Introduction

It is late on a Saturday night in 1993 at the home of a Mexican American gang member in West Ogden, a racially and economically segregated section of Ogden, Utah.[1] *I am 16 years old. The occasion is a party following that night's successful attack on members of a rival group. At the request of a young woman, the gang has gone to the house of an enemy group and beaten up the occupants—a fight I participated in, though I am not a member of the gang. The mood is celebratory as people recount the bravery, loyalty, and fighting skills they displayed during the attack. There is a discussion about whether it was a mistake to shout the gang's name at the victims of the beat-down, and talk turns to the question of whether anyone will snitch on the gang.*

Suddenly attention is focused on me: I am the only person in the house who is not a member. A tall man walks in my direction and confronts me. Do I want to join? The room becomes silent. Angry glances are thrown in my direction, while my friend Rudy protests that I am not a threat to the gang. I try to sink into the wall, but I have only two options: I can fight and be accepted into the gang, or I can be attacked while attempting to leave. Either way I get roughed up, but if I leave I make enemies instead of friends and I will be seen as a coward.

After a brief delay I walk into the center of the room, set down my quart of beer, throw up my hands, and say, "Let's go!" Everyone in the room becomes excited about another opportunity to fight. The house owner says, "Let's take it outside so we don't get blood all over." We walk outside and the gang leaders surround me. I look at the person in front of me and begin throwing punches. A barrage of fists and feet come at me from all angles, and everything turns into a chaotic blur. After what seems like an eternity, someone says, "Okay, okay, that is good."

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I feel like I stepped out of the eye of a tornado. Someone tells me I can go inside and wash my face off. I walk inside and look into the mirror. My face and body are beaten and bruised. I cup my hands as I pour water over my face and smile happily when I realize that I did not lose any teeth. I came out okay. When I step outside I am greeted welcomingly. The mood is once again celebratory as I am told about some of the gang's rules and hand signs. I am now a member.

Getting jumped into a gang was not an expected outcome for my life. I was living in Ogden, and if you asked any of the gang experts around the country they would have limited information available to comprehend gang activity in the state of Utah. This was not Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, or New York; it was a conservative and highly religious state where everything was perceived as better than the ghetto neighborhoods that existed across the country. My homies and I were going through struggles that appeared to have no relevance to most people. We were not going to college. We were headed to the penitentiary. Some of us were headed to the cemetery. Gang members were portrayed as demons on the nightly news and in the local newspaper. Many individuals simply considered us as "wannabees" because the perception was that gangs existed in other places, but definitely not in Utah. If anything, being seen as mediocre made us represent the gang more strongly and attempt to prove by our behavior that this lifestyle was real.

When individual gang members from Los Angeles or Chicago moved to Ogden, the local gangs challenged them to join a local gang or face immediate opposition. Many out-of-town gangsters chose to join local gangs, but some were able to remain separate. Several members of a well-known Los Angeles gang were able to resist and recruit local residents into their gang. The growth of this gang and its determination to establish a local presence developed into the largest gang feud in the city. Gangs in Ogden have been periodically fighting since the early 1980s; however, since the early 1990s reoccurring homicides and an increased number of shootings have reminded those involved with gangs that this lifestyle brought real consequences.

As a young man of Mexican and indigenous descent on my father's side and Scottish and Czech background on my mother's side, I grew up identifying as Mexican and associating with primarily black and Latino youth. My own gang involvement brought me to a point in my life where living as a gangster was my complete identity. I traveled a long road to

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get to the point where I could become a researcher. My curiosity about how and why gangs operated was driven by a search for solutions. College was my ticket to a better future, and my entire passion involved the study of gangs. This path made me appreciate how former and even active gang members could play a powerful role in reducing gang violence. Such a transformation did not happen overnight but grew in competition with the argument of gangs as criminals.

Gangs as Criminals

The argument of gangs as criminals originated from a variety of sources and has increasingly developed since the 1980s. The nightly news and television shows such as *Gangland* (History Channel) portray violent, criminal images of how gangs are organized syndicates designed to make money or prey on the innocent. Law enforcement generally argues that gangs are becoming more dangerous and violent and continually growing in size. Gang members are depicted as remorseless individuals who do not care about whom they hurt and the reasons why. The U.S. Department of Justice has begun exploring transnational ties as resources devoted toward gang suppression have become a major source of revenue for many communities across the United States (Diaz 2009).

The research on gangs has often countered and argued against the media and law enforcement view of gangs, but researchers are not immune to sharing a similar opinion that crime or illegal activities are the defining characteristic, arguing that illegal activities are the key difference between gangs and other social groups. The most popular subset of the literature, starting in the 1950s and 1960s, presents gangs as defying middle-class norms by exhibiting behavior that is "malicious," "negativistic," and "nonutilitarian," with no real purpose—acts committed just "for the hell of it" (Cohen 1955). Gang members were considered emotionally disordered and pathological individuals whose paranoia about the actions of enemy gangs leads them to perceive society as discriminatory (Yablonsky 1962, 1997). Gang members were believed to have lower intelligence (Short and Strodtbeck 1965), suffer problems in proving their manhood (Bloch and Niederhoffer 1958), and maintain a class-specific culture oppositional to middle-class norms (Miller 1958). Many researchers in this tradition before the 1970s maintained a classist, sexist, and prejudicial view of gang members.

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In the 1970s the argument became more sophisticated. Malcolm Klein evaluated two gang intervention programs in Los Angeles and developed the following definition of gangs:

> Any denotable adolescent group of youngsters who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood, (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name), and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or enforcement agencies. (1971:13)

In creating this working definition, Klein saw gangs as antisocial and a group apart. During his forty years of studying gangs (Klein 2007), Klein would become one of the most influential gang researchers. His definition was copied so many times that by the publication of his 2006 book with Cheryl Maxson, five of the six major definitions of gangs mentioned crime. Klein has been central in the creation of Eurogang, a group of scholars who study gangs in the United States and Europe (Decker and Weerman 2005), which I joined in 2007. The working group reached a consensus that the definition of street gangs worldwide should be "any durable, street-oriented youth group whose own identity includes involvement in illegal activity" (Klein 2007). Despite my admiration for Klein and many of his collaborators, I feel that the inclusion of illegal activity in the definition has not allowed for a separation between the scholarly view of gangs and the law enforcement and media view.

The "gangs as criminal" argument has received support, however, as self-report surveys began finding that gang members were more violent (and criminal) than non–gang members (Battin et al. 1998; Bjerregaard and Smith 1993; Curry, Ball, and Decker 1996; Esbensen and Huizinga 1993; Miller 1982; Thornberry 1998). The ongoing survey research that has often found gangs and crime to be synonymous has grown in the last two decades. Major funding for these research projects has often been provided by federal agencies that have helped the "gangs as criminal" argument become the scholarly mainstream (Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Howell 2012; Miller 2001; Spergel 1995).

A small number of gang researchers have not agreed with this argument and have instead argued that such patterns reflect "moral panics" (McCorkle and Miethe 2002; Zatz 1987) or social movements (Brotherton and Barrios 2004; Hagedorn 2008). This has encouraged the de-

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velopment of a counter–gang paradigm. I agree with a slightly modified version of Brotherton and Barrios's (2004:23) definition of gangs:

> A group formed largely by youth and adults of marginalized social class [or racial and ethnic groups] which aims to provide its members with a resistant identity, an opportunity to be individually and collectively empowered, a voice to speak back to and challenge the dominant culture, a refuge from the stresses and strains of barrio or ghetto life, and a spiritual enclave within which its own sacred rituals can be generated and practiced.

Developing a Counter–Gang Paradigm

Based on my experiences and research, I realized there are two major deficiencies in the gang literature that revolve around methodology and theory. First, in terms of methodology, there are still significant challenges for determining what we know and how we go about discovering this information. Most gang researchers have faced difficulties of standpoint or gaining access to gangs, and this obstacle has prevented them from comparing and contrasting their findings in different locations. Second, in terms of theory, the explanations provided about why gangs are formed and how they function have changed little since the 1970s when the "gangs as criminal" argument became popular. Only a small number of gang researchers have considered racial and ethnic bias as a central component for understanding the origin, continuation, and criminalization of gangs. Exploring the role racial oppression has played in the development of gangs and society's response allows us insight into how gangs can be transformed by incorporating the political consciousness and activism from prior points in history. This book will move beyond these two obstacles by arguing for a counter–gang paradigm that builds on the systematic process for how we acquire knowledge and then explain the observed patterns.

How Do We Acquire Knowledge?

Measurement issues of validity are the first important concern in creating a counter–gang paradigm. The foundation of gang research is rooted

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in an ethnographic methodology, but that has recently been overtaken by a detached quantitative analysis based on surveys and law enforcement claims. Each methodology can offer insight into gangs: the ethnographic data-gathering approach attempts to gain access to members' lives through interviews and fieldwork to understand how they see this lifestyle. Sanyika Shakur, also known as "Monster Kody," an original gangster from the Eight Trey Gangster Crips, argued, "There are no other gang experts except participants" (1993:xiii). Ethnographers attempt to learn the gang member perspective in their own social environment. Quantitative studies, on the other hand, do not require the researcher to speak to gang members directly but rather seek information indirectly, using questionnaires and surveys. Large data sets separate the researcher from the individual through coded variables and levels of significance. These studies are good at including large numbers of people and then comparing them with others across the country. Gang research has benefited from quantitative studies, but the scholarly discipline has never reached a point where direct participatory research is no longer needed. My argument is that to truly understand gang life, researchers needs to place themselves close to the participants—to walk in their shoes and see the world as they do (Jorgensen 1989), and to give their stories a voice so that others can understand the challenges they face on a daily basis. *Gang Life in Two Cities* is based upon this premise.

Gaining access and information directly from gang members has never been easy for researchers. My review of Howell's (2008) bibliography revealed that more than a thousand researchers have studied gangs since 1927, yet fewer than forty have actually devoted a year or more to associating with gang members, and less than a dozen have spent a substantial part of their lives eradicating gang violence (see table 1 for an overview of these researchers). Adler and Adler (1987) argued that there are a variety of types of membership roles when conducting ethnographic research: the greatest level of commitment on the part of the researcher involves the complete membership role. One variant of the complete membership role is gaining access opportunistically, which Reimer (1977) outlined as using the sociological imagination and turning it inward to reflect on the researchers' unique historical and biographical experiences. My research on gangs began opportunistically by using an ex–gang member status that kept me networked into those engaged in this lifestyle. In only one previous study of gangs has a researcher taken an active stance to become a member (Sánchez-Jankowski 1991).

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TABLE 1
Gang Researchers Who Have Used Ethnography or Field Research Methods

Researcher	Characteristics	Site	Methods and Focus	Time Period
Barrios, Luis	L, M	New York	Field observation of Latin Kings	1996–99
Brotherton, David C.	W, M	New York, California	Field observation of Latin Kings	1994–99
Campbell, Anne	W, F	New York	Participant observer, three women in different groups	1979–81
Chin, Ko-Lin	A, M	New York	Grant, research team, Chinese gangs	1992
Cureton, Steven R.	B, M	Los Angeles	Ethnography with Hoover Crips	Two months 1999, 2000
Dawley, David	W, M	Chicago	Community organizer, Vice Lords	1967–69
Decker, Scott H.	W, M	St. Louis	Grant, with separate field researcher	Three years
Durán, Robert J.	L, M	Denver, Ogden, southern New Mexico, El Paso	Ethnography, primarily Latino gangs	2001–06; 2007–12
Fishman, Laura T.	B, F	Chicago	Detached workers, Vice Queens—black females	1960–63
Fleisher, Mark S.	W, M	Kansas City, Mo.	Participant observation, Fremont Hustlers	1995–97
Garot, Robert	W, M	Los Angeles	Alternative inner-city school, primarily black and Latino youth	1997–2001
Hagedorn, John M.	W, M	Milwaukee	Grant, focus on top dogs, former gang member fieldworker	1985–86, 1991–92, 1994
Horowitz, Ruth	W, F	Chicago	Grants, participant observation, Lions	1971–74, 1977
Hunt, Geoffrey	W, M	San Francisco	Grant, male and female gang members	1991–93
Joe-Laidler, Karen	A, F	San Francisco	Grant, male and female gang members	1991–93
Klein, Malcolm	W, M	Los Angeles	Grant, detached worker programs	1962–68
Mendoza-Denton, Norma	L, F	Silicon Valley, Calif.	Latina youth gangs	1993–97
Miller, Jody	W, F	Columbus; St. Louis	Grant, young women, mostly black	1995–97

(*continued*)

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TABLE 1
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Researcher	Charac-teristics	Site	Methods and Focus	Time Period
Miller, Walter B.	W, M	Boston	Evaluation special youth program,	1954–57
Moore, Joan	W, F	Los Angeles	Grant, collaborative	1974–75, 1984–85
Padilla, Felix	L, M	Chicago	Diamonds, Puerto Rican	1989–90
Phillips, Susan A.	W, F	Los Angeles	Graffiti, tattoos	1995–96, 2003
Portillos, Edwardo	L, M	Phoenix	Primarily Latino/a gang members	1995
Quicker, John	W, M	Los Angeles	Chicana gangs	Mid-1970s and research in progress
Sánchez-Jankowski, Martín	L, M	New York, Boston, Los Angeles	Gang members, variety of races and ethnicities	1978–88
Sanders, William B.	W, M	San Diego	Police and gang unit cases	1978
Short, James F.	W, M	Chicago	Grant, detached workers with one white and six black gangs	1959–62
Spergel, Irving	W, M	New York	Participant observation and field interviews	1959–60
Taylor, Carl	B, M	Detroit	Owner of private investigative/security company, research team	1980–86
Thrasher, Frederic	W, M	Chicago	Field observation	Early 1920s
Valdez, Avelardo	L, M	San Antonio	Grant, mixed-gender research team, female gang members	1995–98
Venkatesh, Sudhir	I, M	Chicago	Black Kings, Robert Taylor Homes	1992–1994
Vigil, James Diego	L, M	Los Angeles	Grant, primarily Latino gangs	1976–78, 1992–95
Whyte, William F.	W, M	Boston	Corner boys and college boys	1937–40
Yablonsky, Lewis	W, M	New York	Director of crime prevention program	1953–58

Source: This list was compiled from articles, books, and faculty websites.
Note: The characteristics examined here include race and ethnicity (Asian, black, Indian, Latino, and white) and gender (female and male). Other characteristics of interest include age, role in the setting, and background, but I am unable to complete this information for all researchers at this time.

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To my knowledge, I am one of a small number of former gang members who have gone on to attain a doctoral degree, and one of the few to conduct an ethnographic study of gangs as the primary researcher.[2] Many ethnographic researchers attempt to nurture gang insiders to develop their studies (Brotherton and Barrios 2004; Campbell 1984; Cureton 2008; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Fishman 1995; Fleisher 1998; Garot 2010; Hagedorn 1988; Horowitz 1983; Moore 1978, 1991; Padilla 1992; Valdez 2007; Venkatesh 2008; Vigil 1988, 2002, 2007; Whyte 1943). However, these researchers often personally lack the social networks to go deeper into this social life. Researchers often do not share important characteristics with the populations they study in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, race, and urban background. Such personal characteristics are important for ethnography because the researcher is the tool by which data are gathered. Ethnographic research can take us closer to the reality of gang life than any other methodology can because of the researchers' time commitment and higher levels of data validity, but all these studies face different forms of obstruction in developing the analysis and gaining access to natural field observations. Being a former gang member supported my study of gangs in two ways: (1) by increasing my networks and access to the lives of members and associates, and (2) by enhancing my analysis of patterns of behavior, survival struggles, and levels of state-sponsored opposition.

My second contribution to the study of gangs in this book is the incorporation of comparative gang research. Malcolm Klein (2005:135) contends that "gang research would be far more productive if it were based on comparisons." According to Klein, two central themes missing in the literature are comparisons across history and across location. Moreover, studying gangs in more than one location can provide the objective distance and analysis that C. Wright Mills argued for. Mills explained the importance of incorporating both history and comparison to understand the essential conditions: "If we do not take a fuller range into our study, we often condemn ourselves to shallow and misleading results" (1959:148). Comparison between cities and the incorporation of history allowed me to explore similarities and differences in gang culture and especially the response to gangs.

Ethnographic and field studies of gangs have primarily focused on one city and usually a small number of gangs. Although most traditional studies focused on four large cities, more cities have been added since the 1980s, including Columbus, Detroit, Kansas City, Milwaukee,

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Phoenix, St. Louis, San Antonio, and San Francisco (Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Fleisher 1998; Hagedorn 1998; Hunt, Joe-Laidler, and Evans 2002; Miller 2001; Taylor 1990; Valdez 2007; Zatz and Portillos 2000). Only a few researchers have conducted ethnographic or field research in multiple sites (Brotherton 1996; Brotherton and Barrios 2004; Fleisher 1998; Gemert and Fleisher 2005; Hagedorn 1988, 2008; Miller 2001; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991). Quantitative studies have been somewhat stronger in comparative research, as shown by the multicity and longitudinal studies conducted in Denver, Colorado; Rochester, New York; and Seattle, Washington (Battin et al. 1998; Esbensen and Huizinga 1993; Thornberry et al. 2003). The problem with these studies is that time-intensive attention is never developed or pursued to validate self-report claims.

My research adds to the comparative study of gangs by exploring the differences between traditional and emergent gang cities (Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Klein and Maxson 2006; Spergel and Curry 1993; Thornberry et al. 2003). Traditional gang cities, also referred to as chronic gang cities (Spergel and Curry 1993; Klein and Maxson 2006), are described as large metropolitan areas where gangs have existed for decades. Emergent gang cities are smaller to midsize cities with gangs that emerged during or after the 1980s. The distinction between emergent and traditional cities can be tested to some extent by the comparison between Denver and Ogden. On the surface these two gang-influenced cities are quite different—"traditional" versus "emergent." However, as we will see in the next several chapters, the actual experiences of gang members of Mexican descent are very similar in both cities. These experiences include encountering the criminal justice system, negotiating the line between associate and member, and learning the core values of the gang. This thus raises a question: if lived experiences of gang members are similar, of what value is the distinction?

Solving this conceptual argument requires moving the argument from traditional and emergent toward a framework of racial oppression. There are clear differences in the community response to gangs based on the time frame in which gangs were first considered a threat, which is often related to racial and ethnic minority population increases. For example, El Paso, Texas, is considered to have had a gang presence since the 1920s, but the response to and magnification of gang issues in this community have definitely not been as punitive or pushed to the level of moral panic as in Denver and Ogden.[3]

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How to Explain What We Know?

The second reason for creating a counter–gang paradigm is to provide an analysis of the structural impact of race and ethnic bias in the form of racial oppression. Gang members have been primarily characterized as male (97 percent), poor (85 percent), and comprising the following racial and ethnic groups: Latino (47 percent), black (38 percent), and rarely white (8 percent) (National Gang Center 2009). Both Latinos and blacks are three times as prevalent on gang lists compared with their proportion of the population in the United States, whereas whites are underrepresented by twelve times. The power to socially construct or create the conditions for 85 percent of the listed gang members as Latino and black requires discussion. Gang research in the early 1900s in the United States described members who were primarily European (Thrasher 1927; Whyte 1944). Gangs were seen as supporting the various rackets in the city and offering youth an opportunity to move into politics (Hagedorn 2008; Whyte 1944). Thrasher (1927) argued that white gangs could be transformed into prosocial groups such as Boy Scouts. As European ethnic groups became increasingly assimilated into the wider U.S. culture, most of their gangs faded away. For the most part researchers before the 1950s came across as sympathetic to the plight of gang members and did not overdramatize violence or cultural fears with theory. In the mid-1950s and continuing to the present, gangs have been primarily characterized as nonwhite, immigrant, violent, criminal, remorseless, and more dangerous than the past. The failures of the post–civil rights era to alter the racial landscape ushered in a time frame in which eradicating inequality was seen as unfair. Color-blind and common-sense racism became the accepted ideologies for the promotion of the white racial frame (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Feagin 2010; Haney López 1996, 2003). Code words provided rhetoric in which the conversation shifted to race-neutral ideas such as “criminals,” “drug dealers,” “gang members,” and “illegals,” but the suppression was focused on people of color.

The ongoing segregation of people of color from whites allowed for certain neighborhoods to create the conditions for a barrio internal colony: indigenous populations dominated by foreigners (Barrera, Muñoz, and Ornelas 1972; Blauner 1972). Placing gangs of Mexican descent into a colonization framework contributes to a theoretical understanding of the barrio experience and how it differs from the experience of the

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white numerical majority (Acuña 1998, 2000; Almaguer 1971; Barrera 1979; Barrera, Muñoz, and Ornelas 1972; Blauner 1972; Freire 1970; Memmi 1965; Mirandé 1985; Vigil 1999). Barrera describes colonialism as "a structured relationship of domination and subordination, where the dominant and subordinate groups are defined along ethnic and/or racial lines, and where the relationship is established and maintained to serve the interests of all or part of the dominant group" (1979:193). This racial hierarchy offers both material and psychic benefits to whites and thus ensures that racism remains difficult to eradicate (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, 2005). Along with suppression by the criminal justice system and poor living conditions, firearm production and the attractiveness of the gang image led many into unfortunate outcomes, which only enhanced a colonial design of indigenous self-destruction and self-hate.

An analysis of race and ethnic relations is essential to understanding gangs. I argue that if one wants to learn about gangs, one should first learn the history of race and ethnic relations in the community of interest and explore how contemporary patterns maintain this inequality. Both Latinos and blacks have experienced inequality within the historical experience of the United States. Each racial and ethnic group has encountered a different racialized history within each state; I will outline racial projects in the states of Colorado and Utah. Almaguer (1994:212) argued that "Race is fundamentally a sociohistorical category that is historically contingent."

Gangs in Denver and Ogden originated out of forms of poverty and second-class treatment where the dominant groups varied based on the organization used to attain white supremacy. In Colorado the Ku Klux Klan held dominance in the early 1920s, and many of its leaders maintained positions of power into the 1940s. This dominant framework of being in opposition to blacks, Catholics, foreigners, and Jews created an Anglo identity of maintaining traditional Protestant values. Gangs in Denver were seen as a zoot suit migration from Los Angeles after riots there in 1943. In Utah members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) fleeing persecution brought their religious beliefs to the territory that later became a state. Political and social power was built within the state by Mormon settlers who lived separately from Native American tribes. The railroad ushered in a new wave of residents who were different in religion and national ancestry. These groups served as labor but often faced intense discrimination.

The colonial experience determined what social rights were granted and outlined the life chances for those considered nonwhite. Coloniza-

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tion structured the life chances for youth of color in several ways: (1) by providing reasons for joining neighborhood groups created for physical and psychological protection; (2) by creating the conditions that encourage gang rivalries; and (3) by allowing the dominant majority to frame gang behavior and create a suppression response. Socially disempowered racial and ethnic groups have created gangs as a source of empowerment and social control. Ignoring the current and past experiences of racial and ethnic oppression hides the significance placed on the social construction of race and keeps racism masked and perceived as an illusion, yet it is issues of race, class, and identity that fuel gang membership.

The fourth contribution offered in developing a counter–gang paradigm involves understanding how gangs developed from racial oppression and thus require a social movement response that includes forms of empowerment through civil rights. During the 1960s a variety of organizations were created to attain equality and political power (e.g., the Black Panther Party, Brown Berets, Crusade for Justice, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and US organization), thus challenging the social conditions that pushed individuals toward gang membership. During this time gang membership became unpopular, and barrio and urban youth found greater opportunities and ways to channel their energy through nonviolent and self-defense-oriented organizations. As these groups faded away in the post–civil rights era, gang membership once again became popular.

Gangs developed as socially disempowered youth who were primarily segregated into certain sections of the city because of ancestry, poverty, and different religious and cultural beliefs created groups that were first described as gangs by the dominant group. Gangs essentially served as forms of protection. The labeling created a self-fulfilling prophecy as groups adopted names to build on the increased attention. Gangs as a perceived and actual form of empowerment were then converted by the state into legitimized forms for future criminalization.

The literature on gangs has rarely developed the argument of how gangs have been transformed by social movements or how the utilization of grassroots empowerment can fundamentally alter gangs (exceptions include Brotherton and Barrios 2004; Dawley 1973; Hagedorn 2008; Hayden 2004; Montejano 2010; Moore 1978; Vigil 1999). These authors argue how gang member transformation occurred in prison or in the community by emphasizing cultural pride and the incorporation of people with past or present gang ties. Esteva Martínez (2003) found

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gang members actively involved in decreasing violence and working with outside organizations for intervention. Hayden (2004) discovered similar patterns of current and former gang members working to create peace treaties and programs that provide alternatives to gangs. Rodriguez (1994), Ruiz (1997), Shakur (1993), and Williams (2007) highlight former gang member involvement in shaping and changing the path from self-destruction to alternative realities of challenging second-class treatment.

James F. Short (1997:204) argued, "Each city has its own special history, and what works in one city might not work in another. There is no substitute for local knowledge, including both up-to-date information and an appreciation of history." Residents of Denver and Ogden have responded differently to forms of inequality. In Denver the long history of activism by black, Chicano, Native American, and white community residents has created a resistance movement. One group that significantly influenced contemporary advocacy groups was the Crusade for Justice, which was one of the most organized and powerful Chicano organizations during the 1960s and 1970s (Vigil 1999). Contemporary advocacy groups in Denver have attempted to emulate the successes of previous forms of activism. In Ogden the voices of black and Latino residents have been silenced owing to the dominant group's ability to suppress opposition and demonize minority groups as criminals, leaving the barrio discredited and further marginalized. Poor, non-Mormon whites to some degree also have an ambiguous standing in the community. The result is a growing level of division and lack of communication to create needed change.

Based on my research and involvement in the Chicano community, I propose that advocacy groups utilize nonviolent civil rights tactics to push for greater participation of people of color in education, employment, and politics and to counter the stereotypes by which racial and ethnic minority groups are portrayed. This book argues that the central reasons for gangs are racial oppression and colonization. Challenging these forms of inequality and arguing on behalf of a counter–gang paradigm have often been met with criticism from mainstream researchers. Change is not easy, but looking at gangs from a different angle can provide solutions, if this is what the state really desires. A counter–gang paradigm requires less infatuation with crime and more attention to how structural inequality legitimately oppresses racial and ethnic minorities. A counter–paradigm advocates attempts to live and work with those in-

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volved in this lifestyle to develop solutions, for those who are closest to gangs may in fact offer some of the best solutions. Hayden (2004:137) captures one of David Brotherton's interviews with King Tone to describe reformation within the barrio:

> So either me and the ghetto make it together, or me and the ghetto die together. And I think that if more people would take that concept into the street and the schools and everything, there wouldn't be a ghetto. Because the Kings are starting to recognize that it isn't a ghetto, it's home. All you gotta do is not shoot each other, not sell drugs, and walk each other's kids to school. You just make this no more ghetto. So that's where I'm at. I want to beat this ghetto.

This book emphasizes the important role cultural activists and current and former gang members can play in transforming gangs. By capturing the stories of those involved in this lifestyle and discovering the issues they encounter, we can take one step closer to much needed solutions—not only for gangs but for empowerment of the entire barrio.

Organization of the Book

Gang Life in Two Cities begins chronologically with my research and moves into thematic themes that capture the gang experience in both Denver and Ogden. At the beginning of each chapter I incorporate the storytelling style perfected by critical race theory to help introduce readers to my access into the social world of gangs. Delgado and Stefancic (2001:39–41) argue that "One premise of the new legal storytellers is that members of the country's dominant racial group cannot easily grasp what it is to be nonwhite. . . . Engaging stories can help us understand what life is like for others, and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world." "Naming one's own reality" has been a powerful form of storytelling and counter-storytelling used to critique and challenge dominant paradigms.

Chapter 1 describes my transition from active gang member to pursuit of an interest in why gangs exist. The chapter explores my entrée into the social world of gangs in a complete membership role by which I could gather interviews and field observations. It discusses ethnography as a methodology and how it attempts to gain entrance into the lives

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of others. I explain my involvement in gangs in two different cities and share the voices of those I met and worked with as key partners. Such an analysis of my methods seeks to create greater reflexivity by which to outline the data presented in subsequent chapters.

In chapter 2 I explore the war on gangs that developed in the post–civil rights era. The war on gangs utilizes the gang suppression model of law enforcement, which is increasingly being developed in correctional institutions. Aggressive policing, legitimized by the label of "gang," developed in the two cities during the 1990s and became the primary strategy for suppressing the black and Latino community. Such an initiative increased the changes that urban youth of color would serve time in the penitentiary. The chapter begins with a police stop of suspected gang members that resulted in a community member's confrontation with the gang unit. The gang label has been used to profile large numbers of black and Latino youth for increased police contact and subsequent negative treatment. My interviews with gang-involved individuals and law enforcement personnel are supplemented with field observations of over two hundred police stops while working with People Observing the Police. I argue that gang suppression contributed to the longevity of gangs and enhanced negative relationships for gang members with the police and rival gangs.

Chapter 3 begins with a description of gangs in Denver. I start with a story of hanging-out with D-loc as he outlines the neighborhood divisions for gangs. D-loc was the director of a gang-intervention group focused on reducing violence, which was instrumental in developing my networks with gang-involved individuals. Then I move into the history of gangs, outlining how the participation of the dominant group with the Ku Klux Klan during the early 1920s shaped race relations within this city. Next I explain the gang activity in Denver during the 1940s and 1950s and how it began to decline in the 1970s, only to remerge with renewed energy during the mid- to late 1980s. Finally I analyze the developments in gang enforcement in the 1990s and 2000s that influenced the outcomes for those involved in gangs. This chapter builds the argument of racialized oppression and its impact on the development of gangs and how social movements seeking to alter these conditions had the potential to transform gang continuance.

In chapter 4 I provide a historical overview of being Latino, nonwhite, and non-Mormon and living in Utah. The opening story shares my entry into Ogden as an ethnographic researcher and explores the

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changes occurring with my gang-involved friends. The urban violence continued to serve as a point for policy makers to launch new initiatives for combating gangs. To help understand the transition points of gang development in Ogden as opposed to Denver, a historical overview of Utah is provided. The Wasatch Front, a metropolitan region in northern Utah that contains 80 percent of the state's population, is evaluated to explore the role of race and religion in forming a context where gangs emerged. Ogden, the railroad junction city, connected a more diverse set of residents into an area where crime, vice, and toughness had experienced a longer history of encouraging new social adaptations for the Latino community. Included are interviews with and descriptions of Latino residents who lived in the area as early as the 1920s. This chapter explains the role gangs have played in the city and how the historical response to demonizing racial and ethnic minorities along with immigrants has suppressed social activism but encouraged the gang label to enhance control of marginalized groups by intertwining the power of nativism, race, and religion.

Chapter 5 explores a socially created response to racialized oppression in the form of gangs and how youth encountering structural obstacles struggle to negotiate the line between staying an associate and becoming a gang member. The chapter begins with my ethnographic fieldwork, which used not only firsthand observation of Latino barrios but comparisons with neighborhoods with the highest concentration of white people. Such observations developed an analysis of contemporary race and ethnic relations in two states where the general climate is to view racial and ethnic discrimination as an artifact of the past. The structural challenges in the barrio formed a pattern of unreceptive schools, poor neighborhoods, and families encountering difficulties in learning how to manage these obstacles. Youth in the barrio chose to reduce victimization by seeking friendship and creating a social support group that brought status. Generational descent divided the Latino gangs, as did socially constructed separations of race and neighborhood. An organizational typology of gangs is developed to explore these adaptations.

Chapter 6 examines the core ideals of the gang. Only a small number of youth have chosen gangs in the post–civil rights era as the form of recourse against accepting inferior treatment. I begin with a story of getting jumped by a gang with my two brothers and how my inability to negotiate a nonviolent outcome posed a direct difficulty in altering the gang experience. This chapter analyzes the internal dynamics of the gang

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that makes gang intervention complicated. The core ideals are the glue that holds together gangs of Mexican descent in both cities. The group pressure to act a certain way and maintain these values brings a mixture of excitement and suffering. Although many gang members strive to uphold these standards, only a few can truly accomplish these goals. These ideals include displaying loyalty, responding courageously to external threats, promoting and defending gang status, and maintaining a stoic attitude toward gang life. Gangs continue to exist despite a long history of prevention, intervention, and suppression, none of which has altered the structural inequality of racism.

Chapter 7 offers solutions to gang activity based on a racial oppression and anticolonial model. The chapter begins with the Area Support for All People (ASAP) group struggling to provide alternative ways of acting and thinking. Key among these social movements were the Crusade for Justice in Denver and the Spanish-Speaking Organization for Community Integrity and Opportunity (SOCIO) in Utah, which learned lessons from the Chicano movement. These groups attempted to transform local politics for Latino empowerment. I describe several contemporary organizations that challenged unequal social conditions to reduce gang violence. I explore how these nonprofit organizations have worked to address the social conditions in the barrio. Working with these activist groups and different state agencies influenced my perception of how to decrease gang membership and violence.

Chapter 8 offers an analysis to make sense of these themes of inequality and resistance under a theoretical model of racial oppression that combines various actions used to control the perceived threat posed by marginalized group members. I borrow from structural and conflict theories and integrate them with the study of internal colonialism and critical race theory. These control efforts were used against people with the least amount of social power and legitimatized as beneficial for everyone. Urban Chicano neighborhoods are presumed to offer few legitimate opportunities, and this trend has been reinforced historically to maintain inequality. The war on gangs, in conjunction with the war on drugs and the war on terror, targets those with the least social power who are labeled the most dangerous. I discuss how these have coalesced to form an effective war on race and ethnicity and explore how gangs can be transformed by social movements designed to eradicate racism for the ultimate purpose of destabilizing the colonial experience in an unlegitimated fight against the powers of the state.

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