Non-Traditional Street Gangs

The spread of gang influence to corners of society one would not normally expect.

Non-traditional gangs have presented the law enforcement community with a complicated dilemma. Non-traditional gangs have been called a number of things. Some of these names include:

- Hybrid Gangs
- Off-Brand Gangs
- Tagger-style gangs
- Bubblegum Gangsters

Some law enforcement agencies don’t look at these often-violent groups as gangs and the “political” pressures quite often play a role on this fact.

Many Non-traditional gangs are becoming involved in violence consistent with established traditional gang culture and oftentimes, law enforcement is failing to recognize it.

As facts come out that a little-known group’s characteristics are consistent with well-established gang activity, the law enforcement community is struggling to play “catch-up” or explain it’s shortcomings.

The issues become “politically sensitive.”

Gangs are Geographical and Fluid

- Know that street gangs are different in every jurisdiction. One should learn the activities that present themselves within their own area of responsibility.
- Know that gangs are very fluid. Activity changes when a gang is impacted by a number of factors. It might be law enforcement pressure; rivalries with other gangs; encroachment of turfs by emerging or other groups; or it might change because of normal attrition within the gang [aging out/incarceration/death].
Agency Criteria

- Most Law Enforcement agencies have an established criteria for identifying a group as a gang and a separate criteria for identifying an individual as a gang member.

WHAT IS YOUR INDIVIDUAL AGENCY CRITERIA REGARDING THESE ISSUES AND IF YOU DON’T HAVE ONE....

WHY?

Non-Traditional Street-Level Gangs

- Might start as “innocent” social groups at school or within the community.
- Might evolve from established so-called tagging vandal or rebel crews.
- Might become involved in “minor” criminal activities bordering on the “felony.”
- EMBRACE or ADOPT characteristics or notoriety consistent with well-entrenched and established traditional criminal street gangs.

Examples of emulating or embracing established characteristics

- Black gangs as we know them today emerged in late 1969–70: Crips and Bloods. They identify with the colors red and blue. However, Hispanic prison gangs had already embraced these colors to differentiate themselves as Sureños (blue) or Norteños (red) [1966–67].

Filipino, Asian and Pacific Islander gangs

- Filipino and Asian gangs in San Diego embraced the “Crips” and “Bloods” notoriety long established by the black criminal street gangs. They didn’t care to know its origins, rather they simply wanted the established notoriety. They embrace the “Hispanic” gang culture way of writing graffiti, tattoos and turf issues.

More:

- In San Diego Logan Clicka emerged within the Mid-City areas of San Diego. They embraced the “Logan” in their name but had absolutely nothing to do with the community of Logan Heights. Two well-established Hispanic gangs in the community of Logan Heights had established a solid notoriety for viciousness and violence by attaching themselves with the Arellano-Felix drug cartel in Tijuana Mexico.

Logan Clicka simply adopted an established notoriety to enhance its name and image.
Examples of some Non-Traditional Street Gangs

- Bird Rock Bandits
- Dark Side Crips
- French Valley Stoners
- Original Khai Gang
- The Fight Club
- Gangster Mafia Family
- RTS [Running the Show/Roaming the Streets]
- SKA [Still Kicking Ass]
- FH [Forever High]
- SE73 [Southeast San Diego ("73" phone pad #s)]
- V-Boyz [Viet Boyz]

First Generation Street Gang

- Often emerge with characteristics consistently seen in well-established street gangs. This may be because it has learned it and liked it or it has resulted from merging sub-cultures noted earlier.
- Often emerge with membership age in the "second generation" of involvement [late starters].
- May or may not fit established agency criteria or that of the clearly defined S.T.E.P. Act definition.

Identifying Emerging Gangs

- Requires close monitoring of street-level activities by law enforcement.
  - Monitoring of gang graffiti within the community or markings not seen before, depicting confrontation or emerging rivalry.
  - Monitoring of increased confrontation on so-called non-gang entities by established street gangs.
  - Monitoring of borderline criminal activities or borderline felony crimes by so-called non-gang entities.

- Requires that quality "source documents" be maintained by the law enforcement agency.
  - Quality Field Interviews
  - Crime reports and other documents outlining any gang-like trait by the criminal(s) during the commission of said crime or seen after the commission of said crime.
  - Graffiti
  - Identifying names (groups or individuals)
  - Identifying signs or symbols
  - Victim/witness intimidation issues
  - "Rat-packing" activities
  - Organized or conspiracy-type activities
Requires quality gang knowledge by not only the patrol officer, but by investigators tasked with monitoring street-level gang activity.

How can one identify gang activity if one does not know or understand the world of street-level gangs.

One has to be able to recognize "emerging" trends in existing gang culture and activity. What's different? What's changing and why? What's likely going to be the result of evolving activities?

GANG Culture Know How
- Establish a keen insight on street-level gang activity within your particular jurisdiction.
- Establish a keen knowledge of your agency’s criteria for identifying a group as a gang and an individual as a gang member.
- Establish a keen knowledge of the legal definition of how the law identifies a “criminal street gang.”
- Establish a solid foundation on the dynamics, characteristics, trends and activities of street gang culture.

Maintain a quality gang intelligence file system and follow Department of Justice Criminal Intelligence File Guidelines for security, dissemination and purging of data contained in said Intelligence File.

Be professional. Don’t compromise your integrity.

Learn and utilize the benefits of networking with other agencies. Networking between Detectives tasked with identifying gangs and the Patrol Officer on the street is paramount.

Think
“SOURCE DOCUMENTATION”

Any documents, photographs and records that lead law enforcement to identify a group as a gang. Source Documents are discoverable by Defense in any criminal gang case.

- Field Interview Reports
- Arrest and Detention Reports
- Photographs
- Video Recordings
- Any Records

Identify the "Significant Violent Incident" and all the characters involved.

Meticulously research the backgrounds of each individual involved: Victims, Witnesses and Suspects

Identify any "motivations" behind the violence.

Identify any history of “gang-like activities” the group might have been involved in, whether reported or not.

Identify any previous “violent acts” which might be listed under PC186.22(e)

Review your Agency’s “criteria” for identifying a group as a gang.

Review your Agency’s “criteria” for identifying an individual as a gang member.
Identify any gang-like characteristics like:

- Hand signs
- Graffiti
- Unique tattoos or other markings
- Unique clothing styles
- Unique color trends
- Turf issues if any
- Rivalries if any
- Structure or lack thereof
- Leadership, if any
- Patterns of activities, if any

Detective Mike Gallivan, while an investigator with the Riverside District Attorney's Office, oversaw the investigation of the identification and documentation of the Fight Club.

He conducted research on the activities of this group “BEFORE” they had come to the attention of law enforcement. This research confirmed what law enforcement already knew….this “social” group was in fact, a Gang.

Several members of this “Gang” were convicted of various felony crimes and gang conditions.

Murietta’s Fight Club

No Known Rivalries

Between November of 2004 and February of 2007 the Fight Club was involved in the following:

- 15 – Armed Robberies
- 10 – Felony Assaults
- 5 – Burglaries
- 2 – Grand Theft of Firearms
- 2 – Arsons
- 3 – Felony Vandalisms
- 2 – Victim/Witness Intimidation
- And arrests for possession of controlled substances and possession marijuana for sales
LA JOLLA’S BIRD ROCK BANDITS
(No Known Rivalries)
La Jolla's Bird Rock Bandits. A Surfer Gang

Note the characteristics of traditional street gang [Hand signs and paraphernalia]

Because the Bird Rock Bandits were from the wealthy community of La Jolla, did not meet the idea of a stereotypical “gang” as most people saw portrayed in movies and other media, the case received national attention.

The Defense went all out to disprove the notion that this group of wealthy young kids from a prominent community were not a gang, but rather a group of typical young men who became violent when they got intoxicated.

The Defense hired a retired Orange County District Attorney’s Investigator with a PHD in Sociology and author of a book on gangs, now in its 5th Edition of publication.

Defense Expert’s Testimony

- “…there are two definitions for a gang. There’s the sociological definition part of that definition and or what is defined in the California Penal Code for criminal street gang.

- “…so you could have a gang but it may not qualify as a 186.22 (PC) gang. It may not qualify as a criminal street gang under that Act (S.T.E.P. Act).”

- “…loyalty is demanded by the gang. You could not leave a gang. Some do….

- “…it’s not true in Asian gangs or tagging gangs. You can change your gang and be a member of a different gang.

- “…There are things I refer to as false positives because gang culture in America in the last 7 or 8 years has been so popular in our main stream.”
“I’ve consulted three colleagues of mine who I consider experts... and between those three and myself, we have over 100 years’ of law enforcement experience and over 100 years of working with street gangs in this country.

...and I ran this scenario for this case about post qualification (as a gang) and they have never heard of it and they thought it was not possible to have a major incident and six or seven months later, say that the participants in that incident were gang members and the incident was gang related.”

Defense Expert’s questionable statements.

“...It’s been my experience in photographing, if they are a true gang, gang members do not allow non-gang members to take photographs with them.”

“I looked at all five defendants. None of them claim gang membership. They all claim membership in their social network....BRB (Bird Rock Bandits); athletes since elementary school.”

“...This group does not have a rival and in my experience, there has not been a street gang that has formed that does not have a rival.”

“...I think the analysis here is based in what I call false positives.”

DDA Sophia Roach’s questions in cross examination

Ms Roach:

“Hypothetically, if this group had committed 12 felony assaults over the past four years, that would certainly be sufficient for documentation in California, would it not?”

Defense Expert:

“‘Yes Ma’am.”

Ms Roach:

“The conduct related in the prior attacks that you have reviewed is of a nature that if committed by a traditional gang, it would benefit the gang by enhancing its reputation as a group and establish the fierceness of individual members, correct?”

Defense Expert:

“Yes.”
Ms Roach:
- "Does this group satisfy your internal definition of a gang?"

Defense Expert:
- "My sociological definition. Yes Ma'am."

Law enforcement DOES NOT identify a gang using a "Sociological Definition."

It is true, that a satisfactory national/global definition of "gang" does not exist. However...

In California, the Legislature has defined a gang in what we call the California Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act or the S.T.E.P. Act, which was created in 1988.

The Bird Rock Bandit Case National Media Attention

La Jolla is one of the most exclusive communities in San Diego.

Can you see why the political pressures would come to bear on law enforcement and prosecutors?

These kids played football at La Jolla High School and their coach expressed what many were thinking… "surprised and disappointed."

One had a scholarship to the University of New Hampshire.
These three Bird Rock Bandits violated conditions of their probation and were subsequently sentenced to 4 years in State Prison.