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A History of Violence: Understanding the Violence of South Central's Crips

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Based at Saint Paul University in Ottawa, the Conflict Research Centre (CRC) aims to contribute to the advancement of the field of conflict studies, applied peace research, and peacebuilding within Canada and internationally by conducting research and training to foster dialogue, and promote constructive responses to defusing conflict and building sustainable and just peace.

The

Table of Contents

Chapter One

"Los Angeles Street Wars Grow Deadlier" (Winter 2002)

"Crips and Bloods Endless War Has No Boundaries" (Daily News of Los Angeles 2004)

"War on 'The Rotten Little Cowards' : Iron Gates Pledges 1,000 Officers for Gang Sweeps" (Feldman 1988)

"*Gangs Take Root: Slain Crip Glorified as Violence Becomes Part of Everyday Life*" (Leaming 2007)

"In the Streets of L.A., 14 Killings in Five Days" (Booth 2002)

"Gang Violence Puts Cops on Alert At City Schools" (Celona & Edelman 1998)

Media headlines such as these have appeared through the years in reference to the notorious Los Angeles (L.A.) based gang the Crips. The headlines clearly associate the Crips with violence. The violent nature of the Crips has been sensationalized in headlines, movies, and music. Between "1988 and 2001, the movie industry released *Colors*, *Boyz in the Hood*, *South Central*, *Menace II Society*, and *Baby Boy*

The BPP was a source of Black national leadership. Other Black national leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Medgar Evers were assassinated in the sixties (Alonso 2004: 668). The sixties ended with Black political groups weakened, Black national leadership diluted, and L.A.'s Black youth simultaneously "searching for a new identity" (Alonso 2004: 668). The Crips emerged within this climate.

The Crips were organized in 1969 (Cureton) by BPP members, including Bunchy Carter, who were "Disappointed with the Panther Party's inability to endure government attacks" (Cureton 2009: 356). The Crips "were originally organized to be a community help association and were even endorsed by the mayor as Community Reform Inter-Party Service" (Cureton 2009: 356). The potential for the Crips to function as a community association was weakened by the murder of Bunchy Carter in 1969 (Cureton 2009: 356). Following Carter's death, the Crips "name was bastardized" (Cureton 2009: 366) and the nature of the gang changed as the focus shifted to more "self-centered activities" (Cureton 2009: 356). As the Crips "were fashioning themselves as the most omnipotent street gang in South Central" (Cureton 2009: 357), groups opposed to this emerging powerhouse came together under "an umbrella organization" (Cureton 2009: 357) – the Bloods (Cureton 2009: 357).

1.2

are more likely to have entrenched gang traditions than more recent gang cities" (Klein and Maxson 2006: 226). Due to these characteristics, gang cities tend to have "Longer histories of gang rivalries, intergenerational transmission of gang values, and communities infused with gang cultures" (Klein & Maxson 2006: 226).

Based on Klein and Maxson's gang structure typology, the Crips are a traditional gang. Traditional gangs have "generally been in existence for 20 or more years: they keep regenerating themselves. They contain fairly clear subgroups" (Kein & Maxson 2006: 176). Traditional gangs tend to be very large and "they are territorial in the sense that they identify strongly with their turf, 'hood', or barrio and claim it as their own" (Klein & Maxson 2006: 177). In the "Black gang culture of Los Angeles, a gang will develop subgroups within the gang to either distinguish different groups based on age in a hierarchal structure or based on geographic areas within one gang" (Klein & Maxson 2006: 185). By the end of the 1990's, there was an estimated "199 to 213 African-American Crip" (Cureton 2008: 1) gangs in Los Angeles. Sanyika Shakur, a former Crip member in the Eight Tray subgroup, deems the violence between members of different subgroups to be far worse than the violence that occurs between members of different gangs. In his bibliography, Shakur wrote, "…Crips are the number-one killer of Crips" (Shakur 1993: 19).

Klein and Maxson assert, "Gang members do not specialize in violent offending" (Klein & Maxson 2006: 73). Rather, "Gang members commit a cafeteria of offending choices" (Klein & Maxson 2006: 74). Gang homicides "appear to be a function of spurts in gang rivalries, turf battles, and other affiliation challenges" (Klein & Maxson 2006: 81). Due to the nature of gang homicides, "The majority of victims of gang homicides and drive-by-shootings are gang members" (Klein & Maxson 2006: 83).

Based on the work of Klein and Maxson, the source of the Crip's violence is in part understood as the consequence of "gang rivalries, turf battles, and other affiliation challenges" (Klein & Maxson 2006: 81). The Crips are particularly prone to gang rivalry on account of their being a traditional gang and living in a chronic gang city, two factors that promote the formation of subgroups.

The underclass theory has gained prominence in gang literature as a factor in explaining gang violence. The underclass theory suggests that a new group, the underclass, "has made its appearance at the heart of the county's urban "Blac

I believe that it is within reason to assert that there does not exist a bounty of literature that is Crip specific. Within Crip literature, the violent dynamic of the gang is readily discussed. Crip on Crip violence, Crip on Blood violence, and the criminal adventures of Crip members are all detailed. While the violent tendencies of the Crips features prominently in Crip literature, it is often written about in a fact like manner. In othe

violence from the work of Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois's violence continuum is "comprised of a multitude of "smalls wars and invisible genocides" (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2004: 19).

I will borrow Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois's expression, but change the meaning of it by using the ideas of various authors to develop the continuum of violence framework to be used in this paper. Bourgois and Gultang have expressed the dynamic nature of violence in a theoretical framework similar to the continuum of violence that I am proposing. Both academics have expressed the dynamic nature of violence diffe

repression in politics and exploitation in economics" (Petri 2002: 100). Forms of structural violence that have been legitimized and justified by cultural violence include legislated slavery, the Jim Crow Laws, the mass incarceration of poor Black men, and the neoliberal restructuring of the American state.

Bourgois defines everyday violence as the "routine

Chapter Two

2.1 Violence

Jeffrey Benzien, a Boer policeman, "demonstrated before television cameras his signature torture technique, the "wet bag" which he used to force victims to give up the names of their comrades in the anti-apartheid struggle" (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2004: 1-2) Benzien's

2.5 Everyday Violence

The violence between members of different Crip subgroups in this paper is analyzed as being a form of everyday violence. Everyday violence follows structural violence on the

2001: 23), and "the violence is administered as much by the victims as it is by the powerful" (Bourgois 2004: 303).

In short, some individuals have experienced violence, reacted to it, and finally, it has been reproduced in their relationships with others. It should be noted that I have referred to some individuals, not all individuals, as internalizing structural violence and reproducing it in their relationships. It is not my claim that there exists a definitive causal relationship between cultural, structural, and everyday violence. I am simply proposing one theoretical framework, amongst many, that can be applied to understand the violence of the Crips. It is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper to assess why some victims of structural violence react in one way, and others in a different way.

2.6 The Cycle of Violence

When some victims of structural violence internalize the violence that they experience and it is expressed, in the context of this paper, in violent interpersonal relationships, the victim's actions can perpetuate the cycle of violence by jus

Chapter Three: A History of Violence

3.1 Slavery

The historical analysis of structural violence that has been directed towards Black Americans in the United States begins at the time of slavery. Interestingly, the first people to be bound as property in the early history of the U.S. were indentured white servants from Europe. The British settled in North America in the early seventeenth century. By 1620, "indentured servitude appeared," becoming "a central institution in the economy and society of many parts of colonial British America" (Galenson 1984: 1). Indentured servitude "was an initial solution to an acute problem of obtaining a labour supply that existed in many regions" (Galenson 1984: 9). It has been estimated that between "one-half and two-thirds of all white immigrants to the British colonies between the Puritan migration of the 1630s and the Revolution came under indenture" (Galenson 1984: 1). Indentured servitude was not to o st

(Fields 1990: 104). Slavery first became embedded in Virginia law in 1661, when the "provincial assembly was beginning to identify black skin with service for life" (Wax 1973: 372). Laws "establishing slavery would not be pulled together into a full-blown slave code until 1705" (Wax 1973: 372).

The institutionalization of slavery linked black skin with "property-in-person" (Wacquant 2002: 44). Based on the definition of structural violence presented earlier, slavery can rightly be observed as a form of structural violence as it was built into the American political structure as a law, becoming part of the "social machinery of oppression" (Farmer 2004: 319). There is no need to go into the brutality of slavery here as it has been well documented elsewhere. I believe it is within reason to assert that the ability of s

3.2 The Jim Crow Regime

The abolishment of slavery in 1865 did not mean that Blacks became incorporated as equal members of society (Rabinowitz 1976: 340). The distinction between the two races lived on and "most southern states tried to limit the economic and physical freedom of the formerly enslaved by adopting laws known as the Black Code" (Davis, n.d.). The Black Codes were "early legal attempts at white-imposed segregation and discrimination" (Davis, n.d.). Between 1866 and 1876 (Davis, n.d.), the federal government took aim at these actions by declaring, "illegal all such acts of legal discrimination against African Americans" (Davis). The efforts of various states to implement their own forms of structural violence against Black Americans were further impeded by the "Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, along with the two Civil Rights Acts of 1866 and 1875 and the various Enforcement Acts of the early 1870's" (Davis). During this period, Blacks were able to secure some rights. They "were allowed to vote, to hold public office, and even to mix with whites to a degree in keeping with the intergroup intimacy fostered by slavery" (Wacquant 2002: 46).

This state of relative freedom did not last long. Just as slavery had presented a dilemma in regards to the contradiction between democracy and bondage, the abolishment of slavery created its own dilemma. The dilemma was "how to secure anew the labor of former slaves, without whom the region's economy would collapse, and how to sustain the cardinal status distinction between whites and 'persons of color'" (Wacquant 2002: 45-46). White society was beginning to worry. They saw a "New Negro born of freedom, undisciplined by slavery, and unschooled in proper racial etiquette" (Litwack 2004: 124). White society was not so much alarmed by "evidence of black failure but evidence of black success, evidence of black assertion, independence, and advancement, evidence of Black men learning the uses of political power" (Litwack 2004: 127).

The dilemma posed by the freed Black man was solved when the ideology of racial inferiority was recreated and used to justify and legitimize a new form of structural violence directed at Black Americans – the Jim Crow regime. The Jim Crow regime "consisted of an ensemble of social and legal codes that prescribed the complete separation of the 'races' and sharply circumscribed the life chances of African-Americans while binding them to whites in a relation of suffusive submission backed by legal coercion and terroristic violence" (Wacquant 2002: 46). The Jim Crow regime "reworked the racialised boundary between slave and free into a rigid caste separation between 'whites' and 'Negroes' – comprising all persons of known African ancestry" (Wacquant 2005: 127). Blacks "could not work in the same jobs as whites or serve in the same capacities" (Bowser 1985: 309). Blacks were denied the right to vote (Litwack 2004: 124). The plantation system "remained virtually untouched as former slaves became a 'dependent, propertyless peasantry, nominally free, but ensnared by poverty, ignorance, and the new servitude of tenantry'" (Wacquant 2002: 46).

3.3 The Ghetto and Los Angeles's Homeowners' Associ

of some individuals were dashed upon their arrival. The reality they faced was "a fertile territory for traditional White supremacist ideology, institutional inequality (in housing, education, and employment), and restrictions relative to where Bla

How was the ideology of racial inferiority recreated to fit the terrain of the early twentieth century as Blacks began to make their way from the South to the North? Wacquant asserts that "Fear of contamination and degradation via association with inferior beings – African slaves – is at the root of the pervasive prejudice and institutionalization of the rigid caste division which, combined with urbanization, gave birth to the ghetto at the turn of the century" (Wacquant 2004: 112). The ghetto imprinted the dichotomy of Blacks and Whites "onto the spatial makeup and institutional schemas of the industrial metropolis" (Wacquant 2002: 55).

3.4 The Neoliberal Restructuring of the State

The U.S. has embedded into its political and economic structures a neoliberal model of the state. It is beyond the scope of this paper to

The ideology of racial inferiority was recreated to fit the neoliberal terrain to justify and legitimize the neoliberal policies and programs that disproportionately affected the poor, thereby disproportionately affecting Blacks. The underclass theory served this purpose, emerging on the American scene in the 1970s.

The theory's claim is that a new group has "made its appearance at the heart of the country's urban 'Black Belts' in the course of the

rate of 59%" (Wacquant 2008: 59-60). In 2004, "1 black man in 10 between the ages of 18 and 34" was imprisoned in the U.S. (Wacquant 2004: 116).

In direct relation to the mass incarceration of poor Black men is how "the courts have consistently authorized the police to employ race as 'a negative signal of increased risk of criminality'" (Wacquant 2002: 56), and "being Black as an authorized means for probable cause" (Wacquant 2005: 127). In Los Angeles, the association of Black skin with increased risk of criminality has provided the LAPD with enhanced powers. The consequence is that "poor urban African Americans find themselves caught in the clutches of the penal system in numbers and with an intensity far out of proportion with their criminal involvement" (Wacquant 2005: 129). Residential curfews have been "deployed selectively and almost exclusively against Black and Chicano neighborhoods" (Davis 2006: 286). A consequence of this is that "thousands of youth in Southcentral acquire minor records for behavior that would be legal or inoffensive on the Westside" (Davis 2006: 286). Operation Hammer, an LAPD operation conducted in 1988, has been compared to a "Vietnam-era search-and-destroy mission" (Davis 1988: 37). During Operation Hammer the LAPD "saturated the streets with its 'Blue Machine', 'jacking up' thousands of local teenagers at random" (Davis 1998: 37). Youths were held "while officers checked their names against computerized files of gang members" (Davis 1998: 37). In total, "1,453 were arrested and processed in mobile booking offices, mostly for petty offenses like delinquent traffic tickets or curfew violations" (Davis 1998: 34). Another consequence of Operation Hammer was that "Hundreds more, uncharged, had their names entered on the LAPD gang roster for future surveillance" (Davis 1998: 37).

The distinction between Blacks and Whites was recreated to justify and legitimize the mass incarceration of Black men and the loosening o

The ideology of racial inferiority (cultural violence) justified and legitimized the American slave system that indiscriminately associated Black skinned individuals as "property-in-person" (Wacquant 2002: 44). The Black population of America then faced the Jim Crow regime that "infected every crevice of the postbellum social system and culture in the South" (Wacquant 2005: 127). Blacks began to move northward in the beginning of the twentieth century. Some went to California. Some went to the city of Los Angeles. There they faced spatial segregation, being forcibly relegated into the area that would come to be the home of the Crips. The neoliberal restructuring of the American state added further pressure to the South Central community through the loss of jobs and the loss of needed social programs. The penal system has since swooped in to clean up the mess left by neoliberal restructuring by taking poor Blacks, those discarded from the new economy, off the street.

The application of the continuum of violence framework to American history allows for a history of violence to be uncovered. It is a history of violence that has been experienced by Black Americans as a whole, by Black Americans living in South Central, and even more specifically, by Black American males living in South Central. If violence is dynamic, then the violence reciprocated between Crip members can be explained, among other ways, as a product of structural violence that has been legitimized and supported by an ideology of racial inferiority directed at Black Americans. Alejandro Alonso states, "Groups that are subjected to exploitation eventually develop illicit and harmful characteristics and behaviors as a way to cope" (Alonso 2004: 671). Internalization has the potential to lead some "group members to victimize other group members" (Alonso 2004: 671).

The dynamic nature of violence operates in a covert way. As I have stated, structural violence is invisible in nature – embedded in a societies economic and political structures. What is not invisible is the product of the dynamic nature of violence. It is not invisible, since it is observable. By this I mean, one can actually witness everyday violence. When one Crip member shoots another Crip member, it is observable. The consequences of that shooting are observable. The Crip member who fired the gun is observable. Violent interpersonal relationships between Crip members have and continue to garner attention, being sensationalized in various media outlets, from movies to news headlines.

The consequences of the visible nature of everyday violence and the invisible nature of structural violence are victim blame, the erasure of history, and the perpetuation of further violence. When all that is observable is the violence of the Crips, then it is easy to see that violence as senseless and illogical. Victim blame b

and legal codes that made up the regime be implemented in the first place and then allowed to continue had Blacks been considered full citizens, those worthy of the rights and opportunities afforded to other American citizens? Now ask yourself the same question, but input the different forms of structural violence that were examined in this paper: Would _____ (input form

care' to prevent their children's criminal activities" (Davis 2006: 183). Mike Davis asserts that STEP has "criminalized successive strata of the community: 'gang members', then 'gang parents', followed by whole 'gang families', 'gang neighborhoods', and perhaps even a 'gang generations' " (Davis 2006: 284). STEP was not formulated with structural or cultural violence in mind.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the violence of the Crips, expressed in interpersonal relationships between gang memwhhewcan be explainm

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