this conclusion because I haven't been, and don't know anyone who has been, a victim of gang related violence. I have obviously seen graffiti around town, but I don't consider that to be a dan-

gerous act.

I was surprised to learn, from our presentation, that the FBI Officer that William Gonzales interviewed said that she would rank the violence at an eight. I don't understand why the ranking would be so high because there are very few incidents that are gang related. Of course, there are certain incidents that have been said to be gang related violence such as drive-by shootings, or even stabbings. Most of these incidents have occurred around the northeast part of El Paso. As far as the seriousness of the Barrio Azteca gang, we don't see much of it here in El Paso because most of the violence they participate in is in Cd. Juárez. It was brought to my attention that one of the reasons El Paso is considered one of the safest cities in the United States is because the Barrio Azteca victimize their victims on the other side of the border in Cd. Juárez.

There have already been gang injunctions carried out here in El Paso, and this is one of the recommendations that I would make. El Paso also has a gang unit so that's one way to prevent gang violence from occurring. Realistically, I don't think there will ever be a solution to gangs in this area. First, we are a border city and drugs are a big issue. I really doubt that the Barrio Azteca is going anywhere even if gang injunctions continue to happen.



Photo: Marina Nava

## El Paso, Texas — William González

El Paso seems to represent a broad spectrum of gangs in regard to their motives, how they operate, and their levels of violence. One end of the spectrum would include the presence of violent gangs, such as the Barrio Aztecas who can occupy large areas such as the second ward and beyond. On the other end would be the school age kids who spend their time hanging out in and around their respective neighborhoods, and committing occasional crimes such as criminal damage through graffiti. Scholars and law enforcement alike would clearly define the former as a gang, while the latter could be up for debate.

The Barrio Aztecas have a fluctuating, yet ubiquitous presence in El Paso, which

often depends on the current cartel situation, as well as different pressures from local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies (Gangland). Following a gang injunction, crime in the second ward saw a major decline, which included a thirty-three percent decrease in burglaries (Carrillo, 2010). According to Sergeant Carrillo, the Aztecas began to lay low following the impact of the injunction because of the pressure put on them by law enforcement, specifically the El Paso Police Department's Tactical Gang and Special Operations Unit. This illustrates that even the most violent organized gangs do not want law enforcement attention because it can interfere with their operation.

(continued on page 9)



## William continued

Recently, the Aztecas have been in the spotlight again with the alleged murder of American citizens, including a correctional officer, in Juárez. Those citizens, some of whom had direct ties to the United States Consulate, were killed after attending a party in Juárez. According to an in-class presentation on Juárez gangs, the killings were an attempt at revenge, as well as an attempt to be locked up in prison, where they can avoid being targeted by the Mexican military (Juárez Group, 2010).

The Barrio Aztecas are the primary enforcers of the Juárez drug cartel, and have a significant presence on both sides of the border (Carrillo, 2010). Their organization and levels of violence have gained national attention, and they have even been featured on the documentary series, *Gangland*. Sergeant Carrillo also appeared on the same episode of *Gangland*. This national attention following the Juárez murders has even resulted in a huge surge in the presence of the FBI in El Paso. Recently, several hundred Azteca members were detained and questioned in reference to the murders. This description of the Barrio Aztecas goes to show one extreme case of gang presence in El Paso. Fortunately, law enforcement at every jurisdictional level has recognized the dangerousness of the Aztecas and they are willing to do what it takes to stop the violence from escalating.

However, a large number of gangs in El Paso do not have a violent presence that rivals that of the Aztecas, although some violence can and does occur when drug and weapons smuggling are a goal of the gang. While photographing graffiti on El Paso's north side, I noticed a trend of numerous gangs in the area. They all had their respective graffiti patterns, as well as attempts to cross out other gangs. I did not see any overt threats of violence, other than the disrespect associated with crossing out a rival gang. Some of the graffiti I observed appeared to be a result of tagging crews as opposed to street gangs. These mural type depictions differ from the traditional graffiti in that their goal is to express artwork, rather than gang presence. When speaking with an anonymous El Paso Police officer, I learned that gangs

in this particular area are not known for violence or criminal acts. The officer mentioned that the gangs in the area primarily hang out and engage in acts of graffiti.

An increasing trend in the El Paso area is the emergence of party crews. While not considered gangs per se, from a scholarly point of view, law enforcement can identify these crews as gangs in certain instances because of their potential for criminal acts. These party crews essentially want all the benefits of being a gang, such as partying, women, drugs and/or alcohol, but do not want the negatives of gang life, such as the negative label, stigma, as well as attention from the police (Carrillo, 2010).

During the time spent conducting interviews and taking pictures of graffiti, I did not encounter any gang members. I spent enough time driving through alleys and isolated back streets taking pictures that I must have attracted the attention of those living in the neighborhood, yet I was never confronted about my intentions. Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that most gangs in the El Paso area are isolated in the sense that publicity is not something they want to attract. Undoubtedly, based on the presence of graffiti, gangs have rivalries and a presence among each other that can include violence. Those rivalries can sometimes spill over to the extent that they are visible to the community. Based on the data collected by the El Paso Gang Group, I would rate the current gang problem in El Paso as an 8 out of ten.

I recommend education as the primary solution to help stop gangs in the El Paso area. Also, I would recommend a community policing style for the El Paso Police Department because allowing officers to interact, and build a rapport, with communities can and does result in better intelligence on gangs. The El Paso Police Department's Drive-by Shooting Response Team prides itself on its ability to solve drive-by shootings through interviews with witnesses, victims, etc., which illustrates the importance of interacting with the community. Due to the DSRT, drive-by shootings occur approximately ten times per year, considerably low for a city of El Paso's size (Carrillo, 2010).



Photo: William Gonzáles

**“El Paso seems to represent a broad spectrum of gangs...One end of the spectrum would include the presence of violent gangs, such as the Barrio Aztecas...On the other end would be the school age kids who spend their time hanging out in and around their respective neighborhoods...”**

**William**



Photo: William Gonzáles



Photo: William Gonzáles

**“...I found several articles from our city newspaper, as well as various nationwide papers that described the arrests of soldiers linked to gang life. In El Paso alone, 800 members were identified as part of Folk Nation by the FBI just within the last 3 years.”**  
**Zamara**



Photo: Marina Nava

## El Paso, Texas — Zamara Ortega

When given the opportunity to conduct hands on gang research for this class, I felt that it would be an easy task since I had chosen my hometown of El Paso, TX. What I have come to learn based on field research, not only about the city of El Paso, TX, but also about my own personal investigation with our military base of Fort Bliss, TX, is extremely valuable.

At the start of this project, I immediately wanted to focus on an area that would not be thought of as having a problem with gang activity. I chose to focus on the military because I had heard how several gang members joined the Armed Forces to either get out of gang life or to hone combative techniques and gain tactical knowledge of weapons. I learned that the problem is far larger than the audience knows. I was fortunate enough to have a military police officer contact that I could interview. What was unfortunate about the interview is his lack of information on a known problem. In our interview, I simply asked him direct questions pertaining to his job and about Folk Nation. Folk Nation is an alliance of gangs based out of Chicago that has shown a large presence in the military and especially at Fort Bliss, in El Paso, TX. While the Master Sergeant acknowledged he had heard of Folk Nation, he stated that in Fort Bliss, “there was no such animal”.

Through my research, I sought out proof that there are problems within this area and, luckily enough, I found several articles from our city newspaper, as well as various nationwide papers that described the arrests of soldiers linked to gang life. In El Paso alone, 800 members were identified as part of Folk Nation by the FBI just within the last 3 years. Along with that, I had another military contact, a retired Master Sergeant who had been a gang member before joining the military. Although he chose to withhold his identity, my contact reassured me that while he may have chosen the better path, military gang life is present and most of the soldiers involved are in it for the purpose of learning more combative and tactical moves. With that said, I would describe gangs in this particular area of El Paso, TX, as present, but kept under wraps to protect the view we hold of our military.

Based on the research we conducted, I

would say that we can all agree that the current biggest gang problem in El Paso, TX, is the Barrio Azteca. While several other gangs exist, none are as notorious and deadly as Barrio Azteca. Based on the current situation with our sister city of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, I would say Barrio Azteca has us rating El Paso’s gang situation at about an **8** out of 10. I say an 8 because recent reports have had Barrio Azteca targeting several officers and committing serious felonies throughout the city. In an overall context, without the criminal activity of Barrio Azteca, I feel El Paso would rank **5** out of 10 in terms of gang activity.

It seems that as long as you don’t really mess with gangs they tend to be more involved in tagging, small fights, and misdemeanors. In terms of my perceived level of threat and what we have found regarding gangs, I would say I was shocked by the information we found about gang life on military bases. You tend to think that the military is solely made up of good and honest citizens defending you and the country. The thought that there are some who are just in it to learn how to be the perfect criminal is quite frightening. As far as solutions for gangs in this area, I think that in terms of the military aspect of gangs, tougher screening could be performed. After all, weapon trafficking is one of the biggest problems with military gang members, so the proper knowledge of these members’ current status within their supposed gang is key to preventing weapons and information from landing in the wrong hands.

As far as gang problems in the city, we should offer more programs for children to stay out of trouble. After school programs for them to come and do homework, or just have a safe place to hang out, can truly help keep children out of trouble. Also, an outreach program for gang members to help them better their life could help reform those few that are still involved in gang life.

Overall, this research has truly showed me a different side of our military and of my hometown of El Paso, TX. While gang life is present, and I believe it will always be present here and anywhere else in this country, it is our duty as citizens to keep our city as safe as possible. Truly one person can make the difference for their community.

## El Paso, Texas — Marina Nava

Based on our team research in the El Paso area, it seems that gangs have not caused a major problem in the area compared to the 1980's. Territorial gangs start at a young age, but don't evolve to a certain extent. It seems that kids that are involved with gangs either grow out of it or end up doing time, which may lead to joining a prison gang. The prison gangs have a business aspect. They are organized and prisoners become a larger part of an organization. There are diverse reasons for joining prison gangs: for protection, by force, to belong, or by individual choice. It seems that gangs are created to assert kids' identities. Some of the reasons are because of parental involvement or lack of emotional support with their children. A variety of kids are growing up in impoverished neighborhoods; for example, the projects. Lacking money, education, experiencing prejudice, and op-

portunities seems to feed the cycle of gangs.

Personally, I would rank the gang problem in El Paso a **6** on level of threat, on a scale of one being least and ten being the most serious. I think that the El Paso Police Department had to build a relationship with the community in order to deter the gang activity. The trust level between law enforcement officials and the community is seen through reporting any kind of gang activity. The perceived threat level of gangs for the officials I interviewed is around the same level of threat as I ranked El Paso gangs. I think the community's main concern right now is not having any violence spill over from our sister city Juárez. I think that violent crimes are much easier to commit in Juárez rather than in El Paso.

## El Paso, Texas — Marco Flores

Gangs in El Paso are a moderate threat. There are several sides to the city of El Paso; the Eastside and the Northeast are the places where most of the gangs are located. It is very different from other cities where gangs are located. There are drive-by shootings, fights, and murders involving gangs, but the real problem with gangs is the drug trafficking that takes place. El Paso gangs have very organized drug smuggling operations from Mexico to the U.S., and they also traffic firearms from the U.S. to Mexico. The problem is that El Pasoans try to ignore the problem because there is no immediate threat to society.

If I was to grade seriousness of gangs in El Paso, I would have to separate the problems because, like I said, they are not the problems that most people are used to involving gangs. On a one to ten scale, with ten being the most serious and one being the least serious, in cases of crime involving drive-bys, fights, murders, kidnapping, and crimes not involving drugs, I would give El Paso a three. For crimes involving drugs I would give El Paso a nine. The overall grade I would give El Paso in terms of seriousness in gang activity would have to be an **8** because of the level of organization they have

when it comes to bringing drugs to El Paso.

There is a big difference between my perceived level of threat and the people I talked to regarding gangs. Mostly white communities are not aware of the level of gang activity in their city. They are just happy there is enough marihuana to go around. A solution to the problem is what everyone is looking for, but the amount of money involved is just too high.

The market for drugs in the U.S. is on the rise, so I guess the solution is to have worse punishment for U.S. people consuming or in possession of drugs, especially marihuana. Of course that is never going to happen because we would be targeting youth, especially white teens.

Another serious problem that has not yet affected El Paso is gang members receiving military training at Fort Bliss. My dad's theory is that the U.S. people are the ones killing for hire in Juárez so maybe gangs are already taking advantage of their training. I saw a video with a gang member saying that it could not be more perfect, they are getting what they want by getting taught how to properly use weapons, plus they are getting paid for it. They say, "we would have done it for free."



Photo: Marina Nava

**“El Paso gangs have very organized drug smuggling operations from Mexico to the U.S., and they also traffic firearms from the U.S. to Mexico. The problem is that El Pasoans try to ignore the problem because there is no immediate threat to society.”**

**Marco**



Photo: Marina Nava



Photo: Jessica Dueñas

**“I think the community’s main concern right now is not having any violence spill over from our sister city Juárez. I think that violent crimes are much easier to commit in Juárez rather than in El Paso.”**  
**Marina**



Photo: Jessica Dueñas

## El Paso, Texas — Jessica Dueñas

When I had an opportunity to go and do research on gangs during the semester, I learned many different things. I tried to focus my research on school gangs but a lot of the principals did not want to take the time to give me interviews. One school official from Northeast El Paso who wanted to keep his name quiet mentioned that focusing on schools would make them look bad. This person told me that people tend not to give gangs much attention because they haven’t had an issue to where someone gets really hurt. Giving information about gangs would bring unwanted attention. For example, the parents of kids that attend the school and the media would demand answers.

At the end of the semester, a high school principal decided to give me a short phone interview. He admitted that there was a gang in his school but that it has never caused any major problems and that it wasn’t violent. I asked him if they were not engaging in any type of illegal activity then why did he think it was a gang. He told me that it was just a group of kids who were probably bored and decided to make a gang. He mentioned that some of the kids claim to be in a gang and they are some of the top students at the school.

These two administrators work in different districts: one in the northeast and the other in the lower valley. The administrator reporting gangs in the schools was in the northeast and this part of town has been known to have most of the gang activity in El Paso, aside from Segundo Barrio. I never thought schools in El Paso had any type of problems with gangs, but unfortunately I did not have the time or resources to follow-up and completely answer this question.

While doing my research in El Paso, I

took a good amount of pictures. Some of the pictures were taken downtown and the others in the lower valley. The pictures downtown highlight the area of the Aztecas or the Segundo barrio gangs. A lot of the pictures taken downtown looked more like tagger type of graffiti. The other pictures taken in the lower valley had the name of Sur 13, LDT, and Sureños. LDT was the one gang the principal I interviewed mentioned that was present in his school.

Based on the amount of information collected, I believe the gang issue in these two areas needs to be approached in different ways. In the lower valley it seems like its not that big of a problem, but there should be something done to keep these kids from calling themselves a gang. I believe there is hope because they are not committing major crimes. Education about gangs would be something they might need to understand that gangs are not to be played with.

On the northeast side of El Paso, I wouldn’t know what to really recommend since I’m still unclear what type of problem exists.

While doing my research, I spoke with a young man who was an ex-gang member. He told me his life and why he joined a gang. He reported joining a gang similar to others, out of fear for getting beat up every day by other kids on the block that didn’t like him or his skin color. He said it was a discrimination thing. While in the gang he committed different crimes and used drugs. He came from a family without a father and a mother who was always working. Not having someone to guide you in the right path can sometimes lead someone into doing like such as joining a gang.



Photo: Jessica Dueñas



Photo: Jessica Dueñas

## Anthony, New Mexico — Research Team



Left to Right: Jacob Rodriguez, Janesse Mitchell, Ruby Nuñez, and Leon Teague. Guadalupe Gutierrez absent.

## Anthony, New Mexico — Guadalupe Gutierrez

Based on field research, I found out that there is not a huge problem with gangs in Anthony, NM. There is a problem with gang graffiti and tagging in the community, even in the schools; however, their structure and organization is not strong enough to say they are a danger to anyone. In my opinion, if it was not for the graffiti around Anthony we would not know of the gangs and their rivals. It is easy to see who does not like who from

looking closely at the graffiti. It is also very easy to say where a particular gang is located due to the tagging and graffiti.

Gadsden High School has a dress code and teachers enforce it as much as possible. The intervention program was first founded by Mr. Maxi to avoid truancy back in 2000; now intervention is not only for truancy but also to get students from classes where they trouble teachers to continue with their classes, anger management, ISS (in school suspension), and gang related problems. Gang activity, according to Mr. Cornish and Mr. Maxi, is an issue with the freshmen that just come in and want to prove that they are part of a gang.

Mr. Cornish and Mr. Maxi mentioned that there are 14 recognized gangs, but the ones they have the most issues with on campus are the Teners, West Side, and the Sureños. They mentioned that it is not so much the fighting, because they only have about one fight a week that is gang related, it is the drugs (weed and cocaine), tagging, and ditching that the gangs most frequently engage in. Mr. Cornish believes that many of these young teenagers join gangs due to the lack of pride, parents, and role models.



Photo: Unknown

(continued on page 15)

## Guadalupe continued

He also states that in order to prevent gang recruitment they need better parents and to get educated about their roots and country. The gang becomes their family, their role models, and they are proud of being part of something even if it is not good for them.

Many people in the community agree that the lack of resources plays an important role in the development of gangs. They do believe change will occur now that Anthony is a city, at least with the law enforcement more present in the city. Gangs in Anthony, NM, in the past four years have had a big increase in their graffiti and tagging, not so much in their structure and organization, just in causing problems or making the community upset. People who live in Anthony say that the gangs there are not a serious threat, they are just a bunch of bored kids with a lot of spare time on their hands.

According to law enforcement there have

## Anthony, New Mexico — Leon W. Teague

Anthony is the place that I believed to be the worst off gang wise out of all of the cities/towns that were covered in the class presentations. I don't know if this is because I did my research here or if the gangs there really are more active. I found gang activity everywhere you can imagine in Anthony, from children's parks to the local high school, Gadsden High. I think the various gangs that are present here in Anthony work for the cartels in Ciudad Juárez as their foot soldiers or drug traffickers. This is one of the reasons there is also no real gang presence in Juárez itself. One of the reasons given for these violent gangs moving into the small city/town of Anthony is because of the lack of police. They are less likely to be caught or identified by the authorities in a smaller city.

Based on the data collected, I found Anthony to be around a high 6 or low 7 on the scale of gang activity seriousness. I think this because of the fact that there are bigger and more violent gangs moving into the area. Also, the fact is that there is nothing to do there for anyone, so they resort to gang activity as a form of entertainment and as something to keep them busy. As you drive into Anthony you can see the presence of gangs right away. The first thing you see just about everywhere is graffiti. It is just about everywhere you can imagine. The gangs leave no place unmarked

been 14 drive-bys in Anthony in the past four months (January-April). It is also important to mention a young man was killed in Anthony while he was traveling from San Antonio. It has been said that the three people who killed him were associated with some type of gang.

After doing all this research and hearing about all the data collected by my group, I would rate Anthony to be about a 6. The reason is that if Anthony is incorporated into city, it will develop more extracurricular activities that teenagers enjoy which will probably provide more incentive for youth to get out of the gang activities such as drugs and graffiti. The gangs do not seem to be organized like the ones we see in Gangland or even in lectures. Many researchers believe, as I do, that gangs are born out of boredom. They just need someone to fill in the time they have and are wasting on dumb decisions.

with the symbols and phrases that they use to represent themselves. As far as my perceived level of threat, I thought that Anthony wouldn't have any real gang activity prior to my research. After conducting research, I found out that I was very wrong and there is a plentiful amount of gang activity and presence in Anthony. As previously mentioned, I find the gang activity to be increasing. In a small place like Anthony, there is only so much you can do to help control things like gangs. When it comes to something that will help decrease or control the gang activity, I am just as clueless as the local law enforcement. I wouldn't really know where to begin or what to take on first.

The only thing that I could think of that might have an impact on it in some way would be providing something for the youth and other residents to do in their community other than join gangs. If Anthony wasn't so close to the border of Mexico, or if we all weren't so close to the border of Mexico for that matter, I don't think we would have as much of a problem with gangs. Don't get me wrong, gangs are everywhere, but, as far as the violence is concerned, I don't think it would be as bad. The violence is high because of the drugs and the money that comes along with them, and money makes people do crazy things. Then again, everyone has their own opinion.



Photo: Ruby Nuñez and Leon Teague

**“In my opinion, if it was not for the graffiti around Anthony we would not know of the gangs and their rivals.”**  
**Guadalupe**



Photo: Ruby Nuñez and Leon Teague



Photo: Unknown

**“After completing the field research, I was very surprised with the findings. For the most part, the Anthony group found the gang threat level to be minimal.”**

**Ruby**



Photo: Unknown

## Anthony, New Mexico — Ruby Nuñez

After completing the field research, I was very surprised with the findings. For the most part, the Anthony group found the gang threat level to be minimal. This was based on the information that was collected during community interviews. Janesse and Leon’s interviewees perceived Anthony as being a calm city with not much trouble. School interviews indicated otherwise. Interviews at the middle school provided useful information such as identified gangs and graffiti issues. It was not mentioned that the middle school had a large gang problem. Lupe and Jacob were able to collect information that defined the problems Anthony is currently facing. Jacob interviewed a security guard at the high school, and received information on all gang problems currently affecting the area: Tagging appeared to be a large problem in the school. Lupe found information leading to a currently active intervention program. In this intervention program, students are mentored and escorted to class to prevent future fights or administration problems. Students who can’t follow school policies are expelled and offered the opportunity to attend an alternative school called Desert Pride.

The information I found during my field research differed from the information found

by the other interviewers. Community members were aware that there was a gang problem. Most lived close to where a lot of gang crime was committed. One of my interviewees gave Anthony an 8 on a scale of 1-10. I would definitely agree with giving Anthony an 8 as far as the danger zone goes. If I had to base my score on the information gathered by all members, it would be a 6. Few findings indicated that Anthony is an extremely dangerous place. I think if more research was conducted, and possibly if granted access to law enforcement information, the number on this scale would go up.

At one point the city did have prevention programs like a boxing clubs, leadership academies, and police academies. Many sports were also offered and run by community members. Due to the lack of funds programs were cut. Having those programs does help the community deter gang problems early on. Programs are needed because it provides the younger generation choices. When no choices are available, residents are left with only one choice, which is to join a group of people and commit crime. When I was growing up, having programs available helped me and my brother make better choices.

## Anthony, New Mexico — Jacob Rodriguez

While doing about three months of field research on gangs in Anthony, I have learned that gangs can form in any town. My research found that gang members sometimes lure kids in with money, drugs, and girls. I would rate Anthony as a 1 on a 10 point scale. I think that the gang violence is high there because of the Mexican border. Gangs are at school and in the community, which was verified from the graffiti and local administration at Gadsden High School. I would take into consideration that

when seeing graffiti from higher-level gangs affiliated with drugs, money, and extortion, you have to take action to make sure that this violence and behavior is stopped or under control. According to my research at Gadsden High School, the majority of the local gangs are not spreading. Fights usually occur at school. Anthony should take control over the smaller gangs in the community, but should also put extra effort into dealing with the bigger gangs that are trying to enter the community.

## Anthony, New Mexico — Janesse Mitchell

The groups in our gang class have conducted in-depth research on gangs in order to improve our understanding of the gangs within our communities. Our research indicated that gangs are present within the high schools and that there is gang activity in the community aside from graffiti. Anthony, NM seems to be a

community that has a gang influence that is already at a high level and seems to be on the rise. There are even news clips that interview residents within the community about how bad the gangs are getting in the area. Graffiti covers all surfaces and is a constant reminder of the gang presence in the city.



## Las Cruces, New Mexico – Research Team



Left to Right: Matt Ferralez, Joseph Filerio, Anthony Atencio, Felix Cordero, Christopher Carrera, Louis Nevarez, Matthew Moya, Eric Ytuarte, and Roy Garcia

### Las Cruces, New Mexico – Joseph Filerio

Since the commencement of my research in January of 2010, I have gained a wealth of knowledge about the gangs in and around the surrounding areas of Las Cruces. I analyzed two types of gangs for the purpose of this research. The first type is gangs on a local level. The second is gangs on a federal level.

On the local level, I found that a larger gang presence is found outside of the city limits. Early in the year, I went out and took photographs of graffiti that was visible out in the community. I noticed that graffiti inside the city limits of Las Cruces was rare. I would attribute this to the work of the Codes Enforcement Department. They do an outstanding job of removing graffiti quickly, making it hard to obtain gang graffiti photographs. However, out in the County area, it is a different story. The places where I observed most gang graffiti was in the following areas: Mesa Grande, Butterfield, Weisner, Holman, and Moon-gate; just east of Las Cruces City limits on Highway 70. The two predominant gangs that I detected in the graffiti photographs where SUR 13 and E.S.L. (or East Side Locos). These tags appeared as if they had been there for quite some time, something rare inside the city limits. The Sur 13 tags were tagged in blue spray paint and usually crossed out by a big "X", with ESL written over the original Sur 13 tagging. On one particular picture, the number 1-8-7 was written next to a nickname of what I as-

sume was a rival gang member.

However, in making my observations, I spoke with some of the Spanish speaking residents of the area. My overall understanding of their point of view of the gangs in the area was that these gangs are not extremely violent. One older gentleman stated that these tags were nothing new, and it was the local kids who had nothing better else to do, "It's just a way for them to act out."

(continued on page 18)



Photo: Joseph Filerio



Photo: Joseph Filerio

**“Based upon the data collected by our Las Cruces team, I would consider the overall threat of gangs to be a 4, with a potential of 8 or 9 because Las Cruces is unique in its geographic location.”**  
Joseph



Photo: Robert Durán

## Joseph continued

He went on to state that, since the area is extremely rural, these kids walk around on adventures, tagging anything and everything that crosses their path. Another resident did express concern, stating that she has heard of gun shots being fired late at night in the area. I was unable to confirm any shootings that may have occurred recently, or any shots fired calls that law enforcement may have received.

Overall, I did not perceive extreme danger to the community from these two (local) gangs. I would describe these gangs as more like social groups, who make threats for fun, because it's easier for them to try to intimidate one another via graffiti rather than actually carrying out “hits” as the media may sometimes portray.

The issue of gangs on a Federal level is a different one. I discovered that on a Federal level, gangs are a serious concern to local and federal law enforcement agencies. According to the United States Probation Office, District of New Mexico, some of the gangs that they mainly supervise are: Aztecas, Sureños, New Mexico Syndicate or Sindicato Nuevo Mexico (Prison Gang), and Mexican Mafia. It should be noted that all of the gangs mentioned above, with the exception of the New Mexico Syndicate, are gangs that have a presence not only in Las Cruces, but also in parts of Texas, such as El Paso, and many Texas Correctional facilities. In doing research on the Aztecas, I found that there seems to be disagreement about the structure of the gang. I first believed that the Aztecas and Barrio Azteca (or B.A.) were two very different and separate entities with close ties to each other, but with different leadership governing them. The reasoning behind this was that most literature states that Barrio Azteca was founded in the Texas prison system. However, during a presentation in class, we had a guest speaker who was familiar with the Juárez conflict. From his presentation, he gave me the impression that these two gangs are one and the same, both receiving orders from bosses in the Juárez area. The only difference is that one resides on the U.S. side, and the other the Mexican side. I suspect law enforcement and the media are just as perplexed by the different names, as both the media and law enforcement use Barrio Azteca and the Aztecas interchangeably.

I believe it is important to mention the current drug war that is being fought between the cartels in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico since it is

well known that the Aztecas and /or Barrio Azteca are being used by the Sinaloa Drug Cartel run by Joaquín “El Chapo” (or Shorty) Guzmán, as their foot soldiers. Even though Las Cruces is approximately 50 miles away from the border, it is a major concern to the federal authorities. During an interview with United States Probation Officer George Herrera, he stated that “...many of the local gangs in the southern part of the state have aligned with the Mexican cartels to facilitate the transportation of drugs.” Therefore, seeing how some members of the Barrio Azteca are residing in the community of Las Cruces, I assert that it is important to note. He further went on to state that “Gangs are becoming extremely violent as a result of the cartel territory battles...” mainly because of the large amount of capital that is involved.

Based upon the data collected by our Las Cruces team, I would consider the overall threat of gangs to be a 4, with a potential to become an 8 or 9 because Las Cruces is unique in its geographic location. As I mentioned earlier, I divided the gangs in Las Cruces on two levels, a local and a federal level. On the local level, I don't see enough evidence that would lead me to conclude that gangs (such as the SUR 13 and E.S.L.) pose a significant danger to the community. Most of the crimes that I came across that these gangs committed were property crimes and petty misdemeanors. However, taking a look at gangs on a Federal level, I concluded that gangs that are larger and more mobile (such as Barrio Azteca) have the potential to bring tumult to the community of Las Cruces. Las Cruces has two interstates that are easily accessible, interstate 10 (runs from east to west) and 25 (runs north and south). Many drug gangs will want to utilize these interstates in an effort to distribute their drugs as quickly as possible. There is a major difference between my perception of the threat level and the perception of local law enforcement officers I spoke to. The overall feeling I got from them is that they would like to see some sort of anti-gang legislation passed in New Mexico. One LCPD officer stated that he feels our current laws need improvement, and feels that the California three strikes law is more like, “two strikes and... move to New Mexico” because New Mexico does not have these type of laws.

(Continued on page 18)

## Joseph continued

I do not think that New Mexico needs a three strikes law because I don't believe gangs are as big a problem here as they are in California, like East Los Angeles.

Based upon this level of threat, on the local level, I would recommend that the city of Las Cruces allocate more funds towards activities for youth, especially during the summer break when school is out for the summer. This is the

time when most youth are bored at home and need something to do, instead of going out and looking for their own "adventures." However, on the federal level, I would have to recommend that Federal government take steps to stop the interstate commerce of drug trafficking. However, I am not sure how they would go about this, as they have been fighting the "war on drugs" for quite some time.

## Las Cruces, New Mexico — Chris Carrera

Based on my field research on Las Cruces gangs, I have learned from New Mexico State Police officers Greg Smith and Scott Merrill that gangs aren't as bad in the city compared to other places. When comparing gangs to the other groups such as Anthony, El Paso, Doña Ana or Ciudad Juárez, both officers considered the gangs in Las Cruces to be a less serious threat. I've lived in Las Cruces all my life. I have felt the gang presence in the community when I've gone to social events and when I was in high school, but I never really felt any danger from the different gangs. I felt that each gang just put on the show of toughness so that the community continued to fear them. While in high school, the gang members were either skipping school or starting fights between other gangs. I knew about the two main gangs that both Officer Smith and Merrill described to me while conducting my research, both the East Siders and Sureños, but I didn't really know much about them. I also think that most gangs in Las Cruces are not territorial, but they do tag neighborhoods to make their presence known. Both officers corroborated this information as well. They also stated that territorial gangs are seen more in Anthony with the Teners and Barrios Aztecas as well as Doña Ana

with the Donáeros.

Based on the data that my team collected, I would rate the seriousness of gangs in Las Cruces as 4 out of 10. I reached this conclusion because, according to my contacts at the New Mexico State Police, both the East Siders and Sureños have been able to live in close proximity without causing too much trouble. Officer Smith stated that he has seen East Side members date the sisters of Sureño members. Tagging is also covered up rather quickly in this area. While conducting my research, I had the hardest time trying to take pictures of gang tagging because most places either had them covered up or cleaned off. I think the officers would give the same level of threat or they might give the gangs in the city a level of 5 since they have more personal experience with the gangs daily. When looking for solutions for the level of seriousness of gangs in Las Cruces, I would say that the city is doing a good job for the most part by getting rid of tagging. By getting rid of tagging, the broken window theory cannot take effect, which is a good thing. Another solution that could help with gangs in this area would be more neighborhood watch programs as well as expanding on community policing.

## Las Cruces, New Mexico — Eric Ytuarte

The main focus of my research was to find out the perspective on gangs from the Las Cruces Communities point of view. What I found was that people had different ideas based on their age and where they lived in the city. The two places I conducted short informal interviews with people were at the Sonoma Ranch Golf Course and the Picacho Hills Country Club. The questions I asked various people

throughout my visits to these upscale golf course communities were:

1. What is your view on gangs in Las Cruces?
2. How serious do you think gang activity is in Las Cruces?
3. How can we suppress gang activity in Las Cruces?

(continued on page 20)



Photo: Joseph Filerio

**"East Siders and Sureños have been able to live in close proximity without causing too much trouble. Officer Smith stated that he has seen East Side members date the sisters of Sureño members."**  
Chris

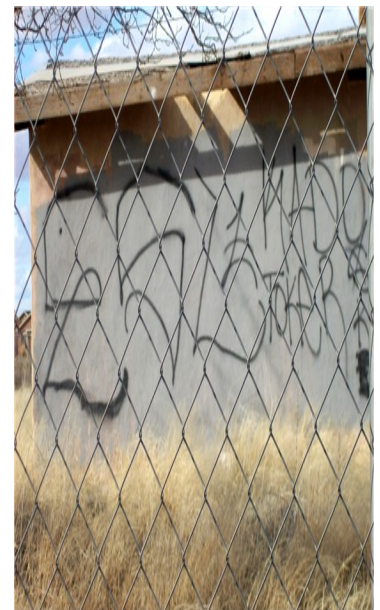


Photo: Joseph Filerio



Photo: Joseph Filerio

**“He said that the tagging wasn’t only done by them but also by the gangsters, sometimes just because they were bored, not necessarily to mark their territory...Their tagging wasn’t always to show dominance over other tagging crews or gangs, but just to let people know they were here.”**

**Anthony**



Photo: Joseph Filerio

## Eric continued

The answer to the first question was basically the same among all of the patrons I interviewed. They thought there was no real gang problem in the city of Las Cruces, and that there were only occasional serious crimes, which really had no gang relevance. In addition, they were unaware of any gang activity and therefore believe it is not a very serious problem.

There were, however, a few gentlemen whose responses were exceptions to the typical answers. These two men were local attorneys who had both covered cases involving a gang member. They did not express much concern for the gangs in the city of crosses, but they did confirm that they are here.

The only real program that they are aware of is the “Weed and Seed” program. This program sets its focus on law enforcement patrolling and controlling the streets in areas that have been designated as “hot spots” throughout the city. These “hot spots” are areas that statistically show the highest presence of gang related crimes and gang activity. The other component of this program is the involvement of the community in these areas to assist these officials in two ways. First, they are to have a strong neighborhood watch system and inform the police of any suspicious activities that might

be occurring. Second, they are to “seed” their communities and improve the physical quality of these neighborhoods which will push out these gangs.

Other individuals I interviewed were current students at NMSU who grew up in Las Cruces and attended public schools here. They are aware of some gangs, but they say that they really are not much of a problem. They say that the most they would ever see anybody affiliated with gangs was in high school, but they were not allowed to glorify their colors at school so there really were not any gang related activities in the school. They admitted there were a few neighborhoods they would not travel down at night, but stated that if you don’t go looking for any gang trouble, you shouldn’t find it.

From the group as a whole, I believe that we found gangs in Las Cruces not to be a very extreme threat. On a scale of one to ten, I would say that they are about a 3. Most of the research that we were able to find was based on youth or high school students. We found strong ties to the juvenile center which had a strong presence of young gang members which leads me to believe that the majority of the gang presence in Las Cruces is very young and not extremely organized or dangerous.

## Las Cruces, New Mexico — Anthony Atencio

I learned a lot about the gangs in Las Cruces through my research. My research consisted of surveying previous Las Cruces High School students. The participants were students from high schools all around Las Cruces. The gangs in the area of Las Cruces were really low key and not anywhere near as violent as people see gangs as being. Gangs are often defined in so many ways by so many different groups of people. They all have a basic territory where they hang out, but not necessarily defend to the death as portrayed in movies. They tag areas where they hang out like banks, street signs, and mailboxes, but mostly out of boredom. This information came from an interview with an individual who was part of a tagging crew in high school. He said that the tagging wasn’t only done by them but also by the gangsters,

sometimes just because they were bored, not necessarily to mark their territory. He said they would often hang out with some of the gang members. Their tagging wasn’t always to show dominance over other tagging crews or gangs, but just to let people know they were here. Gangs overall in this area are a pretty calm breed, they aren’t about violence but more about having people to hang out with.

Based on the data we collected, I believe the threat gangs pose in this area can be a big issue. The reason it is not of great importance right now is because the gangs are not as violent as people would suspect. If they do become violent it is because they feel they have been disrespected in some way.

(Continued on page 21)

## Anthony continued

This disrespect usually involves personal problems they are having with another gang member or even just another person in general. The amount of gang presence alone is why I would rate Las Cruces as a 4 or 5 on a scale from 1 to 10.

This is because it is not a significant problem, but the amount of gangs and gang members could drastically change if they choose to become more organized and violent in crimi-

nal activities. I believe the painting over the tagging is affecting their activities in terms of where they are choosing to put their name, but to control gang activity, school programs may have some potential. As we have learned through our groups and the other students, most of the activity is the work of the younger gang members, which I believe would be a good place to start.

## Las Cruces, New Mexico — Matthew Moya

From the interviews that I was able to obtain, I did learn a lot about gang activity in Las Cruces high schools. The best interview that I was able to get was an interview with an assistant principle at Las Cruces High. I found out that the biggest problem that gangs cause in Las Cruces high schools is graffiti. Graffiti can be found on desks, tables, outside benches and the most is found in bathrooms. According to the vice principle, the graffiti that is found in the bathroom is the work of young women who may be female gang members or just associated with a gang. The young women go into the girls and boys bathrooms to write the graffiti, while one stands outside as a look out. While the vice principle has not caught anyone doing this, he has been told by students that this is the way that the gangs get their graffiti done.

Another problem that gangs cause in Las Cruces high schools is fights with other gang members and between students not associated with gangs. Fights between gang members don't happen all the time, but they are more likely to occur when two gangs are fighting on the streets. Most students try to avoid fights. Las Cruces Public Schools have a three-strike rule, which means that if you are caught fighting or breaking any rules then you are expelled from school.

I learned that Las Cruces schools do not have a program to help with keeping kids out of gangs or getting kids out of gangs. The only two programs that they have are ones for students caught under the influence of alcohol or drugs. They must attend a mandatory intervention and group meeting, the same thing goes if you are caught fighting: you must attend a mandatory anger management pro-

gram. This is the closest that gang members ever get to some kind of help getting out of gangs. I have learned that gangs in Las Cruces schools are not that bad, the vice principle gave LCHS (Las Cruces High School) a 4 out of 10 for gang activity in the school. From what I learned about gangs in the school, I would have to agree.

Based on the data collected on gangs in Las Cruces, on a scale of one to ten on how serious a threat gangs are, I would give Las Cruces a 4. From the data that we collected, Las Cruces does have a gang presence, but they are not as bad as those in Anthony or El Paso. We can see that we have gangs in the schools as well as graffiti and some vandalism at NMSU, but it is not that big of a problem. Gang activity that occurs in Las Cruces consists mainly of tagging, occasionally selling drugs, and burglaries. According to the Las Cruces Police Department, gangs in Las Cruces are not really territorial and often hang out with each other.

Las Cruces does a good job to keep gangs to a minimum, by covering up graffiti when it is found on walls. Las Cruces also has programs such as the Weed and Seed Program, which helps improve problem neighborhoods. Also, there is the TNT, or Targeting neighborhood, program that helps prevent taggers from doing graffiti in local neighborhoods. It is a community-based unit that solves neighborhood problems with crimes and gang activities. I think these programs help with the gang problem in Las Cruces. The only thing that I think Las Cruces should do is make gang prevention programs in schools that will help kids stay away from gangs.



Photo: Unknown

**“Gang activity that occurs in Las Cruces consists mainly of tagging, occasionally selling drugs, and burglaries.”**  
Matthew

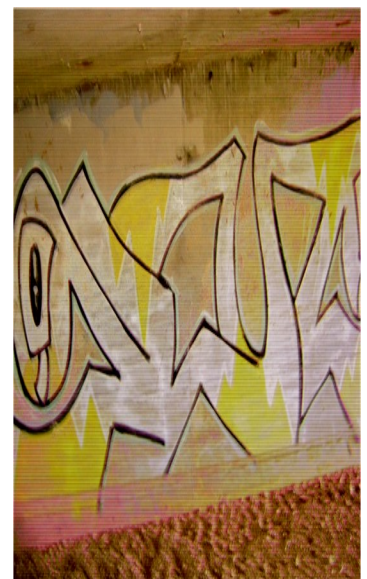


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## Las Cruces, New Mexico — Matt Ferralez



Photo: Unknown

**“I think that all street gangs and prison gangs are race related, but here in Las Cruces there are mixes. Since the area is so small, street gangs are so diverse that there is no set territory that belongs to them and they tend to jump around each gang depending where they live.”**  
**Matt**

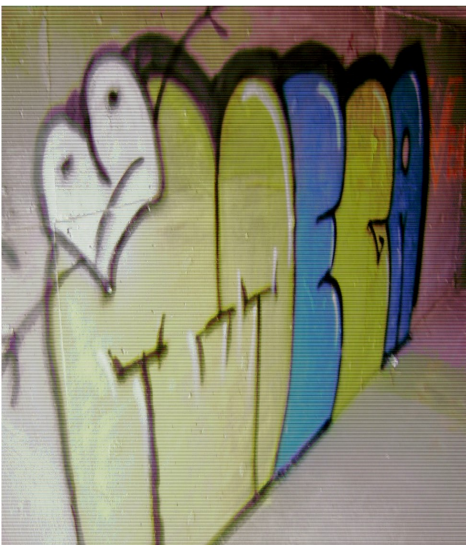


Photo: Unknown

Based on my field research in Las Cruces, NM, it is quite different from other areas of the U.S. My field research included two interviews. One was an interview of a former correctional officer and the other was an NMSU police officer. I have learned that gangs in Las Cruces are brought together because of the demographic area of Las Cruces, family ties, and broken down families. I think the main reason for gangs is broken down families and a sense of belonging for an individual. Broken down families can lead a child at a young age to enter a lifestyle that a parent is not aware of. The NMSU police officer in the city of Las Cruces said he thinks the main reason children join gangs and are affiliated with the gang membership is because of broken down families that begin with juvenile delinquency. Another thing that was brought to my attention is that in Las Cruces the gang presence mainly consists of street gangs and posers who have no background history with the gang that they are representing. For this reason, it makes me think that all these gang members want a sense of belonging in the area in which they live. The violence that occurs between these gangs is mainly related to tagging, graffiti, domestic violence, drug abuse, and burglary. There was not much murder because, like I said, some are mainly posers trying to make a name for themselves. In the Las Cruces area, gang membership ranges between the ages of 19-26. Some are in it for life because there is no reason for them to get out of the lifestyle that they have been living since they were young.

Within the prison setting of Las Cruces, people are brought all around the area because of certain convictions. In the prison, I can easily say that there is a gang problem and it is hard to control because of that sense of belonging and protection between the inmates. In the prison setting there is no belonging based on street gang affiliations. Each person that is in a gang before prison is brought into their own prison gang that is much bigger and more focused on criminal activity. Each prison gang is constructed based on race and ethnic group. I think that all street gangs and

prison gangs are race related, but here in Las Cruces there are mixes. Since the area is so small, street gangs are so diverse that there is no set territory that belongs to them and they tend to jump around each gang depending where they live.

Based on my group's research, I have to say that the level of gang activity is at a 4 or 5. The reason for this is because I do not think that the gang members that live in our community are what most people think of as a gang member. The members that we have here in Las Cruces are wannabes and are all talk and no show. These people are not in the gang to hurt, kill, or harass anyone, they just want to belong. I think that it is safe to say that if we lived in a larger city where gangs are prominent the level would be much higher. If you do not go looking for the gang you will not find them. This is the attitude that I have from living here in Las Cruces.

A solution that I could recommend here in our community for gangs would be that we have more family building. The reason for this is because such a high number of individuals who join a gang come from a broken home. If we could limit or reduce the frequency of broken homes, I think that it could put a large dent in the gang memberships. I have never thought of Las Cruces as having a high gang rate. I have lived here all my life and have never had a run in with a member. Is there a difference between current and previous threat levels here? I would have to say no, the level has not changed from my point of view in the last 15 years. On the other hand, the officer that I spoke to said yes, that things have changed dramatically in the last 15 years. Gangs have evolved and are more self-oriented instead of group oriented.

## Las Cruces, New Mexico — Louis Nevarez

Based on the Las Cruces research, there are gangs present in the Las Cruces area, but they are very few (Klein, 2004, 55). They are more involved in less serious crimes such as petty theft, burglary, auto theft, small drug, and weapon possession. There is some violence such as one on one gang fights, but not major brawls. So the threat of gang violence is very minimal compared to larger cities. There have been gang murders in Las Cruces, but not a large or even moderate number of them.

The gangs here are not very close and bonded to one another and are more independent than dependent on one another, which may cause a lot of disagreements. They are not very united or closely structured, which leads me to the question: why do they join the gang in the first place? The numbers of gang members are high, but many of them are

not fully active members, and are more gang affiliated than active gang members.

I believe that the threat level of the Las Cruces gangs, with 10 being the worst imaginable to 1 being the least serious crime, would be a 2-3. People that I have talked to do not see much crime or gang activity, mostly in schools and police encounters when the authorities are called for any issues: most gang issues are juvenile delinquency issues and substance abuse issues. I believe the issues with gang involvement in the Las Cruces area mostly have to do with not having many things to do in the community so people get involved in gangs out of boredom. A very small percentage of gang members are originally involved from family, not like other gangs like in L.A. or larger cities.

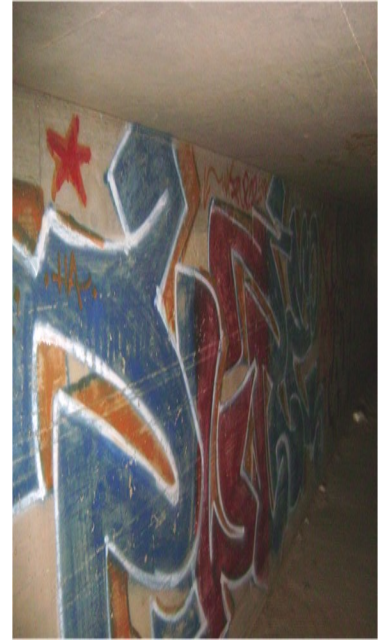


Photo: Unknown

## Las Cruces, New Mexico — Roy Garcia

The way to describe the gangs in Las Cruces is as young individuals causing trouble in friendly neighborhoods. Gangs in Las Cruces like to show off by claiming membership and representing their colors. This could be at the high schools in Las Cruces, the local parks, and neighborhoods where the majority of gang members hang out. I talked to a young kid while out taking pictures of graffiti at the parks and neighborhoods. He mentioned that everything has been quiet in the area where he lives with his girlfriend. Gang activity in the neighborhood was being monitored by a small organization called Weed and Seed. This organization helps keep gang members from causing trouble in local neighborhood.

We found that there are six gangs present in Las Cruces. The gangs here in Las Cruces have their own territory or hang out spots in different places in Las Cruces. There are some gang members from different gangs who hang out with each other without having any conflict because of family relations, friendships, or even boyfriend or girlfriend dating relationships. While going out to find tagging in the local parks and neighborhoods, I have noticed that young individuals who are new to the gang always cause trouble for their gang, this could be by stealing stuff or doing drive-by shooting in the local neighborhoods. There are times when the gang members who commit an of-

fense are arrested for their actions. The young individuals are placed in a juvenile detention center like John Paul Taylor or C.Y.F.D (Children, Youth, and Family development), which is a program that helps the youth that cause trouble at home or in local neighborhoods. In some court cases juveniles who are placed on parole or probation are gang members that have been caught committing a criminal act for their gang.

In looking at our research, we have found that the gang activity in Las Cruces dealing with criminal activity would, on a scale from 1 to 10, be a 6. Viewing the activities going on at the Las Cruces schools, the rating would be a 4 because the gangs are placed apart from each other within the Las Cruces schools. The staff at the schools have found that gangs are becoming an issue among others attending public schools. The principles at the three high schools Las Cruces, Oñate, and Mayfield have all experienced violence caused by a gang member in school. The gangs in Las Cruces cannot be compared to other gangs we have discussed in class lectures. I would say that the scale from 1 to 10 would register a higher number for those gangs we have talked about in class.

**“The numbers of gang members are high, but many of them are not fully active members, and are more gang affiliated than active gang members.”**

**Louis**



Photo: Unknown



Photo: Robert Durán

**“The involvement of local gangs in committing crime is on the lower end of the spectrum such as tagging, burglary, larceny, drug dealing, and drive by shootings. Relatively speaking the crime rate in Las Cruces is lower than most metropolitan cities.”**

**Felix**



Photo: Robert Durán

## Las Cruces, New Mexico — Felix Cordero

Based on my law enforcement experience, I believe the gangs in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County are rapidly growing which will inevitably result in increase violence and crime. The gangs that come from El Paso and California bring organizational skills with more experience on how to commit crimes. These new gangs are recruiting from the local gangs which increases the potential for violence and dangerous activity in the city. The local gangs have somewhat of an understanding of these larger gangs, but do not yet follow their methods. Most of the local gang bangers are wannabes and those with more age and experience prefer to associate with more established gangs. Once these wannabes get in trouble they will turn on anyone to get off with a lesser charge.

Three different agencies provided me with their perspective on gangs. The similarities are common including types of crimes committed to the role of the agencies in responding to these offenses. However, some agencies have more funding than others to deal with gangs and crime. The lesser funded agencies have to use additional community resources in attempt to solve the same problems. The local gang units in each agency work together to identify the gangs and their activities in the area. It is amazing to see how gangs in the area have changed in the past 30 years. The agencies involved are dedicated to tracking the gang members, activities, connections, and how crime impacts certain parts of the city. Neighborhood revitalization programs are being used to decrease the number of gang incidents. In speaking to these agencies and from personal observation, I feel that our system is still far behind the times in comparison to the resources available in big cities to help deal with gang crime.

The involvement of local gangs in committing crime is on the lower end of the

spectrum such as tagging, burglary, larceny, drug dealing, and drive by shootings. Relatively speaking the crime rate in Las Cruces is lower than most metropolitan cities. They are not as organized but with time and lack of resources there may be an up-roar in the crime rate. Gangs use their names to intimidate others in their schools and neighborhoods. Most of the members are young kids looking up to the older kids or young adults coming out of prison. Gang activity will probably never end, but programs operating in other cities that provide alternatives are partially successful. Funding for these city programs is essential.

Local gangs in the area don't possess a dangerous threat to the community at large. They range between a 5 to 6 on the danger threat scale and are more interested in committing crimes towards obtaining material goods and drug dealing on a smaller scale. The new gangs in the area score a 10 on the threat scale. These are the members with ties to the well organized metro city gangs who are not afraid of committing dangerous acts.

The information I obtained from conversations with different agencies had similar descriptions of threat that I provided earlier. They all said the local gangs are not a big threat at this time with the exception of small types of crimes. The officers I spoke to feel the same way that more funding is needed to combat the gang issue before it gets out of control.

This research project taught me how local agencies are using their resources to counteract gang activity. In my personal opinion, individuals interested in the safety of their community should get involved and work together with law enforcement agencies to develop new methods for improving programs and developing solutions.





Photo: Unknown



Photo: Joseph Fillerio

## Doña Ana, New Mexico – Research Team



Left to Right: Robert Vallejos, Emilia McGee, Tara Bullington, Haydee Franco, and Victor Flores.

### Doña Ana, New Mexico – Haydee Franco

Based on my research I learned that gangs in Doña Ana are not very big or dangerous. However, even though Doña Ana is a very small town, gangs are still present. For example, the NSDA, Eastsiders and Sureños seem to control this particular town. Gangs in Doña Ana could be described as non-threatening to the

community or to the town of Doña Ana. At this particular time it's known that the gang activity located in Doña Ana has decreased. From the data collected with my team, I would rate the gangs of Doña Ana to be a one based on a scale of 1-10, with one being non-threatening to the community of Doña Ana. I have lived in Las Cruces all my life I have known that gangs in Doña Ana have slowly decreased in their gang activity and in any threat to the community. About 3-4 years ago if I would have been asked how threatening the gangs in Doña Ana were I would have answered a 5. The media presented gang activity as frequent within this particular town. The gang activities that were present at the time included drive by shootings, attempted murder, stabbing, fights, robbery and a lot of graffiti. As time has passed the gang activity has decreased.

In 2010, gangs have not really been mentioned by the media or the community. Although there is gang activity still present it is not as threatening as before. While conducting research on gangs located in the community of Doña Ana I wanted to examine student perspectives as well as the community perspective.



Photo: Robert Vallejos

(continued on page 23)

## Haydee continued

In this particular project I focused on Oñate High School. Oñate grabbed my attention because within the city of Las Cruces it is assumed that it has the most gangs present out of all the high schools. I decided to survey a class at Oñate which consisted of 20 students from grades 9-12.

The information I gathered from the surveys was very interesting. I learned a lot of different information from the students' perspectives, such as the fact that gangs in Doña Ana are not territorial as other gangs covered in class. Also, since the town of Doña Ana is so small many of the gangs come and hang out in different areas such as Del Rey, Mesa Grande, Holman, Weisner and Moongate. All of the following areas are located by Oñate High School and by Highway 70. Some students explained that gangs in Doña Ana go to the different locations because it is so small and because if they had a party, police would not get there since it's far from the city. I learned that gangs have decreased their gang activity, the students mentioned many of the main gang members had either gone to prison, the army or started a family, causing the decrease in gang activity. Although gangs in DA are present at the school (Oñate) the only gang activity they are involved in is selling drugs and fighting with other rival gangs. According to the students at Oñate, on Fridays all of the gangs wear

their gang colors because they want to "represent" or claim territory at the school. The reason gangs wear their gang colors on Fridays at Oñate is because all of the cheerleaders, football players, and school clubs represent their group, thus the gangs feel like they also have to represent their gang.

Collaborating with my group, I found out that the gang activity has changed the community's perspective. The interviews conducted listed similar themes such as gang activity still being present but less threatening, gangs having many adolescents involved and not being too territorial. The people I talked to gave the impression that gangs were still present because there was still a lot of tagging around the community but it has changed because there hasn't been many drive-by shootings happening in the town of Doña Ana. Since gangs in Doña Ana are not as threatening, I would recommend the Sheriff's department patrol more often; because Las Cruces has been growing rapidly, it might affect Doña Ana in many ways. For example, more people will move to Doña Ana and may even form new gangs. I also believe that since Doña Ana is so small, more gangs will develop their gang activity within the town such as the drug dealers did in Hatch (Sheriff Franco, 2010). I do believe gangs could develop more in the future within the community of Doña Ana.

## Doña Ana, New Mexico – Victor Flores

During the course of my research in Doña Ana I quickly learned that it is not easy collecting data. It wasn't easy because people were afraid and would never get back to you. Overall, I feel our group obtained a lot of great information through an aggressive effort. Searching for information from morning to noon and some evenings was well worth the time and effort because it gives me a better understanding of not only the gangs in Doña Ana but also the community's perspective on gangs.

I would describe gangs in this particular area as non-violent youths who are just out there trying to make a reputation for themselves as being tough. I discovered that gangs in Doña Ana are not as dangerous as they are perceived to be. The graffiti in the community

is what makes others think that there is a gang problem; however, my research demonstrates that it's just teens who would rather write on walls and buildings instead of paper.

Based upon my group research in Doña Ana I would consider the threat of gangs in that area a low; a three on a scale of one to ten with ten being the most serious. I reached this conclusion based on the information from the community and through observations walking around the neighborhood. All the people I interviewed stated that gangs were definitely more violent and dangerous in the past. The threat level I assigned and the impressions of people I talked to were the same; gangs have calmed down.

(continued on page 24)



Photo: Haydee Franco

**“I learned that gangs have decreased their gang activity, the students mentioned many of the main gang members had either gone to prison, the army or started a family, causing the decrease in the gang activity.”**  
Haydee



Photo: Robert Vallejos



Photo: Robert Vallejos

**“Everyone does make mistakes in life; some will change in the future and become a great role model to the youth and community that they once wreaked havoc on when they were youths.”**

**Victor**



Photo: Emilia McGee

## Victor continued

Everyone does make mistakes in life; some will change in the future and become a great role model to the youth and community that they once wreaked havoc on when they were youths.

For solutions on gangs in Doña Ana I recommend more sport activity programs for the youth, to keep them busy and learn discipline. In addition, I also recommend having the youth participate in some community service by picking up all the trash and painting over the graffiti in the area, this will hopefully send a message to others that we care how our community looks.

It would have been great if we had more time to present our research because I was only able to discuss half of the research that

I found in Doña Ana. This is my first class in actually going out into the community and doing research and I enjoyed every minute of it, I wouldn't mind taking another class like this because I feel like there is more information out there in Doña Ana that I didn't get a chance to retrieve. I was eager and just wanted to do more research because it's so interesting and exciting. Overall, it was a great experience in being able to do independent hands on research instead on just sitting in class. The highlight in my research was being able to find and interview the co-founder/leader of the Doña Ana Gang (NSDA).

## Doña Ana, New Mexico – Robert Vallejos

I have learned about the presence of gangs that reside within the town of Doña Ana. The focus on the gangs within Doña Ana is limited and many people seem to forget about this town. Based on our research, Doña Ana gangs would be rated a 4 out of 10. According to interviews and our results from the Oñate and Mayfield high schools, gang members are just wannabes or associates. The activities are mainly minor drug offenses and assaults. According to the group, we felt that Mayfield High had more violence than Oñate High. People we interviewed perceived the threat posed by Doña Ana gangs as low. In fact, one lady residing in Doña Ana did not even know that there was gang activity within the community.

Gangs within Doña Ana that are still present include East Side Locos, West Side, Brown Pride, South Side Locos, CMF, Barrio Aztecas and a minor presence of

Zoe Pound. One of the first gangs of Doña Ana was called the 49ers. According to one of the Original Gangsters we interviewed, the gangs were more of a threat back in the day compared to the gangs running the show today. He mentions that the gangs are disorganized and members chill and mind their own business.

**“People we interviewed perceived the threat posed by Doña Ana gangs as low. In fact, one lady residing in Doña Ana did not even know that there was gang activity within the community.”**

**Robert**

## Doña Ana, New Mexico — Emilia McGee

On a scale of one to ten, I rate Doña Ana County a **2** in terms of its gang threat to their community. The citizens that my team and I spoke with stated that ten years ago gang movement was very bad in the neighborhood. For one of these residents the presence of gang activity drove them to another state; however, this couple has returned to Doña Ana once again and gang movement is not as visible as it was ten years ago. As we were leaving we thanked the husband and wife for speaking with us, and the gentleman thanked us as well. He said for us to continue in trying to minimize gang activity.

Unfortunately for our team, we did not get the cooperation we had hoped for from the Sheriff's department. I went to the Sheriff's department and explained to them that I was a student at New Mexico State University. I wanted to speak to anyone in the gang unit department to ask questions regarding gangs in Doña Ana. I informed them that I had left a detailed message for John Day as well and he had not returned my phone call. The lady at the front desk was very helpful and she made several phone calls. She said that someone would return my phone call. I was so excited for our team, because we were going to get the information that would help us with our research. I left my phone number and anticipated a phone call in return. To this day I have not received that returned phone call. The Sheriff's department let our team down and I felt that our research was not considered to be important enough for them to take the time to return our phone calls. We did not get any statistics regarding gang activity in Doña Ana. We were unable to say publicly if the gang activity has increased or decreased, but according to the community it has decreased dramatically.

Our team did the next best thing: we went out into the community. Some of us went to the high schools and gave the students a survey that they could answer anonymously. We distributed it to students who have contact with gang members on a daily basis. According to the surveys, some youths join gangs due to loneliness, some feel out of place, while others join for protection, power, partying, drugs, weapons, girls, and most join a gang for popularity or acceptance among their peers. In other words, they want to be "cool". Other team members went out to the community and took pictures of the graffiti or tagging that was visible on fences, traffic

signs, homes, or under the bridges off the freeway. Some of the graffiti had Doña Ana boys (northern Las Cruces), Southside Royal Knights, 505, and Sureños/Sur 13.

Society needs to provide entertainment centers to keep our youths active and away from crime and misdemeanor. Many of these families are from poor homes and can barely make ends meet; therefore, they cannot afford to send their children to participate in activities that other families enjoy.

They cannot afford to send their children to play football, baseball, basketball, tennis, golf, dance and the list goes on and on. The government should provide funding for the future of America. This requires someone to care for the youth that are lonely, scared, unloved, unwanted or simply just bored. Funding for all youth to have a choice to go play and stay away from trouble. People might inquire where this money will come from, but what we should be asking is, why Congress and other political parties are traveling in luxury, going from place to place on the tax payer's money. No one does anything about this. It is time for the American people to use their voice and stand up for the rights we all pay for. The youths are the future of America and they have been neglected for too long.



Photo: Robert Durán

**“Many of these families are from poor homes and can barely make ends meet; therefore, they cannot afford to send their children to participate in activities that other families enjoy.”**  
**Emilia**



Photo: Victor Flores

## Special Thanks

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