



CRIPS AND BLOODS: MADE IN AMERICA

By Stacy Peralta

DISCUSSION GUIDE

It's a civil war that's lasted 40 years. Passed down from son to son. Fought eye for an eye. Over 15,000 dead and counting, while the world stands by. Welcome to South Central Los Angeles. But what's at the root of this long-standing battle? Filmmaker Stacy Peralta hits the streets of LA to find out, and speaks with former and current members of the Bloods and the Crips, two of the most notorious and violent street gangs in America.

FROM THE FILMMAKER

I made CRIPS AND BLOODS: Made In America because I was interested as a film-maker and as a resident of Los Angeles in investigating why gang violence has been going on uninterrupted in Los Angeles for over four decades. I could not understand why this is going on in America and why no viable solution has ever been put into place. And it did not make sense to me, our country defeated Nazi Germany and Japan simultaneously and in less than a decade but we can't stop gang violence. It made me wonder if as a society we would find a solution to this problem if instead of poor African-American teenagers it were affluent white teenagers who were killing each other.

Kumasi, who is one of the principle characters in the film says this, "part of the mechanics of oppressing people is to pervert them to the extent that they become their own oppressors." I believe these young men involved in gang violence are carrying out their own extinction and the very sad truth is that our society is allowing this to happen. I hope people who view the film see these gang members as human beings caught up in a tragic nightmare and not as the animals and demons the media has made them out to be.

I believe people should see this film because this is a human rights issue that is happening inside of America and it's happening everyday in many of our largest cities – but it happens in silence. These young men are dying in silence and they are being incarcerated in silence. More people have been killed due to gang violence in Los Angeles than the long running sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland, yet very few know this fact. Young children in South Los Angeles are experiencing greater levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder than children living in Bagdad, Iraq. This is happening inside of our country.

- Stacy Peralta, Director



THE FILM

With a blend of on-camera interviews, historical footage, and scenes of current conditions, CRIPS & BLOODS: Made In America graphically portrays the ongoing street violence between rival African American gangs in South Los Angeles. In this 40-year feud, in which neighborhoods are staked out and rigid boundaries are drawn, crossing a street or taking a wrong turn can mean death. What is it that causes gang members to lock themselves into these tightly-defined zones and so fiercely protect their turf? That question is at the heart of this film.

Three former gang members—Ron, Bird and Kumasi—recount their experiences growing up in South Los Angeles in the 1950s, when segregation ruled, both in organizations such as Boy Scouts and through neighborhood covenants that kept blacks and whites strictly separated. Young black males began forming their own groups—clubs where they could find a sense of belonging. Fighting between rival clubs became part of that culture, but the only weapons then were a strong pair of fists.

Despite the discrimination experienced by African Americans, the 1950s were a period of black prosperity and optimism in Los Angeles, fed by the abundance of industry-based jobs. By the late 1950s, however, those industries began to disappear, resulting in high rates of unemployment and displacement of unskilled black workers. Their downward economic spiral combined with years of prejudice, racial profiling and heavy-handed police methods to produce an explosive situation. In 1965, a routine traffic stop erupted into full-scale civil conflict on the streets of Watts.

Some rays of hope appeared during the late 1960s, with the rise of the Black Pride movement. As groups such as the Black Panthers and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee began providing services and involving young people in community organizing, gang activity hit an all-time low. The FBI, however, considered the Panthers a threat to the internal security of the country and began to target the leaders; many of them were killed or jailed. Without strong leadership to steer black youth in positive directions, gangs became active once more, and this time their weapons were guns.

In CRIPS & BLOODS: Made In America, current gang members describe gang life and the status, protection and other benefits that gang membership gives them. Their statements paint a bleak picture of the physical, social and personal devastation that is the hallmark of South Los Angeles. Even after a second eruption of riots in 1992, after the Rodney King police brutality trial, little has been done to rebuild the area and to provide the education and employment opportunities that could reduce violence and bring stability to those neighborhoods. With little help coming from the government, the vicious cycle of shootings and retaliation (which has produced an estimated 15,000 casualties in the past four decades) continues.

Academics and other experts appear throughout the film, including California state senator Tom Hayden and author Gerald Horne. They offer perspectives on gang behavior and the disintegration of civil rule, and who suggest ways of solving the underlying problems, rather than just attacking gang-related street violence. The most promising solutions, however, may come from the people of South Los Angeles themselves, where former gang members and other concerned individuals have taken on the task of working with young people and providing a positive alternative to gang membership. Examples of their work, and the new groups they have created, give the film an upbeat ending.



INDIVIDUALS FEATURED IN CRIPS & BLOODS: MADE IN AMERICA

Bird
Kumasi
Ron

All three of these men are former gang members who are currently activists, educators and community leaders.

Authors and academics

Dr. Todd Boyd, University of Southern California
Dr. Josh Sides, California State University, Northridge
Leon Bing – *Do or Die*
Dr. Gerald Horne – *Fire This Time*
James Gilligan, M.D. – *Violence*
Senator Tom Hayden – *Street Wars*

Gang intervention leaders

Bo Taylor – former Crip, founder of Unity One
Rock Johnson – former Crip, National Chief of Staff, Amer-I-Can
Vickey D. Lindsey – founder, Cry No More
Minister Tony Muhammad – representative, Nation of Islam, founder of Peace Makers
T. Rodgers – founder, Sidewalk University
Aquil Basheer – Maximum Force Enterprise
Aqeela Sherrills – Reverence Project
Jim Brown – pro-football hall-of-fame member, founder of Amer-I-Can

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Attraction of Gangs

Society's contribution

Certain factors create pre-conditions that can make gang membership an attractive and desirable option for young people. Societal factors include:

- **Racism:** Denied access to opportunities and resources, young people may form or seek to join an anti-establishment group.
- **Poverty:** Being unable to partake in the economic life of a community, or even to obtain basic goods and services, can result in a sense of hopelessness and a lack of self-worth. One way to earn cash is to join a gang involved in the drug trade or other illicit, but lucrative, activities.
- **Lack of a support network:** When basic needs for love and protection are not met because of family dysfunction, and if youth programs are not available in the community to provide additional support, young people may turn to gangs to meet those needs.

Who's at risk?

On a personal level, the list of risk factors includes:

- Family poverty and dysfunction
- Absence of a father figure
- Low school achievement, possibly due to learning disabilities
- Having friends who are delinquent
- No positive activities or interests outside of school
- Lack of positive role models
- Behavioral problems at an early age

Add to these personal factors the feelings of boredom that can come from living in an environment without acceptable outlets for young people, along with the peer pressure that is a fact of life among the young, and gang membership can become an irresistible attraction.

Who joins and why?

Gang characteristics

In general, gangs tend to be urban, male and young. Within those parameters, there are numerous variations in gang membership, with The Crips and Bloods representing one type of gang, the *'turf' gang*. As its name suggests, this type of gang is based on geography, albeit a limited one—the geography of perhaps a few dozen city blocks. Ethnic gangs are defined by the nationality or race of the gang members, e.g., Latino or Asian; others, such as neo-Nazi gangs are defined by their opposition to certain ethnic or religious groups. A third type of gang is the prison gang, which is made up of street gang members who continue their gang activity in prison. Gangs may also start in prison and keep going once members are released.

Estimates from the U.S. Department of Justice provide a rough profile of gang composition:

- In 2000, 94 percent of gang members were male and 6 percent were female.
- 39 percent of gangs active in 2000 had at least one female member; 2 percent of gangs were identified as being composed of predominantly female members.
- In 1996, 50 percent of gang members were under the age of 18, but in 1999 only 37 percent of gang members were under the age of 18.
- In 1999, 47 percent of gang members were Hispanic, 31 were African American, 13 percent were white, and 7 percent were Asian. These percentages have remained fairly steady over the years.

In addition, in 2001, 100 percent of cities with a population of 250,000 or more reported gang activity, and 85 percent of cities with a population between 100,000 and 229,999 reported gang activity.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, National Youth Gang Survey Trends from 1996 to 2000, by Arlen Egley, Jr.

For young people experiencing the risk factors described previously, a gang can provide:

- acceptance, structure, and discipline
- a sense of self-worth, status and respect
- recognition and power
- a sense of belonging, a 'family'
- companionship, training, excitement, and activities
- physical safety and protection
- the continuation of a family 'tradition', i.e., following in an older relative's footsteps



Gang intervention strategies – Do they work?

There have been few rigorous evaluations of gang intervention program, with most studies focused on community-based programs. A Bureau of Justice Assistance report of results of gang-reduction strategies shows a very mixed picture:

Prevention programs have shown some positive results. The Department of Justice's school-based G.R.E.A.T. project has had modest effects on adolescents' attitudes and delinquency risk factors. The Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach (GPTTO) program, operated by the Boys and Girls Club, showed more positive outcomes for high risk than low risk youths. Neither program, however, had an impact on gang membership.

Intervention programs seem to work better when conducted intensively by a team of service agency professionals, rather than a one-on-one approach with gang members.

Suppression programs using traditional law enforcement approaches result in an increase in arrests and incarceration, but have no long-term effects on gang membership and activity. Some programs that involve multiple criminal justice agencies seem to be more effective.

Comprehensive programs that include suppression, intervention and prevention activities within the community have shown substantial effectiveness in reducing gang violence. With a comprehensive approach, communities assess their own gang problems and create a complement of programs and anti-gang strategies. (See Resources for information on a related publication.)

Source: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/evaluation/program_law_enforcement/gangs2.htm "What Have We Learned from Gang Programs/Strategies?"



THINKING MORE DEEPLY

1. What is the significance of the title, "CRIPS AND BLOODS: Made in America"? Is there something unique about the United States that causes it to produce gangs and gang warfare?
2. Why is the fighting between the Crips and the Bloods not recognized as a civil conflict and treated as such by government authorities?
3. In 1965, when riots broke out in Watts, older and younger African Americans responded differently, based on their perspectives on race relations. The former urged caution and nonviolence, while the latter chose to fight in the streets. What accounted for the different responses by the older and younger generations?
4. Commenting on the street violence in South Los Angeles, Senator Tom Hayden says, "It's been defined as a crime problem and a gang problem but it's really an issue of no work and dysfunctional schools." Do you agree? Why or why not?
5. What will it take to stop the gang warfare? Where should efforts begin?
6. What responsibility does the government have in controlling or ending the violence in South Los Angeles? What about the mothers, sisters, and other women whose male relatives have been involved in the violence—what power do they have to make change happen?
7. The film shows a quick series of yearbook-style photos of young children, as well as other pictures of children on the streets of South Los Angeles. What impact does seeing these photos have on you?
8. The film shows numerous shots of South Los Angeles today. What do those pictures tell about the current conditions there?
9. What is your assessment of race relations today? What changes, if any, have taken place in your community over the last decade or two? Is there evidence that shows a need for further change? Explain.
10. Do you think the election of Barack Obama will be a catalyst for change in places such as South Los Angeles? Why or why not?



SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

Together with other audience members, brainstorm actions that you might take as an individual and that some people might do as a group. Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. Find out how you can contribute to keeping young people out of gangs. Check with churches, social service agencies and law enforcement organizations in your community to learn how you can participate in gang prevention activities.
2. Organize a drive to support gang intervention organizations. These groups are often underfunded and fragmented. (See Resources)
3. Organize or join a community activist coalition to lobby for the clean-up and development of a run-down or blighted area of your community. Include young people in this effort. Encourage them to brainstorm and outline their ideas, and offer them training and support in presenting their plans to local officials.
4. Volunteer for a day (or a series of days) of community service with Habitat for Humanity or with another initiative that works to construct or repair local schools and community buildings.
5. Help keep the streets of your community safe by taking part in community policing. Schedule a forum or town hall meeting with local police, churches, businesses and other organizations to inform the community about how community policing works. Basic, easy-to-understand information can be found at www.besafe.org/css_com/community_policing/index.html.
6. Mentoring a young person can help him or her develop skills and interests that lead to positive life outcomes. Look into mentoring opportunities through Big Brothers Big Sisters or other organizations (see Resources).
7. Get involved in efforts to stop racial profiling. Both the ACLU (www.aclu.org/racialjustice/racialprofiling/index.html) and Amnesty International (www.amnestyusa/us-human-rights/racial-profiling/page.do?id=1106650) have projects focused on ending racial profiling. Check their web sites to learn what actions you can take.

For additional outreach ideas, visit www.itvs.org, the web site for the Independent Television Service. For local information, check the web site of your PBS station.

RESOURCES

Gang information & history

<http://people.howstuffworks.com/street-gang.htm> – This site offers a general overview of street gangs and their history.

www.knowgangs.com/gang_resources/menu.php – Founded by a law enforcement officer, this site provides gang profiles, resources and other details about gangs.

www.lapdonline.org/get_informed/content_basic_view/1396 – The official L.A. Police Department website offers general comprehensive information about gangs.

www.streetgangs.com/history/hist01.html – This site features an article called “Black Street Gangs in Los Angeles: A History.”

www.gangresearch.net/GangResearch/Policy/cripsbloodsplan.html – Check out a comprehensive plan for the reconstruction of South Los Angeles, drawn up in 1992 by the Bloods and the Crips, as a reaction to the aftermath of the Rodney King trial.

www.urbanministry.org/wiki/gang-statistics – This section of the Urban Ministry website provides gang statistics at a glance.

Gang intervention & prevention

www.helpinggangyouth.com/statistics.html – This website offers a wide range of information, including steps to prevent gang involvement, gang statistics and advice for parents of at-risk youth.

www.focusas.com/Gangs.html – Focus Adolescent Services' comprehensive website for families with troubled and at-risk teens contains a section on gang issues, including a list of related organizations and information resources.

www.bgca.org/programs/specialized.asp – This Targeted Outreach program from the Boys & Girls Clubs works with youth aged 6-18.

www.great-online.org – Gang Resistance Education and Training—G.R.E.A.T.—is a school-based program from the US Department of Justice

www.usmayors.org/bestpractices/community_policing_2006/gangBP_2006.pdf – “Best Practices of Community Policing in Gang Prevention and Gang Violence” is a 144-page report by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, with short chapters describing initiatives in 55 communities, large and small, across the country

www.be-safe.org/css_com/community_policing/index.html – This site provides a clear, illustrated description of what community policing is and how it works.

www.amer-i-can.org – Founded by former Cleveland Browns fullback Jim Brown, the Amer-I-Can Program is a life management skills curriculum that is designed to empower individuals to take charge of their lives and achieve their full potential.

www.iir.com/nygc/publications/gang-problems.pdf – “Best Practices to Address Community Gang Problems: OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model” describes a comprehensive community approach to anti-gang strategies.



Mentoring & community action

www.cripsandbloodsmovie.com – The website for the film lists all the organizations featured or mentioned at the end of CRIPS & BLOODS: MADE IN AMERICA. While most of them are focused on Los Angeles or other California communities, some are national in scope.

www.solutionsforamerica.org/index.html – A companion project of the Pew partnership for Civic Change, Solutions for America provides guidance for civic problem solving, including information on mentoring.

www.nwrel.org/mentoring – The Northwest Regional Education Laboratory's National Mentoring Center offers training, resources and online services to local mentoring programs.

www.mentoring.org – MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership is an advocate and resource for the expansion of mentoring initiatives nationwide. It maintains a network of state mentoring partnerships and a rich variety of resources to support mentors.

www.bbbs.org – Big Brothers Big Sisters offers a wide array of mentoring opportunities, including African American, Hispanic and Native American mentoring.

www.amer-i-can.org/ – Amer-I-Can is comprised of the Amer-I-Can Program, which is a 60-to-90 hour, 15 chapter Life Management Skills curriculum designed to empower individuals to take charge of their lives.

www.unityonenow.com – Unity One is about building a better future and stronger community through education, empowerment, improving individual motivation and creating lasting opportunities for all people.

www.maximumforceenterprises.com – Maximum Force Enterprises seeks to provide a wide-ranging array of services that deal directly with all aspects of violence abatement and threat eradication.

www.volunteermatch.org/search/org92771.jsp – Project Cry No More's mission is to stop the gang/gun violence that continues to plague communities across the country, as well as the world. Project Cry No More is a self-supported, nonprofit through featuring ongoing emotional support, education, prevention, intervention, advocacy and awareness.

www.icanallstars.com – I-Can Youth Foundation is a local nonprofit organization dedicated to serving youth through sports, mentoring, tutoring and life skills. They are made up of community volunteers including parents, members of law enforcement, aerospace, clergy, firemen, military personnel, entertainers and athletes.

<http://2ndcall.org> – 2nd Call is a community-based organization designed to assist in the personal development of needy individuals: at-risk youth, ex-felons, parolees and others who society disregards.

CRIPS & BLOODS: Made in America WILL AIR NATIONALLY ON THE EMMY AWARD-WINNING PBS SERIES INDEPENDENT LENS IN MAY, 2009. CHECK LOCAL LISTINGS.

CRIPS & BLOODS: Made in America was directed by Stacy Peralta and produced by Baron Davis, Cash Warren, Shaun Murphy and Gus Roxburgh. The Emmy Award-winning series *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

ITVS COMMUNITY is the national community engagement program of the Independent Television Service. ITVS COMMUNITY works to leverage the unique and timely content of the Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens* to build stronger connections among leading organizations, local communities and public television stations around key social issues and create more opportunities for civic engagement and positive social change. To find out more about ITVS COMMUNITY, visit www.pbs.org/independentlens/communitycinema.

