



December 1994

*Juvenile Gangs.* Herbert C. Covey, Scott Menard and Robert J. Franzese. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1992.

James W. Callicut  
*University of Texas, Arlington*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

#### Recommended Citation

Callicut, James W. (1994) "Juvenile Gangs. Herbert C. Covey, Scott Menard and Robert J. Franzese. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1992.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 21 : Iss. 4 , Article 13.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol21/iss4/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [maira.bundza@wmich.edu](mailto:maira.bundza@wmich.edu).



for discussion and debate will find this to be an interesting and instructive book of readings. The organization of the reader is clear and could serve as an outline for a series of class lectures. When augmented with other materials, the book could be a valuable teaching aid. Its bibliography is also one of its strong points.

Another strong point is that the text has significant value for the areas of international criminal justice and comparative criminology. On every issue the author presents material from both Great Britain and the United States as well as limited materials from other countries. It presents valuable comparative information that allows the reader to appreciate a variety of different points of view and international experiences. Taken together, these make it possible to compare the experiences of any single country or those of any single community (such as the Los Angeles Riots of 1992 in the United States) with community disorders of other cultures and nations.

Finally, the book, even with its shortcomings, serves as a valuable interface among the areas of social work, criminal justice and criminology. Students from all three areas can gain a better eclectic understanding of commonly shared problems and appreciate the unique contributions of each academic area.

William G. Archambeault  
Louisiana State University

Scott Cummings and Daniel J. Monti (Eds). *Gangs: The Origins and Impact of Contemporary Youth Gangs in the United States*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993. \$59.50 hardcover; \$19.95 papercover.

Herbert C. Covey, Scott Menard and Robert J. Franzese. *Juvenile Gangs*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1992. \$54.75 hardcover.

Both the print and electronic media are bombarding the public daily with dramatic and shocking reports of violence including drive-by shootings, drug busts gone awry, and other incidents involving the actions of youth. Not uncommonly, the violence is ascribed to gang activities. These two books present

illuminating perspectives on the headline-grabbing phenomena of juvenile or youth gangs.

The Cummings and Monti edited volume with 13 chapters involving 14 authors is organized into three parts. Part I, "What We Know and Do Not Know About Gangs," has two chapters. The bulk of the book is Part II, "The Behavior and Organization of Gangs in Different Settings," with ten chapters dealing, for example, with descriptions and discussions of a wilding gang, the working gang, and gang graffiti. Part III, "What Can Be Done About Gangs," contains three fascinating chapters: "Moral Panic and the Response to Gangs in California," "Gangs and Civil Rights," and "Public Policy and Gangs: Social Science and the Urban Underclass."

Resisting a potential impulse to define a gang, the authors' more credibly list some of the more common traits of gangs. These include "age-and sex-segregated cliques of young persons, sharing a certain group identity and occupying particular geographic territory, often in opposition to real or imagined 'enemies', and who frequently behave in a destructive, disruptive or illegal manner" (p. vii). This work presents scholarly discussions often framed around these traits involving research engaged in by the authors. Particularly in the first chapter, Frederic Thrasher's pioneering research in Chicago resulting in the publication of *The Gang* in 1927, is acknowledged and tautly discussed.

Important points are underscored in the book relative to the prominence of intergang conflict and violence in which innocent bystanders may be victims, the unintended consequence of incarceration and detention of gang members serving to reinforce gang membership and commitment rather than achieve rehabilitation, and the fact that while drug involvement, including dealing, is frequently associated with gang activities, it is not necessarily a paramount function of gangs. Similarly, in discussing gang violence and individual violence in the context of stereotypes about gangs, Joan Moore observes that violence around drug marketing and other criminal activity may more accurately be characterized as activities of individuals (who may be members of a gang) rather than gang-related violence. This distinction has potentially important implications for the future

of gang members who have not consciously engaged in criminal activity that is violence-prone.

Cumming's chapter, "The Anatomy of a Wilding Gang," discusses his study in Fort Worth, Texas, noting the interracial and social class context of the wilding gang violence including the escalation of collective violence involving brutal murders. Wilding gang violence was distinguished from violence related to the protection of turf, drug monopolies, and group reputation and honor, as presented in other parts of the book. Cummings also offers a set of generalizations regarding wilding gang violence as hypotheses for further research.

It is noted that automobiles, school desegregation, and drug sales have made gang members mobile thus impacting both the growth of gangs and the environment of the schools. In addition, the two foci for policy responses to gangs have been prevention oriented and deterrence or suppression oriented.

In his potent discussion of gangs and civil rights, Robert A. Destro develops working definitions of "gangs" and "civil rights" and presents an analytical framework applicable for examining the civil rights aspects of gang control policy and legislation. Also, he cogently notes that any civil rights inquiry is indeed a dual one. He states, ". . . the first inquiry concerns the rights of individual citizens and their families to be protected from intimidation and harm. While this may seem obvious, it is far too often the missing variable in 'rights' discussions in the field of criminal law" (p. 287). Destro further states, "The second inquiry, into the civil rights of gangs and their members, is both more specific and more familiar. . . . It is nevertheless difficult because it involves an overt balancing of individual and associational interests against the individual and collective security interests of those who live and work in a community in which a gang and its members operate" (p. 288).

This chapter "concludes with the observation that, to the degree that the law retains a traditional criminal law focus on illegal conduct, it will avoid the most significant civil rights problem of all: a decision to base surveillance, arrest, conviction, or punishment on factors other than guilt" (p. 278). Clearly, this elegant point has profound implications for all United States residents.

In the final chapter Cummings and Monti underscore the need for social science research that focuses on (1) psychological factors relative to selected aspects of gang behavior, (2) the relationship between community structure and gang activities, and (3) underclass theory as a valuable base for studying gang violence and drugs.

Cummings and Monti offer a concluding comment: "Based upon the evidence and arguments presented by the authors in this volume, we suggest that social program strategies dealing with economic development, education, and job training will be the most effective policy interventions directed toward gangs" (p. 306).

In the last chapter the editors integrate their recommendations and discussions by drawing on the contributions of the authors (social scientists, scholars, and authorities in the field) of the previous chapters. While this is welcome and needed, it would have been useful for the editors to have provided an introduction to the three parts of the book to better integrate and tie together the admirable array of chapters that make a collection that is authoritative, stimulating, and impressive in content and scope. Surely this book will be included in required reading lists in courses dealing with juvenile justice and delinquency, social policy, and urban studies.

In *Juvenile Gangs* Covey, Menard, and Franzese pursue an ambitious goal: "to provide breadth and generality that may help to put separate studies of gangs in particular times and locations within an appropriate historical, comparative, and theoretical context" (p. ix). They do so through eleven chapters that deal with important topics including chapters entitled "Contemporary American Juvenile Gangs," "Juvenile Gang Violence," "Race, Ethnicity and Contemporary Gangs," "Female Gangs and Gang Members," "Comparative Perspectives on Juvenile Gangs," "Typologies of Juvenile Gangs," and chapters discussing classical theories of gangs, interventions, and the future of juvenile gangs.

Chapter IX, entitled "Theoretical Propositions About Juvenile Gangs," merits particular attention. The authors indicate that the formation of true juvenile gangs seems to have the two preconditions of (1) critical mass and (2) social disorganiza-

tion. The presentation and discussion of twenty-nine theoretical propositions serves to construct an integrated theory of juvenile gangs that begins with gang formation, then moves to gang evolution, gang membership, gang delinquency, race, ethnicity, gender, and gang structure, social ecology, and gang longevity. This excellent chapter not only incorporates theoretical perspectives into a valuable unified theory, but it also serves to give an integrative structure for the entire book.

As does the Cummings and Monti book, this one pays tribute to Thrasher's monumental study of 1,313 gangs in Chicago.

The authors discuss the suggestions that factors contributing to the promotion and spreading of gangs across neighborhoods include court-mandated bussing, and the availability of mass transportation and automobiles. In terms of gang membership, "even with all of the variation in gangs, gangs can be characterized as predominately male, young, urban, lower class, and minority" (p. 17).

Observing that gangs are organized along ethnic lines, the authors provide a discussion of African American gangs, including the Bloods and the Crips, Hispanic gangs, Asian American gangs, Jamaican posses, and white ethnic gangs including skinheads.

The concept of the underclass receives substantial attention in various parts of the volume. The evolution and development of the underclass is attributed in part to the lack of low-skilled jobs in many parts of the country. Furthermore, the economic factors responsible for excluding some people from participating in the mainstream of the economy are dominant forces in this regard.

In the chapter that deals with gang interventions, a number of programs are reviewed. Mobilization For Youth, the Urban Leadership Training Program, and others are discussed under the rubric of opportunity and social change as characterized by Cloward and Ohlin's differential opportunity theory. Social intervention programs, including group guidance and detached worker programs, are discussed. Gang suppression programs also receive attention. The authors conclude, "Simple projections of past trends would suggest that juvenile gang activity will continue unabated into the foreseeable future, that juvenile

gang violence will remain the same or perhaps escalate, that juvenile gangs will continue to recruit new members from an increasingly large population base, and that with the growth of suburban areas and small towns, juvenile gangs will become present and active in places largely untouched until now by juvenile gang activity" (p. 249). They indicate that they expect gang policy to continue to be fragmented, largely uninformed either by theory or research, with the intervention of detached workers, counseling, and outreach programs, and suppression being the strategies employed, in spite of the evidence that they are basically ineffective. Strategies that would offer the most promise, those involving long-term social change, employment, education, gun control and school reform are least likely to receive appropriate funding to produce a substantial positive impact on the problem of juvenile gangs. Although this may appear to be a pessimistic assessment, one would conclude that the expectation is indeed realistic and credible in the context of the material so thoughtfully and well presented throughout the book.

In short, this work makes a substantial contribution to the literature regarding juvenile gangs, and it does so in a cohesive, integrated fashion. Again, the integrated theory developed in one of the chapters should prove to be a major contribution to the criminal justice arena. One would only hope that it receives the wide attention that it merits.

James W. Callicutt  
The University of Texas at Arlington

Roy R. Roberg and Jack Kuykendall. *Police and Society*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1993. \$30.00 hardcover.

This book is an excellent example of what can be done with the subject of police in society by avoiding the encyclopedic or catalog treatment, which seems to be typical of so many of the other textbooks. This book forces the reader to think in critical terms about the relationship between police and their society, thus avoiding the, now rather boring, monologue of other texts in this area. While providing material for critical