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Review of *Gangs and Society: Alternative Perspectives*. Louis Kontos, David Brotherton and Luis Barrios (Eds.). Reviewed by Matthew T. Theriot.

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Louis Kontos, David Brotherton, and Luis Barrios (Eds.), *Gangs and Society: Alternative Perspectives*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. \$54.50 hardcover, \$24.50 papercover.

For most people, gang members are nothing more than hoods and delinquents, drug dealers and violent juveniles. Very rarely are they depicted with any humanity or individuality. Instead, popular perceptions of gang activity are usually created by the sensationalized images of gun-toting teenagers or the frequent reports of gangland violence that mark the media landscape. Since there are indeed components of gang life that are criminal and violent, such depictions are not without some validity. Yet, gang life is far more complicated than the media images would suggest and it is the exploration of this complexity that underlies the book, *Gangs and Society: Alternative Perspectives*. To this end, the book's editors and contributing authors do a remarkable job of highlighting the economic, political, social and cultural factors that impact the activities of gangs and their members.

Although each of the six sections presents worthy new thinking on gangs, the first and final sections are the most notable. The opening section of the book contains four chapters sharing the similar intent of challenging current theoretical, economic, and sociological perspectives of gangs. The first chapter emphasizes the need to consider the cultural and political aspects of gangs in addition to traditional thinking about such unions. In essence, then, this chapter attempts to broaden the reductionist view of gang members illustrated in this review's opening sentence. The second chapter describes the evolution of Mexican American youth gangs and the increasing involvement of adult males in their activities. According to the author, such involvement is positively correlated with an increase in criminality among these groups. The author also notes that, given the diversity now found among Mexican American youths and communities in the United States, a better system of classifying Mexican American gangs is needed to reflect these changes. Chapter three challenges the contemporary view that gangs played a leadership role in the expanding drug trade while chapter four concludes this initial section with a study comparing the organization of homeless youths in Australia to the organization of American gangs.

The book's second and third sections continue the challenge to conventional thinking about gangs that is at the heart of this book. Rather than examining fresh theoretical and cultural perspectives, though, these chapters comment on the important yet under-researched political, spiritual, and educational practices of gangs. The focal gang for many of these chapters is the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (ALKQN), the noted gang featured in numerous news stories and a recent documentary by award-winning director Jon Alpert. Among the chapters in this section, there are discussions of ALKQN's move to "street activism", their use of non-violent tactics to end conflicts with a rival gang, and the importance of spiritual texts and rituals in their daily activities.

The next section, "Women and Gangs", describes the role of females in gangs and the formation of female gangs. The conclusions across both chapters in this section note the similar reasons across the genders for choosing to join a gang, yet care is taken to list the unique obstacles and circumstances that female gangs encounter which impact their activities. The fifth section includes two chapters describing new criminal justice policies designed to crackdown on the "gang problem" as well as the policies, treatment, and tribulations encountered by gang members now incarcerated in prison.

The final section, section six, is perhaps the most interesting and weighty contribution to the book. This section, focusing on photography and gangs, includes a comprehensive collection of photographs intended to show many sides of gang culture. The images are noteworthy not only because they depict the expected aspects of gang life (such as drug use and violence), but they also illustrate quieter times, family gatherings, social activities, and the poverty in which many of these gang members live and operate. Like the gang members themselves, the pictures can be shocking, brutal, and disturbing yet some of them also show gang members as human, tender, and even vulnerable.

While this section is probably the book's greatest asset, it also feels a bit incomplete. Looking past the striking work of the contributing photojournalists, the inclusion of chapters featuring photographs taken by the actual gang members or their families would have been a compelling and significant visual event. Just as

the journalists used their cameras to capture powerful snapshots of gang life, images produced by gang members shed light not only on the world of street gangs but also on how these youths see and experience their own lives in this world.

This book breathes fresh air into traditional academic accounts of gangs and gang members. The chapters in this book challenge modern conventions by offering new ways of thinking about gangs, their function, their culture and their place within the current social climate. It is recommended reading for anyone with an interest in gangs, youth culture, urban street life, and juvenile delinquency. Rather than feeding further stereotypes of gang members and fueling the fear that these youths instill in mainstream society, the authors use both the written and visual mediums to add an important human, cultural, political, social and spiritual element that is too often missing in discussions of gangs and gang members.

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Dana M. Britton, *At Work in the Iron Cage: The Prison as Gendered Organization*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. \$55.00 hardcover, \$19.00 papercover.

Written in the tradition of Goffman's organizational theory, and especially of his conceptualization of the total institution, Britton's *At Work in the Iron Cage* is a major contribution to the sociology of work as well as to correctional literature. As the subtitle would indicate, this book is a contribution to gender studies (male *and* female) as well.

As a person who has spent a lot of time visiting prisons and who has observed a lot of "back stage" as well as "front stage" behavior in the total institution, I still found myself fascinated by many of the revelations provided in this book. The study is based on interviews conducted in the 1990s with 72 male and female officers. Federal and state sites were both included. That the author was even allowed to conduct such interviews in the present volatile and suspicious atmosphere surrounding male officer sex scandals is perhaps the most astonishing fact about this work. That accomplishment is a tribute to Britton's fortitude