

## **Globalization and Gang Growth: The Four Phenomena Affect**

By

M. Michaux Parker Ph.D.  
North Carolina Central University

### ***Abstract***

*Globalization has created many opportunities for shared cultural experiences and interactions. It has also created opportunities for growth among gangs. This article examines four specific globalization trends which may increase the criminal impact of gangs at both the global and local levels. Global pillage, urbanization, democratization and the networked enterprise have the potential to increase gang membership, access to victims, institutionalization and criminal sophistication. The macro-social effects of these types of growth are beginning can be seen in the form of sovereignty reduction.*

As Globalization evolves into an accepted way of life, its relationship to crime is also becoming more accepted. There is a growing consensus among criminologists (Shelley, 1998; Passas, 2000, Finckenauer and Veroin, 2001; Tillman, 2002; Clark, 2004; Sornarajah, 2004; Williams, 2005; and Hagadorn, 2008) that globalization has the potential to increase crime both globally and locally. Globalization provides increased access to criminal markets the same way it increases access to legitimate business markets. Despite the general affect of globalization on crime, there are four specific globalization-inspired processes that most directly impact the growth of gangs.

These four globalization phenomena are especially problematic when considering how criminal gangs may use globalization to their advantage. By better understanding these four processes it may be possible for criminologists to better anticipate changes in gang crime and more effectively prepare interventions to address evolving methods of gang criminality. Despite the almost ubiquitous use of the term globalization, there are often misunderstandings about globalization as a concept. As an a priori to this discussion, it is important to begin with a solid conceptualization of globalization.

### **Conceptualizing Globalization**

Globalization has many different definitions. The various definitions used by scholars attempt to describe the central elements of globalization within the context of a specific discipline. For example, globalization definitions used by sociologists often focus on the social aspects of globalization while globalization definitions used by financiers will focus on the economic elements of globalization. Discussing the variety of definitions proposed by globalization scholars would be prohibitively long for this text. However, for the purpose of this analysis, there is one definition that adequately serves the criminological application.

Anthony Giddens, a globalization scholar, defines globalization as: “The intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away” (Giddens, 2003a: 60). As we can see, this globalization definition focuses on the increased social and cultural contacts seen in globalized societies. While there are minor variations in globalization definitions between academic disciplines, most definitions tend to vary with respect to semantics rather than actual conceptual differences. One example of this semantic variation can be seen in the definition used by two other noted globalization scholars: David Held and Anthony McGrew.

Held and McGrew (2003: 3) broaden the definition of globalization a bit by including the idea of space-time compression and accelerated interdependence. The resulting definition used by Held and McGrew is as follows: “...a significant shift in the spatial reach of social relations and organization towards the interregional or intercontinental scale” (Ibid). Regardless of how one defines it, globalization has changed society in many ways.

Despite the numerous globalization-produced advantages such as an increased capacity for social and cultural contact, some advances are more beneficial for the growth of criminal organizations. There are four salient globalization

phenomena that may facilitate the growth of gangs in the age of globalization. Global Pillage, Urbanization, Democratization and Networked Enterprises all have a direct impact on contemporary gang growth. The first globalization phenomenon that may contribute to gang growth is the global pillage.

### **The Global Pillage**

Some scholars (Giddens, 2003b, Steans, 2003, Woods, 2003, Rodrik, 2003) argue that globalization often creates a class of winners and losers on a global scale. This dichotomy of prosperity significantly benefits some but significantly harms the majority of people (Giddens, 2003a: 16). Hardt and Negri refer to those who are disproportionately harmed by globalization as the multitude (2004: 100). Members of the multitude have their own characteristics and concerns which serve to distinguish them from their more affluent counterparts. The idea that globalization has the propensity to increase the proportion of impoverished peoples is called the global pillage (Giddens, 2003a: 16).

By the end of the 1990s there was a vast difference between the people living in the top fifth of the highest income countries and the people living in the lowest fifth. The top fifth nations had 86% of the world Gross Domestic Products while the bottom fifth had only 1% (UNDP Report, 1999). Similarly, 68% of the direct foreign investments were concentrated in the countries in the top fifth while only 1% was found in the countries in the bottom fifth (Ibid).

Despite these data, there are some scholars (Dollar and Kraay, 2003) who disagree with the idea that globalization has significantly harmed large populations. Dollar and Kraay (2003: 447) disagree with the statement that globalization is characterized by the overwhelming disadvantage that accrues to some people. The authors admit that in the period of globalization that peaked around 1975 inequality was the global trend but that trend has stabilized and possibly reversed (Dollar and Kraay, 2003: 447). This 'global financial benefit' argument has one primary flaw. Dollar and Kraay's analysis, focuses almost solely, on India and China as examples of populations who have benefitted from globalization.

The assertion that the number of poor has declined by 200 million is unremarkable considering that India and China together comprise approximately one third of the world's population (Dollar and Kraay, 2003: 449). Therefore the lack of inequality demonstrated by the ascent of Indian and Chinese populations is simply a statistical function. Since India and China have such a large proportion of the world's population, when those nations do well, the data are skewed in the direction of a globalization benefit.

There are still other scholars (Stiglitz, 2003) who adopt a more centrist view and assert that nations vary with respect to their benefits or harms caused by globalization. Regardless of the degree of the disparate financial impact, it still exists.

These patterns of inequality create a global underclass, which may serve as ready recruits for gangs. The access to a steady supply of poor, disenfranchised individuals who may view the gang as the only viable way to survive provides new growth potential. The second globalization phenomenon that has a direct affect on gang growth is Urbanization.

### **Urbana Redefined**

The world is becoming more urbanized. Between 2000 and 2030 the world's urban population is expected to increase by 2.1 billion people (Brennan-Galvin, 2002). The technological advances in globalization, such as ease of international travel and better medical care, have also made migration, longevity and birth rates increase. Even locations that have low levels of urbanization are impacted by this global trend. For example, the continent of Africa has the lowest level of urbanization in the world but it has the fastest urban growth (Ibid). Some scholars (Brennan-Galvin, 2002) believe that virtually all of the global population growth, in the foreseeable future, will occur in cities. In 2008, it was estimated that half the world population already lived in just 24 cities around the world (Houston and Griffiths, 2008: 30).

In addition to the increasing urban population, research suggests that there are increasing proportions of city dwellers inhabit the most impoverished areas of these cities. The United Nation's report on the challenges of the slums stated that nearly one billion people globally live in slum areas (Hagadorn, 2008: 4). In Latin America three-fourths of the population lives in cities and one-third of the city dwellers live in slums (Ibid). Of the 300 million urban inhabitants, approximately 70% of them live in slums (Hagadorn, 2008: 4). The slum populations found in cities around the world, represent a nexus of global pillage and urbanization that will impact gang growth in two ways: increased victim population and a hastening of gang institutionalization through defensible spaces.

The increase in urbanization produces a larger population of potential victims for gangs. Under globalization, the city's population becomes a microcosm of the world's population. As previously discussed, the new urban population is largely situated in the lowest social strata of the society which makes them

easy prey for criminals (Cuadra, 2003). The combination of large populations of underclass individuals situated in confined urban environments has long been shown to produce a criminogenic effect. The globalization-produced urbanization is made even more problematic because it creates new spatial forms that allow gangs to become institutionalized more quickly.

The ecology of crime suggests that individuals who live in increased proximity are exposed to higher crime rates. Still, there are discernable patterns to urban crime. The globalization-produced spatial order in the city is less legible than previous urban environments (Beauregard and Haila, 2000: 23). The new urban spatial order is an interesting mixture of various enclaves and groupings that are seemingly incompatible. In the new urban environment created by globalization, elite financial centers may exist next to neighborhoods that are disorganized, neglected and appear almost third-world in nature (Beauregard and Haila, 2000: 23). The second area of growth potential for gangs in the new spatial order of cities is in gang institutionalization through the control of defensible spaces.

Gang institutionalization can be conceptualized as the development of organizational permanence. Some gang researchers (Hagadorn, 2008: 14), who study the institutionalization of gangs, have called attention to the affect of gangs in large urban centers. Gangs evolve and become institutionalized, partially due to defensible spaces within cities (ibid). These defensible spaces such as housing projects, ghettos and underclass neighborhoods, allow gangs to safely run criminal enterprises without fear of the police or rivals interfering. Large slum areas in Rio de Janeiro and housing projects in Chicago have something in common; both protect gang members from the police (Hagadorn, 2008: 14). Contemporary urban spaces act as elaborate mazes that can be used by gangs to store contraband, sell illicit products or wage war against enemies. Once gangs have assumed control of defensible spaces in the new urban landscape, they may be able to provide increased goods and services to the residents as a result of the third globalization phenomena. The third globalization phenomenon that may significantly contribute to gang growth in the age of globalization is Democratization.

### **Democratization**

The concept of Democratization (Friedman, 2000: 47; Giddens, 2003a: 75) is best defined as: the process of obtaining access to any product, service or advantage that was previously unattainable by the general populace or was previously reserved for the state. Under the rubric of globalization, democratization has occurred in many different areas: technology, economics, information, security and the mechanisms of war. Individuals often take advanced access to goods and services for granted simply

because they are so common.

Democratization of information occurs when citizens have access to international news at the same speed as government officials. It is easy to overlook the extent to which citizens are now inundated with national and global news. Having the ability to watch a global event contemporaneously with its occurrence, due to the advances in satellite communications, empowers citizens. When citizens can purchase the same computer equipment to organize their personal checkbook that government agencies use to conduct public planning, this is an example of the democratization of technology. There are two dimensions of democratization that are especially useful to gangs seeking growth. Gangs may expand their criminal markets as a result of the democratization of technology and the democratization of the mechanisms of war.

Personal computers, cellular phones, 24-hour banking, international travel and satellite communications have proliferated into mainstream society at a rapid rate. In many cases gangs have already rushed to utilize these technological advances. An important element of the democratization of technology is the speed at which society adopts new technology. From the introduction of radio it took 40 years to obtain an audience of 50 million listeners in the United States. The Internet only took 4 years to obtain 50 million users after its introduction (Giddens, 2003a: 12). In an analogy of the Internet's effect on globalization, a United States Federal Communication Commission advisor likened the Internet to Roman roads (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 298). The information super highway provides ordinary citizens with the ability to disseminate their ideas, beliefs, movements and cultures much the same way that Roman roads spread Roman ideals. Gangs are making use of the technology in much the same way.

The democratization of technology has helped to transform and expand the criminal economy of some gangs. The new mainstream economy, under globalization, is primarily information-based and depends on a corporation's capacity to generate, assimilate and access knowledge-based information (Castells, 2000: 77). Globalization also provides an opportunity for the creation of a criminal economy based on information. This does not suggest that traditional forms of criminal enterprises such as drugs, theft and prostitution, will become obsolete. However in the age of globalization, a criminal information trade may prove to be as lucrative as traditional criminal markets. One example of an information-based criminal enterprise occurred in the Southeastern region of the United States.

The organization in question, the Blue Gang<sup>1</sup> was an international transplant to a medium sized city in the Southeastern United States. Shortly after its migration

in 2000, gang members begin to sell a formula for making 'black crack'. There were two primary formulas sold to local drug gangs. The first formula (German) involves lacing the cocaine mixture with pencil lead in order to turn the finished crack cocaine black. The second formula (Eastern European) uses iodine as an additive while cooking the crack and will also turn the finished product black. The use of the specific chemicals does not change the potency of the cocaine but it does prevent law enforcement officers from readily identifying the substance.

The Blue Gang did not actually sell drugs; they simply sold the information on a better production method for drugs. The Blue Gang capitalized on the information-based nature of crime to create a new type of market; an illicit information-technology paradigm. The predominant characteristic of an information-technology paradigm is that information is the raw material (Castells, 2000: 70). Imagine the exponential growth of the drug trade in this jurisdiction as the result of the illicit information provided by the Blue Gang.

Another example of the evolving nature of gang crime made use of the new criminal information-technology paradigm. In October 2000 A Sicilian Mafia group, in conjunction with 20 other individuals, created a digital clone of the Bank of Sicily's online component (McCusker, 2004). The group had planned to steal \$400 million allotted to the bank by the European Union. The gang would have succeeded had the plot not been revealed by an informant (Ibid). McCusker (2004) argued that the real issue was not that the gang tried and failed but that they conceived of the plan in the first place. Despite the problems that the democratization of technology poses for society, the democratization of the mechanisms of war may be more readily felt by local law enforcement.

Weapons, just as anything else, have become commodified under globalization. For the first time in history the individual has access to not only traditional small arms but weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear and biological weapons. Weapons of choice include Man-Pad shoulder fired missiles, of which, 4,000 are missing from the former Iraqi arsenal (Naim, 2005: 53). The Iraqi loss is small in comparison to the total picture. According to the Small Arms Survey, 100,000 Man-Pads are currently unaccounted for (Ibid: 53). In a world where criminals have become aware of the possibilities presented by globalization, the Man-Pad is a force multiplying equalizer. It allows the individual or group to hold itself equal to the power of the state.

The small arms survey also revealed that at least 13 non-state groups own these weapons (ibid: 53). There are indications that these weapons are not mere trophies or objects of discussion; these weapons are being used. In 2002 a Man-Pad

missile was fired at an Israeli passenger plane as it departed Mombasa, Kenya (Naim, 2005: 53). The demand for this particular weapon is so high that companies in Pakistan, North Korea, Egypt and Vietnam are now supplying additional groups (Ibid: 54). For some groups, even the Man-Pad is insufficient.

Naim (2005: 45) asserts that Dr. A.Q. Khan, a nuclear arms dealer, is only one of the ruthless, talented entrepreneurs who sell weapons internationally. The demand for these more powerful weapons has even prompted some traditional corporations to enter the arms trade. Elf, the French state owned oil company, arranged the financial backing for the Lissouba Regime to purchase \$61.3 million worth of light weapons from Iran, helicopters from Russia and the services of 40 Russian technicians (Naim, 2005: 47). It is difficult to separate the acquisition of the weapons from the manner in which they will be used. Democratization has made technology, information and the mechanisms of war much more readily available to citizens and criminals alike. The final impact of Globalization on gang growth is in the fundamental way gangs commit crime; through the use of the network enterprise.

### **The Networked Enterprise**

Manuel Castells' concept of a networked enterprise is made possible through advances in technology and interpersonal contact. This new modus operandi is perfect for criminal organizations seeking to expand their criminal operations. As the ability to communicate with diverse individuals increases, so does the ability to coordinate activities among large groups of people simultaneously. The use of networked enterprises precludes the need for large-scale stable organizations. Gang leaders using a networked enterprise do not have to maintain large organizations. Consequently leaders do not have to worry about maintaining security across multiple organization levels.

Criminal organizations have made use of diverse individuals in their crimes for decades. Criminologists first dealt with the forerunners of network enterprises when combating large gangs and organized crime in the 1930s. However, globalization has again provided a method of evolving the criminal networked enterprise by removing the necessity of stable association among criminal members. Since the nature of criminal organizations depends on the stability of association, the networked enterprise fundamentally changes the definition of what a gang or criminal organization is. In a networked enterprise, the defining elements of a gang may become incident-specific rather than group-specific due to the fluctuating membership of a networked enterprise. This makes the gang more elusive and more difficult to combat.

The network enterprise is best defined as: an endeavor in which the system of means is composed of the intersections of segments of autonomous systems; thereby producing components that are paradoxically both dependent and autonomous (Castells, 2000: 187). Essentially, a networked enterprise is a complex crime committed by a group of independent individuals who are simply acting as one group to complete a specific crime. Stability is needed only for the duration of the crime. It is not important that the individual member even know one another only that the leader knows everyone. A networked enterprise functions on two principles: connectedness and consistency.

Connectedness is the degree to which the network can facilitate noise-free communication (Castells, 2000: 187). The concept of noise-free communication refers to uninterrupted, reliable contact of people and places. By using networked enterprises, a few intelligent criminals can conduct many very sophisticated criminal operations, provided that they can ensure the connection to their networks. With the technological proliferation previously discussed, noise-free communication is more easily attainable than in past decades. Criminals are able to seamlessly integrate target acquisition, planning, criminal operation and dispersal as effectively as any banker servicing a client's account. Interestingly, the lead individual does not need to possess a great deal of knowledge about the component members of the networked enterprise.

The lead individual in a networked enterprise need only know how to contact specific people, what criminal skill set each individual possesses and how to orchestrate the crime. Criminal reputation and the street culture serve as the basic clearinghouse of information as to the knowledge skills and abilities of component members. Once a component member is contacted and agrees to assist with a crime, that component member needs to know only the basics of his or her responsibilities to the operation. If the lead individual manages the networked enterprise effectively, no component member can betray the leader; the component member can only betray the operation as seen in the Sicilian Bank Fraud (McCusker, 2004) discussed earlier. In addition to connectedness, networked enterprises must also possess consistency.

Consistency is the degree to which there is a shared interest between the network's goals and the network components (Castells, 2000: 187). Consistency can be an unknown element in analyzing new criminal networked enterprises. Criminal network enterprises are revealing that individuals and groups from vastly different backgrounds can function well together as long as there is a common benefit to the association. More often than not, the common benefit to association is financial. This expanded cooperation and networking among gangs has yielded several unexpected criminal associations.

There are already allegiances between Mexican and Colombian drug Cartels. These associations are not novel. However, the alliances between Mexican and Chinese human traffickers and associations between Colombian drug traffickers and Sicilian drug traffickers (McCusker, 2004) are more unusual. The lynch pin in these criminal networks appear to be the common interest of expanded profits. Perhaps the greatest example of consistency within a networked criminal enterprise is the relationship between terrorist groups and American street gangs. One of the better known terrorist- gang allegiance is between Al Qaeda and the Mara Salvatrucha.

The Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) is an international gang with deep American roots. This gang came to the attention of Al Qaeda leaders after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and was quickly identified as an organization that could facilitate the transport of weapons and people into the U.S. illegally (Williams, 2005: 160). Their networked enterprise so far has been very active. Between 2002 and 2004 thousands of 'Special Interest Aliens' have been smuggled into the U.S. from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Iraq (Williams, 2005: 161). Not only are federal officials aware of this networked enterprise, the authorities have renamed one particular crossing point 'Arab Ally' and another outside of Douglas Arizona; 'Arab Road' (Williams, 2005: 161). The 'Special Interest Aliens' receive safe transport into the United States and MS-13 maintains a lucrative client relationship.

The use of networked criminal enterprises is becoming so pervasive that it has promoted an organizational shift in the structure of many criminal gangs. More sophisticated criminal gangs are moving away from traditional hierarchical structures due to their inflexible nature and moving toward the swarm structure. A swarm is a permanent networked enterprise. The swarm structure is formidable because it differs so much from traditional criminal structures.

Unlike Weberian structures, a swarm has no head and its members do not necessarily need high levels of intelligence to function. Swarm organizations have no identifiable organizational structure and can form or disperse almost instantly (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 91). It is difficult to use traditional law enforcement tactics when combating organizations that use swarm structures. The formidable power of the swarm can be seen even in nature. Although a single termite may not necessarily be intelligent, a swarm of termites can function as an intelligent system (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 91).

The Internet also uses a type of swarm intelligence and is almost impervious to attack from hostile externalities because of its composition of multiple

singularities (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 91). This collaboration of singularities is what made the illegal downloading of music so difficult for the record industry to curtail. An example of how contemporary gangs are using the swarm structure can be seen in Hobbs' discussion of the transition from traditional British criminal 'family firms' to serious crime networks.

Hobbs argues that traditional British neighborhoods have disintegrated and the 'family firms' have lost their traditional notions of territory and that serious crime networks can operate more fluidly and flexibly on changing terrain (Hobbs, 2004). Hobbs goes on to classify these coalitions of 'loosely structure collectives' as local social systems that could no longer rely on older forms of territorial dominance seen in the 1950s and 1960s. When analyzing evolving criminal organizations, it is helpful to conceptualize the swarm the actors and the networked enterprise as the action.

The advantage of the networked enterprise is that gangs can increase the sophistication of their criminal activities while simultaneously decreasing their chances apprehension. Upon realizing these globalization impacts, criminologists must also try to anticipate the sociological effect that may result.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In the age of globalization gangs are better able to maintain a consistent roster of recruits, have access to larger victim populations, hasten their institutionalization, expand their criminal markets and increase their criminal sophistication as a result of the four phenomena. This growth translates into a criminal evolution that law enforcement may not be prepared to address. Additionally, there may be unanticipated consequences that occur as a result of this globalization-inspired gang evolution. It may be possible for these four phenomena to negatively affect the social stability and sovereignty of the modern nation-state.

The globalization-inspired growth discussed in this text may increase their ability to destabilize a nation-state. *Dysnomie* is defined as the difficulty in governing a population (Passas 2000). *Dysnomie* is problematic in itself but it has also been linked to sovereignty loss. Passas' (2000) analysis of Russian crime and *dysnomie* shows that weak nation-state controls allow criminals to escape punishment and use deviant solutions as the means to success. Passas also warns that successful deviance becomes the normative referent which causes a further breakdown in legitimate norms by overemphasizing goals at the expense of normative means. Once the normative means have been sufficiently weakened, the populace may enter into a *dysnomic* state. To understand the link between *dysnomie*

and sovereignty loss, one needs to understand the tenuous nature of sovereignty.

In the age of globalization, individuals and gangs have both become more powerful. Theoretically, this empowerment weakens the power of the state. The diametric relationship between civil power and state power is based on the idea that there is a finite amount of power that can exist in a society. At its most basic, sovereignty is the condition in which only one entity can rule a given body of people (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 328-329). Most importantly, however, is that sovereignty requires the consent of the ruled (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 332). Individuals can remove their consent to be governed by systematically disobeying laws and maintaining criminal lifestyles.

Scholars have differed as to the enduring existence of sovereignty. Some scholars believe that the nation-state is already powerless in the global society (Giddens, 2003a: 8) while others (Mann, 2003: 145) feel that the ideas of sovereignty loss may be exaggerated. The question of whether the nation-state still has the ability to command the allegiance and sentiment of its people is a legitimate question (Niezen, 2003: 198). Gangs are already playing a very deliberate role in transforming sovereignty.

Another fact associated with sovereignty is that sovereignty can be created by force or violence (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 98). The state exercises sovereignty by its legitimate authority to use violence. This type of sovereignty construction historically has come at the price of revolution. However, in the age of globalization gangs are using alternative methods. Within contemporary society, many people fear criminal organizations much more than they fear the state. Citizens may choose an allegiance to criminal organizations as an insurance against victimization. This selective allegiance is often seen in large urban areas and manifests itself as the refusal of people to co-operate with law enforcement officials in criminal investigations or take any proactive measures to rid their neighborhoods of crime. This pattern of shifting loyalties is being seen across the globe in areas that have a strong gang presence.

Residents in the slum areas of Rio de Janeiro believe that the power of the drug traffickers was greater than the power of the police (Hagadorn, 2008: 15). A similar sentiment was expressed to researchers in Chicago's African American housing projects. Gangster Disciple members in Chicago displayed an astute understanding of defensible urban spaces by explaining to researchers that controlling the parameter of the housing project allows the gang to control the entire projects (Hagadorn, 2008: 15). In its most extreme form, criminal organizations have the ability to engage in direct confrontation with the traditional nation-state.

Naim (2005: 57-58) provides a case study of a criminal organization that used violence to break away from Moldova and form its own republic; the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (TMR). The TMR's only export or claim to fame is that it exports weapons illegally yet it was powerful enough to break away from the nation-state and form a separate sovereign entity because it had more guns than the government (Naim, 2005: 57-58). This is a similar process followed by the Tamil Tigers in Indonesia, who once governed substantial territory in northern Sri Lanka.

Some scholars are increasingly beginning to focus on the threats to sovereignty created by sophisticated gangs. Manwaring (2007) has conducted an extensive analysis of the process by which gangs directly and indirectly attack the sovereignty of the nation-state. He found evidence of the phenomena in Jamaica, Brazil, Mexico and El Salvador (Manwaring, 2007).

Globalization is providing seemingly endless opportunities for growth, development and empowerment. The globalization-inspired advantages will accrue to citizens and criminals alike. Criminology must begin to examine the underlying sociological dynamics associated with criminal evolution.

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### **About the Author**

Dr. M. Michaux Parker completed his Master's Degree at North Carolina Central University. As a Competitive Doctoral Enrichment Fellow, Dr. Parker attended Michigan State University where he completed his Doctorate in Criminal Justice. Dr. Parker has worked as a law enforcement officer with the Durham Police Department, Durham County Sheriff's Office and the Caswell County Sheriff's Department. Prior to his career in law enforcement, Dr. Parker served as a behavioral specialist at C.A. Dillon Training School. Dr. Parker is currently an assistant professor of Criminal Justice at North Carolina Central University where he teaches Statistics, Advanced Quantitative Methods, Criminology and Research Methods. Dr. Parker's research interests include: gangs, criminal organizations, contemporary globalization and social justice.

### End Note:

<sup>1</sup> Blue Gang is a pseudonym used to maintain confidentiality.