

**Gangster 'Blood' over College Aspirations:  
The Implications of Gang Membership  
for one Black Male College Student**

by

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A significant number of black males attempting to earn a college degree are beset by a shackling history of deviant, criminal, and violent associations and social realities. This research examines whether educational attainment is adversely affected by associations with criminal social circumstances and/or associations with deviant peer groups. The evidence suggests that some black males from resource strained environments are socially welded to deviant, criminal and/or violent circumstances or groups, which could prohibit academic success (Cureton, 2003; Cuyjet, 1997; Hamilton, 1997). This is an exploratory project, designed to examine the situational circumstances of one gang affiliated male who attempted to earn a college degree.

Walter B. Miller contends that youth residing in low income environments have adopted a social system that inevitably leads to criminogenic performances. According to Miller, participation in collective deviance, crime, and violence results from subscribing to troublesome and tough attitudes, street smartness, and the search for excitement and autonomy. Moreover, investment in fate more than spiritual connectedness eliminates moral restrictions imposed by most religious doctrines, which alternatively leads to deviant, criminal, and violent outcomes (Miller, 1958). The one on one interview with Terence, a San Antonio Rigsby Court 'Blood' gang member, reveals that investing in such values forces gravitation towards gangsterism more so than conventionalism.

During the five year tenure of my course on Contemporary Gangs in America, I have encountered eight black male students who openly admitted to being gang affiliated or heavily involved in gangs. Gang affiliated implies

that an individual is knowledgeable about the gang within a specific residential area and is therefore held responsible for that gang's offensive activities. Gang affiliated individuals, while not fully initiated members are still bound by the social circumstances of the gang in their neighborhoods. A heavily involved member or gang banger is a gangster who has been fully initiated into the gang, openly claims gang allegiance, and participates in the crime and violence associated with the gang in order to enhance individual and gang status (Cureton, *Hoover Crips: The etiology and anatomy of a gang subculture*, forthcoming Southern Illinois Press; Cureton, 2002; Shakur, 1993).

Terence aka "Sweet T" is a black male with a social biography that forced him to abandon his educational pursuits. Sweet T was a student in my Contemporary Gangs course and agreed to give an in-depth interview concerning his membership in the San Antonio, Texas Blood gang. Although, I am currently collecting data on black male students who represent Bloods, Crips, and Five Percenters, Terence is the feature for this report. Terence's June 2, 2001 interview affirms Miller's perspective on youth male subcultures and provides insight on gangs from initial involvement to continued association through college resulting in dropping out of school one year before earning a degree.

### **Background of Terence aka Sweet T; Rigsby Court Gangster Blood**

Sweet T is a Blood from San Antonio, Texas. He represents RCG, which stands for Rigsby Court Gangster. Prior to becoming a member of the Bloods, Terence was routinely assaulted by other boys. These assaults represented a way to estimate Terence's toughness. Terence was allowed to fight back, demonstrating his physical prowess and heart (fearlessness). Once the Bloods identified Terence as a good fighter, he was recruited. His formal initiation into the Blood gang came when he turned fourteen and the method of initiation was by being beaten by several peers (jumped in).

#### **Interviewer**

*I appreciate you agreeing to do this interview. Please introduce yourself.*

#### **Sweet T**

*My name is T. I represent the Bloods from San Antonio, Texas; Rigsby Court Gangsters--RCG. The first time I got into this thing was, the boys who lived in my neighborhood, they started claimn' 'the Bloods' but I*

*never got in. I didn't know what it was about and riding with them on the bus, they use to beat me up every day. Every day I got beat up, got put over the seat from behind, come home with black eyes, swollen face. It was all about testing. One day after school they decided it was time for me to go ahead and join since they saw I was down to fight with them on campus at school. They saw how I fought so they decided to go ahead and let me in. I didn't want in at first because I didn't know how this was going to change my life. I didn't know what all this entailed. I didn't know shit, basically. So that day, after school, we got off the bus and they kept my stuff and I was wondering what was going on. They kept being huddled up in a group, which scared me at first because I didn't know what was going to happen. All I wanted to do was get my bag and get the fuck home.*

**Interviewer**

*How old were you then?*

**Sweet T**

*I was about 14 and the leader he came up to me and was like, 'Do you trust me? Do you trust me?' And I was like; sure, I trust you. He grabbed me and the next thing I know everybody else was stomping and beating me and I was on the ground trying to fight back and then after it was all over with, I got knocked unconscious. Then I heard; 'That's enough, that's enough!' Then when I got up they gave me the Flag, which is around my head [takes off hat to show red bandana] right here. They gave me the Flag and was like, now you a part of us, you are a member of the family. I didn't know what that meant until later on. We use to go to meetings and it was there that I found out that it was more than that neighborhood. The Bloods entailed brothers from all over the city and I found out that it was a large family. They took care of me, they got me started in making money, got me started in how to take care of myself when my parents weren't around, they taught me how to be more forceful and more aggressive because I was a passive person. After dealing with them, I wasn't afraid of anybody or anything. I'm still not afraid of anybody or anything. I'll pick somebody off the street, I don't need to know them and start a fight with them, knowing I can whoop they ass.*

**Interviewer**

*So what's your gang name and what do the Green and Red colors represent?*

**Sweet T**

*It depends on which area I'm in. There are a couple of names I go by: T, the Pimp but I mostly go by Sweet T. Green is because that's all I seen Bloods wear. The red is for 'blood' and the blood represents to me, other peoples' blood that I spill. Whether it's a fist in the mouth, whether it's a broken nose, whether it's a cut with a knife, whether it's a shot to the body, the red just means the blood. So where ever I go, I'm gonna spill somebody's blood and I dare them to try to spill mine.*

Contrary to popular notions that gang members are the product of single female headed households, Terence was raised in a two parent home with a respected minister as his father. Both parents worked so Terence was often left unsupervised. Criminologists investigating gangs generally agree that inadequate supervision and parental neglect can lead to breakdowns in formal and informal control and alternatively gang membership (Short, 1998; Leet, Rush, and Smith, 1997; Winfree, Fuller, Vigil, and Mays, 1997; Jackson and McBride, 1996; Korem, 1995; Spergel, 1995; Cummings and Monti, 1993; Sampson and Groves, 1989; Johnstone, 1981). Evidently, Terence felt a sense of neglect and loneliness because he was the only child and his parents were not home enough to notice what he was into or who he was hanging around. Terence implies that the gang's familial orientation immediately appealed to him. Moreover, the gang's attention and socialization filled a void and produced an individual who professes to have never ending loyalty to the gang. Another attraction for Terence was the immediate boost in reputation. The instant recognition was seductive enough to infuse him with the confidence that he was lacking prior to gang membership.

**Interviewer**

*What about your parents? Were you raised in a two parent or one parent household?*

*Was the family life okay or troublesome?*

**Sweet T**

*My home life was perfect. I had both parents, my dad was a minister. He was a preacher. I grew up in the church. One thing they say is the preacher's kid is the worst but what really got me off track was just the rebelliousness. I guess they just kept tight strings on me because I didn't know nothing about gangs, I didn't know anything. And my first confrontation with gangs was when I was probably 13 when we moved to San*

*Antonio, Texas.*

*In 1992, was when I joined the gang and up to that point I had pretty much lived by myself, since my parents were always at work. So when they came along it was like—like a family and I stayed out with people, hung out with other dudes my age or a little bit older. They would teach me stuff and I jumped at the opportunity. They showed me how to shoot my first gun. They gave me my first gun, and with that, I took it and ran with it. I was buying and selling guns. I got my contacts throughout the city and I could go anywhere in the city and purchase a gun. I could get any gun I wanted, I needed and if I needed to get rid of it, I could get rid of it, quick. They taught me how to survive on the streets.*

*I didn't know shit about anything. They came along, they taught me how to survive on the streets. They taught me how to survive one night going through the roughest part of town and because of that I'll always be grateful for that, I'll always have their back.*

### **Interviewer**

*Are you comfortable with the gang? I know it's comfortable enough for you to go home and get back in it but if you had it to do all over again, would you do it? If you could, if you could turn back the hands of time and start over and somebody give you a choice to not be in it versus in it, would you do it again?*

### **Sweet T**

*Most definitely because it's a confidence builder. I went from basically a nobody, to everybody knowing who I was. I mean, like the minute I step foot on school campus again, everybody knew my name, I might not of known them but they knew me, and that's just a great feeling.*

### **Sweet T's Rigby Court Gangster Blood Mentality**

Crips, Bloods, People, and Folks represent the largest minority urban street gangs. In most urban areas, Crips outnumber Bloods 3 to 1 so it is no surprise that (within the context of the gang subculture) it is more difficult to claim Blood membership because Bloods are outnumbered by Crips (Delaney, 2006, Sheldon, Tracy, and Brown, 2001). In order to offset the appearance of vulnerability associated with low numerical representation, Bloods participate in more violent crimes (Skakur, 1993).

**Interviewer**

*Given Bloods are out-numbered by the Crips 3 to 1 and given Bloods fight amongst themselves, it seems to make it harder to be a Blood than to be a Crip. What do Bloods do to compensate for the fact that you're out-numbered?*

**Sweet T**

*Looking at the Crips, yeah they out-number us but when you get down to it, Crips don't do shit. I mean they talk a lot of mess but they just didn't show me nothing. I mean, I had a chance to go with Crips before I even thought about going with Bloods. Some homeboys of mine were in the Crips and they talked about it but they didn't do nothing, They walked around talking all that shit and then when it got down to it, couldn't back nothing up. I feel the Bloods are more ruthless, I think that's what compensates for the Bloods and that's why I'm proud to be one because I know we'll go out and fuck you up.*

Sweet T's interview reveals that during his early teens, he experienced anger, frustration, and confusion over what represented masculinity in male peer groups. The source of these underlying disturbances seems to derive from being bullied. Terence discloses that before joining the gang, he use to deal with confrontation in non-aggressive ways, which was interpreted as passive by male peer groups.

Consistent challenges from males that would later become his gangster comrades afforded him the opportunity to become a better fighter and affiliate with a group of aggressive boys. Terence suggests that once he was exposed to the gang, he could not be stopped. Terence seems supremely confident in his ability to fight, which exemplifies Miller's notion of toughness (Miller, 1958).

**Interviewer**

*What is the attraction to gangs?*

**Sweet T**

*Man, when it comes down to it, I'm one of the badest motherfuckers out there, pretty much. I like to dare people to try and step, and if they do that's like signing your own death slip. So one way or another I'm gonna take them down. The attraction is probably the adrenaline, knowing that I could be gone at any time. But also knowing, I know how to survive the street.*

*Knowing that I can get down and dirty, that's probably the attraction or excitement.*

**Interviewer**

*What's more gratifying to you? Would you say physical in terms of man to man combat or would you say shooting? I'm not asking if you ever have shot anyone or participated in something like that in the past. I'm asking what brings you the greatest satisfaction, using your bare hands or using a weapon when dealing with your enemy?*

**Sweet T**

*Most definitely bare hands because it's more personal and I can use what I know. I been doing martial arts since I can remember and I like to invent new moves, new styles of hurting people and I like to test 'em out. Using my hands gives me the opportunity to do that.*

For Terence, New Jacks (contemporary gang members more concerned with cars, money, flashy clothes, and girls) are not skilled at fighting. He offers that these New Jacks would not survive during an era when fist to cuffs determined toughness. According to Terence, New Jacks define toughness as a willingness to use a knife or gun. Fundamentally, Terence's gangster mentality enhances the probability that he will engage in fights over verbal resolution when dealing with conflict.

**Interviewer**

*What is the difference between you and these so called New Jacks?*

**Sweet T**

*These New Jacks want it too easy. They are so quick to pull out a knife or a gun. They can't fight at all. They act as if they are too pretty for the rough stuff. I guess they concentrating on the women and all that. But me, a person like me, I want to make you suffer. I'm going to torture you while I'm fighting you because I want you to experience pain.*

Research on South Central Los Angeles' Hoover Crips reveals that Hoover Crips recognize a period of childhood innocence. Research also shows that gang associations start as early as nine years old. Therefore, childhood lasts from birth until about eight years old. Once young boys reach an age (typically around nine years old) where they step from under the

family's protection to experience the gang world, they lose that innocent status. If innocent children (from birth to eight years old) get caught up in gang warfare, gang members blame parents because gang members and residents are suppose to be well informed concerning which gangs are currently at war with one another (Cureton, Forthcoming: *Hoover Crips: The etiology and anatomy of a gang subculture*, Southern Illinois Press). Unfortunately, Terence's troublesome nature and refusal to be sentimental or soft (toughness), forces him to make snap judgments based on what colors people wear and seems to eliminate compassion for innocent children caught up in gang warfare.

**Interviewer**

*What goes through your mind when you see a person with the wrong color on?*

**Sweet T**

*Only thing is like what this motherfucker thinking? I mean, especially if he's in the wrong area. Why is he gonna come through the neighborhood wearing a blue shirt? May be he might not know any better but he's wearing a blue rag on his head so this motherfucker must be the stupidest idiot in the world to come up here like that and that's an ass whoopin' regardless.*

**Interviewer**

*What if they are White?*

**SweetT**

*It don't matter, White, Black, Mexican, Asian. It don't matter.*

**Interviewer**

*What about children? Is there any such thing as innocence in terms of a gang? What about children that get caught up in crossfire, and gang wars?*

**Sweet T**

*I mean, at first it's sad but that's all we heard about was children getting caught up in it, children sleeping in their bed getting shot. At first, it's like, man a child just died. Soon after that thought you still think about it but you get use to it. You get use to hearing about innocent children. But you know what I'm saying? If it's like the brother or sister of an enemy then that's one step closer to getting to him, or getting to her.*

Miller suggests that gangs flourish as youth seek excitement. Miller's work implies that poor neighborhoods typically don't afford residents with much community recreation so youth often find themselves bored. To escape boredom, youth turn to the excitement of street life, which is usually embedded in troublesome, crime oriented, night time activities. Moreover, participation in activities involving alcohol, sex, gambling, group fighting, and hustling drugs requires some level of smartness or ability to survive by out thinking other similarly circumstance youth. Thus, the gang provides the opportunity to be obedient to three other focal concerns (trouble, smartness, and search for excitement) (Miller, 1958). Terence thought it was exciting to engage in fighting, flirt with women, and even escape being shot at. He appreciates the survival of the fittest orientation that the gang possesses.

**Interviewer**

*Would you say that to be a part of the gang is to be associated with an exciting organization?*

**Sweet T**

*In 1992, I had pretty much lived by myself, since my parents were always working. So when that happens, you do get bored. When the gang came along, it was like a family of friends that you can hang around with or hang out with. It was fun being around other dudes my age. You can chase women together to prove who had game. You fight together for bragging rights. You can go out and do some shooting at people and it is fun shooting at your enemies. It is even fun getting shot at. I would not say fun but like a adrenaline rush. I've been shot at and bullets went flying by my feet and some were even in my backpack. When you make it through that, you just excited about it but you want revenge too so there is always something to do.*

**Interviewer**

*Did the gang teach you anything besides providing an avenue for physical expression?*

**Sweet T**

*The Bloods did teach me stuff. They showed me how to hustle drugs, money, women and other niggas too. I learned how to handle the pressure of the streets. I came into manhood and earned my respect and I credit the gang for that, which again is why I am grateful to the Bloods. They don't have to worry about me because I will always be there to back them up.*

Up to this point, Terence's interview affirms that there is a subculture that focuses on a set of values that promote crime and violence. Certainly, his gang involvement demonstrates the rewards of troublesome behavior and toughness. Additionally, it is clear that the gang became Terence's primary reference group and avenue to escape boredom. Terence's search for autonomy significantly contributed to his desire to return home to the bosom of the gang.

For Terence, leaving school for the money, material, and social trappings of gang life, proved to be the best solution to escape the increasing demands of college. Terence admits that his freshman and sophomore years were manageable but his junior year seemed to involve an increased course workload and academic standard that he was failing to measure up to. By the end of his junior year, he felt that college was not necessary for improving his life. Terence, also felt that the academic environment was too restrictive, too sheltered and did not provide freedom of individuality. In actuality, Terence had a problem with the university's value system because academic success, involvement in university related sports, membership in fraternities, and being student ambassadors to the surrounding community takes precedence over life outside of the university, especially if that life involves alliances with non-conventional groups. In other words, gangsterism, has no social value on a college campus and the result was that Terence felt socially insignificant.

It logically, follows that Terence would seek out circumstances that breed familiarity and success while simultaneously affirming some level of personal worthiness. Thus, returning to the gang seemed like the best decision for Terence. The interview shows that perceived inability to meet course demands and the perception of a better opportunity to earn money contributed to Terence's decision to drop out of school one year before earning a Bachelor's degree in sociology.

### **Interviewer**

*Terence, you are one year or so from graduating! [Terence laughs] I'm going to say it again. You are one year from earning a college degree so why are you going back? You know what you are going back to get into. I've seen you drift from being a student to openly displaying your gang affiliation by wearing or making visible your gang colored flag. I guess I must be missing something because you can wear a red flag and people not notice what it stands for and still complete your college education. Help me to understand what is the rational?*

**Sweet T**

*Man, it is just rough without being in the gang. I tried the school thing for a little bit and right now, it just does not seem like school is for me. School is alright but right now it's just too much. I probably tried to take on too much this last semester and it stressed me out. Plus, right now I'm missing the money. Maybe once I live long enough to get my money back up straight, then I might come back to school. I might finish but until then, I don't see myself coming back.*

**Interviewer**

*How much money are you missing and what are you going to do to make money?*

**Sweet T**

*It's a great deal of money when you are not making any as a college student. There is money to be made by running or selling guns. There is money to be made in the drug scene. I can push weed (marijuana) or LSD. It really depends on where the most money can be made in the fastest or shortest time.*

Terence offers that gang status and continued affiliation exerts pressures that do not let up just because you move away, which contradicts the conventional assumption that moving away from the gang is a solution for getting out of the gang. Terence acknowledged that the gang continued to call him throughout his short college career and that they fully expected him to return to the gang when called upon to do so. Moreover, Terence never formally renounced the gang so his loyalty remained with the Bloods. When Terence's "special" (a young brother that Terence brought in the gang) was murdered in 2000, he immediately wanted revenge. In fact, the Bloods called upon him to "take care" of those responsible for the young home boy's death.

**Interviewer**

*It seems you have a good deal of experience with the gang so what is your status in the gang right now?*

**Sweet T**

*My status in the gang is, if the leader gets popped off (murdered) or he goes to jail for life without any chance of parole then I'm right there to step in and take his place. What people don't understand is that the gang will keep calling you and telling you what news there is. Somebody over here that died,*

*somebody over there done died or one of your girls done got raped or something like that. So with that, what are you going to do? Are you going to just sit there and just be like okay, I'm not part of it no more? No, they expect you to get up and go do something about it and instinct alone is going to force you to react. You going to be like, that's my homeboy, that's my girl, so naturally you are going to get up and go do something. Understand what I'm saying, it's not like you could actually walk away from this thing. I mean you don't have a choice, once you're in, you're in. The gang took care of you before, they gave you your first everything, money and respect and they taught you how to survive on the streets. They made you so with that there will come a time when you are expected to give back and even want to give back. To this day, I have enemies back at home. I have one in particular, one that I am still looking for. He goes by "Pappy" and if he does not get me first, I am going to get him. As recently, as last year (2000), one of my boys that I brought in, he is the one that ambushed him. He is the one that got him killed so that is automatic revenge.*

Terence did not enroll in school the following fall 2001 semester, which would have been the first semester of his senior year. Terence made a decision to leave school for gang life because the gang was home for him. It was a place where he mattered and felt comfortable. The gangster environment guaranteed a measure of success that could not be reproduced on a college campus. Terence believed that the gang offered him freedom and independence from the conventional regulation associated with being a student on a college campus. While this is true, Terence failed to realize that his decision did not lead to complete autonomy. Leaving school to return to the gang simply forced him into a different type of authoritative context where gangster politics govern behavior. Essentially then, Miller seems correct in suggesting that gang members don't actually want complete autonomy. In fact, it seems that gangsters gravitate towards institutions and circumstances that require regulation (Miller, 1958).

The last inquiry focused on Terence's future once he left school. The evidence suggests that he seemed to lack spiritual connection and favored determinism as it pertained to death. It seems that Terence subscribes to Miller's (1958) notion that fate more than God determines life course outcomes, which is particularly ironic given his father is a minister. When questioned about the possibility of death as a result of gang involvement, Terence half-heartedly believes that he will be fortunate enough to live long enough to see grandchildren. Even though, gang life increases the probability of death, Terence does not dwell on it.

**Interviewer**

*Given your father is a minister, how do you feel about religion and God?*

**Sweet T**

*There was a point in time when I went to church like every Sunday. It was God this and God that and I know there is one up there. When it's time, I always heard when it's time you can't run from God. Until God does whatever He is supposed to do, I'm going be like I am. I am comfortable with what the gang is and being in it. I like the confidence that comes with it, to know that people know that I am a Blood. Being in a gang determines more for me now. The gang is money and respect and I will take my chances with the gang and where it leads until God does his thing.*

**Interviewer**

*You have lost some good friends and comrades because they have been murdered by rival gangs. Yet you still chose to associate with the gang. It would seem to me that witnessing so much death would make you think about leaving the gang life.*

**Sweet T**

*Yeah, well I don't look at death the same way other people do. I've never been too much up on death anyway. Really you can't protect people from death. You can try but you can't control it. As much as I might want to, I really have no control over protecting you. When the homeboy dies, I figure it was their time to go. Yeah, they are dead and gone and when people die around me, at least they don't have to live in this world anymore. They got peace.*

**Interviewer**

*You are leaving school to go back to the gang so I have to ask, how long do you expect to live?*

**Sweet T**

*Me, I'm a survivor so the outlook is that I will live long enough to see grand kids.*

**Interviewer**

*I hear you but is that a realistic outlook?*

**Sweet T**

*Not really because I could be gone by the time I get back. I could be gone within a week or I could be gone the very next day. But for now, I feel nobody can touch me.*

**Interviewer**

*Forgive the harping on death but I'm hoping I can say something to make you stay in school. I want you to think about death a little more so what do you want your tombstone to read? Personally, I'm hoping for a good deal of separation between birth and death dates.*

**Sweet T**

*I don't know, I never thought about it, I never even thought about it. Death never worried me, may be when I was little but now I don't even think about it. I guess I would not know what to put on my tombstone may be somebody will think of something good to put on it. Even now, I'm not thinking about it.*

**Interviewer**

*Can anybody stop you from dropping out of school and going back to gang life? What if your mother, father, or girlfriend where to ask you to stay in school?*

**Sweet T**

*My mother could not stop me. My father could not stop me. Not even my girlfriend. It would have to be God himself.*

Terence understands that gang life is criminogenic and fatalistic. Terence offers that in time he will wise up but for now he believes that the streets will prove more opportune than a college degree. Ultimately, Terence's economic hardships, less than ideal academic performance, inability to integrate with the college social scene and continued association with the Rigsby Court Gangster Bloods caused him to yield to the temptations of gangsterism.

**Discussion**

This one case analysis affirms Miller's notion that gangs are the result of subcultural values that emphasize trouble, toughness, smartness, excitement, fate, and autonomy. Subscribing to these focal concerns forces obedience to deviant, criminal, and violent youth subcultures and validates

allegiance to gangs. Miller asserts that gang members typically come from lower class neighborhoods where females are head of the household (Miller, 1958). However, findings from this research don't support these two assumptions. The findings suggest that males seeking gang membership don't have to be like circumstanced relative to class stratification and family dynamics. Terence claims that both parents earned decent enough wages to classify them as middle class. Despite being middle class, Terence found himself socially attracted to peers that come from lower class environments. Apparently, focal concerns of lower class youth subcultures have the power to attract middle class males. The lure of gang life can permeate the social buffers of the middle class, particularly where social control is less than ideal. Terence comes from a home that he says was "normal." Terence implied that his home life was not dysfunctional or problematic. However, his only reservation about his home life concerned the lack of supervision and loneliness that comes with being the only child in a home where both parents work. The evidence minimally suggests that attention starved middle class males become interested in gangs because these groups provide the attention they are missing and the opportunity for recreation within a peer group context. Furthermore, lower class measures of masculinity become valuable forms of social capital for middle class youth because regardless of social class, the streets are controlled by lower class boys (Cureton, 2002; Anderson, 1999; Shakur, 1993; Anderson, 1990; Miller, 1958; Cohen 1955). If middle class boys want to function in the streets where masculinity is measured by street performances (deviance, crime, and violence) and respect is gained by street survival then these boys need to have street level associations.

This research contributes to the long standing belief that the structure and organization of gangs vary along social and economic, neighborhood and cultural, racial, ethnic, age, and gender lines (Delaney, 2006; Knox, 2000; Short, 1998; Skolnick, Bluthenthal, and Correl, 1993; Vigil, 1993; Hagedorn, 1988; Short, 1974; Yablonsky 1959). Once a member of the Bloods, Terence attended gang meetings from which he drew the conclusion that the gang represented a large social network that covered a significant amount of territory in San Antonio. Moreover, Terence offered that the Rigsby Court Gangsters were organized enough to handle the nuances of hustling drugs and guns throughout the city. Gangs have to be organized in some manner to address the politics of gang interaction and the business of the black market economy (Hagedorn, 1994; Jankowski, 1991). Additionally, the Rigsby Court gang was organized enough to exert social pressures on its members and interfere with attempts at conventional

legitimacy. In Terence's case, leaving San Antonio to attend a predominantly white institution in North Carolina did not eliminate his responsibilities to the gang. In fact, according to Terence, the gang was more than confident that upon their request he would leave school for the gang if the situation demanded it. By virtue of continued association, Terence remained informed about the neighborhood's social happenings. Evidently, continued affiliation afforded the confidence that academic failure could be traded for street success. Terence's continued allegiance to the gang negated a complete break from the politics of gang membership, which ultimately made his decision to return to the gang an easy one.

### **Conclusion**

Implications from this one case can't be generalized but the findings offer some compelling information for future research. Fundamentally, there is a need to examine the social biographies of black males that attempt legitimacy through education. Moreover, given that gang members are already on many of the college campuses across the country by virtue of academic or athletic recruitment, there is a need to examine gang culture. Understanding the impact of gang membership and the politics of the gang could lead to information that would assist in school retention and alternatively help black males achieve social legitimacy.

**Note: April 2004 update on Terence:** Terence came to visit me in the spring of 2004. Terence had participated in gang activity for approximately a year after leaving school but simply grew tired of the new dynamics and pressures associated with the gang. Terence suggests that gang life is a young man's game, with new up and coming males who are willing to take more drastic means to be the most respected ghetto superstar of their time. Terence says that maturing means finding a way to take care of family. For Terence it's now unacceptable to participate in activities that could lead to prison or death. Terence is now 27 years old and has joined the Air Force. He is also taking classes, part time.

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