

SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO/TEXAS GANG UPDATE

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



During the spring semester of 2008, I had the opportunity to re-enter the social world of gangs. For twelve years of undergraduate and graduate school I conducted research on gangs in Ogden, Utah and Denver, Colorado. After completing my dissertation on this topic at the University of Colorado in 2006, I moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico to begin teaching at New Mexico State University. At the time, I was no longer interested in conducting gang research. I was ready to move on to other research questions involving law enforcement shootings, border enforcement, and Disproportionate Minority Contact within the juvenile justice system.

One evening during the month of August 2007, I attended a presentation addressing gang concerns in a small town 45 minutes from Las Cruces. The presentation stereotyped youth of Mexican descent and blamed their parents for gang behavior and poor performance in school. The audience sat and listened attentively whereas I felt a deep sense of anger that such incorrect statements could be spread without confrontation. It was on this day that I wanted to study gangs locally to counter the stereotypical images of gangs along the southern New Mexico/Texas border. I did not want to incorrectly assume that my knowledge of gangs in two other cities adequately described local gangs. I needed to conduct more research.

There are many points of interest for gangs in Las Cruces, An-

thony, and El Paso. Economically, these three communities are poor and lack resources; the typical type of barrios that spawn gangs. In addition, the gang literature often considers El Paso, Texas as the origination point for gangs of Mexican descent.

The gangs along the southern New Mexico/Texas border are different from the literature on several points. These three communities can be referred to as “minority majority” because people of Mexican and Spanish descent are the numerical majority. These communities range in size from 7,900 residents (Anthony, NM) to 736,000 residents (El Paso, Texas). All three communities are close to the border of Mexico. Policing and drug dealing feels different here compared to Ogden and Denver.

I plan to continue research in this area because there is still a tremendous amount of unexplored knowledge and much needed community empowerment. Luckily, the local media does not appear as infatuated with gangs. Since there is only one group hyping up gang fears, the local groups remain hidden.

This bulletin is based on the work of students who took my spring semester gang course. These individuals actively pursued and questioned anyone who had knowledge regarding gangs in these three areas. This bulletin is the first comprehensive, non law enforcement, study dedicated toward gangs along the southern New Mexico and Texas border. Although these are students majoring in criminal justice, there are a fairly broad range of perspectives provided. The availability of this bulletin online bypasses the time lag often found with edited journals and books. I hope this bulletin can be of value to the local community to help support efforts for gang prevention and intervention.

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LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO—RESEARCH TEAM



Front Row: Sarah Lerma, Clinton Fahrlender, Anna Thompson, Samantha Slim, and Angela Duran.
Back Row: Manny Ramirez, Thomas Fragua, Justin Lewis, and Billy Romero.

LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO—ANNA THOMPSON

Based upon the research that I have done since January of 2008, there is still a lot to learn and understand about what makes young people join a gang, and what makes older (over 21) individuals stay inside of a gang. The basics of joining a gang are simple. The low-income level seems to add more “freedom” for young people to search for a place to belong, and for a place to feel secure, needed, and loved.

The information that has been gathered by myself, and classmate Samantha Slim has been informative. The officers from the town of Mesilla Marshalls department and the Investigator for Mesilla reported the town of *Mesilla* does not hold much interest for local gangs because of the size, and the closeness of the community.

We spoke with Investigator Day of the Doña Ana Sheriff’s Department. He was able to explain the details of the graffiti that has been taken, and the technique used. He explained the gang graffiti and tagger graffiti and what the difference was between the two. Investigator Day concluded his discussion with us with the fact that parents need to be respon-

sible for their children. Children need something to do, to keep them occupied so they do not have the chance to be reformed into a gang, or to get into mischief.

I met with a counselor from a middle school and he said that all children need to learn from a young age what a gang member is. He believes that the young girls need to know that “bad boys” are not what they are all cracked up to be, as this seems to be what girls seem to be attracted to. This is one of the many incentives for boys to join gangs. To be able to show the girls that they are tough, and being associated with a gang will show the girls that they are big, and bad. This myth needs to be squashed for young girls in hopes that they will realize that the “bad boys” are not the ones they want



(Continued on page 3)

Anna Thompson continued

to consider. Children need to be continuously involved in activities after school so that they will be busy and not idle. The counselor indicated that there is not enough to do in Las Cruces for the young people in town. According to this counselor the recreation center on Hadley use to be open for midnight basketball, but it closed at 4 a.m., then what were the kids suppose to do? How were they going to get home? At least if you knew that the “potential” mischief-maker may be at the recreation center, there may be a small sense of security, but at 4 a.m. what happens when the basketball court closes? Then what, they walk home? What can they do on their way to their home, or to their friends’ home? There is the opportunity and time for mischief making. According to Officer Bookerson, the skate park is not a wonderful clean place for our sweet young boys to hang out, nor is it a place to drop off our kids and come pick them up in two or three hours. The skate park is a “breeding ground” for gangs, for gang networking, recruiting, selling of drugs, etc. LCPD Officer Bookerson considers the skate park a bad place, and believes that it should be torn down. So again, we are back to square one. What can be done to help the youth of Las Cruces?

The gangs of Las Cruces are not territorial. After taking pictures in several areas on a daily basis (7 days a week), from January ’08 until April 08, I found a pattern of tagging. A police district map will show the areas hardest hit, and where the continuous tags have been. One gang seems to dominate Las Cruces more than another. Depending on whom you speak with there is as many as 150 gangs in Las Cruces. I have not seen evidence to such numbers in conducting my research. When tags are thrown up Investigator Day and Officer Bookerson said the same thing. Follow the four “R’s”; Read, Report, Record, Remove. It is believed that by removing the tags as soon as possible there is less chance that they will continue in that area, and that will give a rival gang less chance to retaliate by disrespecting and crossing them out, thus, the beginning of problems and potential situations of violence.

In conducting an informal interview with a man in his 40’s who still has ties to a local gang, it is survival. Not only as a person needing protection from others, but for ones self and well being as a person. To have someone teach you how to take care of yourself and others. This man was left at home at age nine while his mother went to

work, and do other things. He had to learn to fend for himself when it came to food, warmth and sometimes even shelter. I had pointed out that I could not work with juveniles because I would want to help them all. According to this gentleman, if he had to help one, he would pick out the meanest, the worse offender in the room, take that one under his wing. Why? Because, that would be the one that needed the most. The most love and understanding. From that point on in life, whatever, whenever anything was needed, he would be provided for, no matter what. The ties become that strong.

All city and county personnel and one school teacher have said the same thing, that the City of Las Cruces does not want to truly believe that there is a gang problem in Las Cruces. It seems to be a frustrating situation as one department of Las Cruces School District attempts to teach young students that gangs are not where it’s at, but others ignore it. Attempting to speak to several school officials from principals to teachers, they will say that there is no problem with gangs in their schools. When speaking with students from middle schools about gangs, they will contradict the teachers. Yes, there are gangs in the schools, they can name several local gangs, the students even say that there are at least four to five fights/scuffles per day and that they are gang related events. One school teacher I spoke with believes that there should be a “special” school available for those “gang type” people to attend. How does an attitude like that help the children of Las Cruces and the community? over two hours at their office as they showed us tagging information and gang information and explained both to us. Everyone in the office was very helpful and more than willing to answer our questions.

I believe that there is a gang problem here in Las Cruces, but I do not believe that it is so large a problem at this time that if the city and community would only open their eyes and their mouths to speak out, be strong and come together there could be a solution, and hope for the young people of Las Cruces, and the surrounding communities.

“[THE CITY] ...DOES NOT WANT TO TRULY BELIEVE THAT THERE IS A GANG PROBLEM IN LAS CRUCES.”

ANNA



LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO—SAMANTHA SLIM

When I first started this research project, I knew nothing about gang activity in Las Cruces. From the beginning of the semester until now, my knowledge about gang activity in the Las Cruces area has grown immensely. I discovered that we do have gang activity in this area and the main solution to the gang “problem” is from a detention stand point, according to many law enforcement groups. I informally interviewed several law enforcement individuals, an active gang member from the South Side Royal Knights gang, and took pictures of graffiti in various parts of town.



Anna and I set out over spring break to interview members of the Las Cruces law enforcement community to obtain their unique perspective on gang activity in the town. We interviewed an investigator, a Mesilla Marshall, the entire TNT staff, and Officer Jon Day with the Las Cruces Sheriff’s department. Collectively from these interviews, I learned that these law enforcement communities share some compatible ideas about local gangs. However, they also have divergent views on the local gang activity.

I learned that often times these agencies stated that Las Cruces did have a growing gang problem. Officer Day with the Sherriff’s office told us that his task force was formed after 20 years of ignoring the gang problem in the Doña Ana area and then two horrific gang related shootings thrust the issues of gangs into the forefront of law enforcement agencies agendas. The TNT task force said that there were a few individuals who were causing a lot of trouble, but for the most part gangs in this area were “wannabe bangers” just causing trouble.

Most reports of “gang” crimes consisted of property offenses in the Las Cruces area. Gang activity was not even recorded in police reports until the beginning of 2008. This reporting consisted of officers not being able to bypass the question of gang relatedness any longer; they now had to provide a yes/no answer to continue with the computer reporting program. Each interview we went to gave us different information on the number and names of particular street gangs in the Las Cruces/Doña Ana area. By far, Officer Day with the Sheriff’s department had the longest list of gangs in the Las Cruces Area. From all interviews and my own research with Anna taking graffiti pictures, I was able to get the following list of active gangs in the Las Cruces Area.

Las Cruces Gangs

- East Side Locos
- Sureños—Sur Trece
- Brown Pride Locos
- Mesquiteros
- West Side Locos
- Cruces Most Wanted—CMW
- Doña Ana Boys—North Siders
- VML—Varrio Mesquite Locos
- BFP-Butterfield Park gang
- South Side Royal Knights



This list may not be complete and may differ from other lists that have been created. Each time I spoke with a different person, the list grew or shrunk depending on the person.

One of the most striking divergent views I have heard from the different Law Enforcement personal is the use of female gang members as prostitutes to enter the gang or to pay the gang off for drugs. This information was given to me by an investigator and a Mesilla Marshall. Officer Day also related a story to Anna and I about a female gang member who had been handed around to all male gang members and had slashed her arm 12 times to represent all the members she had to sleep with to join the gang. When I asked the TNT officers if they had seen any of this activity around they laughed and asked me who I had heard this from. However, many of the individuals I spoke with said that the gangs in this area were using females and juveniles to carry drugs and weapons for them. They told me that the gangs could not be underestimated to use young people to do their drug running. I found out that juveniles are used to deliver/sell drugs because they often face lesser punishments than an adult drug runner would face. The gangs also use the female gang members because they know that the females cannot be searched by a male officer.

I learned that the gangs located in the Las Cruces area are not territorial. They tend to move all over town. This creates a huge problem for law enforcement personal trying to work to control the gang problem here in Las Cruces. When law enforcement cannot pin point gang activity, it makes it harder to reduce that particular activity in a certain area. Officer Mike Bookreson with the TNT task force explained to me that because of the low income housing located throughout Las Cruces, gangs in this area are not able to claim a territory for their own. Several gang members may be living in the same housing projects.

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Las Cruces, New Mexico—Samantha Slim (continued)

PROPERTY

When Anna and I were doing our graffiti picture work, we often noticed that we would see different gang tags in almost every part of town. However, we did notice patterns. We noticed that the Doña Ana Boys stayed mostly up in the Northern part of town. We also found the Brown Pride Locos could be found on Mesquite Street and Tornillo Street. The East Siders and Sureño tags could be found all over town and were often together. I learned that the East Side Locos and the Sureños are the two biggest gangs in the Las Cruces area. These two gangs have a rivalry going on right now. This is evident in the pictures Anna and I took all over town.

felt that the skate park should be torn down. He felt that this park was a net working place for drug deals and gang members. He said the original intention of giving a youth a fun place to hang out had back fired and that more gang activity and drug deals were coming out of the skate park.

OFFENSES IN THE LAS CRUCES AREA.”

SAMANTHA

I learned from Officer Mike Bookreson that the EK, SK and so represent the gang’s rivalry and mean East Side killers (EK) and Sur killers (SK). When Anna and I went to the TNT office, we went to ask the team to help us interpret the gang graffiti that we had documented. In the office I met Officer Mike Bookreson, who is part of the TNT task force. He had a wealth of knowledge to offer us on the issue of tagging and tagger groups in Las Cruces. He stated that tagger crews are also a big problem in Las Cruces. These groups are often made up of older individuals (18-26) who believe that what they do is a form of art rather than vandalism. He spoke of many of them by name and stated that they were often arrested repeatedly because the punishment for tagging was not that severe. Officer Bookreson stated that he would like to see tagging/graffiti made into felony crimes. The situation he faces now is a never ending battle, because they continue to tag because they face no real punishment.

Before I started this project, I hardly noticed the graffiti in the Las Cruces area. Now I can’t go two blocks without spotting some graffiti. When Anna took me to the Butterfield park area, I was in shock at how much graffiti is all over the place. In my neighborhood there is virtually no graffiti; in the Butterfield Park area the streets are covered by paint. I was told by many Officers that it is important to remove the graffiti quickly so you don’t get a name war going on.

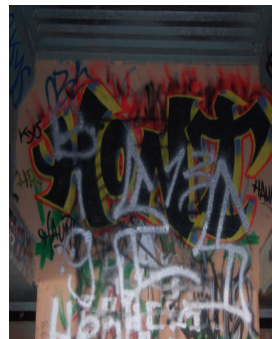
I also had the opportunity to speak with a gang member from the South Side Royal Knights here in Las Cruces. He was a 17 year old member who attended school at San Andreas High. He stated that he was second in command and would soon move up when the leader moved away. This interview was interesting because it offered a different perspective than the local law enforcement agencies. He told me that he did not want to spend the rest of his life banging. He refused to get the tattoo of the gang because he didn’t want to be in the gang life forever. One of the most interesting questions I asked him dealt with the particular activities available in his community. He answered the question by saying getting high and starting shit. To me this shows a lack of alternative, recreational programs for young people in the Las Cruces area.

Officer Bookreson was also able to help Anna and I interpret the pictures we had taken around town. Many of our shots were of tagger groups. Officer Bookreson explained that you could tell and difference because the tagger crews will often plan out there work and use different, special tips to do their work. On the other hand, if a gang member happens to come upon some paint, they are more than likely to just write up the gang name quickly, with little planning. Two examples are:

I feel like my research is not yet complete. Anna and I plan on talking with codes, CYFD, the churches in town, Southwest counseling services, and (hopefully) more schools in the area. The narrative above is what I have learned so far. I feel that there are other perspectives still to hear and learn from. I would like to thank Anna for helping me to be brave enough to go out into the community and interview the different law enforcement agencies. Also, I would like to thank her for having the guts to go into unfamiliar territory and take graffiti pictures (I would also like to thank myself for telling her when she was crazy and that we should get the hell out of a particular place!). We are a great team.



Gang



Tagger

Officer Bookreson said he was unsure of programs in the area that are available to offer alternative recreation for gang members and taggers. He did tell me that he personally

LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO—THOMAS FRAGUA

Considering that this is a small town one might think that this place would not have a gang problem. I have considered that with high level of active gangs in this area would require a number 6 rating. Gangs here are not that territorial is some what amazing in seeing that because almost all other gangs tend to have an area covered. Even talking with the weed and seed program, which is a federal program to help at risk youth. Sitting down with the program coordinator provided some insightful information. Most gang members come from families who are in gangs. Most kids follow in the parents footsteps and most are in prison. Other times gang members come from broken homes in which they are abused or neglected and that leads to joining gangs. They look for the connection of a family and a way to provide for themselves and also protection. Kids come to this program to be kept out of the gang lifestyle by giving them a direction and a place where it is safe. Graffiti is a big issue around here. It proves that gangs are present in the area. The two biggest rivals are the East Side Locos (ESL) and the Sureños (SUR). These gangs are always crossing each others

tagging out which is disrespecting each other when that is done and could lead to the two sides in a big fight. The formation of the gang unit / TNT to deal with the gang issues that arise.

There was little difference reported about the gang issue when I was talking with people to acquire information. Coming from a big city tends to make you think that there is not a big problem in such a small city like Las Cruces. Gangs tend to be more active in larger cities with it comes being more territorial. These gangs in Las Cruces don't have that and makes it harder for police to follow them around. So with that it comes down to how to deal with the gangs in the area. The solution would be continuing the normal patterns that have been going on. Going after them with force is not the right answer in some cases. If you use force it will have a negative effect on how deal with gangs. Some of the information come from gang members about fights or dealings. Working with them as in talking and treating them with respect is one way. Even though it does seem a stupid to deal with that way but in time it will take an effect.

LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO—SARAH LERMA

During the research our team did on Las Cruces gangs, I would say that gangs have a significant presence in the community. I think that the potential for threat is based upon the level we measure it against. If you consider that 95 incidents in four months which breaks down to 1-2 gang occurrences a day threatening, then I would suggest Las Cruces has a low to medium threat level of a 6(LCPD Crime Analyst). In comparing crime rates to Ogden, Utah with Las Cruces, New Mexico it appeared that Las Cruces had higher incidents of crime per 100,000 people. Out of the crimes reported on the UCR it is hard to give a break down of which could be contributed to gang affiliation (FBI.gov 2006). The same reliability issues occur with the LCPD statistics. The validity of UCR takes into account different variables the can lead to disparities in the numbers reported on the UCR. Also, of crimes reported such as murder, rape, and assault any of these can be gang affiliated but not measured as a variable in crime rates. Although Las Cruces may have a higher trend of various criminal activities than Utah according to the UCR, the recognition and measurement of gang involvement seems to be insignificant.

I think some of the biggest problems Las Cruces faces are misdemeanor offenses that end up classifying an individual as a gang member. From statistics that were pulled by the LCPD Crime Analyst ninety-five of the incidents reported from January 2008 to April 2008 were for calls regarding harassment, loud party, vandalism, affray, and phone threats. Many of the reports taken did not lead to arrest. I do not doubt that Las Cruces does have a gang problem, I do however doubt the threat it plays on the city. Many of the incidents were juveniles younger than 17. Research suggesting that they are young

and impressionable and have potential for growth and opportunity for change (Cloward, Richard 1960). Before I began this process I was skeptical that I would find anything less than what we are programmed to believe. Gangs are bad, dangerous and full of criminal involvement. During this research we have obtained information that does seem to discredit the stereotype local law enforcement has given gangs. Talking with schools none of them has suggested heavy gang presence or problems in their campus. Maybe this is incorrect and school administration is protecting the credibility and reputation of their school and does not want to be branded as a school with a gang problem. If that is the case and the people that we have talked to are not forthcoming with information how are we to accurately measure the threat of gangs? If administrative entities would rather save face than admit to potential problems that could be dealt with proactively then the information we uncover will come across as reactive measures to a dangerous problem that was really something that could have been dealt with using prevention and intervention techniques.

Until the data we have obtained can be reevaluated then there is no benchmark to measure how accurate our data really is. I have to measure my findings not on personal opinion, prejudice or stereotypes but on a true analysis of research evaluation. Our job as a researcher needs to be unbiased and conclusions made on the evidence compiled in front of him. With the evidence our teams has obtained I have to say the gang problem is present but not threatening. Solutions need to continue to be preventative. Community support and education based programs. Many of these kids are young and lacking guidance we need to continue to reach out to them and support their efforts.

LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO—ANGELA DURAN

I would say that the gang problem here in Las Cruces, based on the data gathered, is ranked at a 3. This is because they are not a big threat to bystanders or people not affiliated with gangs. The gang problem in Las Cruces is more of generational and some of low income. When you compare the gangs here in Las Cruces to those in Los Angeles or other large cities, they would not allow “hood hoppers.” The gangs here are more about hanging out with friends and conducting petty crimes. They also fight with other gangs through tagging, and more of rivals than enemies.

When I conducted my interview with Rory Rank, I found that he has a big concern for the gang problem in Las Cruces and feel that it is a big problem that no one wants to support with programs to help fix. One of the reasons I felt that he has such a concern with the gangs in our community is based upon the fact that he is a public defender and he sees in my opinion a big majority of gang members because most the time they have no money to pay for a lawyer. Therefore, he sees the problem as a big inconvenience on tax dollars over petty crimes that wouldn't be happening if others in the city cared more about the problem here in Las Cruces.

LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO—CLINTON FAHRELENDER

On a scale from 1-10 with 10 being the most serious, I would rate Las Cruces gangs about a 7. Some gangs in this area would be considered a lower threat and some, such as the East Side Locos, are considered a higher threat. Overall, the gangs in Las Cruces are not as serious as the gangs discussed in California, Colorado and Utah. In my neighborhood there is an abundance of gang members. I never perceived them as being a threat or a force not to be reckoned with.

I interviewed four members of the same community and got several different answers to this question. One young lady in particular spoke about the various actions of the gang members. I was unaware that such activities were occurring and at what levels they were occurring. She gave me very good insight on the gang in our neighborhood and was even able to tell me what kind of initiation process they have and a chain of command style they have. This interview with this young lady was by far the most informative of the four interviews conducted and I would like to thank her for sharing her knowledge. In two of the interviews the people did not have as much knowledge or experience that the first young lady did, but were still able to convey information. They do not feel the gangs to be a serious threat and have not had problems with them in the past. The last gentleman I interviewed said that the gangs in our neighborhood were different from the previous generation of gang members. He mentioned that the current generation of gang members in our neighborhood does not have the respect and discipline that the previous generation had. These younger

Gangs are always going to be a part of any city, and a solution to help the city of Las Cruces would be to take an active approach at elementary students and help with bringing awareness of the negativity of gangs. Also programs to help troubled youth especially those of low income. This could include court ordered or voluntary programs to get out of gangs. Today I think that the city focuses more of taking a criminal perspective and basically “locking them up.” However, it shows today that this is not the answer since the Eastsiders are having problems within their own gang, since the older gang members are now coming out of prison or jail and trying to start where they left off and can't because the younger generation already took over. This is a never ending cycle unless there is a way to prevent gang membership or help people get out of gangs.

guys and gals pick fights with random people and do stupid things just because. He mentioned that the previous generation of members had a mutual respect with the community and other gangs, and these new guys are trying to gain respect without giving any.

The gangs in our area are a serious problem. They may not be the most serious in this state or country, but still need to be recognized as threats to the community. I feel that there is no hope for the members who are ages 18 and up, if they haven't grown out of it by now then they never will. The best solutions are to target the younger children and push them to join sports and clubs through school. I have noticed that the majority of gang members I have come into contact with were never in extra-curricular activities and/or did not have the money to join.

The city of Las Cruces should be able to set aside money for children that cannot pay for extra-curricular activities in order to keep them away from the gang life. The reason for this is because it would be cheaper to pay for their extra-curricular activities than to pay for public defenders and rehabilitation expenses. This city needs to spend more money on deterring children from joining gangs than on defending and prosecuting them.

“I HAVE TO MEASURE MY FINDINGS NOT ON PERSONAL OPINION, PREJUDICE OR STEREOTYPES BUT ON TRUE ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH EVALUATIONS.” SARAH



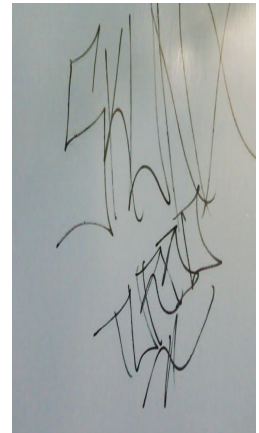
LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO—MANNY RAMIREZ

Based on my field research in Las Cruces, NM it is quite different from other areas of the U.S. My field research included two interviews that were along the same lines of each other. One was an interview of a former correctional officer and the other was a federal probation officer that ranged from prison parolees and city parolees. I learned that gangs in Las Cruces are brought together because of the demographic of the area of Las Cruces, family ties, and broken down families. But the main thing that I think the reason for gangs is broken down families and a sense of belonging for an individual. Broken down families can lead a child at a young age to enter a lifestyle that a parent is not aware of.

As I interviewed a probation officer in the city of Las Cruces, she had said the main reason that children join gangs and are affiliated with the gang membership are because of broken down families that begin with juvenile delinquency. Another aspect that was brought to my attention is that Las Cruces is mainly street gang posers who have no history background of their gang that they are representing. For this reason it makes me think that all these gang members want is a sense of belonging in the area that they live in. Gang membership around the area is basically filled with a different type of social class that includes drinking, partying a drug use. The violence that does occur between these gang members are not really life threatening. The violence that is active between these gangs is mainly tagging, graffiti, domestic violence, drug abuse and burglary. Not so much of murder because like I said some is

mainly posers trying to make a name for them. In the area, gang membership ranges between the ages of 19-26 and some is in it the rest of their life because there is no reason for them to get out of the lifestyle that they have been living since they were young.

In the prison aspect of Las Cruces, people are brought all around the area because of certain convictions. In the prison I can easily say that there is a gang problem and it is hard to control because of that sense of belonging and protection between the inmates. In the prison aspect there is no street gang belonging. Each person that is in a gang before is broken up to their own prison gang that is much bigger and more of a risk that is more likely to commit criminal activity. Each prison gang is broken up by race and ethnic group. I think that all street gangs and prison gangs are race related, but here in Las Cruces are mixes. Because of the area is so small street gangs are so diverse so there is not one set territory that is theirs, they tend to jump around each gang in depending where they live. As for older members in prison that are in gangs tend to step away from the gang life as they continue their life out of prison because of the fact that the gang life is different now from when it was started.



LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO—BILLY ROMERO

After going over the information which our team was able to gather, I would conclude that Las Cruces does have a gang problem. However the problem here is not of violence and criminal activity I think that problem lies in the amount of people getting involved with gangs. On a scale of 0-10 I would rate the city of Las Cruces as a 6. I think the potential for Las Cruces to have a more severe problem is strongly evident but for reasons unknown the city does not experience wide scale violence or high criminal activity. Las Cruces has an interesting gang culture. It does not have heavy influence from outside areas such as California not even El Paso. Gangs are created by locals in the area but they do not struggle for territory. Violence is minimal and crime reports illustrate minor activity or some misdemeanor types.

Our group was able to collect an array of information that came from various aspects of Las Cruces such as; police agencies, community organizations and personal interviews of various ages. The perceived level of threat was a higher concern to law enforcement officials and they were adamant about the problem with gangs in the area. Community agencies seemed to be trying to adjust and combat the poverty and gang concern. The community and community organizations both

seemed to want more options for youth than having them turn to gang life. Criminal activity was low and many crimes were not a serious threat. What is more alarming was the amount of gangs in the area and the general agreement that these gangs were non territorial making them harder to track and keep up with.

I think that gangs cannot be erased, but community and law enforcement can work together to better the situation. Based upon my observations I would have to say that law enforcement (gang task force) needs more help but I think that can be said across the country. However help should come in forms of people who have more of an understanding of gangs or get the task force more training about how to deal with gang problems. I believe the city of Las Cruces needs to become involved and support programs such as Boys and Girls club, YMCA, AmeriCorps. and other community agencies that aim to help the youth in the city. Having programs such as the gang intervention (Mr. Gallardo in Anthony) are always a plus and they should not be cautioned by police yet should serve as tools that youth or young adults can use.

LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO—JUSTIN LEWIS

Throughout the semester everyone in my group uncovered a lot of different issues with gangs in Las Cruces. We discovered that gangs didn't have a real presence here in the area until about the early 1990's. The main gangs were the East Side Locos and the Sureño gang. It seems to me that when the gang scene first erupted here in Las Cruces it may have been bad. I would rate it at like a 7. The whole nation was being taken over by the gang scene and even music and the influence of gangster rap was at its peak. In the 90's rapper like Tupac Shakur and Notorious BIG were stirring up the gang scene and promoting gang life through their songs. I think that's when the impact of gang life was at its peak throughout the nation and even here in the little city of Las Cruces, NM.

I have talked to a couple of family members recently who attended school here in Las Cruces in the 1990's and they said yes that the gang scene here was tough. Everyone was trying to be like the people on television and it was hard to even walk the hallway of a school. I talked to gang experts and people around the community now and the gang scene has definitely calmed down. Based on everything we have uncovered as a group, I would rate the threat of gangs here in Las Cruces at around a 5. The reason for this is that there is still a medium to heavy presence of gangs but there are just not committing the big crimes; or at least not getting caught.

Like I said there is a presence of gangs here but they are not doing much. One source even went as far as calling them 'punks.' When I asked him what he meant by that he stated that gangs here are wannabes. They are high school

kids or high school dropout who go around and get in fist fights, tag buildings, do drugs, and hang out at house parties. Gangs here are no where near the level of California street gangs. The gangs in California are committing robbery, larceny, drug trafficking, murders, assault and battery. The crimes here are petty compared to the list I just named off.

What I perceived the gang threat was here when I first started this class was medium to heavy activity. I thought because the prison being so close that Las Cruces would have a big influence on the street gang life and that this town would be pretty corrupt. When I went out and did the research I discovered I was wrong. The seriousness is not that bad and there seems to be no real ties from the prison gangs to the street gangs here in Las Cruces.

I believe the recent implementation of the gang task force to the Las Cruces community is a great thing. They are new and young but they do know what they are talking about. Of course they didn't give the best presentation in class they still were knowledgeable of the Las Cruces gang life and the only thing they do from here is grow and expand. I think they are a great solution to control the Las Cruces gang scene. Other community organizations are on the uprise and I think that will only add to the fire to keep the Las Cruces gang scene controlled.

“LAS CRUCES HAS AN INTERESTING GANG CULTURE. IT DOES NOT HAVE HEAVY INFLUENCE FROM OUTSIDE AREAS SUCH AS CALIFORNIA, NOT EVEN EL PASO.”
BILLY



ANTHONY, NEW MEXICO—RESEARCH TEAM



Front Row: Erica Alvarez, Ruth Arroyo, Yolanda Salas, Michelle Lara, and Laura Medina.
Back Row: Racquel Reveles, Jacob Glossop, and Justin Romero.

ANTHONY, NEW MEXICO—LAURA MEDINA

Based upon my own field research, I learned quite a few things about gangs in Anthony, NM. First of all, personally I don't think there's a visible problem within the community itself. What I mean with by visible is that there isn't really any gangs that are walking around or causing problems in the community. Although, it is important to mention that Anthony does have a huge graffiti problem. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to see a wall in the community that has no graffiti of some sort on it. It is with the graffiti itself that we then can see that the gang problem becomes more and more visible. It is through these means that rival gangs get at each other by crossing out rival graffiti.

In addition, gang activity in schools, particularly, Gadsden Middle School (GMS) seems to be a growing problem. There seems to be fights often throughout a given month and new gangs forming with in small periods of time. At the time there are about 14 gangs, plenty which could be considered pretty new. The older gangs according to my knowledge are, TNS (Teners), VAL's (Varrio Anthony Locos), the WSD (West Side Dukes), and MQT (Mesquiteros-although this gang is from the Mesquite area). These gangs seem to be the ones

that have stuck the longest.

In addition, the newer and younger gangs include: VBHx13 (Vado Berino Hights 13), LP (Las Palmeras), SUR XIII (Southern United Raza), MSX13 (MaraSalvatrucha 13), Teners, TCK (Thugz Create Khaos), Chambie (Chamberino), CMF (Crazy Motha Fuckers), Barrio Aztecas, and TDS (Tierra Del Sol). Also there are a couple of tagging crews such as: MTK (My Tagging Krew), MSK (Mexican Style Kings), NMT (New Mexico Taggers) and DCK (Dope City Krew). Many of these gangs are represented at Gadsden Middle School and at the high school level itself. Unfortunately, many of the gang members are not given many options in such schools. For example, gang members at GMS are often suspended or put in MAAP, which is an in-school suspension program. In other words, many of these gang members are often not given the proper information, or choices in order for them to try and better themselves. At the high school level though the story is a bit different. Many of the gang members who might once have attended Gadsden High School (GHS) and who might have either dropped out or gotten expelled, have the choice of enrolling in an alternative school.

(Continued on page 11)

Laura Medina continued

The alternative school available for them and located in Anthony is Desert Pride. At Desert Pride students are set in a unique schedule of attendance. Many of the gang members who in fact do attend Desert Pride get to do so with their own gang members. In other words, members who claim a same gang attend school at the same time during the day. The reason being that it is a strategy used to avoid confrontations and fights amongst rival gang members.

In addition, it is also important to point out that there are hardly any organizations or individuals willing to help in the gang issue. Although, many school and city officials agree that there is a gang problem and that the lack of resources play an important role in such area. Anthony as a city lacks resources from recreation to treatment. In fact, Dr. Garcia (principal) at GMS admits that Gadsden is a poor district with little attention given to (other than when it has to do with something negative), which lacks many needed resources. Garcia believes that one of Gadsden's biggest needs is a gang's intervention specialist along with social workers, and mental health coordinators. He was also the one to point out that the Gang Task force in Anthony in reality has only minor contact with GMS, but it is also obvious that such task force also has minor contact with the community as a whole. One individual who has plenty of contact with gangs and who provided plenty of information is Ron Gallardo. Gallardo is a socialist who has dedicated his time and energy in helping gang members in

ANTHONY, NEW MEXICO—RACQUEL REVELES

Based upon the data collected by the team, I do not think there is a serious threat with gangs in the area. Most of the problems we heard about involved occasional fights in the community and school gangs. However, the biggest problem I found was with graffiti. Graffiti both by gangs and tagging crews seems to be a very big problem in the Anthony area and its surroundings. I would rank the problem a 4 since the gangs do exist and create some problems (significant when they do at times) but it's not something that happens daily like in L.A. for example. I came to this conclusion because we really did not find out about any serious activity going on other than the shootings that happened a while back. Also, there is a difference in threat of gangs with my opinion and the people that I interviewed since Mr. Dickson seems to deny completely that there is a problem at all and makes it seem that Gadsden has everything under control and it is obvious that it is not the case. Something that I keep in mind is his comment about the most serious brawl he has ever seen happening a couple months ago. I remember that during my freshman year at Gadsden there was a HUGE "rumble" among many different gangs including some from Chaparral where at least one administrator got hurt. We also have different opinions on why kids join gangs and about the community.

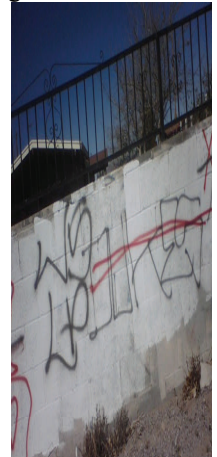
As for other community members that I spoke to, they believe that we have a serious problem with gangs simply be-

plenty of ways. He is the one responsible in forming Operation No Gangs. Operation No Gangs focuses on helping gang members discover that there is something other than the gang life, but it is also a program, which provides information to students, parents and communities from a gang member's viewpoint. Gallardo has done plenty in order to combat gangs and membership, or maybe not necessarily combat but intervene in some way or form and provide alternatives.

In conclusion it is extremely important to point out that although there has been a couple of gang related incidents and deaths in Anthony, it is a rare happening. Unfortunately, being a poor city with less than enough resources we always seem to be on the news for something negative. I mean the gang problem is in fact present in Anthony, but more at a school level than at a community level. And the incidents that do occur in relationship to gangs are no more than in our near vicinities, therefore it is important to know that what the media portrays is not always necessarily true.

"UNFORTUNATELY, BEING A POOR CITY WITH LESS THAN ENOUGH

RESOURCES, WE ALWAYS SEEM TO BE ON THE NEWS FOR SOMETHING NEGATIVE." LAURA



cause there is graffiti all over the place. For example, I asked one of the neighbors why he swore there was a serious gang problem and his answer was "Look around, see all the different tagging and different gangs; they're all over the place." This is true but it is not like we hear about these gangs causing commotion every day.

As for recommendations, that is a hard thing to do because we must consider doing and implementing things that we know the community will cooperate with. As I mentioned before, some community members seem to be in denial of the situation because they do not care or don't want to get involved. Others do think there is a problem but are not willing to do much about it. The first step, in my opinion, is to inform the communities about what is happening in the area and try to explain these things to them since most people seem to blame the parents of these kids when many of them are loving, hard-working, and caring people who simply cannot control their kids' actions even though they try. We need to take people away from these myths that corrupt minds and give them the wrong ideas about these kids who do have potential and who are just like anyone else. Perhaps the community itself will one day be willing to suggest ideas that they are willing to get involved in and that they will be willing to follow. I doubt that implementing programs that a law enforcement agency believes will work, but that the community doesn't support will succeed or function properly.

ANTHONY, NEW MEXICO—MICHELLE LARA

I have gained a lot of knowledge within the gangs of Anthony. I have been visiting with the Desert Pride School in Anthony to find out more about gang life. Interviewing the kid's really gave me an understanding of why these kids join the gang. The gangs are not as serious as we see on Gangland or the L.A. gangs. Most of the kid's do petty crime and some drug involvement. Some of the kids don't like to do drugs and one kid said it was never a problem in his gang if he didn't want to do it. Most of the gang members from the school are a bunch of bored lonely kids. They all seem to tell the same story. They all grew up around gangs, their family's and friends are gang members and they're all low income families. They all say they're a part of a gang, but they're not very organized. The gangs in Anthony are more talk than show, a drive by might happen very rarely, but none of these kids have a leader that they follow to tell them what to do. The gang members all described that their town is boring, so they go around getting into trouble or tagging just for the fun of it.

The kid's are at this alternative school because they couldn't or didn't like high school. So college is not even in any of these kids' future goals. It's almost as no one knows that the little town of Anthony exists. Everyone always passes along that area and smells the cows and never thinks twice about stopping. The government or community sure doesn't care to do anything about the tagging, low graduation rates, pregnancy rate, or low income. So a lot of these kid's don't care either, they group up with some friends, claim their gang,

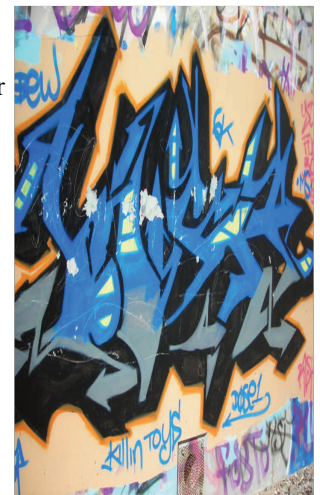
ANTHONY, NEW MEXICO—ERICA ALVAREZ

Based on the data collected by my team (Anthony), I do consider the Anthony gangs a threat. From a 0-10 I would rank Anthony gangs an 8, not only because the information we obtained as a group, but also because of personal experience. I did not grow-up in Anthony but my mom did, I visited a lot and went to Anthony middle school for a couple of months. There were only 3 well known gangs Vals, Teners, and Mesquite this was during the 1994-95 year and you typically didn't see much violence as now, mostly fist fights but no murders or drive-bys.

During our interview with the administration of Gadsden High School, Raquel and I discovered that there were now 30-35 gangs including tagging crews at GHS, way higher than 4 years ago when Raquel had attended this same high school. What really is different is the graffiti that is on mostly every wall, back then you may have seen very little but it would be removed by the next day. I think there was more respect than there is now then back then there was no police substation and it took 30 minutes before cops arrived. There is now a substation and the cops still take 10-15 minutes to arrive, as you can tell this is why gangs seem to flourish here. The police department only gets involved when the media is called due to gang violence or even murder as we've seen in the last couple of years and then make it seem as it's the parents fault and every-

and cause trouble. As they're doing all this, they run into drugs and most of them will try it out because all of their friends are doing it. I have learned a lot of the same gang traits from L.A. and the bigger cities, but this doesn't even come close.

I feel that there is still hope for rehabilitation for this town to see improvement in these kids so they know what is available out there as far as college and work. They see the same thing day in and day out, so they don't know any better because their bored, uneducated, and lonely. My aunt, Elaine Lara, got me involved at this school because she is a teacher there. She always comes home to tell me these sad stories of these kids. They're really good kids, but have bad parents, or need to be pushed in the right direction, or don't know any better. I give her credit for working with these students to help them out and tell them that a gang, violence, and drugs are not the answer. I would also like to thank the acting principle there at the school, Marci Carlo, she met with us as well and answered any of our questions we had for her about the school or students regarding the gang problem, drug issue, and home life for the students.



thing is under control. In a way it seems as the Anthony community doesn't get involved as they should and I can say that most are scared to talk whenever they see any gang activities because of retaliation, a lot of residents are immigrants and are scared to call the police, and because they don't think its there business and know the police wont do something about. I personally know this because the neighborhood I live in is the best example, you see cars being stolen in broad daylight, mobile homes tagged up with gang names and nobody gives information because of fear. In the past 6 years that I have lived here, I have seen the rise in gangs and gang violence. My stepsister's boyfriend was the one murdered last year here in Anthony. He got shot because he was from Canutillo (Canuto), and to see how these kids are even making there own weapons and trying to kill others is just scary. If the violence has grown in such little time like 6 years I could just imagine what another 6 years will bring. I believe there is hope for Anthony and if only the community, parents, and officers get involved in trying to stop gangs. In order for it to work all three have to work together because if one is missing it will be the same as it is now, where all three are missing and will continue give the same negative results.

ANTHONY, NEW MEXICO—JUSTIN ROMERO

Based on the information I have gathered from doing gang research at Desert Pride Alternative School, I talked with six ages 15 to 18 with all kids knowing or being a part of gang activity in the town. The interviews gave me a broad sense of how gangs work and run in Anthony and how they affect the city. While in the class with the kids I gave them background on my experience with gangs from my home town and talked to them not as a reporter but as a new friend which made the experience more successful for my research. I talked with the kids on their knowledge of what gangs are in Anthony which included contained over 12 gangs such as Tenner North 15, Azteca's, West Side Dukes, West Side Loco's, North Side, and MSK. Each kid was jumped into a gang at ages of 13 through 16. Most of the kids had family in gangs which gave them no say to wither or not they wanted to be affiliated with a gang. One kid was a transfer from New York and had no choice to be in a gang his father, uncles and cousins were part of one which he will not mention. He was jumped in by family and friends each member had a minute by themselves with him and the older and bigger guys were at the end of the jump in. He told us if he had a choice he would not have been in a gang and seen or done the stuff he experienced while a part of it. The youngest kid I talked with was hardcore and devoted with his gang the Tenners. He would tell us that they would jump their friends that would not back them up in fights if they did not jump them then they would be jumped by the older guys. One other kid told us that he felt bad when he jumped his cousin which is a girl but if he didn't hit and stomp her then the older members would do it to him.

All the gangs in Anthony are all based on reputation and respect they hold it up as their highest ideal and that they would kill or beat anyone that disrespected them or their gang. When they were asked where they would see themselves in ten years or where they would want to be in ten years all but one said they would be in a cell or in a box. The one that said other is joining the marines and wants to make a career out of the military. The others didn't say anything about where they wanted to be because going to college or moving out of Anthony was only a dream to them and that nothing good comes to them. They said if they were born somewhere else they still would be in a gang that there was no escaping gang life. Just recently before going to Anthony that one of their friends was killed due to gang related activities. All kids except the young one in the Tenners said if they had a choice they would not have been in a gang. My group also interviewed a teacher, principle and security guard at the school. The teacher and principle said that they had a real big drug problem at the school all

kids but eight would be high on coke or weed and that they first tried or experimented with drugs around the ages of nine to thirteen. The teacher told us of one incident about a student up on coke that threatened to hit her and punched the wall she was leaning on. That another student is a big drug dealer and drives the most expensive car and wears the most expensive clothes then anyone in the town. The teacher told us that no student can be trusted that they would turn on the staff at any given moment. Many of the kids parents are into drugs and give the kids any love or attention.

So the kids join gangs for the affection from another person that sense of belonging that none of them get. They would steal their parents drugs to sell or get high off. The teacher has attended more then six funerals for kids that were killed in drive by's and that the students were all from their school. When we interviewed the security guard he said that the kids were only allowed to bring a note book and pencil with them and they were not allowed any form of book bags, hand bags, or anything where a weapon can be concealed. Before a kid is registered the school needs to know what neighborhood they are from so that the kids would not be placed in classes with other kids from other gangs so problems would not arise. Kids in the morning classes were all from the same neighborhood and the kids in the afternoon classes were from different ones. Before the kids from afternoon classes were permitted on campus the morning kids would have to be completely off of campus so they wouldn't taunt each other or fight. Because of the that system they had not had a fight within three months. We asked him does he think they are making a difference with the kids. He said yes even if they get one kid out that is still one life that is saved which to their family and own person it's a change in a very big way. Most of the boys would get jobs in construction and that most girls would be successful in cosmetology.

With my information gathered the gang in Anthony is rising with the young generations and that drugs are taking over and they are losing more kids to gang violence. There is not really any support groups in Anthony for youths in gangs and that the city is too poor to make any agencies to handle the rising problems with gangs.



ANTHONY, NEW MEXICO—YOLANDA SALAS



In the Anthony New Mexico area, the issue of gangs is very important. The rise of gangs in this area has been an ongoing situation throughout many years. There have been various incidents that have occurred in this area that have been gang related. There have been drive-bys and killings because of opposing gangs. While studying

the area I noticed tremendous amounts of graffiti claiming all sorts of gangs. As a Gadsden graduate I was amazed to see all the different gangs names that are being claimed nowadays. When I was in school there was a gang issue but there was never as many gangs as there are today.

I interviewed with Dr. Garcia, the principal at Gadsden Middle School, and he provided a lot of helpful information on the gang issue at that level. The principal agreed that there was a major gang problem in the Anthony area. He said that part of the reason that there is a problem is because children have way too much free time and no restrictions. He emphasized that Anthony, NM does not have a curfew law, while their neighbor Anthony, TX does. He stated that curfew was one reason that there was so much tagging in Anthony, NM as opposed to the minimal tagging in Anthony, TX. He also told us that because we live in a poor county there are is not a lot of funding or resources that can help eliminate gangs. This issue

could be resolved if people would get more involved with trying to help stop the gang activities.

The community should take a stand because recruitment is beginning at even a younger age group. Gang members are now even targeting children in the sixth grade. That means that before they even enter the middle school they are already associated with gangs. This thought is astonishing because you wonder how they can even consider children as young as 11 to join their gang.

Students can't avoid gangs in school because they are everywhere. The school is trying to minimize gang recognition by implementing a uniform code. The students will no longer be able to wear gang colors or gang related memorabilia. But unfortunately this is only a small step to minimize gang activities at the school. The community does have people who help gang members trying to cope with gang life. They talk to them and try to keep them away from that life. It is going to take a lot more people and a lot more activity to try and stop gangs from growing in this area.



ANTHONY, NEW MEXICO—JACOB GLOSSOP

After gathering all the research data in the Anthony area, I feel the gangs are at a medium/high threat for the local community. If I were to rank the seriousness of the threat, I would rank the Anthony area 8 out of 10. I pick 8 because I interviewed students who have lived in Anthony all their life and have experienced the gang life. The students I interviewed were gang members that had good information on the local area. They told me that the Anthony area was heavily populated with small local gangs. These gangs were run by young gangbangers that were 17-23 years old. The things these young gangbangers would do in Anthony include: Graffiti on public property, fight amongst other gangs, and skip school. That would be the less serious activity the gangbangers do in Anthony. The more serious activity conducted in Anthony would be drug trafficking, heavily vandalizing the community property, and shootings.

During my research I decided to interview students from Desert Pride Academy, which is an alternative school for students that get into trouble frequently and most of them are

gang members. The first interview I had conducted with the students was very interesting because I had a certain perceived level of threat from the students. After I talked to the students more, I felt the threat level lowered. I fell the gang members had their guard up when I first came in the classroom, but after they got to know me better, they felt more comfortable around me. That was when I realized the level of threat was very low with these students.

When I interviewed the teacher, she told me that sometimes during class some gang members would come to class with bad attitudes and interrupt the class from work. The teacher said one time she had to break up a fight and was threatened by one of the gang members that she would be killed if she did not let the two gang members fight each other. I feel her level of threat changes every day she comes to class. The teacher told me, it depends on what the student goes through at home and how his family treats him or her before they go to school. This fact has a big effect on how their day

(Continued on page 15)

“THE POLICE DEPARTMENT ONLY GETS INVOLVED WHEN THE MEDIA IS CALLED DUE TO GANG VIOLENCE OR EVEN MURDER AS WE’VE SEEN IN THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS AND THEN MAKE IT SEEM AS IT’S THE PARENTS FAULT AND EVERYTHING IS UNDER CONTROL.” ERICA

Jacob Glossop continued

will be sometimes. Most of the students live in bad family environments at home.

I feel the teacher information received was very helpful and true. Based on the level of threat the teacher went through everyday in class; I feel teachers should get paid more for all the time and patience they put in for the students. I feel the gang members in this school have been given a last chance to change and become a better person. I believe the gang members in this area still have a chance to change themselves and earn a great education. Solutions I feel Anthony could use consists of more law enforcement on the streets patrolling, more activities in the community for students to conduct and a bigger gang unit in the area. I feel these ideas may help address the gang problem in Anthony.



EL PASO, TEXAS—RESEARCH TEAM



Front Row: Richard Ayala, Sophia Gonzalez, Ruby Rubio, and Elisa Martinez
Back Row: Robert Salas, Raul Magallanes, Jacob Thornquist, and Justin Moss.

EL PASO, TEXAS—ROBERT SALAS

Throughout my field research in El Paso it has become apparent to me that a gang problem does exist within the city. However when you consider the size of El Paso which is a mid-major city, the number of gangs/ activity isn't quite as severe compared to others its size such as Albuquerque. I attended the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque for one semester and it seemed as if almost every other day there were articles in the newspaper about larceny, battery, and homicides involving gangs not to mention new graffiti popping up around the city daily.

Here in El Paso we do have these problems, but with less frequency. In addition, the majority of gang activity seems to be highly concentrated in one area of the city as opposed to Albuquerque where it was all over. The majority of graffiti I found was south of I-10, from both taggers and street gangs in parts such as downtown, Socorro, and Segundo Barrio. Not to say there is none north of I-10, but over there the graffiti is more scattered, with no areas dominated by it.

Another important note on El Paso gangs is that

the majority of them are petty criminals, and a meager portion are small time drug dealers. The only real legitimate criminal empire in El Paso is the Barrio Azteca gang. This gang has been the only one to make the El Paso Times and in recent months there has been a federal and local crackdown on them which has resulted in the arrest of more than a dozen members. The charges have ranged from possession with intent to distribute all the way to murder. It's extremely rare to see gang articles in the newspaper, which may come from the city not wanting to receive negative perception or simply because there is a very low level of gang crime in El Paso. The Barrio Azteca gang has been the only one to receive media attention in recent years and appears to be the only gang whose organizational style resembles that of gangs found in Los Angeles and Chicago.

However for the most part the rest of El Paso gangs appear to be low-key and more like "social groups" than the stereotypical street gangs we see in larger cities. Gang homicides are a rare occurrence in the city and if I'm not mistaken El Paso hasn't had one this year and had less than five all of last year. The majority of criminal activities committed by El Paso gangs, if any

Robert Salas continued

are simple petty offenses such as vandalism and larceny. In addition out of all the “declared” gang members I’ve seen, none have distinguishing tattoos or “brands” something that is a norm for the traditional street gangs found all over the country. The only gang whom I noticed to have gang affiliated markings was the Barrio Aztecas, bearing the number 21 (2- B is 2nd letter in alphabet, 1- A is 1st letter, Barrio Azteca) in addition to the Aztec calendar. The only distinguishing traits El Paso gangs seem to use are the clothing they wear (Dickies, Low Rider Sunglasses, Nike Cortez, Red/ Blue colored clothing).

The majority of my knowledge on El Paso gangs came through independent research, driving through the various neighborhoods and observing certain characteristics from each which could be attributed to gangs. I also have to give credit to

EL PASO, TEXAS—RAUL MAGALLANES

The data we collected about El Paso was interesting in many ways. I learned a lot of new things that I might have not understood before. As far as the seriousness of gangs in El Paso, from what I have learned, I would rate El Paso a 6 as far as the level of threat they bring. According to our information gathered, gangs in El Paso could be a problem that gets worse with the arrival of military. A gang member may choose to become part of the military for different reasons, but if a gang member wants to continue his life of gang banging while in the military and even after, the military could have turned him in to a trained gang member with better skills to shoot. The people we interviewed to gather our data feel El Paso could serve as a model to other cities when it comes to gang problems. It just doesn’t feel like El Paso will ever have a big enough problem with gangs as to where they will take over the city and make their own rules. Drugs are the main crime that gangs are involved with.

Drugs are always an issue that can make a situation worse. The city of El Paso has gangs that pursue drug trafficking as a way of making money. El Paso has kids in middle school that get involved in a life of gangs. If children remain involved in a gangster life, the future could be dangerous for El Paso; a kid will have real experience as a gang member by the time he is in his 20’s. This could make for dangerous gangsters in the streets of El Paso. Sometimes, while going about on a normal day, I have been walking though a mall in El Paso and I have seen kids that seem to be young enough to be in elementary school dressed in apparel that might be gangster related, if part of a gang, some of those kids might have been involved in crimes to become part of the gang or even show loyalty. The people we talked to said that kids young enough to be in elementary could be in gangs. I never thought an elementary student can have the mentality to even understand the kind of life he could be getting in to. I don’t think El Paso has a terrible uncontrollable problem with gangs, but gangs are a problem

certain individuals whom I know who are either in a gang or a former member. Their insight was a huge contribution to my research and helped me better understand El Paso gangs and how they can be seen as social groups more than anything. Their accounts of their time in gangs really never turned up any serious criminal activities but rather only altercations involving rival gangs at parties or at school. For the most part, it was all about hanging out with their boys drinking beer and smoking bud.

“ FOR THE MOST PART, IT [GANGBANGING] WAS ALL ABOUT HANGING OUT WITH THEIR BOYS DRINKING BEER AND SMOKING BUD.”

ROBERT



that should not be ignored in El Paso. Solutions can come in many forms. I think people alone can make an impact to inspire those that want to be helped. We were told when we interviewed a cop in El Paso about a cop who had such an impact with kids, that kids would really look up to him and respect him. If kids have people to turn to that they feel they can trust when they need help, then at least someone is getting help. Schools also need to have available programs where kids can do constructive things; these programs can include athletic teams, or even academic teams like a math club or science club, or even a chess club. If a kid wants out of a gang, he should be able to turn to an adult for guidance, so schools should also have trained personnel that can handle an issue like that. Parents should also learn to identify if their child has a problem or needs help. Giving parents the knowledge to have the tools to help their kids could be valuable.

Solutions for gangs in El Paso can start with helping the kids of El Paso. They need to have options growing up and alternatives they can choose from, not just gang life as a way out. If a kid feels the need to be part of a group to feel popular or safe, a gang doesn’t have to be their only option, being part of the soccer team or any other athletic team could give him popularity and respect if a mind is set to accomplish a goal. If a kid learns to work hard for a good outcome, then they might learn to like to stay away from trouble and bad influence.



EL PASO, TEXAS—ELISA MARTINEZ

It's very hard to write a lot on what I have learned from the gang research for El Paso. It was very hard for any of us to find thorough information on the subject. It seems like all the information that we would ask people in law enforcement had to be kept under wraps. Based on what I found in the El Paso public library, as far as history, there have been gangs in El Paso that were reported on in the El Paso Times in the 1970s.

The history of the Pachucos in El Paso is something that we talked about, but I was not able to find anything on them. Most of us in the El Paso group were able to find graffiti

around different parts of the city, but most of it seems like it's taggers that did it. Other things that we found were that gangs in El Paso are joined together, mostly because of the recent information that the news has been showing with the arrests of the Azteca members.

There doesn't seem to be too much gang activity in El Paso when you look at it, but based on the information that we got from interviews we learned a lot. Inter-

views with high schools in the area and the few police department connections that we were able to make, we found that there is gang activity in the city. At the schools it seems like it's more of an image that the kids want to make for themselves, and the gangs around the city seem to keep to themselves. There wasn't too much actual gang members that we spoke to and we got minimal information from the law enforcement perspective. I think that more research needs to be done on the El Paso area in order to really find what is going on. I think that the gang threat level is about a 6 in El Paso. The police department seems to be doing a very good job in covering up what's going on, but at the same time it seems like they have a hold on it. The reason that I think that it is under control is because you don't really hear too much about gang disturbances in El Paso. There is a big case going on right now, but eventually that will diminish.

The people that we talked to don't seem too worried about El Paso gangs because mostly what they see are petty crimes. Most of what is seen on the streets are the doings of taggers that are in the area. Gangs seem to have a lot of what goes on under wraps. I think that in El Paso there needs to be more help toward the youth. Students in high schools that become the "big guys" in the gang world need to be looked at more carefully. There needs to be more programs implemented in El Paso to help these kids look at the big picture. Nobody helps them apply for college, nobody looks at the hidden talents that some have. I think that the gang members in El Paso need to be advised. They need to see what opportunities exist outside of the small border city.

EL PASO, TEXAS—JUSTIN MOSS

Based on the data that my team and I were able to gather in our research of the El Paso gangs I would say that ranking El Paso's gang threat as an 8 of 10 would be easily justified. Compared to the other areas that were researched I think that the El Paso group had the area with the most serious level of activity. Being that El Paso is a border town and the activity that is going on in Juarez, Mexico right now. In our research we were told that since the beginning of the year (2008) the cartel in Mexico actually put a hit list on television and there has been over 200 murders including many police officers since January 1, 2008 (EPPD Officer Slade Davis).

In our research we also found that with the increase of a military presence in El Paso that now there is cause to be concerned because gang members are joining the military to gain access to weapons and clearance that allow them to things that a regular citizen is not capable of attaining. Also the idea that with military training you now have gang members that are trained in combat and make the area all that more dangerous. I think that it is safe to say that as a group we found that the El Paso area has a incredible threat on its hand when it comes to gangs and

especially the Barrio Aztecas. Within El Paso you have very violent gang ties to the Juarez drug community and violence that is pouring into the streets on both sides of the border. In talking with members of the police department and members of the El Paso community the problem is definitely more serious than at first look.

The seriousness of the El Paso area gang problem is so extensive that it has an effect on surrounding communities such as Anthony and Las Cruces; drugs crossing the border and fighting for the power and money that comes with drugs can lead to serious problems in the future and a lifestyle for the youth in the communities that could lead them to jails, prisons, and even death. In order to keep the gang activity in the area to a minimum it is imperative that the police and the community be proactive instead of reactive. At some point the federal government is going to have to step in and realize that a lot of the problems are coming from Mexico and putting our citizens in danger; in order for this to begin to take place it is important that El Paso realizes that it needs help and that the problem is not something they can continue to hide from the public and down play when it is called upon.

EL PASO, TEXAS—RUBY RUBIO

Based upon the data collected by our El Paso team, we had two types of gangs we had the regular street gangs we saw in Anthony and Las Cruces, but El Paso also has other types of gangs, and those are prison gangs. These gangs started on the inside of prisons and are also run outside the streets, these are more organized and pose a greater threat to El Paso than most street gangs. Therefore, for the street gangs I would rate the threat as a 5, they do commit crimes but as statistics show more than half of the crimes committed by these gangs involves vandalism.

As for the other gangs present in El Paso, the prison gangs, I estimate the threat is about a 9 or even a 10. Since they are mostly ex-convicts and therefore become even more dangerous, they sell drugs, collect taxes on local street gangs for their drugs and commit murders, extortion and many more serious felonies. There was really no great difference between what I perceived the level of threat was and what people we interviewed told us. Growing up in a town bordering El Paso and Mexico I always knew that gangs were a problem in our city, just the simple fact that we were unable to get much information from our local law enforcement told us that gangs were a big problem and they wanted to keep it silent so that El Paso could still be perceived as a “safe” city.

EL PASO, TEXAS—SOPHIA GONZALEZ

From the field research that I’ve begun and tried getting some kind of information is really relying on just the people. I’ve spoken with a uncle of mine and to this day he is still a pretty good informant on the gang problems in El Paso. As I’ve attempted to make phone calls to various places, I always get the run around. I don’t understand why people are so secretive to want to talk about the gangs in the area. I grew up in El Paso and so I can tell you that every, and I do mean every school has gang member on school campuses. As much as they don’t want to admit it, it is an issue in El Paso as well. I personally feel that El Paso wants to be considered one of the safest cities in Texas, but they are going about it in a very wrong way. I’m doing an internship with the Juvenile Probation office here in Las Cruces and some of the kids that I’ve worked with are from the Anthony area, so yes majority of them are in my office because of gang affiliations and I’ve seen what a problem it is right now in that area, I see what kind of problem it is in high schools in Las Cruces like Las Cruces High. So why is it that El Paso is a “free choice” area and Las Cruces and Anthony are screaming for some help with the gangs?

How would I describe the gangs in this particu-

You can even see it on the news now, the threat of the “Barrio Azteca” which is one of the local prison-formed gangs, with all the recent arrests for drugs, money laundering, etc.

Based upon the level of seriousness for these gang’s possible solutions would be to implement more programs in helping gang members get out and provide them assistance in obtaining jobs and helping them become contributing members of society. Also a great help would be to create a program targeting gangs specifically, something like the D.A.R.E, but to prevent kids from joining gangs and implement that throughout 5th-9th grade. Therefore, we can prevent the kids from joining gangs and going to prison. Most teenagers start joining gangs in the Middle School, so by implementing a program from elementary throughout Middle School and continuing to their freshman year would help prevent some teenagers from joining gangs.

lar area, well to begin with I would say some are very organized and the others are just little street gangs made up of teenagers that are bored. We have gangs like the Aztecas and the Mexican Mafia that are well organized and are also in the prison systems, and you have little gangs that are run from projects and neighborhoods. There is also a wider area and they call themselves “crews,” you have party crews, you have tagging crews, you have biker crews, and you have racing crews. All of these can be considered gangs but they call themselves crews. I have also found out that once a teenager is seventeen years old, they are considered an adult in the CJ system of Texas. So all these crews and gangs (prison and street) if caught in some kind of crime, they are no long a juvenile but an adult. This is interesting because we are under the impression that its age 18, but in Texas you are an adult, so right there you are going to see an increase of the adult system go up and your are going to see more younger youths in the juvenile system as well.

The only special thanks I can give is to the people on the streets and for my uncles that took the time to talk to me. The schools and the probation office that I’ve tried to get a hold of I’m still waiting on your call, I’ll try again some other time. I guess they are busy with all the “free choice” kids.

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EL PASO, TEXAS—RICHARD AYALA

By the information that my team gathered in El Paso and as we went over all of it, I feel that gangs in the area of El Paso does not have that much of a threat with gangs at the moment. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the worst, I would say that the city of El Paso is at about a five. The reason I say this is because even though they do have a total of 515 gangs and close to 5,000 gang members, they do not commit as much crime as in other cities. The biggest threat the city is the Barrio Azteca. This gang is among the most notorious gangs in the country and is very well organized. Before the El Paso team went on to investigate gangs, I had in my mind that El Paso had not big problem coming from gangs but if left unattended it will get serious. When talking to police officers, the gang unit, and the gang intelligence team at the Sanchez State Prison, we saw that they had the same ideas and perspectives as we did about gangs in the area.

The gangs are not all laying low but they are not as active as other gangs in other cities. El Paso has a history of gangs that goes way back and is known for being one of the first cities where gangs originated from yet it has come to be one of the safest cities in the country due to how the police department handles their problem with

gangs. When the city of El Paso completely eliminated the gang problem, they used a program called CRASH which is what helped them handle all their problems but when they put it aside and decided that they didn't need it anymore the gangs began to arise and commit more crimes. Even though the problems are not as big they still pose some sort of threat for future years to come.

As a solution to gangs I would say that they need to bring the CRASH program back to solve these small problems. The El Paso police department needs some serious help with personal because they are very short. In a city of 700,000 people there are only 1,000 officers and that is a problem to the city because it is very short from meeting the actual amount of what is required for a city as bit as El Paso. As of right now the FBI is taking care of the cities biggest threat "Barrio Azteca". They are cracking down on them and they are doing a great job keeping them to a level of control and maintaining things as minimal as possible. The El Paso police and FBI agents have some degree of respect to the Barrio Azteca members and the Azteca's have the same for law enforcement officials. Even though law enforcement and gang Azteca gang members do not see eye to eye on the things they do, the respect is still there to a degree.

EL PASO, TEXAS—JACOB THORNQUIST

There is no doubt that there is a gang problem in the city of El Paso. The seriousness of the problem lies in the source that you gain your information. We quickly found out that some gang intelligence in El Paso tries to downplay their gang problem. Some gang intelligence doesn't though; they are open about it and want to educate others on gangs. The hardest thing to obtain was statistical information; the police departments were very protective of that. We were not even sure what type of statistics they hold and gather. I would personally rank the gang problem in El Paso at a seven. A six is too close to medium, and I feel that an eight would be too serious. I chose a seven for the following reasons: the number of considered "gangs" in El Paso (over 500), the drug problem, the low rate of other crimes compared to drug related ones, the organization of the Barrio Azteca gang and their recent criminal involvement, and the problem of El Paso being a border city to Juarez.

I can honestly say that what I have learned about gangs in El Paso is exactly what I expected. I knew there would be a high amount of drug problems and a lower amount of other crimes. But I guess the one thing that did surprise me a little is that there is, supposedly, a low amount of gang related homicides. The most surprising thing was learning about the worry of the return of some of the troops to Fort Bliss among law enforcement. There are tens of thousands of troops returning and many of which are believed to be involved in gangs. Law enforcement fears these members will train others in the combat that they have

learned, have access to weapons, and increase gang crime in El Paso. There will always be gangs in El Paso and there will always be some level of a problem. The level of the problem depends on the steps taken to solve the problem. I would first suggest that more people outside of law enforcement become more aware and educated on gangs and gangs in their area.

The community must help with programs that offer help to gang members of all ages. These programs should help deter them from joining gangs, offer counseling, activities, possible jobs, and alternative groups. Law enforcement should continue to further expand their efforts and possibly increase their number of officers in the gang unit. These officers should be well trained and knowledgeable of gangs though, no officers like Paco Domingo [character in Klein, 2004]. Law enforcement must get a solid grip on the border and drug problem. They need to work both with and against gangs. By this I mean helping those in bad situations, and stopping those that break the law and endanger the community.



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