



Southern New Mexico/ Texas Gang Update 2012

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Overview of Project—Robert J. Durán, Ph.D.

During the Spring semester of 2012, I taught my final applied gang research class at New Mexico State University. This was the third participatory action research course for undergraduate students I taught. The students selected the communities of Anthony, Chaparral and Sunland Park (near Las Cruces) in New Mexico, and El Paso and Horizon City in Texas. Similar to previous years, the students evaluated the data obtained and ranked the level of seriousness of gangs. These conclusions were reached after reviewing the national gang literature. Please be aware that everything included is not related to or involved with gangs but is more of a reflection of the art and style of a particular geographic region. The conclusions reached by my students were definitely influenced by whom they spoke to and what they were observing. Many of the students were from these same communities but most did not have any prior association with gangs. Some of the comments provided read more as opinion than based upon actual data whereas other points were very insightful and established through teamwork. Each report includes the students name as do the pictures provided. My graduate student editors worked closely with



every sentence to bring greater clarity to these responses. Although it has been eight years since the data for this gang update was acquired, I hope it can serve as a model for highlighting the various perspectives regarding gangs in Southern New Mexico and Western Texas.

Anthony, New Mexico — Research Team



Top Row, Left to Right: Robert Baylon, Danielle Dove, and Cesar Aguirre.
Bottom Row, Left to Right: Daniella Minjarez, Alex Guillen, Ashley Medina, and Alexandria

Anthony, New Mexico — Danielle Dove

I learned a lot about gangs in Anthony, New Mexico. Before starting this project, I thought that there was a serious gang problem in Anthony because of all the shootings and violence that is shown on the news. I learned that gangs are not as bad as the media would like us to believe. Gangs and gang members only interact with each other and tend to leave non-members alone. Much of the gang activity in Anthony is due to a lack of things (i.e., activities) for kids and teenagers to do. For example, there are no places of recreation or outside entertainment for kids, so the youth turn to gangs out of boredom. Anthony is a really poor community. The median household income in the area is \$25,129, which is extremely difficult to live on these days if there are numerous people living in the home. Anthony has low educational attainment: about 53.9% of the population did not finish high school; only 20.2% finished high school; 14.8% have *some* college education; 4.42% have an associate degree; 5.0% have a bachelor's degree; and 1.67% have a graduate degree. The local school system reports to have a zero-tolerance policy for gangs. This may be because they do not want to deal with them, so they just get rid of students instead of trying to help them.

As previously mentioned, I would describe the gang issue in Anthony as kids who are trying to find something to do. The gang's main criminal activities are graffiti, property offenses, and drug related offenses. Many of the kids who join these gangs are reported to be lonely. They look to the gang to fill a void in their life whether it be a lack of family, friends, loyalty, or protection. Many of these kids have previously experienced family problems at home and the gang is often seen an escape.

I would rate the gangs in Anthony a level **5** out of 10 in terms of being a serious threat. The gangs are present, but they do not pose a real threat to the community; they pose more of a threat to each other. Gangs do not seem interested in causing huge problems. The members flaunt their colors...(continued on page 3)

Dove — Continued

...and symbols but do not really enforce it on one another such as in some big cities. The gangs are not set on killing each other or members of the community. They are more interested in “tagging up their turf”, consuming and selling drugs, and committing property offenses against rival gang members.

Perceptions of gang activity seemed to vary based on who you speak to. Schools in the district say there is no gang problem. This was odd because school representatives did not want to cooperate with our research. If there really was no problem with gangs, it would be useful if the school would broadcast that information. If you speak with members of the community, about half say that a gang problem exists, and the other half would say there is no such problem. This can be based on where they live and their occupational status. Law enforcement officials say that Anthony has an average gang problem - the gangs are there, but they do not pose a major threat to the community. The media, however, reports that Anthony is one of the biggest gang cities and is a major issue when compared to El Paso. Nonetheless, the media needs to magnify events, and nothing sells better than murder. Therefore, the media covers mostly negative (in this case, gangs) events and not the positive.

If Anthony were to get recreational facilities and create events for kids to participate in after school and on weekends, gang participation would decline. If kids were not so bored then they would not be so inclined to join gangs and find other things to do. There would be supervised activities for kids to participate in instead of their involvement in criminal activity. The schools, however, need to contribute to fight against gangs and help their students instead of abandoning them at their first troubled incident. Many kids join gangs because they want friends and a family, so if they make these connections through a different outlet it could lower the problem with gangs.

Anthony, New Mexico — Ashley Medina

Based on the data my team and I collected, I would rate the severity of gangs in Anthony, NM a **6** on a scale from one to ten. The reason being is that community members living in Anthony do recognize that there are gangs in the area, but they do not feel threatened or endangered by them. The gangs in the Anthony area have their own groups, territory, and rivals amongst each other but do not act out towards the larger community. I feel that there is more of a graffiti issue in Anthony than an actual gang problem.

In our assigned textbook, we read about gang homicide and drug dealing – all the problems that occur in major cities like Chicago. Anthony is not a big city to have some of these major problems. You would assume that living next to the U.S.-Mexico border it would be, but drugs are a very small problem from what research my group gathered. When news networks report, they mention what side of town where something is occurring. In Anthony, this is not the case. The news will mention one of Anthony’s “sections” but will make sure to say in Anthony or near Anthony. Anthony is broken down into different sections, consisting of Anthony (Texas), Chamberino, Berino, La Union, Vado, and so on. Some believe that Chaparral is part of Anthony as well, but they are all in separate sections. This confusion results in people thinking Anthony is a bad town based on media reports from these other, outside but nearby areas.

Area characteristics are strong in Anthony, because it is a small town, which makes it difficult for everyone to not know each other. This makes it harder for kids to avoid joining a gang because they might see friends they have grown up with join a gang, or friends who live in the same neighborhood become involved. Usually kids who join gangs live in impoverished neighborhoods and Anthony is considered a low-income town. Another reason for joining gangs is family characteristics, meaning that children have poor relationships with their parents.

Growing up in Anthony, I feel that these family characteristics “hit the nail on the head”. The reason I say this is because I have a younger brother who grew up similar to how I did - knowing many people around our town. However, he associates with gang members from many different gangs. Many of these kids grew up in my home. They would sleep over some nights and the next morning get rides home from my mother and me. Many played sports with my brother before they turned to gangs. These kids all respect my home, my family, and me. Most of them come from single parent households... (Continued on page 4)

Medina—Continued

...and don't get the attention they want or need. In my home they are cared for, are asked how their day was, and my parents joke with them by telling them to pick their pants up or to cover their tattoos. All of them laugh and joke with my family and give us respect. They are open to the attention they get from my family and I feel that they enjoy it. You can notice a bit of discomfort when they are hugged by someone or when getting a firm handshake from my father – you can see it in their eyes. They all smile and relax around us. I strongly believe that kids become what they see and receive at home.

When I first decided to do my research on the city of Anthony, I assumed that because I am from the area I would know enough about it, but I was wrong. I believed the gang level here was high, but after going out and actually driving around town I found that I was mistaken. You do not see gang activity happening or see gangs overtaking neighborhoods. If you were not from this area and drove into town you would not think there was a gang problem. Again, I would rate Anthony a 6 out of 10 because although gangs are present, but they do not affect the town, and no one is threatened. There are a few gangs in Anthony and there is a lot of graffiti in the area. Overall, the gang issue is known but not seen.

Anthony, New Mexico — Alexandria Padilla

Through my own research, I have learned that the perception and reality of gangs are two different things. At least in the case of my groups research location. Yes, there were gangs, but it was not anything like the media portrayed. Due to media reports, we create this idea that gangs and gang-related violence are a major issue. But when we researched gangs in Anthony, we found that the gangs there are not that big of a problem. From my own experience, I learned that the place where gangs are the biggest issue is in public schools. The reason behind this is because delinquency starts from a young age. For example, when kids “ditch” school and flunk out, they end up in getting in bigger trouble. This leads them to tagging, stealing, and involvement in other gang activities. If there were more social activities that kids and youth could do to occupy their time they may not turn to gangs.

Based on our group research, I would rate the threat level of gangs in Anthony a level 4 on a scale from one to ten. As mentioned, gangs are present, but they are not as serious as the media portrays. My assumption going into the project was that the threat level was probably an eight. This is because my images and ideas surrounding gangs came from the media, news networks, movies, television, and music. I believed that there was so much violence involved wherever gangs are present. However, I did not realize that it can also be a matter of how big the gang is and where they are located. After completing the research, I realized it wasn't as serious as I has assumed. The media always presents the biggest, most captivating stories for their audience, but those are not always representative of the whole situation. Based on my own observations, I would recommend there be more activities outside of school to occupy kids – a place where they can hang out with friends and be entertained so they don't get bored. Since Anthony is a small town, there isn't much for anyone to do, especially for the kids. The only options they are related to drugs and gangs. Also, I would say that if kids became more involved in school, they would have another alternative, but because of how the school system is structured they don't have to work very hard at school – most will do just enough to pass. The public-school system seems to only be interested in passing students to the next grade. As a result of this, students find other activities to occupy their time, such as joining gangs. If schools required more work, focus on assignments, and didn't just pass people along then children would be forced to dedicate more time to their studies – their focus will be on education and not gangs, which could lower gang membership in Anthony.

Anthony, New Mexico — Alex Guillen

My description of gangs in Anthony, New Mexico is that they are small in number and most people in the gangs are teenagers. All of the “jump ins” or fights between rival gang members happen in the ball-park near Gadsden Middle School, because most of the members are either in the area or get dropped off near there by the school transit location. Gadsden High School has a great intervention program that deals with gangs in which they will escort gang members to their classes. In the local schools, all of the gangs have areas where they hang out. If they are not in their usual locations, it possibly means they are getting ready to fight. The gangs are very territorial and will fight for their physical area in the school and in the neighborhood they claim as their own. When gang members are suspended from school, they take their violence to the streets. The gangs love to talk bad about their rivals and make fun of them. Overall, there is a lot of drama involved in the gang. When there is a new teenager that comes from out of town to live in Anthony, the gangs in the area approach him or her to try and recruit them into the gang. It’s interesting that when a gang member is mandated to do community service with a rival gang member, they will tolerate each other while doing so, but shortly after they go back to being enemies.

The community tries to get involved to fix the gang problem, but they don’t know how to control it. The people of Anthony have held community meetings in which they discuss the gang problem. Most of the time, an unfortunate circumstance such as a gang related shooting or a murder forces the community meet up and discuss the matter to try and put an end to it. For example, there was a task force put together by the New Mexico State Police that would come to Anthony twice a week and document all the gang members in the area. However, the task force was dismantled due to a lack of funding. According to an inside source, the gang task force was working in the area to have teenagers get away from the gang life. They were helping control the gang population and the involvement of gang related crimes. Also, social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have become a method for gang members to communicate with one another. They will post fights with rivals, put out a “hit” on rivals, detail missions to other gang members, and communicate any current happenings with the gang. There is currently a task force that oversees social networking sites that works directly with federal government. An example of this is how YouTube videos of gang fights are considered hate crimes, and the people involved can be charged.

One of the biggest problems in Anthony is the graffiti. The “tagging” crews in the area are part of the problem, but most of it is from gang members in the area. One of the areas that has constantly been vandalized by graffiti is the building that once was the boxing gym. Gang members make a hit public on rival gang members by putting up that person’s gang nickname with the numbers “187” next to it. These numbers signal a death threat to the rival gang member. The Doña Ana Sheriff’s Department has had programs and community service groups that paint over these tagging in the area, but it usually gets marked up again in the following days after cleanup.

The area that sees the most action is called “the box” located on Madison Street. This is where most of the Teners and Sureños hang out and live. This is the area that is most known for drug sales, fight for their “barrios” and other illegal activities. The Teners (North Side) and Sureños (Vals) are the biggest gangs in Anthony. There is also the West Siders, Dukes, Aztecs, Aryan Brotherhood and Folks Nation. These gangs, though, are minimal in numbers. There is also an all-female gang that go by the name of South Side Queens.

Based on all the research and data collected, I believe that the gangs in the Anthony should be rated a **5** on a scale of one to ten, because it is slowly getting to a point where something bigger could develop if nothing is done about the gang problem. The Doña Ana Sheriff’s Department, Anthony Police department, and the local schools can only do so much. In order to help control the gang population, it would help to build more recreation centers in the city. Bringing back the Gang Task force that was run by the New Mexico State Police would also help profile the gangs and gang members. In all of this, we must remember that most of the gang members are just teenagers.

Anthony, New Mexico — Robert Baylon

I grew up near Anthony, New Mexico. I attended Gadsden Middle School, Gadsden High School, and later Desert Pride Academy. Therefore, the gangs in Anthony are not new to me. Throughout the years, I saw the gang lifestyle first-hand. Whether it was physically seeing gang members, or me participating in gang activities, the gang was always there. I cannot say I was surprised to find gangs in town or doing what they do, but at the same time I did learn a fair amount of how the gangs operate. Some information I learned was that kids in elementary are learning early about the gang lifestyle. The younger kids are said to already “throw” gang signs. When I was younger, I barely knew what a gang was much less know how to “throw up” a gang sign. In our course, we learned the ways in which an individual joins a gang. Most individuals join a gang for love, acceptance, and gaining a sense of belonging to a family structure. The research that was performed coincides with what we learned in the classroom.

Additionally, I learned that women are becoming involved in the gangs more than before. From what I recall, “gang girls” participated but they did not carry-out much of the violence or get into the gang lifestyle. The women were into the music and the aesthetic of the gang. Women were almost pushed to the side when the males would congregate amongst themselves. Most of the females were attracted to the “bad boy” image, so they hung around the gang often. I also learned from my group project members that females are climbing in status when in the gang hierarchy. Some women earn high status roles or possibly even go on to lead the gang. A recent incident about a month and a half ago occurred where a girl near the age of 16 to 17 was shot by a rival gang member in Anthony. The shooter was a 20-year-old male from a rival gang – this was unheard of in my day. I witnessed female gang members fight among themselves, but never heard about a female gang member getting shot.

One shocking find that our group came across was that 30 something people from the Anthony community stated that they believed there was not a gang problem, or an issue with violence in Anthony. This could either be because they have normalized this behavior, or they simply just don’t see it. Some time ago, a body was burned in the trunk of a car in an Anthony rest area next to the freeway. It was a horrible act of violence. To commit homicide is terrible, but to burn someone is the worst.

I would say that the gangs in Anthony are kids or young adults simply committing delinquent crimes because they do not have anything else to do. The community of Anthony does not offer any recreational activities so that children can keep themselves occupied. In my opinion, the gangs in Anthony differ from the gangs that we have read about in our book. There are some similarities such as gang affiliation to a specific neighborhood. Many children come from a working-class family, so there may be a lack of attention in the home. If there is no authority in the home, children will more than likely turn to gangs for excitement or even love. Granted, there are adults who are in gangs as well, but they seem to age out of the lifestyle, find steady employment, and/or start a family of their own. When this occurs, gang members distance themselves from the gang as other priorities begin to take over. I do not see a threat at the moment from the gang in Anthony, but I do see potential for gang violence to escalate.

I would rate gangs in Anthony a **5** on a scale of 1 to 10. This rating is due to the level of homicides not being at a level where they are occurring all the time, but it is serious enough that the potential could rise in the future. Anthony is very close to the US-Mexico border, and the violence in Mexico is certainly dangerous. That threat of violence could spill over to the America side of the border and cause further damage. Anthony is also located next to a major highway, so drugs can be easily transported in and out of the area. Being so close to a major highway can also mean a quick getaway for someone that has committed a crime. I had anticipated the threat to be a little higher than what I found it was. The major difference was that I didn’t expect younger gang members to take on gang-like manners at such early ages. If that continues, there is no telling how they will grow up. The assistant principal at Gadsden High did not want to cooperate with my interviews. This makes me believe that gangs are in fact a big problem at the school. A counselor at Southern New Mexico Human Development provided useful information about individuals that are tied into the gang lifestyle. Her point of view is there is a problem that needs to be solved. (Continued on page 7)

Baylon — Continued

...My solution to the gang problem in this area would be to give more attention to the youth. I believe that the way a person develops starts in the home. This is where the foundation of an individual's personal identity begins to form. The way a person is raised will determine their outcome in the future. I believe that the children need more attention, care, and affection in the home. They need positive feedback on any questions they might have. Ignoring them makes them resort to other outlets where they will not be ignored. However, a solid home foundation may not always be available due to many families being single parent homes, children living with grandparents, or being placed in foster care. Personally, I believe that no matter where the child is an adult must remain close to motivate the child to strive for a productive and healthy life. Another solution would be to offer more recreational activities in the community. Kids get bored easily and having something that is both fun and positive for kids would be a good alternative. Kids need to stay away from gangs, period. However, they should also know what a gang is in order to stay away, but the need to go looking to join one should not occur.



Photos on left by Cesar Aguirre; Photos on right by Ashley Medina

Chaparral, New Mexico — Research Team



Left to Right: Gabriel Ramos, Maria T. Garcia, and Crystal Perez

Chaparral, New Mexico — Gabriel Ramos

Gangs in Chaparral, New Mexico are in many ways similar to gangs from anywhere else. On my first visit to Chaparral, I immediately noticed the economic condition of the town – it was a poverty-stricken area where there are very few middle-class homes. Further, while driving through the town I noticed a lot of graffiti. Almost any place you looked there was “tagging.” However, what really caught my attention was where the graffiti was located and also how gangs were doing it. Though there was tagging everywhere, it was very difficult to be able to distinguish what “part of town” you were in from the graffiti. This let me know that there were indeed gangs in Chaparral, but the organization and threat level of these gangs was not very serious. As our team conducted interviews and field research, we concluded that there was not much of a gang problem. This is not only based on our research, but on interviews with law enforcement and school administration, as well as a community-wide perspective.

Before the start of our research, we would best describe the gangs in the area to be the typical middle and high school “cliques” that are looking for attention. Our interview with faculty at the high school helped us to better understand the seriousness of the gang problem in Chaparral. The gangs here are mainly comprised of kids who hang out together and live in a certain part of the town. They are involved in criminal activities such as theft, tagging, vandalism, and drug use. Based on our information collected and the knowledge that was obtained during this research, I would rate the seriousness of the gangs in Chaparral a 4 on a scale of 1 to 10. A level 4 is adequate because the gangs here in Chaparral are not much of a threat to the community – they mainly stick to themselves, and more importantly, they are just kids looking for acceptance and something to do with their time. Most of these kids come from single... (Continued on page 9)

Ramos—Continued

...parent homes, and those that have both parents are often raising themselves because the parents are working outside the home. The kids then turn to their friends and the streets to raise them. Consequently, in a small town where there is not much to do, these kids get caught up in the wrong paths and end up in trouble. I believe that those who are true gangbangers will leave Chaparral and go to bigger cities, such as El Paso, Las Cruces and even the Anthony area. This is due to them wanting bigger and better things and basically to feel more important. I don't believe that there was a difference in the perceived level of gang threat. Being that one of our group members was from Chaparral, she was able to fill us in before we started the project, which helped to get all of us on the same page. It also allowed us to better connect and relate to the people we interviewed about gang activity.

Looking back at the gang problem in Chaparral, I think it will be very hard to develop a solution. Nonetheless, a possible solution for this problem must come from the home. Since most parents are struggling to put food on the table, they have limited time to raise their kids. If the town had a better economy with quality jobs for these people, that will allow them to make more money and work less, spend time with their kids, and have more opportunities to raise them. Local schools are doing what they can with the resources they have, but they cannot help all these kids. Also, the city could create more social activities in the town such as with the Boys & Girls Club programs, sports leagues, parks, and even a community pool. In general, these kids need an alternative to gang life and troubled outcomes.

Chaparral, New Mexico — Maria T. Garcia

While doing field research in Chaparral, NM, I realized that there is a high level of poverty. Most of the houses are trailer style homes, others are abandoned or vandalized, and many areas of the city are tagged by different gangs or "crews". Some of most predominant gang signs I noticed were: NSL, WSL and ESL. As an outsider, I had no idea what these signs meant. Crystal, another student in our group, is a Chaparral native. She mentioned that these signs stood for "North Side [Lokos?]" "West Side *Lokos*" and East Side *Lokos*". Later, I obtained a phone and e-mail interview with Deputy Dina Juarez from the Doña Ana Sheriff's Department – Chaparral Station. She confirmed Crystal's definition of these gang signs and added that Chaparral is divided within two counties. Therefore, the West Side *Locals* (as she called them) claim the Doña Ana county side as their territory and the East Side *Locals* claim the Otero county side. Deputy Juarez added that there are also a few Hell's Angels biker gang members in Chaparral, and some from the Aztecas biker gang. She stated that the Aztecas come from Texas, and that these two groups are mostly involved with drug trafficking.

I also learned that the racial/ethnic demographic of gangs in Chaparral is mainly young, Hispanic males, with very little female involvement. Females that are involved are usually the gang members' girlfriends, who they call "rucas". Deputy Juarez stated that the main reasons why the youth in Chaparral join gangs is because they lack parental supervision, begin using drugs, and are often victims of bullying. She also added that there is no danger in non-gang members wearing certain colors in the certain neighborhood unless you belong to a gang and are deliberately flashing the colors. Deputy Juarez stated that the portion of serious crimes attributed to gangs is mostly graffiti. When asked what the authorities do to prevent gang activity, she responded that "the Sheriff's department has certified Deputies that attend the elementary and middle schools to teach the D.A.R.E. and G.R.E.A.T. programs. The Sheriff's department puts on a presentation together with M.A.D.D through the DWI programs to local high schools called *Every 15 Minutes*."

Crystal was able to obtain an interview from the wife of a "West Side Lokos" member, who confirmed many of the things I learned from the law enforcement perspective, and also added some additional facts that we did not know. For example, she stated that her husband, "Roach", joined when he was 14 because he wanted to fit in with his peers. His wife also mentioned that he was in...(Continued on page 10)

Garcia — Continued

...charge of distributing narcotics, which makes me wonder if law enforcement knows that this gang is involved in drug trafficking – Deputy Juarez did not mention this, or perhaps she just did not want to put that information out there. Finally, Roach’s wife added that the colors for WSL are black and white, and use the numbers 23, 19, and 11, which represent the letters W, S, and L in the alphabet.



Photos by Maria Garcia and Crystal Perez

Las Cruces, New Mexico — Research Team



Top Row, Left to Right: Randy Baca and Ubaldo Hernandez
Bottom Row, Left to Right: Elijah, Langston, Stevie Hendrix, Carlos Jurado, and Garrett Patton

Las Cruces, New Mexico — Stevie Hendrix

This semester I was assigned to a group to conduct research on gangs in Las Cruces, New Mexico. As a Las Cruces resident, I thought this would be a good way to gather insight on the city's gang problem that I may have not been aware of. Based on our research, I concluded that gangs and gang activity are not a serious problem in Las Cruces. I had assumed that the gang problem would be much worse. I was anticipating to find a more threatening issue with gangs. It was during the time I was conducting field research that I learned Las Cruces does not have a major gang problem. Surely, gangs are present, but I would not consider them a problem. I would describe gangs in this area as very subtle, as they are not seen very often and are not well known. Occasionally, they make their presence known by doing graffiti or some form of violence. An important finding is that these acts of violence very rarely have any impact on the average person living in the community. This was stated by some well-known gang members who were interviewed and wish to remain anonymous. They also stated that they are not trying to cause a problem in the community; they just want to continue doing what they are doing, and if they have an issue with anyone it is usually some rival gang member or ex-gang member. They mentioned that law enforcement tends to see them as a bigger threat than what they actually are, and they do not believe community members view them as a big threat. These opinions held by law enforcement that posits gangs to be a bigger threat than they are was proven to be true from the research we conducted.

We learned that law enforcement is very concerned about gang activity... (Continued on page 12)

Hendrix — Continued

... in Las Cruces, even though there is very little gang activity. I believe this level of concern may stem from popular media depictions of gangs in the city. When we researched how gangs are covered in the media, our team did not find a large number of articles on gangs or gang activity, but the ones published were meant to sound very serious. I think this demonstrates how the media is one of the biggest informants of gangs and the perceived impact they are having on Las Cruces. From speaking to a number of community residents, I learned that they do not see gangs as a threat, but more of a nuisance – people are not afraid of gangs, but they know they exist. I also talked with a public-school teacher who works in the Las Cruces area who provided her educational perspective on the issue of gangs in schools. She stated that she does not think there is a gang problem in schools, rather there is a bullying problem. She believes that this may be what causes children to form gang-like groups to bully other children. She believes that more needs to be done about bullying in school and lessen the focus on gangs. She mentioned that parents need to be more involved in their children’s lives, as this could help combat gang problem early on instead of when the child was much older. Based on our research, I would rate the seriousness of the Las Cruces gang issue to be a 3 on a scale of 1 to 10. This is based on the personal interviews with several individuals. I really do not think there is a major gang problem or threat in Las Cruces. As previously stated, gangs are present, but they are not feared in Las Cruces. This rating is also due to my team and I finding very little evidence to support a higher threat rating. I believe that what is being done to prevent or stop gangs is working. One suggestion I do have is to require more parental involvement in schools to help parents understand their children. I also think this would also demonstrate to the children that the parents value education, which may show that education is important.

Las Cruces, New Mexico — Carlos Jurado

This assignment was very interesting to research and examine, to find just how severe the gang problem is in Las Cruces, New Mexico. At first, I found it a bit difficult because you simply do not know where to start. Nonetheless, once we began our research, information began coming in from various sources. Before conducting my research, I was unaware of the amount of resources the city expends to try and control the gangs. The first goal for our group was to simply drive around the city and observe our surroundings. To our surprise, we found a lot of covered up graffiti, but as Professor Duran mentioned in class, no information can be information within itself. Everywhere we turned, we saw large stains of paint on city walls. Our next goal was to identify who this graffiti could be attributed. We found that a program called “Keep Las Cruces Beautiful” was responsible for covering up a lot of the graffiti in town. It was interesting to find that there were many programs of this kind doing good for the community. Many of the residents of Las Cruces are not aware these programs exist or the amount of work they do.

Once we had a better idea of what was happening in Las Cruces, we divided our research agenda so that we could collect information from different fronts. Our group split up to look at different areas such as the media, community, policing, and schools, in order to get insight from these perspectives. I was assigned to investigate policing. My hope was to find someone to interview so that I may ask questions such as “what is the department doing to combat the gang problem in Las Cruces?” and “as a police officer, do you ever feel threatened by their presence?”

As I prepared for the interview, I was expecting the worst possible outcome. I anticipated that the officer would talk about the severity of the gang problem, especially after reading articles and watching the local news networks. The media has a big influence on the community’s response, but sometimes it can deliver biased information. When I finally got the chance to speak with a local police officer from the Las Cruces Police Department, I found many inconsistencies from his report to what the media says. The officer concurred that there is gang activity in the region but assured me that the... (Continued on page 13)

Jurado — Continued

...department has it under control. He mentioned that the gang activity that he has witnessed is mostly coming from young school kids who are looking to commit petty crimes such as graffiti, theft, and small drug offenses.

I decided to look at policing in Las Cruces because I would like to work in law enforcement some time after I graduate. I believe that community policing is critical when it comes to repairing the relationship between gangs and police in the city. You would be surprised to find just how important having a police officer present can be. The discretion of a police officer can be either a help or a hindrance for troubled youth, depending on how the officer handles the situation. My goal as an aspiring officer is to be more understanding and responsive to young people rather than being a simple authority figure who looks to correct. An example of this is how the car club here I belong to hang out Friday nights. At our car meets, we park our cars and talk to each other – we are never looking for trouble. In some instances, the police have come and told us to go home. I have had police officers politely tell us to just go home. On the other hand, I have also had an officer be very rude and insult us for no particular reason. The incident with this officer made me lose respect for certain police officers, because he didn't approach us or the situation correctly. When I enter the field, I would like to be aware of how to properly address people in those situations, because police officers can make a big impact on a person's life.

Overall, this research helped me understand the kind of situation Las Cruces is dealing with in ways I would have not known otherwise. Driving through the city and observing different parts of town, watching media coverage, and learning what the police and community are doing to deal with this issue all added to our understanding of gangs in Las Cruces. In the earlier stages of the research, I was looking for gang activity by seeing the amount of serious offences and criminal involvement there was, but I found very little of that.

Las Cruces, New Mexico — Garrett Patton

I would describe gangs in Las Cruces, New Mexico, as somewhat of a growing problem. They are definitely present in the community and surrounding areas and seem to be expanding. Being so close to the international border and having a population that is largely Hispanic, gangs here become easily influenced and involved with the drug trade in Mexico. For the most part, people assume that if we are not involved in gang activity, then we would not fall victim to their violence. I came to Las Cruces from Ruidoso and carried these assumptions with me. After living here for two years, I experienced a situation at a party where six people were stabbed, and many others were assaulted. The officers on scene informed me that the man that had been apprehended was participating in a gang initiation. The group of alleged gang members were seen talking about the incident shortly after at a nearby convenience store. The gang members were supposedly required to stab someone in order to enter the gang. At the party, violence broke loose and there was chaos. Everyone was either fighting or running away. People were assaulted with bats, weightlifting equipment, planters, or anything solid within reach. The people who tried to help were assaulted by multiple assailants. Bottles were also being thrown at car windows. As you can imagine, it was a very violent situation. There was a number of individuals in critical condition that needed to be airlifted from the scene to a hospital in El Paso. Before the incident, I was not aware or under the impression that gangs were ever a problem in Las Cruces. To my surprise, the police on the scene told me that things like this had been happening every weekend.

After taking this course and acquiring an educational viewpoint on the subject, many things come to mind about the aforementioned incident that I did not take notice at the time. Many of the victims were fraternity members. I still cannot decide if I would place fraternity members under my personal definition of a gang. However, based on my newly acquired knowledge of all the different definitions of gangs, they could certainly fit the description of a gang. The crimes committed consisted of one individual being stabbed in the face multiple times. I was confused at the court's ruling, as only... (Continued on page 14)

Patton—Continued

...one suspect was charged with a crime less than attempted murder. How can law enforcement officers argue that this kind of thing happens every weekend, but not have any offenders apprehended to show for it? Do these incidents in fact happen every weekend? Though the research process, I learned to understand the difference between the different agendas that the media, law enforcement, and the community have. I then realized that the incident I witnessed had made me a little biased. Based on what I learned in class and the research we conducted, I noticed that older gangs and gang members have respect for the individuals and personal property. I find this to be the case in Las Cruces as well. Law enforcement, as well as the community and the local school system, seem to be doing a good job of combating the problem. Programs in Las Cruces are expanding and have a proactive approach, as well as a focus on rehabilitation. The G.R.E.A.T program, along with Operation No Gangs, and Las Cruces Public School's Crossroads program are all doing a great job.

From the information gathered during the research process, gangs in Las Cruces appear to be involved with drug activity due to their ties with larger gangs in surrounding areas, including those across the border in Mexico. Most members are Hispanic, which resemble the demographics of the surrounding areas. The violence and proportion of gangs is not as severe as some neighborhoods in Los Angeles or Chicago. I would rate the gangs here in Las Cruces as a 6 on a scale from 1 to 10. There are violent incidents and criminal activity, such as graffiti, fights, violent assaults, and drug offenses. Members from much larger nationwide gangs have also been apprehended here. Las Cruces is in somewhat of a smuggler highway, as it intersects with the I-10 and I-25. This results in gang traffic and their presence in our community, which should not be overlooked.

Las Cruces, New Mexico — Randy Baca

After a few months of research on gangs, we gathered a lot of useful information. Yet, there is still a tremendous amount that is unknown. To fully understand the gang threat level in Las Cruces, we must first be able to connect all the pieces, then take a step back to view the entire picture. For now, we know that Las Cruces is a relatively small, but is a growing city with a population of around 100,000. After researching the area exclusively for approximately 3 months, the gang threat is surprisingly low. I have concluded that the threat level of gangs here is a 4, from 1 being the lowest threat and 10 being the highest. This find is surprising, because after similar research was conducted in 2008, the consensus was that Las Cruces had a gang threat level of about a six or seven.

We based our research agenda to address the question of what a gang really is. Collectively, our research team hit the streets with particular areas of interest that we thought were important when trying to illustrate the city's view on gangs. We reviewed police content, media coverage, public school policies, and prevention programs to better understand this arbitrary concept of what constitutes a gang in Las Cruces, NM. Once we gathered our information, we found that gangs, although present, are not considered a threat.

According to the interviews with a Las Cruces Police Officer and a Doña Ana County correctional officer, gangs continue to grow along with the city, but do not pose a serious threat to the public. Most of the crime attributed to gangs is either property crime or drug offenses, which is consistent with what the research found in 2008. Unfortunately, the most dominant gang "Sur Trece" (Sur XIII) is believed to be linked with the transport and sale of drugs for the Mexican cartel. However, sources did not provide any concrete evidence to support this claim. The Las Cruces Police Officer was also open to give us his personal opinion and stated that gangs are more prevalent in the public schools because they serve as a space for juveniles to gather and recruit. His response was intriguing, so our research team drove to the public schools to see if there is any evidence of young gang members trying to... (Continued on page 15)

Baca—Continued

...congregate or recruit. We interviewed schoolteachers and principals from Lynn Middle School, Sierra Middle School, Las Cruces Crossroad Program, and Doña Ana Elementary School. Based upon the responses we received from a collection of Las Cruces Public School employees, gangs have become less of a problem in the local schools. Further, each interviewee did agree that gang members are present among the thousands of kids that walk the school hallways. However, they seem to believe that there are successful strategies in place to prevent, intervene, and suppress these young people from committing any “gang-like” activity that is harmful to the student population. These school policy initiatives to control gangs and violence in educational settings is included in Policy JICF. This policy is quite thorough in defining what is considered a gang or gang-like activity. It also outlines specific procedures on how instances of violence should be handled for both non-gang and gang members. Overall, our team understood this policy to be successful, as we continued to get responses from our interviewees that gangs are not a threat in schools any longer. More importantly, this is contradictory to what the LCPD officer had mentioned earlier.

Along with our interviews, we collected information that is readily available on the Las Cruces Public Schools website. Among this data was a questionnaire that included a specific question as to what parents thought about the gang problem in schools. The results of the survey showed that parents believe there is a gang problem, about 52% of respondents answered they either agree or are neutral to the presence of gangs. However, they also answered that they believe that their child is safe in school. This corroborates the argument that gangs are obviously present in the schools, but that the LCPS does a good job to keep the violence out.

We also observed the tendencies of the media and how they viewed, reported, and interacted with gangs in the area. We read and reviewed article after article that had published any material on gangs. We realized that most outlets focused on reporting the most catching and emotionally inducing stories. Usually these stories included statistics on how dangerous gangs are, along with reports of violent crimes, murders, and large-scale drug smuggling operations. However, our group seriously doubted these media sources were credible as they mainly seek out and report information from old sources and from the local police. The statistics can be somewhat misleading, because old data is almost never a true representation of a current problem, and law enforcement will almost always report to the public what is in the best interest of their department. Therefore, we were quite skeptical of these stories and how they tried to escalate the gang problem to a level that we felt was inaccurate.

Lastly, we sought to discover what means of prevention and/or intervention programs Las Cruces has so that we could determine whether or not the city has enough resources to keep kids off the street and away from crime. We felt that this would have a significant role in assessing the overall gang threat in the area. Programs that we found to be important for the city were the G.R.E.A.T. programs, Weed n’ Seed, Operation No Gangs, Keep Las Cruces Beautiful, Summer Recreation programs, and the Crossroads school program. The Crossroads school program was of great interest to us. Through an interview with the school’s principal, we found that it is a great opportunity for kids who are at risk of becoming involved in gangs and other forms of violence. They hold group discussions with kids by age groups and have on-site psychologists and social workers. Although there are only 80 students in the program, they are all youth who have been punished with long-term suspensions from their home schools. Therefore, we sensed the effort that the Las Cruces school system is making to prevent young teens from becoming involved in violence are fruitful.

Overall, after all of our research was conducted, assessed, and rated according to the threat level, I was surprised to see that we all agreed Las Cruces does not have a very serious gang problem. All of our data showed that the entire community felt no real threat of gang activity. We believe this is due to ways in which the community and schools have complimented one another by enacting prevention programs that help to suppress gang activity with step-by-step procedures to identify and treat at-risk youth.

Las Cruces, New Mexico — Elijah Langston

Las Cruces, New Mexico is home to over 97,000 residents. Of that number, 25% are in the prime ages for gang recruitment and juvenile delinquency (2010 Census). Coming from Albuquerque, I had a very biased view of gangs in Las Cruces. In relation to Albuquerque, Las Cruces is considered a college and retirement town. I did not think that gangs would have that much of a presence here. However, my research proved otherwise. In class, we discussed the fluctuating definition of a gang. I felt that in order to accurately research gangs, we first had to answer what a gang was. In the beginning of the semester, we broke down three main definitions of gangs: legal, law enforcement, and research (Duran, Robert J. 2012. "What is a Gang Powerpoint" CJ 432 Spring semester). Using these definitions, we set out to answer the question of gangs in Las Cruces.

For the average person who does not have the luxury of learning about how gangs are defined, the media becomes their main source for information. However, it is a widely known that media outlets tend to generalize or even fabricate some aspects of a story in order to make it more appealing and get it out faster than competing sources. Upon conducting this research, I concluded that media sources in Las Cruces are no different. During our class presentation, I gave two quotes on the subject from officers employed by different law enforcement agencies. One quote mentioned that Las Cruces had a major gang problem, and already had over 200 "gang-related" incidents that year. The other officer stated that they had only registered 76 "gang-related" incidents during the same time period. What is the reason behind these unmatched figures? Perhaps a lack of communication between agencies? Regardless, that is a major discrepancy. I would argue that many media sources generalize and over-report stories for shock value, which gives many citizens the belief that they are in more danger than they actually are.

As we began our research, we felt it was best to start directly at the source by interviewing law enforcement officers. During an interview with a correctional officer at the Doña Ana County Detention Center, he mentioned that gangs are most definitely present and growing in the Las Cruces area. However, they are more involved in drug trafficking and property crime as of late rather than violent crime. Some of the gangs he had encountered were the Sureños, East Side Locos, West Side Locos and Cruces Boys. Although it is a growing problem, he still felt that the level of threat was minimal. We got a similar response from an interview with a Las Cruces Police Officer. He stated that gangs are not a problem in this area, just something that needs to be "worked on." He also agreed that from what he has seen, gangs are more into drugs, property crimes such as auto theft, and especially graffiti rather than violent crime. These responses were similar to what officials in the local schools reported. Many principals and teachers said that while gangs were definitely present in schools, they are not much of a problem on campus. Most of the delinquent activity they encounter are graffiti in the bathroom stalls, and an occasional fight. In fact, one teacher said that she felt it was more of a "wannabe" issue rather than a real gang problem that takes place in schools.

Even the interviews with active gang members themselves yielded some interesting results. Contrary to what we read in our text, the gang members that we interviewed claimed that they had "no definite way to get in." When asked what kind of criminal activities they partake in, the most common responses were selling drugs and selling firearms. When asked who was in the most danger when it comes to violent offenses, they stated "only rival gang members and ex-members. We do not bring our issues to the outside public." In one interview, the gang member went on to talk about how he felt that law enforcement targeted them more than others, which is why it seems that they are a constant nuisance. In reality, they are not doing as much as people think.

If I had to describe the gangs in this area, I would say that they are present, but not overwhelming. When asked to rank Las Cruces' gang problem, I would rate them around **4 or 5** on a scale of 1 to 10. I believe that the threat is definitely there – we heard it from the media, law enforcement, the schools, and from the gangs themselves. Their presence is known and seen throughout the city, but it is the way in which they make their presence known that leads me to believe that the problem is not as bad. Every source we spoke to mentioned that drug sales and tagging are their main source... (Continued on page 17)

Langston — Continued

... of criminal activity. While this is certainly not a good thing, it could be a much more violent outcome. In a local news article, it was mentioned that the LCPD Gang Unit currently has 4 members on the team. Given this number, and the information the officers gave saying that the threat is minimal, I believe 4-5 is a fair assessment. On a personal note, the gang presence is definitely higher than I had anticipated, but still not as bad as some make it out to be. When talking to people from Las Cruces, this is about where most would rank the issue as well.

Given the minimal threat level, the community understanding of the issue, and the level of offenses the gangs commit, I believe that Las Cruces is doing a good job in creating solutions to combat these issues. Initiatives such as Operation No Gangs, Weed and Seed, Keep Las Cruces Beautiful, G.R.E.A.T, and the Crossroads School are just a few of the programs that are helping to prevent gang activity. Given that the biggest problem in this city is with graffiti, the Keep Las Cruces Beautiful crew has been doing a great job at eliminating most graffiti incidents in a matter of 24 hours. As a group, we had a hard time finding fresh graffiti spots due to their quick response time. The other prevention groups are also important because they help with advice and creating a positive influence for children outside of school grounds where the threat to join gangs is highest.

Las Cruces, New Mexico — Ubaldo Hernandez

Based on my research done in Las Cruces, New Mexico, I found that gangs are mostly groups of juveniles rather than being composed of adults. I was able to find several articles that discussed juvenile crimes and their connection to gangs. Further, I went out and drove the Las Cruces area and found several sites with graffiti. One of the articles in the newspaper mentions an incident at Oñate High School, a local school, where two teenagers had gotten in an argument inside the school, but it later escalated outside of school grounds. It is said that one individual approached the other at the bus stop at Oñate High School, when one student pulled out a knife and stabbed the other. This altercation was deemed as being gang related. It made me think about how gang members may be taking their crime and violent behavior outside of school property in order to avoid any legal repercussions. Some schools in the district have resource officers on site during school hours. While driving around and observing the area, I noticed a person outside of their home watering the lawn, so I decided to ask him about gangs in Las Cruces. He stated that he did not see any gang activity near his residence, but he had seen the graffiti in other areas. This made me question if gangs and poverty were related here in Las Cruces. The neighborhood he lived in was middle-class and the area in which he was pointing towards was lower-class. I also found that although gangs do engage in various types of criminal activity, they are usually crimes against each other rather than the public. It is mostly gang-on-gang violence, which is one of the reasons their criminal behavior has not escalated overall. Something that I also noticed while conducting my research was that the media plays a role in the public perception of gangs. “Many Las Cruces residents might not notice gang activity around our community, but it’s a real problem” (News 22). This quote is a direct example of how the news networks exaggerate gang activity. You may notice that in the same sentence they state, “residents do not notice gang activity” but then follow up with “gangs are a real problem”. If gangs are only engaging in violent behavior against only each other, are they really a problem in the community? Some stories in the media have even contradicted themselves, which we discovered while doing research. When a gang related incident occurs in the city, the public will hear about it through every newspaper and news channel in Las Cruces. The problem with this is that people get an overwhelming sense that there is a massive problem with gangs, which only heightens their sense that something should be done about it. Even when there is only one incident, the news reports covering the incident is ultimately what affects the public perception. I believe that if the media covered these gang stories in a different manner, then the public may think it is that big of an issue, this was my perception going into this project. As an outsider of the Las Cruces area, my perception of gangs was solely built on what the media covered.. (Continued on page 18)

Hernandez—Continued

...and what I read in online articles. This research certainly gave me a different way of seeing this issue and made me realize that I should not solely rely on the media to form my opinion.

Based on the data that we collected as a team, I would rate the gang problem here in Las Cruces a **3** on a scale of 1 to 10. Although gangs are present here in Las Cruces, there are little signs violence. As stated earlier, most crimes committed by gangs are against other gangs rather than against the public. Therefore, they are not a major problem to the community, but rather a problem among each other. Additionally, some of the gangs that we found are comprised of juvenile members, and as they grow older these groups do not last very long together. Rating the gang issue this low surprised me, because going into this project I had assumed it was going to be much higher. Since this is a city with a growing population, I imagined that various gangs were moving in from other cities and bringing new troubles to Las Cruces. This was only seen at the Southern Correctional Facility. Given this low rating, I believe that current and future prevention programs should be aimed at helping school students. As stated, we found more gang activity with juveniles, which means that prevention programs may serve a greater purpose if they are focused on the younger population. One program that we discovered is called the Weed and Seed program, which is aimed at keeping kids out of gangs and away from drugs. When talking with other residents of Las Cruces, they stated that on several occasions they felt the gangs were a problem. Based on our research, this appears to be quite the opposite. This could mean that the approaches being taken by schools are working. We did not find a significant problem with gangs in the schools. Overall, my group and I do not believe there is not a major gang problem here in Las Cruces as our findings show.



Photos by Garrett Patton and Stevie Hendrix

Sunland Park, New Mexico — Research Team



Top Row, Left to Right: Samantha Monroy, Martin Gonzalez, Hector Aldama, Mario Arvizo, and Mercedes Jordan, Bottom Row, Left to Right: Ismael Monreal and Shanna Quam

Sunland Park, New Mexico—Hector Aldama

I have lived in Sunland Park for about 13 years now, and all I can say is that times have changed. When I first moved into Sunland Park, gangs were the least of my problems. It was not until the end of my sixth-grade year in elementary that I began to notice some friends joining the gangs. As the years went by, I began to make friends with a few of the Meadow 13 and the Anapra gang members – both of these are rival gangs. The few friends I knew who became gang members joined early while in elementary school. Most of what they did was drink alcohol, graffiti, and occasionally fight here and there. In high school they began to get more involved with the gang. Drug dealing was, and still is, the number one thing going on with gangs in Sunland Park. Having known several members and associates, I have learned that everything they do at a serious level is kept on the “down low”. The most common activity that all gangsters do is binge drink, and every weekend attend a house party. Upon conducting my research, it became clear to me that these two rival gangs no longer dominate in Sunland Park. The Barrio Aztecas Gang have risen to power and have taken control of most of the areas in Sunland Park. I did not become aware of this due to the Barrio Aztecas gang moving very discretely. Although various smaller gangs have since formed, the Aztecas are the responsible for most of the drug dealing activity. During my research, I found that there have been three arrests of known Barrio Aztecas members in Sunland Park. Based on all the data that we collected, I would rate Sunland Park a **6 or 7** on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of its seriousness to being a threat. The reason for this is because it is clear that there is a gang problem, and with the Barrio Aztecas gang working with the drug cartels out of Mexico, it is just a matter of time when things will begin to get out of hand. I had always known that there were gangs in Sunland Park, but if I... (Continued on page 20)

Aldama—Continued

...had not known about the Barrio Aztecas and their connection with the drug cartels I would have rated Sunland Park a 2 or 3 on a scale of 1 to 10. This potentially minimal rating also has to do with the fact that the Meadow 13 and Anapra Gangs are not much of a threat. As I previously mentioned, I have been living in Sunland Park for the past 13 years. The local police department has been doing a great job of maintaining the peace, along with the help of border patrol and law enforcement and federal agencies.

Sunland Park, New Mexico — Mercedes Jordan

My group was assigned to research gangs in the Sunland Park area and I can say that I am not surprised by our findings. Perhaps this is because I have lived in El Paso, Texas, my entire life, and Sunland Park is only about an estimated ten minutes away from my home. Therefore, I am already aware of what really goes on in and around these areas that outsiders are not. Nonetheless, this research did open my eyes to a lot more details than I originally never knew of. I learned that there are three major gangs in the area that are considered the biggest threat: Barrio Aztecas, Meadow Trece, and Anapra. The police officer that I interviewed told me that there are smaller gangs present, but they are irrelevant because they pose very little-to-no threat and are not as active as the dominant gangs. The Barrio Aztecas are known to be involved with the drug cartel from Juárez, Mexico, and because of this are currently the biggest threat to the community at large. They have recently been more criminally active, and now are in hiding because law enforcement has been keeping such a close eye on them. As a result of this heightened level of policing, if you drive around the streets of Sunland Park you will rarely find any tagging from them. Anapra has not had as much of the spotlight but still remains very active. In regard to Meadow Trece, their tagging can be found pretty much all over the place. You can go down almost any random street and you are likely to find some graffiti attributed to them. I would say that the gangs in this particular area are very active, but I feel that they are not too much to be worried about. As a resident of El Paso, you learn how to avoid certain situations and based on that experience you learn to avoid drama and value peace. One thing that I had never knew existed was this long history of underground tunnels that gangs use to smuggle their drugs across the border. The officers stated that bundles have actually been seized inside this tunnel and that people set bonfires in there as well. We decided to investigate and notice there is evidence of people still going down there. This goes to show just how much is really goes on in our own cities, sometimes in our own backyard that we know nothing about. I would have never known that this tunnel existed had the officers not taken me to it, because it cannot be seen from the roadside. Aside from this, it is located on the side on a road that is frequented by border patrol and law enforcement. It looks to be positioned in a well thought out location – this is so it can remain as unnoticeable as possible. Based on the data we collected, I would rate the Sunland Park area a **7 or an 8** on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of level of threat. This is because gangs are still very active in this area but may be laying low on their activity due to Barrio Aztecas being on high watch. I personally feel that it is just a matter of time before this issue gains more attention because Sunland Park sits so close to the international border. Also, because the Barrio Aztecas gang have ongoing ties with the drug cartel in Juarez, Mexico. There really was not major difference in my perceived level of threat and the information I obtained from my interviewees. The only moment of surprise came when the assistant principal from the high school refused to admit that there was a gang problem. His responses made it seem as if he were trying to cover everything up and send us on our way. It is obvious that there is a problem and his job, as a school representative, is to conceal it. As far as my suggested solutions for gangs, I would advise that starting a program similar to what Father Gregory Boyle has done would help gang members focus more of their time on jobs and positivity. Slowly, gang members they are able to disassociate out of that lifestyle – you can't force people to commit to such a drastic change. Individuals must have to want change for themselves before it is offered, because it is a path they chose. Therefore, they must take the initiative to seek the change in lifestyle.

Sunland Park, New Mexico — Shanna Quam

Before I began my research on Sunland Park, I had no idea it was located right across the border from Juarez, Mexico. Based on the location, I assumed there had to be some sort of illegal activity there. A lot of the neighborhoods are impoverished, and after visiting some it became apparent that gang activity might be an issue, but I could not determine just how serious the problem might be. During my ride-along with a police officer, I had a chance to visit the neighborhood of Anapra, which is also known as “Little Juarez”. I then learned that the gangs are very much real – their presence is known, and the members are capable of committing any type of crime in commitment to the gang. I found that there are three main gangs: Barrio Azteca, Anapra, and Meadow 13. There are other gangs in town composed mainly of juveniles that people know as “wannabes” but are not as known to the public because of their low level of criminal behavior. The gangs in this particular area are more involved in the drug trade mainly because of the Barrio Aztecas – it is said that they have control of the gangs. While on the ride-along, things were moving unusually slow for a Friday night, which was a big surprise to the officers because of how active the city was the night before. Due to the inactivity, I was able to see the different neighborhoods where many of the gang members reside and maintain a presence. I also found out that the neighborhood of Anapra is closely tied together by different generations of families who have remained involved in criminal activity and are hesitant to cooperate with law enforcement under no circumstances. We also came across a house that received a noise complaint, and among the people standing outside was a Barrio Azteca member, who was said to be recently released from prison. Just seeing this person (the Barrio Azteca gang member) from inside the squad car made me feel intimidated because of all the tattoos he had, especially on his face. This demonstrates that the gang is serious about their lifestyle and will make sure this status is known.

Based on the data collected by our team, I would rate the threat level of gangs in Sunland Park an **8** on a scale of 1 to 10. I believe the gang problem is a serious threat because of the Barrio Aztecas gang and their link with the Juarez cartel. The Barrio Aztecas may be in hiding due to the recent shakedown they were subject to by law enforcement, but it is only a matter of time before they decide to reorganize. Also, the rival feud between Anapra and Meadow 13 is ongoing, but the Barrio Aztecas want it to come to an end – they want the gang to focus on the drug trade instead. There were no major differences between my perceived level of threat and what I found during my fieldwork regarding the gang problem. The officer I interviewed did admit that there is a gang problem. To combat this issue, I would recommend that more police officers be hired and assigned to the department since they are lacking in numbers. Currently, the gangs in Sunland Park outnumber the Sunland Park Police Department three to one.

Sunland Park, New Mexico — Samantha Monroy

The research site I was assigned was Sunland Park, NM. Prior to starting, I did not think much about gangs in that area. Although I had never visited this location, I had only heard about its popular racetrack and casino. Because of this project, I learned that gangs do exist in Sunland Park. According to Sergeant Holguin, who works with the gang unit in the Sunland Park Police Department, there are active gangs in the area and there is some potential harm that can come about through their actions. He tells me that there are three main gangs in the area: Barrio Meadow Trece, Barrio Aztecas and Anapra. During the interview with Holguin, he stated that the Barrio Aztecas Gang are the biggest and most influential out of these three. He explained how they try to recruit members from other gangs and create subdivisions. He also mentioned that although the gangs do not cause much harm to the community, there is a great amount of violence and danger that occurs within the gangs. Now, the gangs in Sunland Park seem to pose more of a threat, and it is speculated that they will have more power and influence as time goes on. With Sunland Park being so close the border, there is some spillover happening from Mexico that could snowball and create a more problematic gang force. I believe that the gangs use... (Continued on page 22)

Monroy—Continued

...Sunland Park. their proximity to the border to smuggle drugs, human trafficking, and make money. Seeing the actual tunnels and warehouses that have been used for these activities makes the danger more realistic.

Some gangs make their presence known through the graffiti across the town. The tagging is usually attributed to the Barrio Meadow Trece and Anapra Gang. Some of the houses in these neighborhoods were in poor conditions and sometimes constructed out of a few materials. Some were even made from clay and straw and had no running water available. When I first saw the areas with graffiti, I was surprised to see how much of it there was, and that people did not seem to care enough to cover it. This may be due to the fact that there are few resources in place for the community to cover up graffiti and keep their neighborhoods clean. In some of these areas there is also a lot of litter and signs of neglect to the community's appearance. Graffiti was often on houses, inside schools, on fences, mailboxes, street signs, and pretty much anywhere else the gangs feel like vandalizing. I was saddened to see the entire community has to experience this from their local gang problem. The tagging made the neighborhoods appear intimidating and makes you aware that gangs are present. Even though it does not seem harmful, the tagging has some influence on gangs and their use of power. In contrast, I had the opportunity to get a different look at Sunland Park where there are no signs of graffiti, very few police officers, and the people are unaware as to what is happening on the other side of town. During my ride-along with a local police officer, I was taken to a gated community in Sunland Park that really highlighted this experience. Some of the houses were large and extravagant. There are some homes that had acres land and were beautiful aesthetic. I found it funny that Sergeant Holguin stated he could not even recall the last time he had been there prior to that night.

If I had to level of threat that gangs pose in Sunland Park, I would give it about a 7 on a scale of 1 to 10. This is because the gangs may not cause great harm or danger to the community, but they are still very active. I also believe that proximity to the international border could be linked to an increase in the threat that may arise. I think it is only of matter of time before these gangs expand and take control of the area. With that said, the threat of harm does not seem to carry over into the opinions of residents who live there. After interviewing the Principal of a local middle school, it seemed that she did not see much of a threat from gang members. instead, she stated they were kids who were "wannabes" rather than something dangerous. However, even though the kids may not come off as dangerous, it does not take long for them to grow and learn more about gang life the longer they are exposed to it. I believe that if action is not taken in schools or within the community to prevent the problem from escalating, it will only grow larger. Given the seriousness of the issue, Sunland Park has to take preventive measures and keep the problem from growing.

I would recommend the creation of prevention programs in local schools, as well as community programs to spread awareness of gangs and their danger. Simply realizing that gangs are present and pose a threat could be the first step in trying to combat the gang problem. Also, more research is needed on local gangs – this could help take control of the problem. People seem to either not care or are naïve to what is really happening here. This is a major cause for concern. The police department's gang unit is doing their best to decrease the harm and danger that occurs daily, but they can only do so much.

Sunland Park, New Mexico — Ismael Monreal

One of the things I learned from my research in Sunland Park, New Mexico, is that many of the community members that have lived in the area for more than thirty years know about gangs, but they do not wish to address it. Many of the residents from the Meadow Vista community were very close-minded about the gang topic. A couple that I interviewed mentioned that as long as they have been living there it has always been peaceful. Members of this community seem to be ignorant to what is happening internationally with the gangs. Many gangs nowadays tend to keep their business quiet, using technology to communicate, using text messages and phone calls to move drugs, and move around very secretive. There could literally be a drug war going on right now and very few people would... (Continued on page 23)

Monreal-Continued

...know about it because of how quiet they keep this kind of information. The days where gangs are imagined to only be hanging out in public are over. If ever they are “hanging out” it is either at a party or a club.

I would rate the threat level of gangs in the area a **10** on a scale of 1 to 10. The gangs in the area pose a threat to the community that has pretty much never had any issues with gangs. The Aztecas gang, now categorized as an international gang operating in Mexico and the US, have been known to lure other gang members from Sunland Park involved in their business. This business is usually to help the Aztecas take over the community by selling drugs and increasing their reputation. If for some reason the Aztecas gang have problems with the drug cartel of Juarez, Mexico, it will surely cause problems for the Sunland Park community – the gangs from Meadow Vista community are also said to be involved with the Aztecas. Even those who are not affiliated with the gang, many people are at great risk. Although Sunland Park is not a big city, gang members there are perhaps more dangerous than most other gangs because they work together with the Aztecas.

The proximity to the border in Juarez, Mexico is also a threat. It is said that some Border Patrol Officers allow cartel members to come and go as they please. It is possible that these officers are working with the Cartel members and getting paid for assisting them. Other reasons to allow this is because if they deny them this privilege, it could put their whole family at risk. Cartel members have many different hiding spots that they use to evade law enforcement – they know how the system works and their way around it.

A few solutions I recommend to address the gang problem are to create more programs for kids. From elementary school and beyond, students should be supported in all the extracurricular activities in which they partake, such as sports, music, and more. The big brother program has been successful because kids who are younger have been provided a role model to follow and tend to find guidance in mentors who have been successful. This could be helpful for students starting in middle school, so they can begin to focus on their career and life goals. Other solutions for students in the community could be to supply art classes. Music could also be taught at elementary schools, or inside of homes so that students get involved in performing arts. The benefits of playing an instrument are that when a student begins high school, it will be easier for them to become involved in the school band instead of associating with gangs. Developing these programs could potentially keep kids busy and focused on more positive activities instead of learning how to pull a trigger.

Sunland Park, New Mexico — Martin Gonzalez

What I learned about gangs in Sunland Park is that they are currently active, though I assumed they had faded away. I currently reside in the area and it does not feel like the gangs pose any threat to the community. Residents are not very aware that there is a problem, because much of the gang activity is not always visible. Some residents realize that there are gangs in the area and can address them by name. The two most predominate gangs are Mero and Anapra. Both of these have the same initiation ritual, which requires a new member to get “jumped in” by current gang members or carrying out a criminal activity of some kind. Around 5 to 6 years ago, the gangs seemed to be more active. I know this because a friend of mine was in the Anapra gang, and he would tell me things were getting really “hot” because some of the Anapra members beat on a rival member from Mero and got badly hurt. This situation arose after both gangs fought each other, tagged on the opposite gang turf, and damaging property. Till this day my friend still has problems with members of the Mero Gang.

As of late, I have not heard of any recent violence between Anapra and Mero. This made me assume that the gang problems had faded away, but I was wrong. When our team conducted field research, we were granted information from an Azteca gang member. He stated that the Aztecas gang are trying to make the smaller gangs work together to distribute drugs and participate (Continued on page 24)

Gonzalez—Continued

...in other delinquent activity. I would assess that the threat level of gangs jumped from being a 5 to a 7, because if gangs begin to unite with the Aztecas then there is more potential for expansion. This would result in gangs recruiting from schools and a big spillover of drugs coming in from Juarez, Mexico, to Sunland Park. People are not very aware of the situation and need to implement community action soon or else a rise in delinquency will affect Sunland Park. A solution I would recommend is for the community to work with local police and schools to help the youth stay away from these groups and inform them about the possible outcomes. Having initiatives, such as Operation No Gangs, coming to schools and talking to students about gangs and its consequences could be useful. Also, an increase in policing is needed in the form of a law enforcement gang unit to be on watch for potential threats.

Sunland Park, New Mexico — Mario Arvizo

I researched gangs in Sunland Park which pose a threat to society to a certain extent. I feel as though the gangs that are present are working up something and since the Mexican border is right next door, it's only a matter of time before something happens. According to the Sunland Park Police Department the Barrio Aztecas have been working with the cartels in Mexico. Although there is not much gang activity other than drugs deals, they really keep to themselves. People say that El Paso is the 2nd safest city in the country and I feel that they are wrong. I know for a fact that it has already spilled over and they have been keeping it hush hush when it comes to paying the cartels debts. According to the Sunland Park Police Department they stated that cartels own businesses over here and its' only a matter of time they cross over and bring it over here or have the Barrio Aztecas take care of it. When Martin had the interview with the assistant principal, he stated that when he was working at the middle school that there was a higher percentage of gangs there than at the high school. Any problem can occur when it comes to asking a school for data when it comes to gangs because they don't want to make it seem that there is a gang problem, so the school was not really helpful. Pictures were taken at the school of tagging and most of them were from taggers not so much gangs.

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being most serious on how serious of a threat they pose to society, I would give them a 6 or a 7. I gave them this rating due to the fact that they are present. Not much gang activity is going on, but you do occasionally get domestic disputes, etc. It's high because the fact that the Barrio Aztecas reside there only questions me as to why are they not causing mischief or havoc. On the ride along, the officers stated that there were three main gangs in the area which consisted of Barrio Azteca, Meadow 13, and Anapra. If I were to rate them from most dangerous, I would put B.A. first, followed by Anapra, and finally Meadow 13. I would rate them like this because the Aztecas are a known prison gangs and since there are a lot of prisons across the nation there are bound to be a Barrio Azteca. Hearing that the B.A.'s are working with the cartels in Mexico just gives me a sixth sense that something is going to happen really soon and they are going to attack everyone and anyone that gets in their way. Mexico is right across from them and they go back and forth bringing in drugs and do some of their dirty work over here. They also stated that they have set up surveillance all throughout their yards so that they know who's out there and who's keeping a close eye for them. Then Anapra would come next because of what I heard when I was working at Western Playland in Sunland Park. The people that I worked with would talked about shootings and stabbings that would go on and yet nothing would ever make the news and I thought to myself as to why would there not be something on the news about it because those stories were news worthy. I really did not hear much about Meadow 13, I would just see tagging all over. My cousins live out there and they really did not talk much about any of the gangs out there.

When I interviewed the gang member, I had moved my point of view from that 6 – 7 to a 10 only because of what they have to do in order to get into the gang. I was really scared when I was giving the interview because I would have not known that he had done all of that stuff. It goes to show that we don't know what other people are capable of until you sit down and talk to them. (Continued on page 25)

Arvizo — Continued

...I would have never guessed that he was that type of person. I feel that there is not changing for the “gang” problem solely for the fact that we will always have gangs everywhere and anywhere we go. There is nothing that any of us can do other than wait until they actually start posing a threat to the community at hand because they are not doing anything wrong that we can see. We all know that they are present but just like you and me we all can be suspects of being in gangs because as time progresses gang members are starting to cover up their identity so anyone can basically be in a gang. They don't have to fit the criteria that law enforcement or the media passed out when trying to describe a gang member.



Hector Aldama



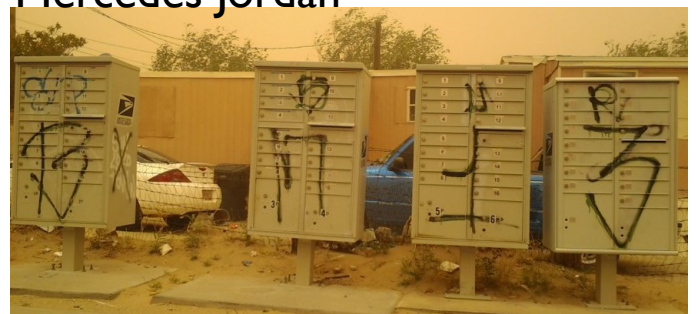
Samantha Monroy



Ismael Monreal



Mercedes Jordan



Hector Aldama

El Paso, Texas — Research Team



Left to Right: Israel De La Rosa, Jose Garcia; Missing: Mario Munoz

El Paso, Texas— Jose Garcia

El Paso, Texas, is considered a large city, which makes the problem with gangs more complicated than other areas nearby. As of 2010, the population in El Paso was around 800,000 people. With an increase in population there can also be an increase in criminal activities. In the research we conducted for the course, we found out that there are over 200 gangs that are registered by the El Paso police department. However, these numbers may not be the most reliable because in 2009 there were over 500 gangs that were registered. The problem is that in the span of three years, over 300 gangs apparently vanished. An explanation for this would be that the media plays an important role in the public's perceptions. I also discovered that many of the gangs in the area can be considered a threat, because many of them are well organized and have branched out from other gangs and spread throughout the country. El Paso is considered one of the safest cities in the nation. Therefore, many residents and visitors might think that El Paso does not have a gang problem. This may be the case considering that there does not seem to be a high level of violence in the area. We discovered that many of the gangs in El Paso are sometimes divided by the geographic area in which they operate. I personally visited the west side, northeast, and south side of El Paso and was able to find tagging that pertained to gangs in the area. Based on our research and the information given by law enforcement officials and current gang members, many of the gangs in El Paso are involved in some kind of illegal activity. The gang that is known to have the most violent reputation is Barrio Azteca. This gang has caused violence in the city and as a result, there has been an increase of drugs in the area. Barrio Azteca is a gang that is said to be highly... (Continued on page 27)

Garcia—Continued

...organized and the top leaders run the gang from prison. Coffield is where the gang was founded in 1986. On a scale of 1 to 10, I would rank El Paso an **8** in terms of their threat level. This is based on our discovery that shows Barrio Azteca to be considered in the top 20 threat list given by the FBI and the DEA. Being on such a list means that federal law enforcement is now on the lookout for any criminal activity coming out of this group. As a result, federal indictments have been issued in order to prosecute members of the gang. RICO charges have also been used in the past to incarcerate members of this gang. Another reason that I ranked El Paso an 8 is because the Juarez Cartel is a well-known ally of the Barrio Azteca gang. This alliance has brought violence and more attention to the gang on both sides of the international border. The Sinaloa Cartel is the current rival of the Juarez Cartel, and they are currently fighting a drug war in order to gain more turf to operate. Since Barrio Azteca is now involved with the cartel in Juarez, they automatically share enemies that are looking to eliminate both the Juarez Cartel and Barrio Azteca as a competitor. According to the research we conducted, Sureños, another gang from the west coast, are arriving in the El Paso area in order to help the Sinaloa cartel eliminate Barrio Azteca. This creates another frontline in the drug war between criminal groups on both sides of the border. Barrio Azteca also started forming alliances with several gangs around the area in order to secure their power and influence over the border. This allowed smaller gangs to now become involved in violence and conflict on border. Apparently, Barrio Azteca's influence has grown over the years, and according to an active and well-known gang member from the El Paso area (who requested that we not mention his name, nickname and affiliation), the Aztecas control the drug trade in El Paso and all surrounding areas. He stated that he personally does not get involved with them. Barrio Azteca was involved in a shooting that took place in Juarez back in 2010. This incident claimed the lives of three members of the American consulate. Not long after that, the leader "Ravelo" was put on the FBI's most wanted list, sharing similar status on this list as Osama Bin Laden and Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, the former leader of the Sinaloa Cartel. The information obtained makes it seem that the current gang situation in El Paso is idle. However, the current situation with Barrio Azteca and the cartel in Mexico is a disaster waiting to happen. Law enforcement officers in the area have been able to neutralize possible scenarios where gang violence might happen as well as slow the spread.

Before starting the research, I perceived the threat level of gangs in the area to be low. After conducting the research, I discovered that law enforcement and media have been able to hide events where gang violence took place. I asked relatives and friends about their opinion on gangs in El Paso, and they concluded that even though they know there are gangs in the area, they do not feel threatened by them and consider El Paso a safe place to live. From the perspective of law enforcement and current gang members, they recognize that Barrio Azteca is considered a threat to communities in the El Paso area. Through an interview with a gang member (who wished to remain anonymous), I found that members of his gang were involved in serious violent crime at a local establishment in El Paso. I researched local news outlets to find more information on this and discovered that there was never an article published or broadcast regarding about this. Considering the facts and evidence I mentioned, the best approach right now is to use the suppression strategy in order to reduce the influence that Barrio Azteca has in the area. This gang has become very powerful in the last couple of years and could be a cause for problems in the future. El Paso is fortunate to have several law enforcement agencies working together on this issue. Cooperation between agencies can make all the difference when engaging in suppression techniques. Interventions and prevention approaches can be used with younger gang members in order to prevent extended affiliation with gangs, especially with Barrio Azteca.

El Paso, Texas — Ismael de la Rosa

Throughout this project, I have come to understand the limitations some researchers face. The inability to interview individuals that could potentially make your research better leaves you with gaps in the research. Other than that, I have learned many things that I did not know about gangs in El Paso Texas. I conclude that there is a definite gang problem in El Paso. The city is divided into four main areas: the Westside, Northeast, Eastside, and Downtown. As I drove around the Westside, I did not see much tagging or graffiti. There was some graffiti, but it was very minimal. I was in disbelief because when I went to school around this area and remember there being a lot of people that claimed that they were in gangs. It makes me wonder how many of these kids were really affiliated with a gang and how many of them were “wannabes”. In the downtown area by Segundo Barrio, which is home to one of the most dangerous gangs called “Barrio Azteca”, you would think that you would see a lot of tagging here but we did not come across any tagging from any particular gang. All that we found by the downtown area was a lot of murals, which the gangs and tagging crews seem to respect. Where we found most of the gang tagging of specific gangs were in the Northeast and the Eastside. These areas are the most populated, which then bring more crime. Gangs in El Paso don’t congregate in any specific area of the city and do not necessarily have to make their presence known by tagging, but people know they are there. The most notorious gang in El Paso is the Barrio Azteca. They have become one of the most dangerous in the area. People typically recognize members by their tattoos. While doing this research, I found that this gang has certain criteria all members have to meet in order to join. Also, from the officers I interviewed I noticed that the rituals and the foundations of gangs still have the same pattern from the early 70’s and 80’s. Gang members look to recruit middle school kids and give them their initiation process. The gang makes teenagers visualize what benefits they can have as members, and as we have seen many are attracted to the gang life.

Based upon all the data we collected, I would rank the gang threat level in El Paso an **8** on a scale of 1 to 10. The reason for this is because there is in fact a gang problem, especially since many of the gangs here look to work with the cartels across the border. As a matter of fact, this is where all the violence mostly comes from. Many of these gangs provide their services to the cartels, who are the ones committing the crime. As one of the female gang members I interviewed stated, “many of these gangs are motivated by money. Money is what brings food to their homes.” She added that gangs are a problem in the El Paso area because we have a lot of cartels fighting for turf in both El Paso and Juarez. Officer Urrutia, who has worked for the police department many years, said that he believes El Paso has a gang problem. “Gangs are growing stronger and are committing more crimes. Just because the news doesn’t report it doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist,” he said. He also mentioned that many gangs are using technology and the internet to integrate new members into the gang. From the data gathered in our interviews, El Paso does look to have a gang problem, which is reflected in my rating above. It seems that things could get worse if gangs start to fight for territory similar to the cartels. Citizens in the El Paso area don’t really see what is happening with gangs because the media does not cover it much. While working at the District Court House in El Paso, I saw the entire picture based on the kind of criminal cases the city had in the docket. The number of open gang-related cases left me speechless.

Some of the solutions I see for the city of El Paso is to educate not just the kids, but the community on gangs. I would like to see more organizations and outreach programs like “Operation No Gangs” operate in the El Paso area. These programs help teens and youth that feel neglected re-evaluate how joining a gang can grant you anything positive. I also think that getting the community more involved with helping kids and talking with neighbors can help reduce the gang problem. If we had more after-school programs around the city of El Paso, many youth would stop joining gangs because they would have something to do after school. These may seem like costly solutions, but in reality, if we compare the amount of money spent per inmate versus what these solutions would cost it makes more sense to fund preventative measures. We must invest in keeping teens from going to prison. Having the GREAT program would also help kids learn about gangs. It would be useful if ex-gang members and police officers work together to do these presentations, which could help to see the issue from both sides.

El Paso, Texas — Mario Munoz

My research project on gangs of El Paso began in January of 2012. I learned many things throughout my research, some good and some bad. The El Paso Police Department recently stated that “for the first time, the City of El Paso has been named the city with the lowest crime rate in the United States with a population of over 500,000. Since 1997, El Paso has been ranked 2nd or 3rd in safest cities by an independent study. The El Paso Police Department attributes this accomplishment to the community policing efforts and the many partnerships that the department has developed with citizens, other law enforcement agencies, city departments, and various civic groups throughout the city. Additionally, this success could not have been accomplished without the hard work and dedication of each and every El Paso Police Department officer, and civilians that work each day to make El Paso the safest place in the United States (El Paso, Texas – The Safest City in the United States).”

From reading this statement, what would most people think about gangs in El Paso? It would seem that El Paso does not have a gang problem. One thing I have come to realize is that the media can be biased not only on reports of El Paso, but across the United States. For example, if you turn on your television to any local El Paso news station, you will see great similarities in their way of reporting. The stories covered on KFOX, KTSM, and KVIA are relatively the same, but just delivered at different times. I believe that El Paso has a good reputation and plans to keep it that way. Since the city is so close to the international border, it might be better to control the media rather than create panic among the viewers about gang-related violence.

The irony is that El Paso is known to be amongst the safest cities in the United States, yet they are home to one of the most dangerous gangs in the United States, Barrio Azteca. Based on the research conducted, the team and I gave El Paso a rating of **7.8** on a scale of 1 to 10. I believe the El Paso area ranked as one of the most researched areas this year. This is because gangs in El Paso are tied to the drug business and the drug war is troubling Mexico at the moment. These gangs are highly structured and running a lucrative drug business. One thing we must consider is that these gangs are often recruited by cartels as reinforcements to their organizations. Occasionally, the gangs do draw attention to themselves – this are the gang members you hear about in the media. In reality, these gangs have evolved from a regular street gangs to a more serious, violent organization that has spread throughout Mexico.

It is clear that there are many gangs in El Paso, Texas. However, difficulties arise when trying to prove the relationship between crimes committed in the area and street gangs. In 2009, El Paso Police reported 539 active gangs, but this year there are only 246. What happened to the other 293 gangs? El Paso's gang population has dropped by nearly 2,000 members in the past two years according to police statistics, which raises questions about how gang members are documented. This week, the Police Department released statistics showing that El Paso has 3,677 documented gang members, compared with 3,653 gang members in 2010 and 5,665 in 2009. "So, 2,000 gang members just disappeared from one year to the next?" asked Rob Gallardo, director of Operation No Gangs, a local gang-intervention program (Borunda, 2011). “, should we give the El Paso Police Department the benefit of the doubt? I doubt it!” he states.

As for solutions to gangs in this area, I think that all we can do is wait and hope that the violence from the city of Juarez does not spill over into El Paso. I personally don't think El Paso has any reason to worry, even if some people believe El Paso is facing the same problems as Mexico.

El Paso, Texas — Pictures



Top Photos by Jose Garcia



Above Photos by Mario Munoz

Horizon City, Texas — Research Team



Left to Right: Gary Vivoda, Jesus Quinones, Cassandra Branch, Kristen Riley, Zoe Meade and Belloise Frazier.

Horizon City, Texas — Cassandra Branch

After conducting my research, I learned that the number of gangs in Horizon City have increased during the past several years. Horizon City, Texas, has a population of around 12,000+ residents, and is mostly comprised of Hispanics who make up 85.7% of the population. The gangs that were frequently discussed are the Eastside Locos, Sureños, Bloods from the “military family”, Brown Dogs, and Barrio Azteca. Most of the gang activity relates to drug use or the distribution of drugs. The gangs mostly hang out and party out in the desert area, demonstrating that there is a lack of violent offending against other gang groups. I learned that the community is well aware of the gang problem in the city but believe that it is only getting worse. As I distributed a survey I created to random participants, I noticed that many of them were unsure if their children were involved in gangs or not. One respondent in particular stated that she wished there was a spokesperson available to reach out to the kids and warn them of the consequences for joining gangs.

Based on our group’s data, I would rate the threat level of gangs in Horizon a 6 on a scale of 1 to 10. As we did our research, we never came across more than one media reports or incident in which gang members were caught terrorizing the streets of Horizon or making it unsafe for fellow residents. What we did find was a lot of drug incidents and tagging. I believe that if I was living in Horizon, I might be able to get a better understanding of what city residents might say about living there. As we went through the semester and identified the types of gangs, none of the them resemble the level of violence that Latin Kings, Ogden gangs, or Bloods and Crips carry out. When visiting Horizon City, I automatically noticed the large amount of graffiti everywhere. As we spoke to people around town about gangs, every person had a different perception of the gang problem. The majority of male respondents did not... (Continued on page 31)

Branch — Continued

...believe that gangs were a big threat in their respective neighborhoods. The only threat mentioned amongst several people was the Barrio Azteca. Officer Casillas from the Horizon Police Department's gang unit also stated that the Barrios Azteca gang was responsible for a large part of the recent crimes including a murder and drug trafficking operation within the last two years. It is stated that many of the gang offenses are not consistent, and major offenses are scattered throughout the years. I recommend that people try to work with law enforcement officials in deterring crime in their own neighborhood. Gang prevention groups could visit schools and other local organizations to help children learn about the gang life.

Horizon City, Texas — Belloise Frazier

Based on my research, I learned that gangs in Horizon, Texas, do exist, but they are not an immediate problem. There are a lot of “pee-wee gangs” there that have formed from other gangs and are involved in drug operations for the cartel or gangs in Juárez, Mexico. In the schools of Horizon, marijuana and ecstasy are one of the biggest problems with children and youth. Other problems with juvenile gang members are truancy or attending school intoxicated. Since there has been an increase of drug distribution in schools, the biggest challenge police officers face is catching them in the act. Another thing I learned from researching Horizon is that the parents are ignorant to the trouble that surrounds youth in schools. Some believe that their kids are well behaved, and if they do happen to get in trouble with school it is because police officers are picking on them. One incident in particular that took place on school grounds caught my attention. A student that was caught by police with marijuana was forced to explain to his parents what had happened. Even after confessing, the parent immediately took their child's side and accused the officer of framing him. I quickly learned that parents are often enablers and they do not encourage their own children to of their actions – they are always pointing the finger at someone else.

We were fortunate to be able to talk to an officer who was part of the gang unit. They shared a lot of information with my group and was able to discuss how many incidents have occurred while she has been working with the gang unit. Only a couple of cases have went to the media and that was only because there was a murder involved. The gangs that are popular in Horizon are the Eastside Locos, Sureños, Bloods from the military families, Sur Trece, and Barrio San Angeles. These gangs are more involved with drug use and if they do commit other crimes it is related to petty theft, robbery, or fighting with other rival gangs.

The best to describe gangs in Horizon would be that they are more “low-key”, because many of them are hidden and don't draw much attention to themselves. The officer we interviewed did mention that a member of the Barrio Azteca gang had recently moved to Horizon and the gang unit was informed where he was living. He had moved in with his family and required that the officers watch him for many months to see if was causing any problems in the area. After watching him for some time, they concluded that he was not a threat. However, the officer mentioned that this person did travel a lot, which made them think he might have been participating in criminal activities in another city. The gang he belonged to is known to be involved with arms trafficking, drug trafficking, arson, assault, auto theft, illegal immigration, kidnapping, money laundering, murder, prostitution, and racketeering. They are rivals with Artistas Asesinos gang and the Sinaloa Cartel. This story that the officer shared with me caught my attention because I had assumed that individual gang members were not concerned for their own safety. However, it was clear that this man was trying to keep his personal actions away from his family so they would not have to be caught in the middle of his wrongdoing. I thought this was a good move on his part.

In terms of rating, I would say that Horizon is a 4 on a scale of 1 to 10. This is because gangs in this area are mostly young people looking to have fun in comparison to other gangs who commit horrendous crimes. When gangs from Mexico or other areas along the Texas border come into the picture, I believe the security level of gangs will drastically increase because it will turn into... (Continued on page 32)

Frazier — Continued

...a battle for dominance and respect from every group. Horizon should continue to be watched closely over the next couple of years due to the increase of army families being stationed in El Paso. The military brings in a lot of the gangs into this area because they relocate from different parts of the U.S. and bring the gangs with them. There was not a major difference between my perception of gangs and the perception of people that I spoke to about it. From an outside perspective, I did not expect there to be any problems in this town, but the deeper we looked the more I realized that I was wrong. When I saw all the graffiti that in some hidden areas of the city, I realized there was more gang activity in the area than I had expected. I did not get the impression that it was a major problem, but I did notice there were a lot of gangs I had never heard of before. As of right now, the gangs are not a big problem, but the officer stated that they are expecting an increase in population once the military troops move into Texas. This could cause a lot of trouble in the near future, so putting a focus on schools and the streets can help curb the problem before this happens.

Horizon City, Texas — Jesus Quinones

In most cities and towns, gangs seem to be an issue regardless of population size. I believe it is more common to see the more dangerous gangs in bigger cities. My perspective on gangs and gang violence has changed after seeing that there is activity all around us but never notice it. As our team researched the city of Horizon, I began to learn more information about gangs that operate in that region. Horizon City may be a small place, but it has been a part of the drug trade spilling over from Mexico for some time. According to Officer Mary Casillas, a criminal prevention officer from Horizon City police, big gangs like Barrio Azteca, have moved to less populated areas in order to reduce pressure from the law and rival gang members. The Barrio Azteca gang has a core membership located in the heart center of El Paso, but as they begin to feel pressure from law enforcement, they strategically move to little towns such as, Socorro, San Eli, Horizon City and other small areas and bring criminal behavior with them. Officer Casillas mentioned that the military was also responsible for drawing in people with gang backgrounds to the area, which has affected the local schools and community as a whole. This feature is important because it ends up affecting the youth and compromise the future of the city. Horizon, in my opinion, does not have a huge gang problem, but if gangs keep operating in this area the way they have been for the past four years, it may negatively impact the city in the long run.

Based on the data collected throughout this project, I would rate the severity of gangs in Horizon a 7 on a scale from 1 to 10. The Horizon City Police Department informed us that Barrio Azteca gang members have moved into the area and has caused concern within the community. This is mainly the reason why I have ranked Horizon a bit high. As gang members relocate and run away from the violence in bigger cities and escape the grips of the Juarez drug cartel, they find security but fail to realize that they place this new community at risk. As a resident of Horizon City, I can say that this has never been a violent area until a series of events took place – an event that started as a kidnapping later became a murder in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. In Juarez, a man was kidnapped from Horizon and murdered by Barrio Azteca members. The victim was also said to be a Barrio Azteca member. It is hard to believe that only ten years ago Horizon had no serious crime. Now, the city has its own “sicarios” or hit-men, which could potentially be living next door to a schoolteacher. On our first visit to Horizon, most of my group’s perceptions of the area was that it was a small town with little to no activity. The city often feels like an abandoned when it becomes dark out. These were just perceptions at first, but when we began obtaining information, we found that Horizon was more notable in gang activity than most cities near or around of El Paso, Texas.

Based on the research we conducted, my suggested solution to the gang problem would be to enhance the level of policing in the city. As a small town, in order to keep strangers out there is a need to patrol and watch for suspicious activity to protect the community. I believe that schools should also get involved and create programs to keep kids out of trouble. More after school programs should become available because the majority of students find it easy to get into problems they...(Continued on page 33)

Quinones—Continued

...really shouldn't. Other than this, I believe that if the community comes together to establish a plan for community policing and neighborhood watch programs, it could create a safer environment for everyone. Regardless, these things should always be considered, especially from residents who have resided there for long periods and can distinguish between old and new community members.

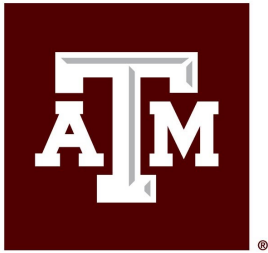
Horizon City, Texas — Zoe Meade

Due to the research done in the city of Horizon, my knowledge of gangs has expanded. While conducting our field research, we were able to speak with Officer Mary Casillas, who told us that a poor home environment can result in a child seeking outside attention from places such as gangs. This is topic that has been reverberated throughout the entire semester. Officer Casillas gave our group information on how gang affiliation tends to run in the family. For example, if a child is born into a gang family or they are affiliated with a gang, the child grows up normalizing the gang lifestyle and takes it as a way of life. This is often the case with many of the juvenile gang members in Horizon. Officer Casillas was able to disclose information about a case in which a home intervention was needed on a child that was causing trouble at Horizon High School. The officer then went to the home and was able to get a sense of why this child was acting out. The child was the oldest of four children and both parents had a history of gang affiliation, and while the mother had left the gang, the father was in prison. Officer Casillas believe that these circumstances place the child at risk of joining a gang. One of the biggest takeaways here is these children are not bad kids, they are just underappreciated and are trying to cope with the lack of love and a caring family. I also found it surprising that gangs in Horizon do not take part in violent activities but are more interested in getting high and making quick money by selling drugs.

According to the data our team collected, I would assess the threat rate for the gangs in that area to be at about a **4 or 5** on a scale of 1 to 10. The reason for this rating is due to many of the children in the area claiming to have gang affliction are only tied to the gang because they are neglected at home. Also, the gangs in this area are mainly focused on selling drugs and not carrying out violence. However, I do think that if these problems are not addressed it can bring in more gangs to the area because of how the military is responsible for drawing in the gangs – Law enforcement believes that this has been an increasing problem for Horizon. There was a large difference in my perceived level of threat and what residents in the area responded about gangs. Before starting this project, I believed that the city had a very minimal threat level. As we drove around taking pictures of graffiti and talking to members of the community, it became clear that many people believe this to be a safe place but do think that there is drug and gang problem. My recommendation for the gang problem would be to put together a program that allowed children to get involved with clubs and after school programs, which could help take up some of their free time and give them a home-like environment. I also recommend that parents look into community classes that help them become aware of potential dangers and how to communicate with their children.



**SOUTHERN
NEW MEXICO/
TEXAS GANG
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