EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Stage 1: Assessment

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National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention
Research and Development Program
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PREFACE

This Executive Summary reviews and integrates the findings of the various reports of seven different data collection or research phases conducted in the Stage 1 Assessment, National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Program, in cooperation with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Justice Department. The three primary reports include:

1. Literature Review: Youth Gangs: Problem and Response, 1990
2. Survey of Youth Gang Problems and Programs in 45 Cities and 6 Sites, 1990
3. Community and Institutional Responses to the Youth Gang Problem, 1990 (Field Visits)

Because of the complexity of the youth gang problem and to better prepare for later stages of Prototype Development, Technical Assistance and Training, and Prototype Testing, four additional reports were developed:

4. Report of the Law Enforcement Youth Gang Symposium, 1989
5. Law Enforcement Definitional Conference - Transcript, 1990
6. The Youth Gang Problem: Perceptions of Former Youth Gang Influentials. Transcripts of Two Symposia, 1990
7. Client Evaluation of Youth Gang Services, 1990

The purpose of the assessment stage of our research and development program was to determine the scope and nature of the youth gang problem and the response to it, especially what might comprise promising approaches for combatting it.

I. Scope and Seriousness of the Problem

The scope and seriousness of the youth gang problem is not clearly or reliably known because of limited research and the lack of consensus on what the definition of a gang or gang incident is. Based on law enforcement and media reports, criminal youth gangs or their members are to be found in almost all 50 states, including Alaska and Hawaii, as well as Puerto Rico and other territories. Youth gangs are present in certain large- and middle-sized and even smaller communities, including the suburbs of large cities. At the same time, youth gangs may be absent or their presence less extensive in other seemingly similar cities and communities. They are also found in many city, county, state, and federal detention and correctional facilities. They are present in many school systems, although they are usually more of a problem around than inside schools.

Youth gangs and gang incidents are defined differently across and within cities and jurisdictions by criminal justice, community based organizations and schools. Based on our survey of 45 cities and 6 sites with promising approaches for dealing with the problem, the most frequently mentioned elements of a definition of a gang were certain group or organizational characteristics such as symbols, and a range of specific and general criminal activities, particularly violence, drug use and sales. Of 35 non-overlapping emerging and chronic gang problem cities and jurisdictions with organized programs to address this problem, law enforcement respondents estimated the presence of 1,439 gangs and 120,636 gang members. Blacks (54.6%), mainly African-Americans, and Hispanics (32.6%), mainly Mexican-Americans, were the major racial/ethnic groups in the gang populations reported by law enforcement.

Two-thirds of the law enforcement respondents in our survey of 45 cities perceived gangs with similar names and possible affiliations across neighborhoods, cities, or states. The respondents stated that 75 percent of gang youth had prior police records and that 11.3 percent of total index crimes in their jurisdictions were committed by gang youth. The gang problem was viewed as not only juvenile, since adults were cited as involved in 45.6 percent of the youth gang-related incidents. While gang members with arrest records were responsible for a disproportionate amount of violent crime, the proportion of total violent crime committed by gang members was still estimated to be fairly low, but statistics depended in large measure on the local definition of a gang incident.

A key aspect of the problem of youth gang violence is its concentration in certain categories of violent crime, such as homicide and aggravated assault, and in its concentration in certain neighborhoods. Gang homicides, using a broad and inclusive definition such as in Los Angeles City, have ranged between 25 and 30 percent of all homicides in recent years. In a city with a more restrictive definition of gang incident, such as Chicago, they have averaged about 10 percent.

The close relationship between gangs, violence, and a significant crime problem is most evident, however, when delinquent and criminal patterns of gang and non-gang delinquents and their careers are examined. Youth gang membership is associated with significantly higher levels of official prevalence and incidence of delinquency than nongang delinquent members. The rate of violent offenses for gang members is three times as high as for non-gang delinquents. Gang members even without official delinquency records have a higher adjusted frequency of hidden delinquency than do non-gang official delinquents. Gang membership also appears to prolong the extent and seriousness of criminal careers.

In recent years, there is evidence that more and more gang youth have used and sold drugs. Currently some youth gangs, more likely gang cliques or former gang members, are heavily engaged in street sale of drugs, and also some mid-level distribution. However, the growth of drug dealing by gang and former gang members is insufficient to account for the greatly increased sale and use of drugs in many inner-city communities. Furthermore, while individual gang members may be involved in violent activities that are related to drug use or sale, the existence of a causal relationship between gang-related violence and drug use and sale is less clear. High levels of competition for drug markets seem to increase the likelihood of conflict, but most gang homicides still appear to grow out of traditional turf conflicts.

Law enforcement respondents who perceived drug dealing as a primary purpose of the gang stated it was more characteristic of black than of Hispanic gangs. When drug distribution was regarded as a primary purpose of the youth gang, a higher percentage of index crime in the community was attributed to gangs. Gangs that were perceived to be affiliated across neighborhoods, cities or states were also viewed as more likely to be connected with adult criminal organizations. Such gangs were regarded as highly likely to be engaged in both street and higher level drug trafficking, e.g., transporting drugs across jurisdictions. Nevertheless, it is likely that the availability of significant drug selling or trafficking opportunities has more to do with the development of a serious criminal youth gang problem than the presence of youth gangs has a significant influence on the general drug problem.

II. Characteristics of Gang Structure and Experience

Gangs appear to be more highly structured than delinquent groups, yet they may still be regarded as loosely organized. Some gangs are based on age divisions, others are located in different parts of a community or city. Some gangs are part of larger structures, alliances, or so-called "nations." The size of a gang has been a continuing source of disagreement, varying over time, place, and by observer. Estimates have ranged from 4

or 5 members to thousands in a particular gang or gang conglomerate.

The gang consists of different types of members: core, including leaders, associates or regulars, peripheral or fringe, and "wannabees" or recruits. The core may be regarded as an "inner clique" which determines the basic nature and level of gang activity. The extent to which gang members maintain long-term roles and specific positions is not clear. For example, some members join for a short period. A youth may switch membership from one gang to another for various reasons. In general, core members are more involved in delinquent or criminal activities than fringe members.

The age range of gang members appears to have expanded in recent decades, particularly at the upper end. Members remain in gangs longer and become increasingly involved in serious criminal gain-oriented pursuits, perhaps for lack of alternate legitimate opportunities. Extreme gang violence is concentrated in the older teen and young adult age range. The average age of the arrested gang offender is 17 or 18 years. The average age of the gang homicide offender is 19 or 20 years, and the victim a year or two older, at least in large chronic gang problem cities.

The evidence is overwhelming that males are almost exclusively responsible for gang-related crime, particularly violent offenses. About 5 percent or less of reported gang crime appears to be committed by females. Male gang members are estimated to outnumber females by 20 to 1; however, half or more of the youth or street gangs may have female auxiliaries or affiliates. Some gangs are mixed gender groups; a very small number are unaffiliated or independent female gangs. Females are likely to join gangs at a younger age and leave earlier. Female involvement in gangs is less substantial; their criminal behavior is related directly or indirectly to that of the dominant male pattern. Furthermore, despite myths to the contrary, females are more likely to make a positive contribution toward conventionalizing gang male behavior rather than inciting male gang members to violent or criminal activity.

Gang socialization processes vary by age, context, situation, and access to alternative roles. A great many reasons for joining gangs have been identified, including need or wish for recognition, status, safety or security, power, excitement and new experience, especially under conditions of social deprivation. Joining a gang may be viewed as normal and respectable by youth, even when the consequence is a series of delinquent and violent acts. It may be that gang affiliation has been viewed as part of an expected socialization process in certain communities related to such values as honor, loyalty and fellowship. The gang has also been viewed as an extension of the family and as contributing to the development of the clan. Joining a gang may also result from rational calculation, not only to achieve security or protection in certain neighborhoods, but to benefit financially. The youth gang may provide the youth

with sanction, contacts, and preparation for a variety of later criminal career pursuits efforts.

III. Social Contexts for Gang Development

The factors of rapid population change in urban areas, community social disorganization, increasing poverty both relative and absolute, and social isolation contribute to institutional failures and the consequent development of youth gangs. The interaction of social disorganization and lack of access to legitimate resources most significantly accounts for the development of serious deviant groups and subcultural phenomena in a variety of contexts. The defects of family, school, politics, and neighborhood organization, as well as the presence of organized crime and prison experience by youth, may be viewed as contributing to or reinforcing gang patterns.

Family. Family disorganization, e.g., single parent family or parental conflict, per se does not predict gang membership. A variety of other variables must be associated with weak family structure to produce a gang problem youth, including certain "aggressive" need dispositions of individual youth at certain social development stages, and the availability of a peer group that does not fully support family, school, and other normative values. Thus, while youth gang membership may not be explicitly acceptable, it may be traditional among certain inner-city families. The extent to which some families condone or implicitly approve participation in the gang may be a contributing factor, particularly if the youth thereby helps to support the family economically.

Schools. A youth gang member is likely to have done poorly in school and have little identification with school staff. He does not like school and uses or finds school more useful for gang-related than academic or social learning purposes. Furthermore, few schools directly address gang-related problems or factors which precipitate gang membership. By and large, gang violence does not erupt in schools, although gang recruitment and especially planning of gang activities may occur on school grounds and may be carried out after school is dismissed. Not all schools in low-income or even high gang crime areas contribute to gang development or gang crime. Some schools -- perhaps because of stronger leadership and more stable and concerned learning environments -- do a better job of sustaining student interest and achievement and thereby may have lower rates of gang problems.

Politics. A symbiotic relationship has been observed between politicians and gangs in certain low-income communities, particularly those in the process of considerable demographic or political change. Political aspirants with a weak or shifting base of support and short of manpower may call on youth gangs and individual gang members to perform a variety of tasks needed to compete in local politics, e.g., obtaining signatures on petitions, putting up or tearing down election posters,

intimidating voters, and getting voters out to the polling place. Gangs have also been used by a variety of organizations at times of urban or organizational disorder to try to control disruption or riot potential, and thus to stabilize volatile community situations. Gangs and gang members have received income, acceptance, status, and very occasionally a limited degree of influence for their "services."

Organized crime. So-called violent and criminal subcultures have probably become more integrated in the 1980s than they were in the 1950s or 1960s, as newer minority groups enter the field of organized crime. Greater competition among nascent criminal organizations, the relative increase of older youth and adults in youth or street gangs, and the expanded street-level drug market have probably further contributed to the integration of violence and criminal gain activity. Several observers suggest a close relationship between youth gang members and organized adult crime. Adult criminals may follow the street "reputations" of youngsters and use a process of gradual involvement to draw youngsters into criminal networks. Youth gang structures, or cliques within gangs, may be considered increasingly as sub-units of organized crime for purposes not only of drug distribution but also car theft, extortion, and burglary.

Prisons. Prison gangs and street gangs are interdependent. The prison or training school may be regarded both as facilitating and responding to gang problems. In most states, prison gangs are outgrowths of street gangs, but there is evidence that gangs formed in prison may also transfer to the streets. Incarceration or incapacitation, while it is a simple short-term and often necessary response, has led to increased gang cohesion and membership recruitment in many institutions, and may have indirectly worsened the problem in the streets. The development of gangs in prisons has been attributed in part to a mistaken approach of certain officials who gave recognition to gangs as organizations and tried to work with them in order to maintain institutional control.

IV. Emerging and Chronic Youth Gang Problem Cities

We began more sharply to delineate differences between emerging and chronic youth gang problem cities or sites based on a series of visits to various cities, jurisdictions, and sites. The purpose of these visits was to closely examine the nature of youth gang problems and responses to them, particularly where promising models of intervention seemed to have at least partially evolved. The beginnings of the youth gang problem in certain cities particularly since 1980, seem to be characterized by certain similarities. Youth are observed congregating or "hanging out" at certain locations within low-income communities. These groups are small and amorphous; lines of membership are unclear; distinctive features of the traditional youth gang -- gang names, colors, signs, symbols, graffiti, turf, and

particular criminal patterns, e.g., intimidation, gang assaults, and drive-by shootings are not well developed. The distinction between an ad hoc delinquent group and a relatively better organized youth gang is not easily made at this time.

With the passage of time, sometimes a relatively brief period, characteristic youth gang behavior becomes more clear. This behavior includes clashes between groups of youth and property crime, especially vandalism and graffiti, both in and around schools and at "hang-outs." Certain types of crime, e.g., burglary, car theft, and narcotics use, become more clearly associated with particular individuals or cliques. Tensions between increasingly organized youth groups result in increased recruitment of members. Assaults are more frequent at popular youth hang-outs, including shopping and recreation centers, and sporting events. Some of the violence assumes serious proportions: stabbings, shootings, and homicides. Fear and concern permeate certain sectors of the community and are reflected in an increase in media attention. The youth gang problem crystallizes as it assumes crisis proportions and responsive action by police, politicians, schools and other agencies and community groups is called for and usually taken.

Some of the key political and agency influentials in emerging gang problem cities may assert at first that the problem is "imported" from the "outside," i.e., from specific chronic gang problem communities or cities. Some of the leaders or organizers of youth gangs within their jurisdiction have arrest records in other cities. However, it is usually clear that in most cases new youth gangs are not franchises nor developed as part of a calculated expansion for status or economic gain purposes. The "importation" of the problem more substantially seems to result from the movement of families out of low-income inner city areas in search of improved housing, employment opportunities and a better way of life for their children. Youth in these families may have been gang members or at least prone to gang membership. These newcomer youth seek status and sometimes protection in the new community, often at school, from youth hostile to them.

Other influential observers in these cities also argue that local youth, with or without the presence of "outsiders" were ready to form or participate in gangs because of deteriorating family, school, social, and economic conditions. A later stage of the development of the youth gang problem in these emerging gang problem cities, was the development of a serious drug trade problem, often involving "crack" cocaine, which occurred within two or three years after the onset of a traditional youth gang problem. Traditional youth gang patterns become muted or almost disappear. The relationship of youth gang members to drug trafficking and other more organized criminal activities grows more difficult to detect.

The situation may be even more complex in chronic than emerging youth gang problem cities. Problems of youth gang violence, turf protection, gang symbols, recruitment, and gang

organization have been well established, perhaps for decades. However, cycles of organized gang activity, particularly violence, including retaliatory killings, are followed by periods of relative tranquility as older, more serious offenders are imprisoned. In time, they return to their gang communities and some resume patterns of gang violence or stimulate gang organization and patterns among younger youth. Different generations of youth in low-income areas also create different patterns or sequences of gang-related deviance. For instance, stoner activity, i.e., drug use, vandalism, and satanism, become popular, but in due course, may be transformed and integrated into traditional forms of youth gang violence. Drug trafficking and other adult criminal patterns are usually more developed in chronic poverty, minority ghettoes or enclaves. The adult criminal system in these areas serves to reinforce youth gang patterns, probably more indirectly than directly. Youth gangs serve as a basis for recruitment and even potential infrastructure for the development of adult criminal enterprises.

V. Response to the Problem: Historical Perspectives

Four or five basic strategies have evolved in dealing with youth gangs: community organization or neighborhood mobilization; social intervention, especially youth outreach or street gang work; social and opportunities provision, such as special school and job programs; gang suppression and incarceration: and an organizational development strategy, e.g., police gang and specialized probation units. Since these strategies are often mixed in a particular city or organizational context, it is useful to incorporate them into two general organizational approaches or ideal types: a traditional, limited bureaucratic or unidimensional professional approach and an evolving rational, comprehensive, community centered approach.

The neighborhood mobilization approach to the delinquent group or gang problem, which evolved in the 1920s and 1930s was an early attempt to bind elements of local citizenry, social institutions, and the criminal justice system together in a variety of informal and later formal ways. The approach often did not clearly target delinquent or gang youth, but focussed on neighborhood adult involvement and greater activity by agencies to socialize youth. The approach led to the development of more sophisticated outreach or street gang efforts in the 1940s and 1950s based on the assumption that youth gangs were relatively normal or adaptive phenomena in socially deprived communities, and that such youth groups could be redirected through various social intervention activities, such as counseling, recreation, group work and social service referrals. A variety of research evaluations indicate that this approach per se does not reduce delinquent activity and in fact may contribute to increased cohesion and criminalization of the gang.

An opportunities provision approach developed in the 1960s, but did not specifically target the youth gang problem. Great

concern with rising rates of delinquency, unemployment, and school failure of inner-city youth in the late 1950s led to a series of large scale resource infusions and innovative programs in the 1960s designed to change institutional structures and reduce poverty. While such programs as Head Start and Job Corps appeared to have had a positive effect on the reduction of delinquency, it is not clear to what extent the specific youth gang problem was either addressed or modified by these programs. There was, in fact, evidence of a rise in the scope and seriousness of the gang problem in several cities in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

A new strategy appeared to emerge in the 1970s, 1980s, and is still dominant today, suppression. The dominance of a suppression strategy can be related to several factors - the decline of local community and youth outreach efforts, at least in respect to the youth gang problem; the insufficiency of opportunity provision approaches to target or modify gang structures; the changing structure of the labor market which could no longer adequately absorb unskilled and poorly educated older youth gang members; and the consequent increased criminalization and sophistication of youth gangs. The youth gang was increasingly viewed as dangerous and evil, a collecting place for sociopaths who were beyond the rehabilitative reach of most social institutions. Community protection became a key goal. Vigorous law enforcement was required. Gang members, especially leaders and serious offenders, were increasingly arrested, prosecuted and removed from the community to serve long prison sentences.

VI. Institutional Responses

Police. Law enforcement has pursued an increasingly sophisticated suppression approach, including surveillance, stake out, aggressive patrol and arrest, follow-up investigation, intelligence gathering, and some prevention and community relations work in regard to gangs. The police have created complex data or information systems and improved law enforcement coordination. However, no systematic evaluation of varied police approaches has been conducted. While it is possible that a straight "nip in the bud" suppression approach may reduce gang violence in the short term, there is little or no evidence that a primary or exclusive suppression approach has contributed to a lowering of the gang problem in the long term.

Some police departments have developed additional community-oriented strategies, with considerable attention to community collaboration, social intervention, and even opportunities provision. Some police department officers assigned to the gang problem have directly engaged in counseling, job development and referral, student tutoring, and extensive community relations and development activities. In some cities where these more complex approaches have been tried, there is some evidence of a decline in the youth gang problem. But again,

it is not clear whether the decline was due to changed police strategies or alternate but unrelated structural changes in the community environment, e.g., greater availability of legitimate jobs or greater access to income producing drug trafficking opportunities.

Prosecution. The primary mission of prosecutors is successful prosecution, conviction, and incarceration of gang offenders. Focus has been on serious gang offenders in recent hard-core or vertical prosecution arrangements (i.e., a single prosecutor follows a case through from start to finish). The rate of conviction and incarceration has increased. It can be argued that the gang prosecutor's approach has become more specialized and somewhat more community oriented with increased understanding of gang norms and behaviors and community factors which influence them. At the same time, the vertical prosecution approach can be broadened to include preventive and social intervention strategies, particularly for younger offenders, for example community development activities and social service referrals. Constitutional questions also need to be resolved as state law and gang prosecutors begin to define gangs as criminal organizations which places gang members at special risk of arrest and enhanced sentencing.

Judiciary. Little attention has been directed by the judiciary to special approaches for dealing with juvenile or youth gang offenders. The tendency has been to emphasize a "get tough" strategy, and more often removal of the serious juvenile gang offender from the jurisdiction of the juvenile and family court. However, some judges try to use the court as a basis for a community-oriented approach in which a variety of community, school, family, and justice system organizations concentrate efforts to address the special needs of the youth gang member. While many judges pursue a broad social rehabilitation or protective approach in respect to abused and neglected children and minor offenders, little consideration is given to adapting such an approach for juvenile gang offenders.

Probation/Parole. Most probation departments and parole units have not given special attention to the gang problem, particularly through special units and procedural arrangements. However, "innovative" approaches have been developed, for example, in Los Angeles, San Jose, San Diego, and Orange County in California. The specialized programs emphasize suppression in collaboration with law enforcement, and to a lesser extent close coordination with community-based youth service agencies. They may involve vertical case management and intensive supervision. A few probation and parole units have also experimented with various combinations of individual and group counseling, remedial education and alternative school arrangements, employment training, job placement, and residential care. An integrated outreach crisis intervention youth service program combined efforts with a "detached" probation unit and a variety of community groups associated with a reduction of the youth gang problem in Philadelphia in the 1970s and 1980s. The Gang

Violence Reduction Program (GVRP) of East Los Angeles, part of the California Youth Authority, uses former gang members and a strong community involvement strategy which was also reported to be successful.

Corrections. Traditional suppression still predominates in most prisons, including swift reaction to, and "forceful" prevention of gang activities via special lock-up arrangements, and moving gang leaders from one prison or prison system to another. A more community-based comprehensive approach is more likely to be developed in a youth correctional institution and provides for close coordination with a variety of law enforcement and community based agencies, better communication between correctional officers and inmates, and increased institutional social opportunities for positive inmate development and change, including employment training and work programs. Evidence for the beginning of a more comprehensive and promising long-term approach exists in some of the programs of the California Youth Authority and in the Ethan Allen School for Boys in the Division of Corrections, Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services.

Local School Programs. Public schools, especially middle schools, are potentially the best community resource for the prevention of and early intervention into the youth gang problems. The peak recruitment period for gang members is probably between fifth and eighth grade, when youth are doing poorly in class and are in danger of dropping out. Most schools, overwhelmed by other concerns, tend to ignore or deny the problem. When forced by circumstances to recognize the presence of youth gang problems in and around schools, the first reaction is to beef up police, school security and/or to invite probation and youth service agencies to develop gang prevention programs in the schools. Otherwise there tends to be little restructuring of school programs, including the targeting of high-risk gang youth for special supervision and remedial education. Sometimes probation officers have established special outreach programs in schools that involve parent education, family counseling and referral. Of interest in recent years has been the development of special anti-gang curricula for children in the early elementary grades, usually taught by representatives of outside agencies. While there is some evidence that these curricular efforts are successful in changing attitudes of youth about gangs, it is not clear that behavior of youth who are already gang members is thereby also changed. A variety of school anti-drug programs, with some attention to gang issues, are presently being tested in California, Oregon, and elsewhere.

Local Community Organization. Ad hoc, sometimes ephemeral local community efforts have developed in recent years to deal specifically with the youth gang problem. Some of these are variations of more general citizen crime control and prevention programs. It is questionable whether limited citizen participation can be effective where the risks of intimidation by gang members are high. Nevertheless, a variety of proactive, if

not angry, and militant local citizen groups have formed to deal with the problem, sometimes with the aid and supervision of the local police. Such groups patrol streets, supervise social events, and monitor students in school buildings. Some of the groups have taken on a vigilante character and do not shrink from interrupting drug deals, holding offenders until the police are called, and even shooting at gang members, on occasion.

In an earlier period, some resident groups attempted to mediate gang disputes when youth gang activity was a little less lethal and criminalized because of the involvement of fewer adults and the absence of drug trafficking. Mothers' groups were active in preventing gang conflict in Philadelphia. A number of cities currently have active Mothers' or Parents' Against Gang groups, somewhat similar to the Mothers' Against Drunk Driving organizations. Their members provide mutual support for parents whose children are victims of gang violence. They also lecture in the schools, advocate for tighter gun controls, and pressure police and other agencies to focus greater attention on the problem. However, it is doubtful that such groups alone can make much difference, although, there is evidence, both in Philadelphia and East Los Angeles, that local community groups in close coordination with schools, police, churches, and youth agencies can make a significant and positive difference.

Employment. While there is evidence that gang youth prefer a "decent-paying job to the gang life," training and employment programs have not yet adequately targeted gang youth. Most policymakers and practitioners familiar with the problem believe that part-time and full-time jobs would be effective in pulling youth away from gangs and socializing them to conventional careers. However, gang members generally lack the vocational skills and appropriate social attitudes and habits to hold jobs. A variety of social support, remedial education, and supervision strategies appear to be required to make job and training programs directed to gang youth successful. Some local projects, combining business and public sector interests and resources have been promising. Examples include the San Jose Youth Conservation Corps experiment closely connected with the Juvenile Court and a somewhat similar project recently initiated in Dane County, Wisconsin. A long running program in El Monte, California, has involved police and the Boys' Club, along with business and industry in extensive job development and placement efforts directed to gang youth and their families. Intensive efforts to prepare and sustain gang youth on the job are undertaken in some of these projects. Recent U.S. Labor Department efforts to create comprehensive community-based job training and placement programs targeted to a variety of socially deprived youth, including gang youth, may also prove to be promising.

VII. Policy Structures and Procedures

We attempted to discover what policies and procedures were currently employed by agencies and community groups to deal with the youth gang problem. We conducted a survey of 45 cities and 6 sites, mainly correctional institutions with organized programs. The 254 experienced and knowledgeable policymakers and administrators contacted, included police, prosecutors, judges, probation, parole, corrections officers, school personnel, youth agency and social service staff, grass-roots representatives, and community planners.

A variety of criminal justice and community-based organizations currently respond to the youth gang problem; nevertheless, law enforcement is still the dominant response. The structure of the police response tends to differ from that of other agencies. Police departments are usually larger in size and can allocate more resources to the problem. An explicit, formal, and increasingly specialized approach tends to characterize law enforcement programs, including specially organized gang units, written policies, special training, and increasingly sophisticated data collection systems. However, they are less likely to have interdepartmental or external program advisory structures than other agencies; still, the police tend to participate extensively in community-wide coordinating or task force efforts.

In those jurisdictions where promising approaches exist, organizations tend to have special policy and training arrangements addressed to the gang problem. Internal agency arrangements across units, in terms of policies, procedures, and coordinating mechanisms, are reasonably well-interrelated. However, there appears to be a negative (statistical) relationship between the presence of a special gang unit or program in an agency and external advisory program structures for that unit or program. It is possible that when an organization has made a special commitment to dealing with the youth gang problem, it does not want anyone from outside of the agency examining or advising what its' policies and procedures should be. However, this may have adverse consequences for the effectiveness of outcomes, as indicated below.

In general, the presence of special programs, units, policies and activities directed to the youth gang problem is associated (statistically) with a worsening gang problem. Agencies are especially responsive, when there is evidence of gangs penetrating or spreading across neighborhoods or cities, and when youth gangs are perceived to be affiliated with adult criminal organizations. Generally, no specific policy or program arrangements appear to be related to a decrease in the youth gang problem over time, with one exception.

Our survey data indicate that a significant relationship exists between the presence of an external advisory structure (but not internal agency coordination mechanisms or interagency task force or community-wide coordination arrangements) and a

lowering of the perceived (and actual) gang crime problem. The existence of external advisory structures was significantly correlated with a variety of indicators of a reduced youth gang problem, including lower numbers of gangs and gang members, smaller gang size, lower percent of gang incidents involving adults, and lower percent of gang members in the community with police records. However, an external program advisory structure is not associated with a reduction in the more serious or criminal aspects of the gang problem, including reduced presence of "non-local" gangs, adult involvement in youth gangs, or drug trafficking by youth gangs or gang members.

We are not certain how to interpret this single set of statistically significant findings. It is possible that the presence of an external program advisory group results in a high degree of participation and accountability in the formation and implementation of community and/or interagency anti-gang programs. An internal agency coordination arrangement or a weak community-wide public relations oriented coordinating mechanism may not signify as strong a commitment to community mobilization against the problem as programs that are really exposed and held accountable for their performance.

VIII. Promising Approaches: The Law Enforcement Perspective

Participants from 14 cities or jurisdictions at a recent law enforcement conference were asked to describe what they have done in conjunction with other agencies or community groups to address gang activity and to assess the results of these efforts. Two principal approaches to gang intervention were evident in the discussions: suppression and cooperation with community based alternative support programs.

Suppression: A strong targeted law enforcement presence was seen as essential to the department's mission of stemming violence. Targeting high incidence areas and deploying the same officers to those areas for an extended period of time was deemed to be essential. Effective suppression was based on gathering and organizing intelligence information on gangs and gang members. Law enforcement officers were specifically trained and experienced to recognize gang problems in particular parts of the city. The police also were able to communicate with gang members in a positive way. Several departments worked closely with vertical prosecution units in their county district attorney's office. They also ensured that gang affiliations of defendants were known to judges before sentence was passed. These efforts resulted in large numbers of gang members being imprisoned. In at least three cities, targeted suppression, in combination with other justice and community interventions, was viewed as resulting in a reduction in gang violence. One large city department described its policy in respect to

gangs as follows: Three units are spread throughout the city and are in operation seven days a week. There are both tactical and crime specialist officers in each unit. The tactical officers, in uniform or plain clothes, are given directed missions on a day-to-day basis. The gang crime specialists do more investigative follow-up of crimes. They write-up gang histories and prepare cases for trial. A monthly report is prepared based on statistics of type of crime, location of crime and district of occurrence. The gang crime unit works closely to assist the district commander with information on gangs and to supplement his personnel in a given situation. The gang unit uses the central records division to determine whether a person arrested is also on probation or parole. If so, the proper authority is notified. The unit also notifies the corrections department when a leader or core gang member is being "set up." In turn, the prison authorities are expected to notify the gang unit when a high ranking gang member returns to the community or a potential gang problem may occur with that person's release.

Alternative Support Programs: A variety of community-based programs were thought to diminish the hold of gangs on their members or to lessen the chance that young people would join a gang. The police in some cities were directly involved in these efforts. These included:

- -- In school anti-gang education programs which alert grade school youth to the consequences of gang membership and encourage their participation in positive alternative activities.
- -- Social agency crisis intervention teams to mediate disagreements between gangs. These teams work closely with police and/or probation officers to identify potential trouble spots, prevent gang retaliations and/or resolve gang problems without violence.
- -- Alternative education programs to teach young people basic skills which they may not have mastered while in school and to prepare them for a G.E.D. or, where possible, higher education.
- -- Vocational training and job placement for gang members and support for their efforts to hold jobs.
- -- Pairing of gang members with local businessmen (some of whom were gang members themselves at one time). These businessmen provide support and guidance as well as a positive role model to the gang member in order to channel energies into positive activities.
- -- Parent education classes and other programs which promote the family as a strong unit capable of providing young people with emotional support and supervision as well as clothing, food, and shelter.
- -- Instruction to school personnel, community residents, agency staff members, as well as criminal justice personnel and others on gang activities and their impact, signs and symbols, and the way to counter gang influence.

While none of these approaches or activities has been systematically evaluated, participants asserted that both suppression and social intervention programs were needed to stop gang violence, draw members away from the gang, and provide them with alternatives to gangs. The age of gang members, degree of gang organization, and commitment to criminal activities should determine the appropriate mix of these strategies. Busing children to schools out of neighborhoods which had gang structures and traditions appeared partially to mitigate, but could also spread, the gang problem. Gang cohesion generally was reduced and children were less committed to gangs. Participants also felt that gangs were not the responsibility of one or two community institutions. All social institutions and community groups -- police, courts, corrections, social service agencies, schools, parents, citizens -- must work in concert to combat the rise and spread of gangs in their communities. The Philadelphia representative stressed the importance of total community involvement by all key actors in successful efforts to deal with the gang problem.

IX. Effectiveness of Intervention Strategies: A General Perspective

Our survey of 254 informants -- so-called experts -- in 45 communities and 6 sites described which strategies they believe hold most promise in reducing the youth gang problem. We were able to elaborate empirically the historical development of the 4 or 5 basic strategies described above in terms of current practice. We identified the components of these strategies across the agencies and community groups contacted. They included, for example, grass-roots participation and interagency networking as key to community mobilization; focus on individual youth behavioral and value change in social intervention; special focus on improved education, employment training, and job placement efforts targeted to gang youth in the opportunities provision strategy; arrest, incarceration, and close monitoring and supervision as characteristic of suppression, across criminal justice agencies; and the presence of special gang units and programs as typical of an organizational development strategy.

These strategies were usually employed in various combinations by particular agencies in each of the cities. A classification of primary strategies indicated that suppression was most frequently employed (44.0%), followed by social intervention (31.5%), organizational development (10.9%), community organization (8.9%), and opportunities provision (4.8%). Prosecutors and judges were most committed to the use of a suppression strategy. Social agencies and grass-roots organizations were most committed to the use of social intervention strategies. Chronic gang problem cities emphasized a broad range of approaches, combining community organization and suppression with social intervention strategies. Emerging gang problem cities were divided in their approaches; some focused primarily on community organization and organizational development, while others focused on suppression.

Based on cross-sectional survey data, we attempted to determine whether different strategies, policies, structures, and procedures lead to a perceived (and actual) reduction in gang crime. Only 23.1% of the police and 10.4% of non-police respondents believed that there had been an improvement in their communities' gang situation between 1980 and 1987. In only 17 of 45 cities or jurisdictions was there evidence of any level of improvement in the gang situation. In an independent external validity check of perceptions of improved gang problem situations, we found that these perceptions were associated with significantly fewer numbers of gangs, gang members, size of gangs, and a decline in the percent of total index crime attributed to youth gangs. Serious gang crime, including drug selling, was also reported lower. There was no evidence that improvement was necessarily more likely to occur in large or small, chronic or emerging gang problem cities. We found that no special policy or procedural development was associated with any of the perceived characteristics of an improved gang situation,

with the exception of the presence of an external advisory group to a program.

On the other hand, respondents' ratings of how effective their agency or local interagency or task force efforts had been were far higher than their ratings of an improved gang problem situation. More than 40 percent of all respondents saw their agencies as very effective in dealing with youth gangs.

Nevertheless, the three perceptual ratings -- situation improved, agency effectiveness, and interagency effectiveness -- were significantly intercorrelated, and consequently a "general effectiveness score was constructed and used as a basis for ranking cities on whether or not the gang problem had been successfully addressed. These rankings became a major basis for the selection of cities and institutions for field visits to inquire about which programs and approaches might be promising and could serve as models for other cities and institutions.

Aggregate Level Analysis. At this point, our analysis shifted from a mainly individual respondent level to an aggregate, or city-wide respondent aggregated, level analysis. We were particularly interested in whether approaches dealing with the problem might be more effective in one type of city than in another. First, we had to make sure that we had classified our cities reasonably well. In a series of discriminant analyses, we determined systematically that chronic problem cities were larger and characterized by greater proportions of Hispanic gang members. Emerging gang problem cities were more likely to be smaller and had higher proportions of black gang members. Respondents in the smaller cities were also more closely interconnected in terms of networks of interagency and community group relationships. Also programs in chronic problem cities were more likely to be characterized by social intervention and opportunity provision as primary strategies. Programs in emerging cities were more likely to exhibit community organization as a primary strategy.

Our final step in the search for promising approaches was to construct causal models, using multiple regression analyses. First, in our chronic gang problem cities, using the variable of (perceived) improved gang situation as our dependent or outcome measure -- probably the most valid of the three component measures of general effectiveness -- we found in a probit regression analysis that the interaction of the strategies of community organization and opportunities provision was the single strongest predictor. It accounted for 40.2 percent of the variation in our dependent variable, perceived improvement in the gang situation. The second significant predictor was the proportion of local respondents networking with each other in a city to address the youth gang problem. Together, these two predictors or independent variables accounted for almost 60 percent of the variance. We were unable, however, using this procedure, to find variables or factors that predicted success in the emerging gang problem cities.

We turned next to use of the general effectiveness score as the dependent variable for measure of success. For the chronic gang problem cities, we achieved an extremely potent set of predictors. The two primary strategies of intervention separately -- community organization and opportunities provision -- in conjunction with a consensus on the definition of gang incident in a community, accounted for 69 percent of the variance. The fourth variable that entered the regression equation was the proportion of agencies with an external advisory group. Together these four variables accounted for 82 percent of the variance in the general effectiveness score in chronic gang problem cities. The model for predicting general effectiveness in emerging gang problem cities was not as robust. Only community organization as a primary strategy contributed to an explanation of 31 percent of the variance in the outcome variable.

Our survey of 45 cities and 6 sites concludes with the recommendation that future policy and research emphasize the testing of strategies of opportunities provision, particularly improved educational, training and job opportunities, for gang members and gang prone youth. Strategies of suppression and social intervention were common to all of the cities in the survey, and we viewed them as essential for dealing with the youth gang problem effectively. However, success was more likely when community organization and opportunities provision strategies were also present and emphasized.

X. Recommended System-wide Responses: Field Observations

The results of a series of field visits to five city or county jurisdictions and one correctional institution suggested certain common elements that were associated with a reduction of the youth gang problem for significant periods of time. These included clear and forthright, if not early, recognition of a youth gang problem. Proactive leadership by representatives of significant criminal justice and community-based agencies was exercised in the mobilization of political and community interests and resources to confront the problem. A mechanism or structure was created comprising both formal and informal networks of criminal justice and non-criminal justice actors, to operationally coordinate their approach to the problem.

Additionally, the principal actors developed consensus on a definition of the problem (e.g., gang, gang incident), specific targets of agency and interagency effort, and on the reciprocal interrelated strategies to be employed. Operationally this meant, especially in chronic gang problem areas, that a multi-disciplinary approach evolved in which strategies of suppression, social intervention, organizational development, and especially social opportunities were mobilized in some collective fashion on a community basis. Finally, it appeared that a successful approach had to be guided, not only by a concern for protecting and safeguarding the community against youth gang depredations,

but also for providing support to (as well as supervision of) potential and actual gang members in a manner which contributed to their personal and social development.

In the course of contacts with agencies and community organizations, mainly during field visits, a brief survey was administered to youth gang members and former members to determine what services they received, how helpful they perceived these services to be in reducing gang crime, and under what conditions members left the gang. This was a "quickie" survey of a small non-random availability sample of programs and youth (n=124). A variety of selection factors may have affected the results, however. Thus caution needs to be exercised in use of these findings. Their main value is as a basis for development of hypotheses and questions for later more systematic testing in the course of program research and evaluation.

Almost half of the respondents (47.6%) declared they were former gang members; 29.8% said they presently were gang members; 16.9% said they had never been gang members. About a fifth of the respondents were female. The majority were Hispanic (66.1%), mainly Mexican-American, and 29.1% were black. For all respondents the most commonly reported service or activity provided by the particular program was recreation and sports. This set of activities was also declared as most helpful of all the 22 options listed. The second most helpful service reported was job placement. Hispanics reported receiving fewer services than blacks but rated service helpfulness higher. However, there was more difference by program site than by race/ethnicity.

When we examined differences among groups, we found a significantly larger proportion of blacks than Hispanics in our sample who designated themselves as former gang members, although in fact, blacks were slightly younger (19.7 years) than Hispanics (20.5 years). Blacks were more likely to report leaving the gang because of arrests and fear of violence; Hispanics were more likely to report leaving the gang for reasons of drug use and drug dealing. These findings can be interpreted in various ways.

There was no relationship between receipt or perceived helpfulness of services and leaving the gang. In a logistic regression analysis the most important variable explaining why a youth left the gang, controlling for race/ethnicity, site, and other factors is simply "getting older," although "being arrested" and "tired of violence" were also other important reasons checked off. However, age is the only variable which enters our regression equation, accounting for 23 percent of variance.

XI. Former Youth Gang Influentials' Perspectives: Some Racial/Ethnic Differences

We thought it important to further qualitatively assess the problems of gangs and how to deal with them based on the views of those who had significantly experienced youth gang life, and who had been reasonably successful in surviving and moving beyond

this involvement to productive and legitimate careers. Two conferences or symposia were conducted involving a relatively small number of young adults in their 20s and 30s who had been major figures in extremely violent and criminal youth gangs in Hispanic (mainly Puerto Rican) and African-American low-income areas or ghettoes of Chicago. The symposia addressed a variety of questions including views about leaving the gang, gang control and prevention policies and programs, and what more needed to be done. Differences as to the nature of the youth gang problem and what was required to deal with it seemed to differ in the black and Hispanic communities.

Youth gang membership seemed to be more total and continuous in the black than in the Hispanic community. While it seemed to be more culturally defined, it was also delimited as part of growing up in the Hispanic barrio community. There seemed to be earlier points and more manageable ways to leave the gang experience behind in the Hispanic community. In the black community, youth ganging, although not necessarily more violent, was a critical and pervasive element of survival. The youth gang seemed to be a supplement for more basic institutional lacks in the black ghetto, providing essential controls and opportunities, and not as substantially lacking in the Hispanic low-income community. Drug use and drug selling appeared to be prevalent in both gang communities but utilized relatively more as a means of psychological escape and economic survival for the black gang member and relatively more as a matter of recreation, and even transition out of the gang for the Hispanic gang member. Nevertheless, drug trafficking was an important way of earning money to survive for both gang and non-gang youth and adults in both black and Hispanic low-income communities.

Factors mentioned as motivating youth to leave the gang included: growing up and getting smarter, fear of injury for oneself and for others, a prison experience, a girl friend or marriage, a job, drug dealing, concern for youth and community welfare, interest in politics, religious experience, and the assistance and interest of a helping adult. Opportunities for leaving the youth gang for legitimate life styles seemed to be more available to Hispanic gang youth. On the other hand, the gang seemed to continue to provide discipline and support, as well as economic, social and political resources which could not be obtained readily through other institutions by older black gang youth and adults.

In some cases, the transition out of the youth gang was accompanied by a complete break with gang peers or leaving the neighborhood. In most cases, it meant simply desisting from gang violence and criminality, but not restricting relationships with former gang buddies. There seemed to be a stronger tie to the gang culture even for former gang influentials in the black community because of the power and influence the gang still represented relative to other local institutions. Nevertheless, for both African-American and Hispanic (Puerto Rican) young

adults in the two symposia, the youth gang was regarded as more negative than positive.

Ways of dealing with the youth gang problem or of preventing youth from joining gangs were viewed somewhat differently by the two groups. For the former Hispanic gang influentials, improved services and especially more positive attitudes and practices by agency personnel, especially the police, were seen as important. While some of these views were echoed by the African-American group, a more substantial community and societal effort was seen as required. A massive infusion, not only of economic, but spiritual and intellectual resources was thought to be needed. Equity or fair treatment of minority groups, especially male youth, by the larger, dominant community, increased opportunities, better local citizen and parental discipline or social control, and stronger mobilization of local community groups and agencies were seen as important by both groups.

XII. Policy and Program Recommendations

Based on our extensive assessment process, the following recommendations are made for systematic testing in various cities and sites around the country:

1. Definition. The definition of a youth gang should be restricted to youth groups engaged in serious violence and crime, and whose primary purpose for existence is symbolic or communal rather than economic gain. Drug trafficking or criminal gain organizations per se should not be considered youth gangs, although distinctions are not easy to make. A gang incident should be any illegal act which arises out of gang motivation, gang function, or gang-related circumstances, in which being a gang member per se should not be sufficient to label the event as a gang incident. A youth should not be labelled a gang member unless sufficient and reliable evidence exists. Appropriate procedures, especially in regard to the schools, police, and courts, should be required to maintain the confidentiality of gang member records. Records should be frequently updated and purged about three years from the date of the entry of the individual's last gang-related incident.

2. Targeting Gang Youth. Youth who give clear indication of gang involvement should be the primary targets of comprehensive gang control and early intervention programs. We assume that a small number of youth can be targeted for special remedial education and supervisory attention. The tendency to identify at-risk youth without clear, criteria and reliable

evidence of potential gang membership should be avoided.

3. Chronic Cities. A special comprehensive approach should be established in chronic gang problem cities. Leadership of such an effort should be assigned to an official agency, such as probation or a special unit in the mayor's office. All criminal justice agencies, including police, probation, parole, judiciary, prosecution, and corrections should be associated with the new authority, supported by key voluntary agencies, schools, business and industry, and local community groups. Multiple strategies including social intervention and suppression, but with emphasis on social opportunities and community mobilization, should guide the development of program activities and the roles of various personnel. While priority should be given to remedial education and employment training programs for juveniles and adolescent gang members, older youth gang adolescents should also be targeted. Employment training and a job development structure should be established as part of the authority concerned with needs of these older youth. The gang problem as it affects older and younger youth --often interrelated-- needs to be attacked in an organic fashion, reflecting the interrelationship and interdependence of younger and older youth in the gang.

4. Emerging Cities. In emerging and in some instances chronic gang problem cities or contexts, a local educational administrative unit based within the school, should take responsibility for the development of special early intervention programs. This unit should collaborate closely with law enforcement, family or juvenile court, as well as social agencies and community groups to target youth gang members at an early stage of development of the problem. These programs should be directed to social education and social control of gang youth, especially those between 11 and 15 years in the middle grades who are beginning to take on gang roles and are already engaged in law-violating behaviors. Efforts should be made to improve the academic performance and social adjustment of such youth, and provide them and their parents with outreach counseling, referral, and opportunity provision programs. General anti-gang crime curricula, crisis intervention, and school-community advisory groups should be established directly by the special school unit for the development and implementation of early, school-based, gang control programs.