

Street Elites

Considered as a social form of violence, street fighting between adolescent groups shares several features with homicide committed in the passionate spirit of righteous slaughter: the irrelevance of utilitarian calculations, a provocative vocabulary of cursing, and a semiotics of violence in which injuries inflicted on victims attest retrospectively to the profundity of the attacker's offended dignity. But there is no evidence of a special delight among violent spouses for the militaristic weapons that group fighters in the ghetto have found charming, such as garrison belts, sawed-off shotguns, flare guns, Ninja stars, switchblades, and rope knives. Unlike the typical impassioned killer, violent youth groups often make elaborate, detailed plans; indeed, they plan and discuss battle tactics far more often than they attack. Perhaps weeks after an insult has been registered, a youth group may surprise its enemies in a moment of domestic calm, as when shots are fired into a family living room by a passing car.¹

Fights are conducted for distinctive symbolic rewards. When the reputation of a militant youth group has been offended, satisfactory vengeance sometimes can be accomplished by harming any member of the rival group, or even any young person from the offending neighborhood. At times the Vice Lords of Chicago's West Side in the early 1960s, one of the most fearsome groups documented by modern ethnography, were satisfied if their enemy ran away: "The first who runs, that's it right there."²

The practice of peer violence by adolescent groups is also distinguished by an egocentric, at times masochistic, focus. In contrast to impassioned violence among spouses and friends, adolescent attackers of other adolescents may never get close enough or stay around long enough to witness their victims' destruction. But their own "battle scars" are sure to be reviewed repeatedly in intimate collective settings. In an hour-long documentary film on Mexican-American barrio fighters in Oakland, California, the young men are shown on two occasions collectively reviewing the holes and scars they carry from enemy attacks, tracking, in detail, the paths the bullets and knives traveled through their bodies.³ Short-lived battles

can be eternally resurrected by fascinated commentaries such as: "See, it went in here and then came out there." "If you hadn't been wearing your pants high (as a Homeboy should), your belt wouldn't have slowed down the entry and you'd be dead." "Oooh, can I touch it?" The animating concern is less a sadistic consumption of the suffering of others than the construction within one's circle of proof of a heroic commitment to the group's grandiose stature.

In short, the phenomena of gang violence are unique and thus call for their own explanation. But before launching a causal inquiry, I should note that something about the "gang" rubric is itself a bit off the mark.

Ever since Frederic Thrasher's study appeared in 1927, students of juvenile delinquency have had a special fascination with gangs.⁴ Since that time, sociologists of various theoretical perspectives have continued to assume that it makes sense to address the problem of "the gang." Meanwhile, the subjects' have been stubbornly recalcitrant about accepting this definition of the phenomenon. An inside joke that has been shared by field investigators over several decades is that subjects freely refer to their enemies as members of gangs but instruct an observing sociologist that their collective commitment is to a "club," an "organization," a "clique," a "barrio," a "mob," a "brotherhood," a "family," an ethnic "nation," a "team," or a "crew."⁵ Often, they expressly deny membership in a "gang."

Although it has sometimes been suggested that "gang" members resist being so labeled because they are uncomfortable with the negative connotations,⁶ this resistance is common even in groups with names like the Vice Lords, Savage Nomads, Devil's Disciples, Reapers, Tongs; as well as among "homeboys" from Los Angeles barrios who proudly dress like the 1940s gangsters and occasionally blast shotguns at enemies in imitation of scenes from movies set in the days of Prohibition. "Gang" is a troublesome term not because it conveys an impression of evil but because the evil implied by an admission of gang membership is not sufficiently grand. Real, adult, serious "gangsters" do not call their groups "gangs." The media tells us that adult gangsters use euphemisms: Cosa Nostra or This Thing We Got, the syndicate, the organization, the Family or La Familia, and the Black Hand. These terms are more serious, more cool, more adult; "gangs" are for kids. Furthermore, loyal members do not confess the deviant status of their groups to outsiders. Since "gangs" are units of deviance that have already come under the cognitive powers of social researchers and other agents of social control, however, "gang" members have no hesitation about designating rival groups as gangs because the label is a relative minimization, a combative depreciation.

This pride in displaying the symbols of terrifying evil may be used to delineate a particular form of deviance. The distinctive features of violence already noted—strategic calculation, militaristic delight, symbolic representation of enemies, and melodramatic self-absorption—indicate a pride in ruling the streets by terror. Accordingly, I will take as the problem to

be explained a socially widespread and recurrent problem of twentieth-century British and American juvenile delinquency: street elites, or adolescent groups that maintain terrifying claims to dominance in urban areas.

As with the other forms of crime treated in this book, my explanation will be of a project constituted in three individually necessary, jointly sufficient stages. The first section analyzes the ways in which groups of adolescent males have constructed the appearance of one or another form of ancient, barbaric, feudal, or supernatural elite that maintains its rule through physical intimidation. In the United States and Great Britain, elite, evil guises have been especially seductive to poverty-level and working-class urban adolescents of varying ethnicities. The common features of their posture may be highlighted by comparing the forms of collective deviance among white middle-class youths.

Second, the project of street elites faces a special practical challenge. By parading in public in bizarre, menacing disguises like those that are associated with feudal knights, they risk being thought of as engaging in child's play. So seen, this form of deviance is humiliating; it continues into adolescence the patterns of geographic, age, and sex relationships that are distinctive to the social organization of childhood. Thus, members must engage in practical activities that convince others that they mean it. Here, we can understand the centrality of the geographic metaphor in the shaping of intergroup violence. "Turf" wars and other forms of violence by ghetto youth groups are essential, literally and figuratively, to ground the myths of natural antagonism among the combatants.

The third essential condition is an emotional process. In the members' experience, "being in" such a group is constantly precarious. Terrifying postures of evil may be adopted for parading around the burger palace on Saturday night, to be replaced at home by a benign outlook on traditional values of family and friendship. What keeps members "in" is their cooperative mobilization of challenges to the personal competence to move socially from the subjectively familiar "here" of local childhood relations to a larger, more vaguely anticipated, social world that exists somewhere out "there," or, as they often refer to it, "on the streets." In this regard we can understand the fascination with parading in menacing postures, the logic of the special tactics of street elites for opposing school authority, and the group's support of various facets of street life.

The final section emphasizes a particular connection between the phenomenal life of street elites and the social conditions in their members' backgrounds. When juxtaposed against the humbled populations in their neighborhoods or in their parents' generation, these groups dramatize a superior moral ability to transcend local communal boundaries and move in a spirit of freedom and emphatic self-respect without accepting social limitations. Writing about gangs from the outside, social researchers and commentators have usually assumed that the key causal forces lie in the

distance between their own world and that of the "gang." Members of street elites have been more vividly aware of the proximity of groups that they would place beneath them in social disrepute.

The Posture of the Street Elite

Despite the importance of urban, lower-income, ethnic-minority status for theories of the gang, social-class variables have rarely been examined comparatively to hone in on the thing to be explained.⁷ Some authors have offered themes that are supposedly specific to lower-class delinquency but without considering carefully just how these themes are distinctive to their class setting.⁸ The prevalence of reckless driving and of illegal drug cultures should serve as a reminder that even in the most respectable, affluent suburbs, adolescents have a special attraction to excitement, trouble, tests of autonomy, and proofs of toughness, as well as an apparently romantic tendency to abandon life to fate. Indeed, on a purely actuarial basis, the attraction of white middle-class youths to these values may be more physically self-destructive than is the violence of ghetto "gangs."⁹

Over the past thirty years, there have been sharp differences in collective forms of youth deviance across class and ethnic lines. To highlight the distinctive pretensions of ghetto street elites, I will, for the most part, neglect intermediary types, such as working-class groups that have combined patterns of "hippie" drug hedonism familiar in suburban middle-class settings with physically intimidating "greaser" styles.¹⁰ On the "street elite" side, most of my materials represent groups from what were at the time of the relevant study ethnic minorities in low income urban centers in the United States. But some, such as the examples from Glasgow and London, clearly are of low income but not ethnic minority youths. And some of the Mexican-American groups with relevant patterns of intergroup violence are from communities that, although ethnically isolated, enjoy an economic status that is markedly above poverty levels. On the other side of the contrast, middle-class adolescent deviants delight in imitating working-class forms, literally inviting class and sometimes ethnic confusions. I will treat punks here in their American incarnation, as an example of a middle-class form, even though the historical origins of the symbolism elaborated in the "punk" movement may be traced to working-class British groups. At the end of the chapter, I try to explain the relationship of social class and form of collective youth deviance. Here, the task is to set up the association that calls for an explanation.

CELEBRATING VERSUS OBSCURING TIES TO HOME

A fascination with spatial mobility expressed through geographic metaphors runs throughout the social lines of adolescence. But across class and ethnic lines, the symbolic slant runs in opposite directions.

Consider the proud self-label, "homeboy," which Mexican-American and black adolescents from low-income areas in Southwestern cities use to signal their loyalty to neighboring peers. Homeboys take great risks to write the name of their neighborhood on walls and to carry its "colors" in their clothing; they anticipate that they may be asked questions about their street or barrio affiliation on the understanding that the "wrong" answer may lead to great personal harm. More generally, neighborhood names have inspired American ghetto adolescents to collective violence against other adolescent groups, from at least the New York Irish of the turn of the century; to Eastern Europeans in Chicago in the 1920s; to Southern Europeans in New York in the 1950s; and to Puerto Rican, Mexican, and black youths in major U.S. cities over the past twenty-five years.¹¹ A universal rationale for violence among street elites is their claims to control landmarks of a particular residential area: street boundaries, "turf," local food outlets, parks, or particular benches in parks.

In contrast, when middle-class white American adolescents develop forms of collective deviance, they make a special effort to conceal the location of their primary family. Whether in the style of beatniks hanging around Greenwich Village in the 1950s, hippies congregating in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury in the late 1960s, or punks "slam dancing" in Hollywood clubs in the late 1970s, middle-class white adolescents have attempted to appear as natives of bohemian cultures and lower classes, obscuring their residential ties to, respectively, Westchester County and Long Island, Marin County and Berkeley, and West Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley.¹² For these middle-class adolescents to have been considered by their peers as socially tied to the locale of their homes in the middle-class suburbs and emotionally tied to their families would have triggered feelings of shame, rather than pride.

SEGREGATING VERSUS INTEGRATING THRUSTS

Since at least the end of World War II, middle-class white adolescents have been attracted to deviant movements, trends, and cultural themes—to what sociologists call "collective behavior." In contrast, ghetto and working-class adolescents have often banded together in more or less formally organized deviant groups, sometimes with designated leaders, "war counselors," official symbols, induction procedures, clubhouses, and a territorially defined jurisdiction. These formal indicia of collective unity

tempt outsiders to refer to ghetto groups as "gangs." When collections of middle-class youths have been seen as physically threatening, for example, punks slam dancing in music clubs or hippies protesting in parks, they have achieved no more than the minimal formal status of "mobs" or unruly "crowds."

This social structural difference is itself related to the different slants taken by the two youth groups on the metaphor of geographic mobility. Organized formally into residentially based fighting groups, ghetto adolescents generate mythical distinctions within otherwise homogeneous social groups. Most gang violence is within ethnic and class lines. One group of young Chicago blacks, for example, organizes under the banner of the Blackstone Rangers to fight a neighboring group of young Chicago blacks organized under the name, the Devil's Disciples, with no distinction between the two groups in social origin or philosophy other than that each is linked to a territorially different home base.¹³ In the ghetto, adolescent forms of collective deviance are committed to the artificial *construction* of segregating geographic boundaries.

On the other side of the class and ethnic tracks, white middle-class adolescents delight in the use of deviant forms of collective behavior to affect the symbolic *destruction* of geographic boundaries. Hippies did not express their ties to particular places. Instead, they became a national and then international movement by dressing in the culture of transience and—as symbolized by "flower" children reaching out to embrace horrified passersby—by celebrating a spirit of universal understanding. Punk originated in working-class white English adolescent society and was picked up across class and national lines in the United States and continental Europe. Punks of different nationalities and social classes who could not speak to each other, formed an international street show under a common symbolism of deviance.

In the collective worlds of adolescent deviance, ethnic-minority members distinctively and ironically promote segregation. Throughout this century in the United States, urban male adolescents who have been subject to segregation because of their ethnic identities—the Irish in 1900s New York, Eastern European ethnics in Chicago in the 1920s, Italians in Brooklyn in the 1950s, blacks in Chicago in the 1960s, and Mexican-Americans in Oakland barrios in the 1970s and 1980s—have drawn battle lines to enforce neighborhood boundaries. In contrast, an integrating thrust characterizes the forms of collective deviance embraced by ethnic-majority young men. Thus, the Hell's Angels made a practice of flying "colors" while taking trips far from their residential neighborhood, the hippies congregated in a hedonistic mood in public areas, and middle-class suburban and small-town adolescents "raise hell" by traveling to other cities to vandalize property, play tricks on unsuspecting citizens, and commit property theft.¹⁴

ARISTOCRATS VERSUS RABBLE

In the ghetto, congregations of adolescents style themselves as elites; outside poor ethnic-minority communities, adolescents fashion deviant styles by dressing up as commoners, working-class militants, or members of a mass. The naming conventions that have been widely popular among ghetto fighting groups declare an inborn right or power to rule. Some track the status terms of ancient and medieval royalty and aristocracy: Lords, Nobles, Knights, Pharaohs, Kings, Emperors, Viceroys, Crusaders, and Dukes. Others pick up "classy" terms of style: Diplomats, Saints, and Savoyes. Another tradition of nomenclature ties ghetto youth to regal levels of the animal world: Lions, Eagles, Panthers, and Cobras. Still another points upward cosmologically, to Stars and Jets. Yet another turns toward the uppermost levels of the underworld: Satan's Angels and the Devil's Disciples.¹⁵

In contrast, the hippie styles of white middle-class youths were continuous, in such details as hair style and then in such broad themes as political sympathy, with a humbly named music group, the Beatles. More recently, the bands associated with the punk movement have provided a long list of symbols of low, disgusting, rejected, offensive, conventionally depreciated regions of experience.

The beatnik, hippie, and punk movements have all been distinguished by symbols of low social status. Hippies not only dressed in ways to suggest vagrancy, they developed a form of begging or panhandling as a characteristic street activity.¹⁶ The punk movement is the latest in a series of styles elaborated by white middle-class youths from those originated by British youth groups who were overtly and proudly working class. In Paris in the 1980s, casually destitute middle-class *poseurs* mixed with hard-core unemployed working-class youths around Les Halles.¹⁷

Jeans and a dishevelled look were de rigueur for hippies; punks, despite their pronounced antagonism to hippies, wore high boots associated with working-class occupations and clothes seemingly torn in a life of hard knocks. In contrast, for "bad" black ghetto adolescents, to look "clean" has long meant to look good. Oddly, ghetto adolescents dramatize deviance with a metaphor similar to the one that middle-class whites have long used to dramatize conventional or "straight" moral affiliations: looking "clean" and "sharp" (sometimes rendered as "keen") and "neat." Thus, at the time when hippies in Chicago's Lincoln Park were provoking public outrage with unkempt long hair and dirty clothes, a few miles south, across 63rd Street, a leader of the most feared "gang" of the day, the Blackstone Rangers, became furious on discovering that a shirt in his closet, recently retrieved from the cleaners, had been borrowed by a brother and now bore minor wrinkles.¹⁸

The more we focus on the symbolism used to make aristocratic status manifest, the more we illuminate aspects of deviance that have had a

distinctive appeal to street fighting groups. Eighteenth-century European aristocrats caked white powder on their faces to emphasize their social distance from field laborers, as if the sun cast an indelible moral stain on the humble classes who worked the soil. Today, barrio homeboys insist on daily rituals of washing and ironing that keep their undershirts brilliantly white and a super-sharp crease in their pants.¹⁹ In the early 1970s, members of fighting teams from Glasgow's poor areas often played soccer in the mud without changing out of the "Edwardian" suits they favored.

Dan McDade informed me, with admiration on his face, that Dick [the "King" of a large fighting "team"] would throw the suit away and change into another for the evening. The boys were unanimous in telling me that Dick always played while wearing a suit. In fact, once during the summer, he had "done his goalie" wearing a stolen mustard-coloured suede coat, "divin' intae the mud an' everythin'."²⁰

HORIZONTAL VERSUS VERTICAL DIRECTIONS OF HOSTILITY

White middle-class adolescents collectively form a deviance that reaches out horizontally to include peers in far-flung places in an antagonistic spirit that is directed upward in the social class and age structure. Their deviant movements tend to take on politically leftist themes, while ghetto fighting groups mobilize aggression primarily horizontally, against peers, and gravitate to the symbolism of right-wing political power.

Following in the legendary traditions of samurai in service to Japanese *daimyo*, criminal gangs bound to Chinese warlords, knights allied with European landlords, and the Mafia in Southern Italy, contemporary ghetto elites conduct violence as agents of aristocratic privilege devoted to the oppression of the poor who live in their neighborhoods. In contrast, portraits of adolescent deviance outside the ghetto typically show a solitary group directing its deviance against adult authority.²¹ Outside the ghetto, collective forms of youth deviance regularly turn into rebellion against police authority. Because of the way they dressed themselves and decorated their vehicles, marginal working-class, urban-based Hell's Angels, white Southern "rebels," and middle-class hot rodders have shared the similar, practical problem of police intervention, a ubiquitous contingency that makes driving an inevitably deviant affair.

In contrast, ghetto fighting groups, while enjoying moments of antagonism with the police, often appear remarkably indifferent to official, adult authority. Many autobiographies of ex-ghetto group fighters recall an informal understanding between the police and adolescents by which the police would stay on the sidelines as long as fighting remained among peers.²² Antigang activities by the police sometimes draw violent attacks from ghetto adolescents,²³ but such events are rare. Ghetto fighting groups

seem to be less inclined to attack the representatives of the power of the larger society in which they live than to act as if they live in a country that is foreign to and independent of the one the police represent.

Hippies and punks have been distinctively opposed to adult values, often scandalizing parents and generally promoting critiques of the adult value system. In contrast, while ghetto fighting groups are often abhorred by adults and members' parents in the ghettos, they ironically embrace adult values. Formally, insults to "mothers" frequently serve as the sensible way to begin fights. Perhaps especially in Hispanic ghetto areas, "wars" between adolescents representing different barrios are, in surface rhetoric at least, often understood as outgrowths of insults to family honor (for example, to protect a sister's reputation or avenge an attack on a brother).²⁴

A recent study of a violent youth group in an affluent white suburb of Chicago should, by way of contrast, bring into high relief the aristocratic airs that are distinctive to collective adolescent deviance in the ghetto. This group was that rare sociological find, an exception—a formally self-conscious, violent adolescent group in an upper-middle-class white area—that, in its inverted social patterns, demonstrates the rule in the relation of class and deviant form among adolescents.²⁵

First, the group's name: "the Losers." Minority-group youths from impoverished urban areas are delighted to identify with all manner of devil and beast, but affiliation with a deviant status on conventional *moral* standards is usually balanced by a simultaneous claim of superiority in *power and prestige*. Thus, a few years before the Losers were formed in one of the most affluent communities in the nation, a few miles to the southwest, in one of the poorest areas in the United States, the Vice Lords were battling the Spanish Counts. In naming themselves the Losers, working- and middle-class white adolescents in an affluent suburb were expressing a cynicism about adult values in a way that is anathema to minority fighting groups in poor areas. What was most peculiar for such a formally self-conscious, violent adolescent group was that there were no other "gangs" for the Losers to fight. When they spray painted "the Losers" on a railroad overpass, they were not challenging another gang's graffiti: theirs was the only tag in town. The thrust of their graffiti was, like the group's ironical name, directed against the town's self-concept as a community of "winners."

The Losers had a shifting core of ten to fifteen members, but, unlike many ghetto "clubs," there were no initiation rituals or membership formalities. As Gene Muehlbauer and Laura Dodder noted, "Michelle [one of the Losers] put it rather succinctly: 'As long as you were tough, and talked loud, and smoked a little pot or drank a little beer or were willing to try those things they'd accept you.'"²⁶ The Losers did not attempt to "run" or "own" a residential neighborhood. Like rockers at English seaside towns and *zonards* who congregate in the elegant renovated Forum des Halles in Paris,²⁷ the Losers provoked controversy by congregating on public prop-

erty, at the beach, and, especially, at the center of town. Identified first in the style of the hippies, the Losers socialized in the town square and in a park on a major street near the public library. Cruising to show off cars and to pick up girls was the initial attraction. Next, taunting shoppers, the police, and private guards at the center of town became fun. Finally, maneuvering around the police to mobilize parties at public beaches and parks became a focal activity.

Overall, the Losers were very much of the contemporary sociopolitical scene. Their dress and their battles against local authority tied them to the national youth movements against "the Establishment." When, after about six years, the Losers resorted to violence, it took the form not of attacks against neighboring peers but of firebombings of the cars of the chief of police and a vice-principal of the high school.

OPPOSING VERSUS TRANSCENDING AUTHORITY

Collective movements of deviance created by middle-class ethnic-majority adolescents are elaborated in opposition to conventional forms of authority. In the early 1970s, police resistance spurred the informal process of recruitment to antiwar protests, adding a political charm to the street display of such symbols of deviance as long hair and drug paraphernalia. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the punk scene in Los Angeles was at its height, the local periodical, *Slash*, regularly covered clashes with the police at punk clubs; its allegations of abusive police power were the most specific rallying cries of the movement's moral energies.

Innumerable dramas were played out when hippie and then punk students devised styles in clothing, cosmetics, and hair to ridicule the codes of school authorities. Particular movements have grown as their members locate and create juxtapositions to the elements of personal style that provide middle-class adults with the means of assuring themselves that their worlds are rationally ordered. Thus, at one historical moment or another, there may be a violation of all "neat" boundaries in personal dress and demeanor, a celebration of chaos in audible dimensions, a fervent commitment to protect the freedom to take gratuitous personal risks (for example, riding motorcycles without helmets or ingesting drugs without knowing what they contain), or a delighted confusion over gender.

In their posture, ghetto street elites stand independent of rational-legal authority, poised as aristocrats, as regal animals, as underworld creatures, or, in a recently popular style, as barbarians (Mongols, Nomads, Barbarians, and Outlaws). For details, members of street elites seem to draw on any bit of historical lore that recalls a pre-nineteenth-century elite. The ethnographer R. Lincoln Keiser noted that the list of original Vice Lords "reads something like the catalog of warriors in the *Iliad*."²⁸

For enemies, the Vice Lords found, among others, the Egyptian Cobras, a group that invoked not the Egypt of today but that of the pharaohs. *Con*

*safo*s, written on contemporary barrio walls as an omen to protect graffiti writing against future invaders, recreates the ancient institution of the curse. Mexican-American youths have innovated styles that conjure up long-moribund Mexican Indian civilizations; in Chicago in the 1950s, the first fighting groups formed under the rubric the "Sons of Azteca";²⁹ today's cholos favor bandana-headbands.

The charm that draws ghetto youths to imagine continuities with socially distant cultures is not simply the charm of the foreign. When black ghetto styles of deviance take on allusions to Africa, they are not to contemporary leaders dressed in Western styles, but to prehistoric or colonial images. In the United States, the famous picture of Black Panther leader Huey Newton, sitting in a naturally woven sedan chair, recalled African colonial rule; in black ghettos in Great Britain, dread locks call up the Rastafarian mystique, which professes a tie to peoples of ancient Ethiopia.³⁰ In cars, in styles of dress, in trends in music, the American ghetto adolescent is not particularly drawn to European models or futuristic images. The fascination is with being, by birth, the natural heir to an elite status.

Graffiti writers in East Los Angeles achieve a certain grace by writing "El" or "Sir" as a preface to their name. In this fashion, they are transformed from persons to personages, promoting an otherwise ordinary name to the stature of a title that can be treasured as a public testament to nobility.³¹ As was often the case among the small elites who were literate in pre-Enlightenment societies, the quality of the handwriting is the cardinal preoccupation of Mexican-American graffiti writers. "Chingaso" made the sociological connection explicit when he sensed the continuities with Mandarin calligraphy in East Los Angeles graffiti:

It's like the old Oriental cultures. If somebody was appointed to a government cabinet position, he not only had to be a big general, valiant at war, but he also had to write poetry. And he had to have a beautiful script, because you can tell a person's character by his script.³²

"Heart" is experienced specifically in relation to the modern rational definition of personal competence. It is displayed as an insistence on receiving respect, without weighing alternatives, envisioning consequences, or even systematically organizing the precise execution of a combative plan. This "heart" is not a sympathetic organ, and its logic is not a "reason," as Keiser's description illustrates:

A Cobra swung on one of the fellows, and he come down with his knife out. That means he's not scared to take that man's life if he wished to. That's what you call a lot of heart—not scared to go to jail and pay whatever the consequences is.³³

In Glasgow, being "gemma" ("game," as in "I'm game for anything.") has a meaning analogous to heart. "This is the mark of the 'gemme boay': someone who is ready to fight, whatever the odds, even if defeat or physical punishment is inevitable."³⁴

Heart often is identified with aristocratic stature in references to being "classy." A self-described barrio warrior who became an undergraduate at the University of Southern California (USC) recounted the challenge issued by Bruno, a "rich" Anglo USC football player, to Duke, a homeboy visiting the author in his dorm. Bruno said to Duke, "You think you're big shit! Well, I think I'm bigger. I challenge you to do the most craziest thing you can think of." Bruno threw a sofa out a window; then he took a knife and cut the rug, some walls, another student, finally himself. Duke retorted with an outrageous challenge of Russian Roulette: he would pull the trigger twice for each pull by Bruno. After the first round, "Suddenly, Duke began to go insane, he began yelling 'There's no need to fear, the Duke is here! Cha-haa-haa! Duke! Duke! Duke!'" Duke then pulled the trigger on himself three more times, gratuitously, but Bruno declined to continue. What is most revealing in this possibly embellished account is the author's interpretation of the moral of the tale: heart, not money or conventional social status, proves class:

The wild behavior of a mad football player was no match for the intrepidly courageous Homeboy element. The football player's madness is an academic act. For the Homeboy, barrio madness is a way of life. . . . The risks involved did not matter, rather what counted was one's courage, machismo and prestige of one's social status. The Homeboys had class, and they flamboyantly showed it to the USC crowd.³⁵

EMPHASIZING VERSUS OBSCURING GENDER DIFFERENCES

Whatever the realities of private relations between the sexes, the public life of the street elite expresses male dominance in an overt manner that further elaborates the group's claims to a privileged status. In contrast, whatever the reality of private relations, the public display of beat, hippie, and punk identities have been accomplished as much by females as by males. Gender distinctions in white middle-class movements of adolescent deviance are blurred by various means: in the hippie style, jeans and long hair for everyone; in the punk movement, makeup for males as well as females.

Females who are associated with street fighting groups are either kept apart or visibly kept down. Observers in several areas noted the practice of seclusion from women (New York in the 1950s)³⁶ and an absence of public socializing between the sexes (Chicago in the 1960s).³⁷ In the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, which was Italian in the 1950s, Harlan Ellison noted, "The female's position in the social structure of a street gang is cut

and dried. She is property."³⁸ In the East End of London, a couple of girls hung out around the original skinheads, but the boys, in their own retrospective accounts, were embarrassed to be seen with girls and treated them with snickering, lewd disrespect.³⁹ In Glasgow, physical intimacy through sex with females was explicitly regarded as inferior to intimate physical contact through fighting with other males:

Big Fry, the boy "wi' aw the answers", who was easily the most fluent and effusive member of the gang, described the sensation [of fighting] as follows: "See the feelin' in yir belly goin' intae battle, it's like the feelin' ye have when Rangers are attackin' the Celtic goal. Yir heart's racin', ye feel sick; it's better'n sex." The others agreed that gang fighting was what really mattered to them; sex came a poor second in their list of priorities.⁴⁰

Studies of female gangs have described a derivative status. After six years of observing gangs in Mexican-American communities in Los Angeles, Malcolm Klein concluded:

The female gang is smaller (from 5 to 25 members), less seriously delinquent, and less stable than its male counterpart. It forms in response to the male structure and dissolves as the boys' group loses cohesion.⁴¹

Anne Campbell summed up her ethnography of black and Puerto Rican girls in New York gangs as follows:

As they assume a more three-dimensional representation [than they had in previous studies], girls appear increasingly as sisters in the gang instead of as molls. But it cannot be said that their roles have altered substantially. They exist as an annex to the male gang, and the range of possibilities open to them is dictated and controlled by the boys. Within the gang, there are still "good girls" and "bad girls," tomboys and fallen women. Girls are told how to dress, are allowed to fight, and are encouraged to be good mothers and faithful wives. Their principal source of suffering and joy is their men. And though the girls may occasionally defy them, often argue with them, and sometimes patronize them, the men remain indisputably in control.⁴²

In the culture of street elites, sharply contrasting gender styles are common, such as the contemporary cholo in khakis, hair combed straight back, with a bandana sweat band and the chola, with creased levis, halter top, up to three pairs of false eyelashes, and white eyeshadow.⁴³ Street elites have, at times, adopted sartorial styles shared by males and females (jeans and denim or leather jackets displaying a club insignia). But other features of the group indicate that similarity should be read not as equality of the

sexes but as the females' imitation of the males' style. As Suttles noted about the differences in the dress of inner-city youths as a whole: "The males show much greater differentiation in their apparel. They seem the primary bearers of those emblems of clothing that express ethnic differences and it is among them that examples of this differentiation are most apparent."⁴⁴

SPECIFYING AGE COHORTS WITHOUT TEMPORAL REFERENCE

Middle- and working-class styles of deviance among ethnic-majority youths tend to blur age differences within an emphasized period of adolescence. Hippie, biker or rocker, and punk styles may be picked up by youths aged 12 to 20 with roughly equal ease. In contrast, running across ethnically, geographically, and historically separate ghetto fighting groups is the pattern of formalizing short age cohorts into separate subgroups, while formally negating the use of age as the criterion.

Thus, "cliques" (usually pronounced in a way that, like a finger snap, audibly suggests disciplined unity, as "clicks" or in Mexican-American groups, "klikas") of about two-year age spans are formalized almost universally. As Horowitz observed in one of the large major Mexican-American neighborhoods in Chicago:

There are eight major gangs in the area, each of which is segmented by age: miniatures (ages eleven to twelve), midgets (thirteen to fourteen), littles (fifteen to seventeen), juniors (eighteen to twenty-one), and seniors (twenty-one and over).⁴⁵

Frias, a barrio warrior from East Los Angeles whose clique was Los Pequeños, realized on entering high school in the tenth grade that he did not know the homeboys from his barrio, Los Chicos, who were in the upper grades. Keiser charted the age divisions in numerous neighborhood groups of Vice Lords in Chicago in the 1960s and found "Seniors, Juniors, Midgets, in some even Pee Wees."⁴⁶

That street-fighting groups organize the social relations of members around short age cohorts has been almost universally recognized by researchers on gangs. What has not been sufficiently appreciated is the special appearance that members create for the criterion of age. Urban lower-class fighting gangs convert the time metaphor in age into some other metaphor—most typically one of physical size or institutional tenure—which avoids the direct assertion of differences in chronological age. In any institutional framework, "Veterans" are usually older than "Seniors," who are usually older than "Juniors," but not necessarily so in the gang. "Dukes," "Counts," and "Cyclones" have no necessary age ordering. Princes may be older than Kings. Barrio cliques are known by a variety of

terms that refer to small stature rather than to young age: los tynies, los enanos (dwarfs, midgets), los pequeños, los chicos, and los cherries.⁴⁷

Violence and the Generation of Dread

Our problem is the recurrent involvement of American and British youths in groups that sustain terrifying claims to dominate urban areas. The first condition for such a group is the detailing of an elitist posture. The street elite saunters onto neighborhood streets in the posture of an aristocratic group of males who rule local landmarks, in opposition to similarly postured neighboring groups, on the basis of a power that transcends the demands of rational authority.

Violence is the second condition, and the deepest challenge to which it responds arises not from other youth groups but from internal moral dangers. Violence is essential so that membership may have a seductively glorious, rather than a mundane, indifferent, significance.

Combative adolescents and middle-class observers generally agree that the evil specter of "gang organization" is responsive to antecedent, independently existing, terrible realities. In the fearsome inner city, it is practically useful, at times essential, to walk on the streets with an aristocratic bearing that supports a self-confident association with terrible power. It would then only be prudent to maintain the social principles of primary loyalty to mates who reside in close proximity.

But not all young men in the ghetto are members of fighting groups. And even if those outside the fighting groups are sometimes subject to harassment, the hyperbole that membership is necessary for "survival" does sociological understanding a grave disservice. Adolescent street warriors must continuously prove the enormity of the dangers they face. In effect, they work together to provoke fights and create a culture of violence that sustains the image that "it's a jungle out there," that those are "mean streets," that everytime they step out of their homes they are on a "battlefield."⁴⁸

The economic and emotional realities of contemporary ghettos may be terrible, but the violence to which adolescent fighting groups primarily respond is not that of muggers, rapists, child abusers, robbers, or desperate drug addicts; it is the violence of other adolescent ghetto fighting groups. The violent threat and the militaristic response exist in the same social circle. In a usually implicit, cooperative manner, adolescent street elites collectively sustain antagonistic relations in which each effectively causes the other's existence. Street elites are collective phenomena in a double sense: as multimember, self-conscious, symbolically formal entities and as

groups whose *raison d'être* depends on the existence of structurally similar oppositional groups.

To understand the violence of street elites, I suggest that we turn the folk perspective around. We will then see that the violence of these groups does not necessarily follow from the nature of the ghetto as an oppressive social background; rather, groups must use violence to create an oppressive background if they are to bring into relief their effective presence as an elite on city streets. For without the violence, would-be street elites would appear to be bound to the social world of childhood.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE MAGIC OF VIOLENCE

Just at the time in life when many middle-class white American adolescents are drawn to deviant movements that obscure their social-class and neighborhood origins, transcend narrow age grades, break down sex segregation, and replace the heroic, fantastic caricatures of childhood play with contemporary symbols of political and social class struggle, groups of street fighters are cooperating to create a world of deviance in which sticking close to home (being homeboys),⁴⁹ identifying with the primary family (fighting to avenge an attack on a brother or a disparaging remark about a sister's morality), hanging out with peers of the same sex and age cliques, and adorning the self with images of fearful power first encountered in childhood fables (vampires, black widow spiders, skulls, serpents, and dragons), will be matters of awesome struggle and heroic loyalty.⁵⁰ In essence, the violence of street elites does the double service of transforming into an awesome presence what might otherwise appear to be the social structure and culture of childhood, and intimidating awareness of the transformation.⁵¹

One who adopts the adolescent ghetto posture of an elite who wields the powers of terror, without backing it with material violence, risks humiliation. Preadolescents in ghetto areas are often ridiculed for imitating the terrifying flourishes of comic-book toughs. From his youth in Pittsburgh, John Wideman recalled that when his brother, Robby, began hanging out with tough friends, their father would ridicule Robby as "Sluggo."⁵² A student in a continuation school in East Los Angeles was aware that

when we wear kakis or cuffed levis with a pendleton shirt or a tee-shirts and spit shine shoes most of the teachers laugh at us and say thing like, "Oh Tommy, you look like a wino or a killer."⁵³

In high schools in East Los Angeles, "wanabe," a noun created by merging "want to be," is used, among other things, to deride recent immigrants who have only begun to take on aspects of the cholo/chola look.⁵⁴ Among graffiti writers in New York,

use of the word *toy* in reference to an experienced writer is considered to be a powerful denunciation, and it is used in face-to-face confrontations with experienced writers only in anticipation of an argument or a fight.⁵⁵

An ex-skinhead, encountering young skinhead types on London streets, recalled his own painful apprehension of ridicule:

When a younger kid of say fifteen "screws" you in the street. . . . You don't really know what to do. . . . Sometimes you turn away but are embarrassed, but you would be even more embarrassed if you continued looking at them and the little kid ended up kicking you or something. . . . Maybe the best thing to do is just to smile; we can laugh at them, mainly because we were like them when we were their age. You have to laugh at them, the same as people laughed at us when we were fifteen.⁵⁶

By overwriting the principles of childhood socialization in blood, violence transforms the limitations of the social worlds of adolescent street elites into boundaries that are consecrated in meanness. The Sandman, a figure from the folklore of childhood, becomes an ominous name in the South Bronx when the violent activities of those who wear Sandman colors give "putting to sleep" the awesome meaning made famous in old gangster movies. Violence brings comic-book symbolism to life: Manny Torres stated that the most feared member of the Bishops (a New York gang of the 1950s) was Batman, who wore a cape and "was a stone-cold killer" at age 14; once, Batman murdered a youth by shotgun because he assumed the youth was out to get him.⁵⁷ Violence makes the liberty to cross a street—an early parental acknowledgment of the child's developing competence—a proof of manhood. Sticking close to the neighborhood, a parental restraint on the young child, becomes a matter of pride. The Sex Boys, who took their name, in part, from Essex Street, could brag, "We walk all over East New York—everywhere"; because of intergroup violence, a small section of Brooklyn may be spoken of without pause as "everywhere." Degrees of "badness" show bravado and are measured with the handy, local geographic metaphor; people call the Bikers the "baddest," but, bragged Big L, the Sex Boys are badder because they go into the Bikers' turf but the Bikers will not go into the Sex Boys' turf.⁵⁸

The passive fact of living around the primary family home, just being there, may be treated as a heroic feat of "surviving" once intergroup "warfare" has become sufficiently impressive. The protagonist in a video focused on Las Sesentas, a Mexican-American barrio fighting group, introduced the viewer to his world with, "only the fast people survive. . . . this isn't Alameda, Hayward, San Leandro. . . . It's East Oakland." That East Oakland is the measure of the dangers of the larger world would surely

be contested by warriors from distant barrios, such as Ruben: "East Los Angeles is the baddest area around—in all of California."⁵⁹

Occasionally, particular incidents will illustrate directly the significance of group violence for transcending humiliating treatment that dismisses the street elite's arrogant, evil posture as childish. The following murder by Chicago Vice Lords was described similarly in two ethnographic interviews, in widespread newspaper coverage, and in judicial proceedings. Keiser's account was as follows:

One night we was coming from the Golden Dome. The papers said there were thirteen, but they only busted thirteen. They questioned everybody that was there, but they let me go. What happened, we asked this man for a nickel or a dime or something—and he got smart. This fool ["The Fool"], Wine, asked the man for a nickel. And he answered, "I ain't got no nickel."

Wine said, "You're going to have to give me a nickel!"

The stud said, "I'm not your daddy!"

The fool ["The Fool"], Wine, said, "I know you're not my father!"

And Bull, he hit the man and knocked him down. The man tried to get back up. He was a judo expert. When he got back up again, I guess he was trying to get into position, and somebody hit him again. Boom! He went down. The poor soul, that's the last time he ever stood up . . . they stomped him to death. I forgot if he was dead on arrival or not.⁶⁰

VIOLENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY

In that incident, violence was used to overturn an attempt to ridicule evil pretensions as childish; the victim's "I'm not your daddy," which implied that despite his physically intimidating gestures, Wine was presenting himself as a child (perhaps an illegitimate child in search of his father), was catalytic. But other details of this incident are also significant.

Note just how the money was demanded. Surely, the killing cannot be understood simply as a response to poverty. If acquiring money was the object, why ask only for a nickel? Had a nickel been given, it is unlikely that the drama would have ended. But if more would have been demanded, why not simply ask immediately for all the passerby possessed? Why not conduct the encounter straightforwardly as a robbery? The Fool was employing a familiar gambit of street humiliation: to ask for a minimal sum and, if acquiescence is forthcoming, to keep raising the demand in small increments until the victim must realize he is being robbed.

Although the ending is unusual, this incident began with a device commonly used by street elites to make literal the symbolic demand that is implicit in their posture as a whole—that tribute be paid. The insistence is for a monetary token of respect in the form of a toll imposed for passage through their territory. The collection of such payments indicates the

presence of a ruling regime. These tokens will not enrich those who collect them, but they will attest to their sovereign control.

When a quarter is demanded of an unaffiliated student in a "gang-controlled" high school, it is the metaphor, not the money that is irresistible. In an Orange County, California, continuation school, Juan bragged that when he is with his barrio homeboys, others "treat us like if we're big shit. Man, we even take money away from some of them."⁶¹ The threat of violence explodes small change into big shit. As a way of dramatizing that it is "their park," a group of Los Angeles cholos approached a picnicking priest dressed in street clothes and "asked" for drinks from the provisions he had assembled on his blanket in a tone indicating that their concern was moral satisfaction, not thirst.⁶²

For the members of urban street elites, violence has the instrumental value of stimulating metaphors that make the group a real presence as a militant force of sovereign rulers. In neighborhoods where graffiti or the wearing of group "colors" has suggested that militant collective organizations are about, a relatively few incidents of violence can suddenly conjure up the metaphor of "gang warfare." In the context of militarized tensions, the associational principles of the adolescent street elite—loyalty to mates, an exclusive male society, close ties to a home base, fantastic inspirational symbols, and internal differentiation by length of tenure—become the sturdy framework of a manly social order.

Group members and the metropolitan press alike are charmed by the military metaphor. Much attention is given to the display of "weapons," a category that, in the context of the gang, includes everyday implements, such as hammers and kitchen knives; a collection of such "weapons" is known as an "arsenal." In black and Puerto Rican areas, particular members have been known as "war counselor" or "sergeant at arms" or "minister of defense." Within the context of gang "warfare," a girl who is known to "sleep with" (perhaps just date) members of two rival gangs may be regarded as involved in a "spy/counter-spy" intrigue.⁶³ Outsiders may be issued passports for visits to the neighborhood, as was a journalist who was granted safe passage into the headquarters of the Blackstone Rangers on the basis of a napkin signed "Fox [,] Black (P) Stone 21."⁶⁴ In group settings, wounds are often exhibited and discussed as "battle scars." The crossing of a neighborhood boundary may be readily referred to as an "invasion." Much discussion may be given to military tactics, such as Who should "attack" first and with what "weapons"? If they come first, which way will they approach? Should we try an "ambush"? It follows naturally that gang "wars" may be avoided or ended with "peace talks."

Military-like uniforms are also commonly attractive, although the style, again, suggests not the drab, dull, anonymous uniformity of modern working-class or peasant armies outfitted in khaki greens or plain ("Red" Chinese) jackets, but the flamboyant, colorful, personality-expressive uniforms of royal guards. "Colors" may be sported on handkerchiefs or

bandanas in a touch that suggests Indians fighting as renegades against the domesticating forces of modern civilization. If feathered plumes are not worn on hats in a style reminiscent of ancient helmets, they might be carried in the design of birds of prey painted or sewn on the backs of group jackets.⁶⁵

Turf wars, which might, in the childhood analogy, suggest king-of-the-hill play, take on dimensions of political seriousness when they become part of wider claims to symbols of sovereignty. In the sixties and early seventies, in southside and westside Chicago, the most famous adolescent fighting groups boasted of multiple, allied subgroups joined together in transcendent "nations," as in the Black P. Stone Nation, or, only slightly more modestly, in their own "city." As Cupid explained in his interview with R. Lincoln Keiser:

You was out there. You was holding that street twenty-four hours a day. And you just had to constantly fight life and death out there. Lots of times the police even threatened us. . . . We was a little city. That's why they called it Vice Lord City.⁶⁶

These claims of sovereign rule achieve an especially compelling, glorious ring. To be a "nation" in the primordial sense is to have, in addition to a territorial claim, a collective, ethnically distinctive character. The cultural dimension of nation is achieved through various flamboyant styles: berets and headbands, symbols drawn on or woven into jackets, nonconventional boots and gloves, and so forth. In some Mexican-American communities, adolescents do not treat their barrio just as a neighborhood. With the loyalty due a national homeland, they self-consciously continue elements of the styles associated with prior generations of barrio adolescents, for example, by drinking the same brand of beer as did the defenders of their barrio's pride in previous decades.⁶⁷

By linking their street styles to violent claims over turf, ghetto adolescents avoid another risk of ethnic nations, becoming patronized as a quaint subculture, which occurred for a short while in the 1980s with break dancing, until street gangs began adopting this art form as they had previously adopted graffiti writing, to promote conflict with rival groups. Despite its culturally creative and traditional elements of dress, street talk, and "stroll," the barrio warrior style is not likely to be celebrated along with mariachis, hat dances, and fiesta costumes in the civic center on the Cinco de Mayo in Los Angeles. Nor is it likely that the distinctive esthetics of black ghetto gangs will be celebrated along with gospel singing, inspirational preaching, and myths recalling the African heritage on Martin Luther King, Jr., Day.

Street elites use violence innovatively to elaborate the theme of sovereignty. It is as if a member grasps one or another of the array of activities

that nations characteristically perform and, with friends, brings the metaphor to life with the creative magic of violence. Consider initiation ceremonies, for example. Although initiation ceremonies are not universal features, many fighting groups of ghetto adolescents have found them attractive over the years. In contemporary Mexican-American barrios, they commonly take the form of brief, casually arranged episodes of submission to group fist pounding. On the East Coast among white ethnics in the fifties and among Puerto Ricans in the sixties, initiation procedures were described as formalized, elaborate, painful, and terrifying. They are rarely mentioned in the ethnographies of black urban gangs of the sixties. When they are performed, initiation rituals most directly work like a metaphysical immigration ceremony, granting membership in an ontologically higher order.

"Council" meetings may be held with fastidious trappings of diplomacy. Enemy groups at times send reciprocal feelers through emissaries who set up meetings of rival leaders with all the gravity of summit sessions held by chiefs of great nations. Particular sites in no-man's land, such as movie theaters, public schools, and athletic clubs, are discussed as locations that one or another group "has," "controls," or "runs," even though neither group collects the box office receipts, shapes the curriculum, or hires the club's staff. But then, conquering armies of real nations likewise capture hills, fields, regions, and whole countries from enemies, and all may understand that the area has been "taken," even though the only control exercised by the victor is to exclude the rival army. A member of the Vice Lords put it this way:

Our motivation was to be the baddest, toughest, roughest gangbanger, or streetfighter, and what showed a cat was powerful was turf. We needed land to establish our identity and we really didn't own land. But we thought this was ours and we paraded the streets and occupied certain corners. . . . Or you would tell a cat, "Well, dig, man, I want the movie." He say, "I ain't gonna give it to you. If you gonna take it, I'll be at the show next Sunday." That's an automatic challenge, so next Sunday whoever runs whoever out of there runs the movie. Then the word spreads that so-and-so took the show from so-and-so. Next you take the swimming pool, then the park, then two blocks, three blocks, until he doesn't have any territory at all. The only thing left for him to do is to become a member or move out of the area.⁶⁸

Like flags staked to mark territorial boundaries, the graffiti of ghetto adolescents lay claims to sovereignty. On the wall of a West side high school is written, "Vice Lords Run It." On a highway overpass in East Los Angeles is scrawled, *Hoyo Maravilla Rifa* [rule]. In the bathroom of a Glasgow pub frequented by the Young Team is a notice:

Wild
Young
Catholic
Team
Rules
O.K.⁶⁹

The violence of ghetto adolescents has frequently succeeded not only in channeling the movements of adolescents but also in shaping the ways in which social workers, sociologists, and even the police conduct their activities. The police officers who, through effective "intelligence gathering," incarcerated numerous leaders of an infamous gang center in the South Bronx were careful to knock on the clubhouse door and wait to be admitted: "We'd knock on the door and announce ourselves. They appreciated that touch of formality—it showed respect."⁷⁰ Group members may rejoice in the recognition that gang "intelligence" squads have attempted to trace their domains, even to the point of offering to "correct" the lines drawn on police maps. With task forces and spy activities, police departments—big groups of serious, tough-looking, gun-bearing, flesh-and-blood adult men—organize their work lives along units that are dictated, in effect, by metaphors designed by the ghetto's adolescents. What greater proof of sovereignty than the ability to draw official maps of urban geography?⁷¹

Despite the sometimes desperate poverty of the citizens of these adolescent ghetto "nations," despite their inability to shape the lives of non-adolescent local residents, despite the irrelevance of their violence for any voting or economic franchise of their own, their violence routinely suffices so that members take for granted claims that the groups "control" or even "own" their neighborhoods. Nations, after all, need not engage in any particular business or practically intervene in the lives of most citizens. But if they are recognized as possessing territory, if they successfully defend their claims to turf, nations have a sovereign existence.

VIOLENCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF DREAD

In the hands of adolescent street elites, violence has a constructive power sufficient (1) to transform the significance of their principles of association from demeaning indications of childhood to the social requirements for glorious combat, (2) to establish a metaphor of sovereignty respected by peers, observed by the police, and duly reported by the mass media, and (3) most essentially, to sustain the claim of elite status in an aura of dread. It should be emphasized here that these are not unwitting consequences but tacitly understood themes. Ghetto adolescents know that if they are to rule their streets as an elite, they must do so by dread. Violence is but one means of conjuring up dread.

Group names imply an elite whose authority may be questioned only

with dreadful results. In the 1960s, in Chicago, the Vice Lords epitomized the combination of aristocratic and evil themes that are distinctive of adolescent fighting groups. These naming conventions continue long-standing patterns. Commenting on the European-immigrant "gangs" of 1920s Chicago, Thrasher noted an order of grandiose, "high-sounding" names like "Golden Palace Athletic Club," and an order of "names suggesting murder, blood, banditry, and piracy. . . . 'The Vultures,' the 'Forty Thieves,' the 'Murderers,' . . . [the members of which] get a great 'kick' out of feeling how diabolical they are and, hence, how superior to the world at large."⁷² Likewise, the "detached" social workers who were assigned to New York City street gangs in the 1950s found names of "conflict gangs" that tracked neighborhoods, reflected high statuses, or symbolized evil personages (such as the Daggers, the Stompers, and the Killers).⁷³

Group names are only the most obvious indicators of an effort to generate dread behind an elitist stance. George, the leader of the Reapers in the famous "Fort Apache" area of the South Bronx in the early 1970s, added a sartorial detail to this theme by carrying a mahogany cane that concealed a sword—a touch of class covering a terrible, hidden power.⁷⁴ In an ethnically mixed, poor and working-class area of Chicago in the early 1960s, a group of Mexican-American youths who "openly embraced the stance of a fighting group," made up cards that "introduced them as the 'Fabulous Taylor Barracudas.'"⁷⁵ Given the then-popular television show, *Paladin*, whose main character identified himself to strangers with the calling card, "Have Gun Will Travel," this device reflected the calling card of an aristocratic cowboy-knight. At about the same time, in the deepest West Side poverty area, the Vice Lords wore black capes with gold lettering and earrings; using a top hat, canes, and gloves, they created a logo worthy of a collaboration between Noel Coward and the devil. Their canes were arranged to spell out CVL (for Conservative Vice Lords); the top hat was set on a skeleton's head that hovered over a bow tie; and, in the middle of the skull, was a cigarette holder and a stream of exhaled smoke.⁷⁶

Unlike black and Puerto Rican groups in the Midwest and on the East Coast, Mexican-American barrio warriors have not often shown commitments to these themes in their collective names. Nevertheless, both themes have been elaborated in their symbolic world. On the West Coast, for example, the conquistador/devil style of facial hair is popular; in this style, a triangular mini-beard is maintained under the lower lip, sometimes framed, with allusions to myths of Mexican outlaws and a "bad" oriental image, by narrow mustache lines running from the nose to the chin. In chapter 3, I noted the aristocratic squat and related manifestations of the proud, down-the-nose posture of the "bad" barrio youth culture. One more detail is: instead of the leather jackets and embroidered sweaters associated with East Coast youth gangs of the 1950s, West Coast barrio warriors (and some black groups as well) use the strikingly simple sartorial

device of an upturned bill on a cap to signify membership in a "bad" group. The barrio name is commonly painted on the underside of the brim, and circular letters in the barrio's name frequently are drawn and punctuated to suggest eyes. When turned up, the bill of the cap has the "bad" youth peering down on passers-by with a collective identity drawn from underneath. And if there is no "evil" image in the barrio's name, the members wear, as a substitute, colorfully painted T-shirts showing vampires with mouths dripping blood over the legend, Dracula; devils grinning sadistically while slaughtering pathetic victims; and self-portraits of the wearers engaged as terrifying superheros brutally beating down enemies of inferior stature.⁷⁷ The symbolism of that eternal aristocrat of evil, Count Dracula, is commonly embraced by contemporary cholos.

I suggest that adolescent fighting groups find violence compellingly attractive as a means of sustaining the aura of dread that is an essential element in their project of elite rule. From the vignettes of intergroup violence by detached social workers in the 1950s to the more detailed accounts in recent ethnographies, a number of catalytic scenes and provocative actions continuously reappear. The peculiar contingencies of violence between street elites are situational opportunities to construct dread.

In her observational study of fighting groups in Mexican-American barrios in Chicago, Ruth Horowitz gave an example of the instigation of conflict through one group's seizure of an irresistible opportunity for provocative behavior toward an "enemy" group. The Dukes and Lions spoke of each other as opposed groups, but, as Horowitz observed, "Lions from 32nd Street frequently visited relatives on 40th Street, where several rival gangs were located, with no trepidation." But when a Lion took possession of a Duke's sweater, even though it was by chance discovery in the park, keeping the sweater became an irresistible and a fateful act that, the Lions assumed, meant that they could not longer enter the Dukes' territory with nonchalance. As a Lion said:

If we go wandering around 40th Street then the Dukes know that we're out looking for them and we got to be careful 'cause its dangerous and we're likely to get shot at. They know who we are and they don't like us 'cause we got one of their sweaters.⁷⁸

Note that the passive act by the Lions of retaining possession of the Dukes' sweater created an aura of dread, first for the Lions themselves. Perhaps the Dukes also realized that intergroup relations had become deadly serious or perhaps not. But the theft of the sweater instantly and naturally made the Lions' otherwise mundane movements through neighborhoods into arrogant acts of aristocratic conquerors. For the Lions, holding onto the sweater brought to life the portentous metaphor of sovereignty. The sweater became a flag and its possession, a declaration of war. The Lions

understood that nations at peace may freely allow border crossings by each other's citizens, but when they are "at war," border crossings, if not challenged with at least an inquiry about one's national identity, undermine claims of sovereignty.

If they often plead self-defense as a motive for interrogating outsiders, in their own culture, members of street elites not only recognize but celebrate the willful generation of dreadful tensions with other groups. In Glasgow's fighting "teams," members use "puttin' the mix in" as "their expression for contriving a quarrel where none existed."⁷⁹ In Southern California barrios, there are reliable methods for acquiring the awesome status of a "psyco" [*sic*] or *vato loco*. In graffiti, for example,

the crossing out of a barrio's sign and gang members' names can lead to violent upheavals and confrontations, resulting many times in death for those individuals who dared cross-out their opponents' barrio's name and/or persons' names. Any person who crosses out another barrio's name or gang member's names and who identifies himself by writing his name and his barrio on that same wall is a courageous example of a *vato loco* who does not care what happens to him if the gang members he crossed out are out to get him.⁸⁰

Perhaps, somewhere lurking behind the violence of street elites, there are pathetic, negative conditions: an anticipatory fear of failure in adult careers, resentment over social or racial injustice, irrational and short-sighted lower-class values, and so forth. But what is visible in the process of generating violence is a positive relish, even to the point of self-destruction. The sweater of the rival group is retained and the insulting graffiti is signed, *in spite of* the prediction of a violent response. In Glasgow, "Big Sick" was on trial for using a razor to slash. As Patrick noted, "the case for the defence collapsed . . . when Big Sick boasted in the witness box that the attack was 'the biggest rippin' Ah've done.'"⁸¹ The delight in violence is disastrous from the perspective of defense but irresistible for constructing dread.

Perhaps fatal conflicts resulting from a "stolen" sweater or the writing on a wall of one group's name over another's—not to mention a craftsman-like pride in knifing a victim—indicate psychological pathology. Indeed, even the adolescents involved may label the provocateur as "Fool," a "vato loco," or "Big Sick." But, from Los Angeles to New York to Glasgow, graffiti on walls attest to the *collective* celebration of the acts of the *vato loco*, the "psyco," the group that has been accorded a reputation as "mental." Although the point may be made less routinely in real blood than in red paint dripping from the mouth of a vampire on a T-shirt, the point is the same. To rule the streets as an elite, arrogantly, as if with an inborn right to rule, the youth group understands it must rule by dread.

Evoking the Spirit of Street Elites

My subject throughout this volume is the lived experience of criminality, in this instance, being in a group that sustains terrifying claims to dominate an urban area. "Being in" this world of experience is not simply a matter of detailing a posture and using violence to raise the specter of terror. It is also a contingent sensual involvement.

Ethnographic research on gangs reveals several recurrent processes of involvement. Each is a way of dramatizing the gang member's project of moving, in a self-respectful, practically successful manner, from the "here" of his small, subjectively familiar social world into a vaguely apprehended, broader, more anonymous society that the adolescent experiences as a challenging presence somewhere out "there." By evoking this transcendence on the field of an immediate social situation, members lend the group significance as a means of exploring feelings on an irresistibly compelling dimension from pride to humiliation.

COLLECTIVE ARRANGEMENT OF SPONTANEOUS VIOLENCE

Occasionally, the tacit cooperation underlying the violence of street elites comes to the surface. Recalling his research in the 1960s with Fred Strotbeck on Chicago's black West Side, James Short gave a memorable example.⁸² A newly formed black gang in a housing project attempted to stimulate the reorganization of the Egyptian Cobras, another black group that was virtually defunct. The aggressive group was intent on provocation, despite the lack of insults and harms to redress; they sought conflict with the Cobras because the latter, although inactive as a fighting gang for several months, still had a formidable "rep."

Reviewing social workers' field notes from New York City in the 1950s, Irving Spergel was exceptionally clear on the self-conscious maintenance of hostilities between conflict groups:

It was also important to guard against conditions which might destroy opportunities to have gang fights. Bobby said, "It was best if the Noble Lords didn't go to the Regal's territory or the Regals to the Noble Lord's territory, otherwise we would get to know each other and become too friendly, and then it would be hard to bop."⁸³

More commonly, an artificial origin of intergroup conflict is indicated by the ritual invocation of hollow insults. As Spergel illustrated:

Pro forma, Brave Eagle, a Regal who was tiring of the month-long peace, went over to Lucy, the girlfriend of Flash Gordon, one of the leaders of

the Noble Lords, at the community-center dance, and said loudly so that all those nearby could hear, 'You're getting fat, honey. Flash must be f—g you too much.' The Noble Lord-Regal conflict broke out again the following day.⁸⁴

Similarly, in East London in the early 1970s, the original skinheads were often "searching out provocative situations, looking for 'aggro.'" ⁸⁵

For one's provocation of others to become their provocation of oneself, some magic must be worked. One must simultaneously do the dualistic work of manufacturing an irritation of others and not experiencing the resulting tension as one's artifact. In part, the fascination with posturing as a member of a street elite consists of experiencing this magical generation of malevolent action. An alumnus of the skinheads reminisced: "We only 'it' people for reasons, didn't we? . . . like if they looked at us."⁸⁶ With friends, you generate a terrifying style, then take it to the street. When others curiously take note, you experience "aggro"; suddenly, "they" are "screwing" you. Suddenly, the otherwise mundane phenomena of behavior in public are transformed into the stuff of mortal challenge.⁸⁷

Between predatory inclination and the practice of violence, there is an intermediary process in which the responsibility for the attack is transferred to the other side. The youths' collective creation suddenly takes on a spontaneous, independent life. Such a process is both logically absurd and experientially real.

Dances at clubs or parties, encounters in school corridors, and in bars (in Britain more than in the United States) have frequently been reported as the sites of intergroup violence.⁸⁸ The casual settings that bring members of different street elites together are fertile for conflict because the opportunity for elaborating a dreadful aura is exceptionally tempting and in crowded contexts, the collective arrangement of spontaneous violence is geometrically facilitated. To each locally styled elite, these places represent a social world that exists out "there," at a distance from the home base. As such, they are especially salient to the transcendent project of street elites.⁸⁹ When the public character of a setting attracts numerous members to strut about in the guise of rulers of the scene, the line between intentional offense and "accidental" bumps may suddenly vanish in any number of chance encounters.

Gang violence has often been attributed to overblown commitments to traditions of honor and revenge, especially among the latest ethnic representatives of this social problem in urban America, Hispanics.⁹⁰ But insults to family need not be either delivered or received with passion to be treated by fighters as determining causes. What is essential for a compelling involvement is that one group challenge the seriousness of another's elitist pretensions. And this challenge may be accomplished as a simple extension of the posture of arrogant domination. After all, one of the prerogatives of an inviolable elite is to deliver insults to subordinates

as the spirit moves them, without regard to such petty matters as valid foundation.

Once received, however, an insult must be treated as an offense to honor or else the target group will have acknowledged that it cannot sustain an aura of dread. Thus, systems of honor may appear to move enemy groups into real combat, even though the insults may be collectively understood to be artificial. That the insulting party may not know the sister said to be a whore or that the braggart is obviously inventing his liaisons with the insulted party's mother (who may not even be alive) makes no difference.⁹¹ Everyone understands the message that cannot be dismissed: "We're not taking you seriously; we regard you as punks. Prove you mean it by being mean" ("it" being all those pretensions you convey in your talk, walk and dress). At the extreme, there need be no insult at all; a mere "bad look" can puncture another group's pretensions, unless the other group strikes back, as the following account indicates:

Badman of the Clowns was famous for the manner in which he could look over the enemy. A dirty look from Badman was the equivalent of a slap in the face or a stab in the heart. One evening he was given a work assignment of helping collect tickets to a club dance at the door of his lounge. Several younger members and the president of an opposing group entered to go to the dance. They handed their tickets to Badman. Slowly he accepted their tickets, tore them in half, returned them to the boys, looked them up and down, turned his nose away, and indicated they should enter. The group was furious. Although this incident seems trivial, four youngsters lost their lives over a period of two years, and at least 20 were imprisoned as a result of a gang fight which ensued.⁹²

Once an attack by another group becomes public knowledge, a failure to respond threatens to make retrospectively ridiculous the pretensions of all in the attacked group. Members of the attacked group who are related to or friends with the victim are expected to effect the revenge; if they refuse, they may face more danger from within the group than from outside it.⁹³ At this point, the history of posturing arrogance by the attacked group suddenly becomes a heavy commitment. What had been playfully under the group's control is now out of its hands; the group may no longer determine unilaterally to back off because other elite-styled groups see a prize in its defeat. Whether it delivers or receives the first blow, it has become controlled by its own symbolism.⁹⁴

Virtually all ethnographies of street violence among adolescent elites describe fights generated by interrogations or spontaneous declarations of group membership on public streets. Manny Torres's account of his adolescence in New York City's Spanish Harlem, recounts how Manny woke up in the hospital after miscalculating the audience for his shout of bravado one afternoon in a movie theater, "Young Star Here!"⁹⁵ In Glasgow,

fights would often start as quick responses to the simple question, here asked by Big Dave of a boy he happened to meet: "Who rules? Whit team are ye in?"⁹⁶ And Keiser reported the dramatic way in which the Vice Lords occasionally announced their presence:

There weren't but two of us—me and Ringo. So Ringo, he yells, "We're Vice Lords, mighty Vice Lords!" He yelling to a man coming up the street. This stud said, "Well, you all Vice Lords, huh!?" We said, "Yeah!" And by the time he was reaching for his back pocket . . . I guess he didn't get out what he wanted to get out before I got what I got out. I shot him in the leg or foot or something, and he ran down the street . . . hollering like a dog! I don't even know if he a Cobra, but it was in the Cobra's hood.⁹⁷

Note that no insult was stated in these incidents. The violent response did not redress an attack on personal, family, or group honor in any conventional sense. What was being formally stated was a simple question or fact of membership. What was being enthusiastically declared was dominance of the streets. What was being conveyed was not an insult but a dare. To one who has been strutting arrogantly, not to take up the dare reverses the meaning of a multitude of prior intimidations, changing their status from an elite's dominance to a punk's bluff.

PARADING

Some gangs of ghetto adolescents have been credited in sensational news stories with organized extortions of local merchants or of running drug markets;⁹⁸ some have elaborated an independent social order to the extent of conducting such civil niceties as marriage ceremonies.⁹⁹ But the ethnographic record is clear that despite the deep appeal of the metaphor—despite the regular jaunts in which they oversee their lands, the occasional tribute they exact on passersby, and the innovation of social rituals like initiation ceremonies—the "rule" of these rulers is superficial, not only to their communities but, without more, to their members' lives.

Indeed, perhaps the greatest danger to the survival of the fighting group as an entity that embraces the lived experience of members is not the strength of other gangs or pressure from the police, but boredom.¹⁰⁰ In addition to violence, a number of routine practices are universally employed to raise the spirit of the group. Virtually all ethnographies of youth groups that boast terrifying postures describe parading on local streets as a recurrently thrilling practice. Parading is a process of walking in apparent unison past a relatively stationary public while displaying "colors" or other insignia of membership in a diffusely threatening group. Three members of a Glasgow gang were

all reminiscing about the time the assembled Young Team had travelled across to Saracen Cross in Possilpark in as many as twelve to fifteen taxis. "It wis some sight. Aw thae taxis in a big line-up." (The phrase "line-up" provoked considerable laughter from the other two, as it was normally used to describe the queue of boys waiting to have sexual intercourse in one of the "gang bangs.") "We came pourin' oot, aw jazzed up in wir tin flutes [sharp suits], aw drunk and blocked up wi' the goofies. Great, man."¹⁰¹

Or the thrill of the parade may be achieved by reversing the relationship between viewer and viewed, as when members pace about a public location, gesturing defiance and shouting insults at will. No practice of violence is necessary. The essential element for sustaining the member's involvement in the group is the passerby, whose anonymity represents the world out "there" and makes being in the group a meaningful vehicle for moving from what is subjectively familiar to members to what is less intimately known "on the streets."

Consider, for example, how, without striking a blow, some Glasgow adolescents use remarks, songs, and gestures to infuse a mean spirit into everyday public scenes. The following was reported by a school teacher, who conducted participant observations in the early 1970s:

Back at the corner, we passed the time by criticizing everybody and anybody who passed by. Typical of the comments was a remark shouted to young girls walking in the street: "Hi! Sexy drawers! Ah want ma hole." Or again, to girls and, surprisingly to boys: "Ah'll kick yir cunt in." As darkness came down, their daring increased. The Young Trio broke into song, the melody being "The Auld Orange Flute" with the words rewritten by themselves:

I went to a party one Friday night,
The Tongs were there and wanted to fight,
I drew my blade out, quick as a flash,
And shouted 'Young Team, Young Team, Ya Bass.'
The first one that came was five foot four,
I lifted my boot and he fell to the floor.
The cunt was in agony, The cunt was in pain,
So I lifted my boot and I fucked him again. . . .

One gesture in particular, made from the top of buses and from the other side of streets, will be difficult to capture in words. I would call it the "Come oan, then" gesticulation. To the accompaniment of these words, the hands were outstretched, palm upwards, and the fingers moved up and down as if beckoning the opposition to approach. The final stage of

the hand movement came when the boy drew his two index fingers across his cheeks in imitation of slashing razors. Two "Mars Bars" were being wished on the adversary's face.¹⁰²

The involving potential of parading may be elaborated in various ways. The original skinheads used petty theft to spice up the process:

Biggest laugh, loads of things really . . . there was so many things 'appening. . . . You go to a hot-dog stall and someone nicks one and then the geezer comes out after you, it just all 'appened.¹⁰³

These incidents do not reflect the experience of "going on a (criminal) job" or of responding to "peer pressures." Rather, they illustrate the delight in discovering the spiritual power of a collective posturing as deviant: how, once the group is constituted, a coherent line of action can spring spontaneously from chaos. The very unpredictability of actions and reactions makes "being with the mob" predictably exciting. Otherwise unimaginable, transcendent possibilities are now sensed as real, as this account reveals:

Yeah, they all want to fight when they're in the mob, it's like the pack qualities in the wolf. A wolf on its own will only attack small creatures. Once skinheads get together they think they're tough, they would attack something, anything. . . . It's like a copper, you get some kids jumping on coppers but they wouldn't do it on their own.¹⁰⁴

Parading on foot, or in cars as a collective "cruising," is seductive as a way of injecting self-confident expressions into the consciousnesses of a mass of observers.¹⁰⁵ It follows that the mass media's coverage of "gang activities" is a powerful stimulus to members' involvement.¹⁰⁶ Note that what is involved in this acquisition of a "reputation" is not simply what sociologists call "prestige" or "peer acceptance." There is a transcendent, sensual quality to the experience that often shows up as hubris:

We was saying that we going to make the name Mighty Vice Lords go down in history some day. We had so much confidence in ourselves that we felt we could do this here. Actually we was obligated to do it. This was our supreme purpose—to be known, to gain this certain respect. . . . It was at the meeting, and Count said, "One day the Mighty Vice Lord name will go out to history, and we'll be known nation wide. Everybody will remember the Mighty Vice Lords."

Those were his exact words. And we tried to make it so.¹⁰⁷

THE TRANSCENDENCE OF MUNDANE AUTHORITY

Relations with school authorities provide many opportunities for elaborating the transcendent significance of the group. In this regard it is useful to imagine a fourfold table constructed by two distinctions, one contrasting *individual and collective* forms of deviant response to school authority and the other contrasting an *oppositional and a transcendent* posture of deviance.

The commonest and mildest acts are *individual* acts that use sensual involvements to contest the demand by school authorities for intellectual attention: chewing gum, conversing with another, distributing food, sleeping, reading comic books, and the like. A further elaboration of deviant opposition is accomplished when students *collectively* elaborate a world of hedonism in the interstices of official oversight on school grounds.

The second distinction refers to the spiritual reach of the deviant project. Across all social classes and ethnic groups, adolescents enjoy *battles* with teachers and administrators on the official moral grounds of school authority—*rationality*, by exploiting gaps between rules and practice and between formal rules and institutional purposes, inconsistencies in the relations among rules, and the normatively ambiguous areas that are slightly beyond the school's jurisdiction. One widely popular tactic, for example, is to follow the rules so strictly that one undermines the authority they are intended to serve. When conducted before other students, the spirit raised in the audience makes the ploy an act of collective rebellion. Ruth Horowitz gave this example from one of the barrios that produce Chicago's Mexican-American "gang" problem:

Rosita explained how she reacts without explicitly violating any rule when a teacher demeans her publicly in class. "When a teacher tells you to sit, you do, no matter where you are—on a desk, the floor, or a dude's lap. When she says take your gum out of your mouth and throw it away—take it out with your fingers and throw—particularly at someone you know will scream."¹⁰⁸

Another collectively arranged play played off the gap between the wishes of authority and the formal boundaries of its jurisdiction:

The students were required to wear uniforms to enter the [parochial] school building. In order to protest, they started changing into their uniforms in the street. That ended that rule.¹⁰⁹

With such tactics, students may assume a momentary dominance over school officials, but all remain players within the same *moral framework*. The means of opposition is also a method of celebrating one's command of the very competence to which the institution is committed. The students tri-

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Images Scanned: 55
Size: 0
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umph by demonstrating a superior ability to manipulate the institution of rational authority.¹¹⁰

A contrasting posture is that of transcendent superiority in which students treat the concerns of the school authorities as wholly alien, part of a world that is at an unbridgeable distance from their subjective reality—a moral sensibility to which they need not respond. Among black adolescents, a favorite way of signaling a transcendent superiority to mundane authorities is to refer to the authorities' normative demands as intractable nonsense: "noise," "beating his mouth," "talking shit." The following excerpts are from two of Carl Werthman's interviews with gang members in San Francisco:

That Math teacher, I know he don't like us. He don't like me anyway. When I come to class, he always say something smart. Like "Don't talk."¹¹¹

I say, "I'll talk as loud as I want!" He want us to be silent all the time in class! . . . the teacher said he kicked me out cause I, you know, upset the class. And I just got in the class! He just don't like me reading comic books while he up there beating his mouth.¹¹²

Alternatively, one may dramatize that one's intractability to rational authority is constitutional, as when an administrator's inquiries are said to make one "sick," as this account illustrates:

I don't hardly get along with no teacher. I just get in there and do what I got to do. Claudette and me used to go out to lunch. And when we come back, we be all late and stuff. Mr. Chasworth be breaking, "Where's our late passes?" and stuff. He used to get me sick. Always asking for a late pass. . . . And then we have to get one. Me and Claudette we used to try and get high.¹¹³

Membership in a physically intimidating street group is not necessary for presenting oneself as intractable to rational authority but it can help in several ways. Minimally, the group provides a chorus that can chant in the background and preserve especially daring dramatizations as legends. Ex-skinheads from London's East End recalled a memorable demonstration of the claim that students' sensual involvements—this time sex, not drugs—represent a subjectivity that the teacher's authority dare not reach.

Oh Dave used to be really filthy like in school, he used to start singing, "We caught you rubbing off" and you get these right shy teachers and they get all red . . . "David, I'll tell the headmaster" . . . "We caught you rubbing off" and all this and 'e used to drive 'er mad, or 'e used to get it out, and he used to get it out on the desk and "AYYYYYEEEE,"

AYYYYYEEEE" and all the girls used to scream like and shoot off out like and all the class would go wild.¹¹⁴

Cutting class is an effective way of demonstrating independence as an individual, but when the street group is used to organize a mass "ditching" or "blowout," absence from school takes on the additional significance of indicating who and what form of authority really "runs" the school. In the South Bronx in the 1970s, gangs made cutting class especially attractive by organizing "hooky parties" during school hours in abandoned buildings that directly faced the school.¹¹⁵

Just as effectively, students can demonstrate to their clear satisfaction who "runs" the school by remaining within school, structuring relations among students to fit the deviant norms of the street group, and ridiculing the inferiority of the school authority as a power for controlling their world. Horowitz reported that while a member of the Lions in Chicago was given (in absentia) an award at graduation as the best dressed student, he was celebrating the school's ignorance by "drinking wine with the boys out back."¹¹⁶ As an example of how his "homies" ran the school and controlled the teachers, Tomas, a student in an Orange County continuation school, related how he and friends knifed a boy in shop class and then produced the story that the victim accidentally slipped. Tomas recalled with delight how the teacher, "this fucken' bitch," "fell for the soca."¹¹⁷

We are trying to understand the emotional process through which members make their involvement in physically threatening street elites compellingly seductive. No doubt, adolescents often join gangs for the same garden variety of uninspiring motives as do members of conventional groups: a fear of isolation, a desire for status in the eyes of one's peers, boredom, and so forth. But if what we want to explain is the special quality of deviance enacted by physically threatening young street elites, we should look for a correspondingly special charm that mobilizes involvement. The question is not what draws young men to hang out together, but how they draw themselves up into the posture of a street elite. I suggest that the special attraction is not in entering the worlds of formally rational authority and emerging superior on its terms but in a transcendent project. One expression of this project is the fantastic dream of capturing the mundane authority in the world of the street elite and proving it to be absurd and pathetic. In virtually all close ethnographies and detailed autobiographies of the worlds of proudly dreadful adolescent street elites, there is a version of a fantastic dream in which students, through uprisings, kidnappings, or other devices, utilize the collective deviance of the street to humiliate school officials. As Patrick noted:

At the time, Tim was fourteen. He had been expelled by the headmaster, an action which he still resented almost two years later. Tim, however, had struck back: he waited for the man to leave the school one evening,

and then, surrounded by his team, had followed him along the road, cursing and swearing at him.¹¹⁸

The finest hour of Robby Wideman, a young black who was subsequently imprisoned for participating in a felony murder, came in 1968, when, wielding the symbols of "black power" with a physically threatening militant flourish, he led an assembly of students in the humiliation of the school administrators.¹¹⁹ And from his high school days in East Los Angeles in the early 1970s, Gus Frias depicted what ensued when Lil Crow, who "proudly wore a blue head-band, a white T-shirt and grey khaki pants low-riding to the floor," walked into class late one day after "toking-up on a Oaxacan marihuana cigarrete [*sic*] on his way to school" and was ordered to the principal's office by the teacher:

Very calmly, with a very accentured voice, he replied, "Say listen lady, don't make a big thing out of nothing, just mark me late and that's it. O.K.?" This strong response really infuriated the teacher as she said, "God damn! Nobody is going to answer me that way, your lack of respect condemns you to expulsion, young man!" Lil Crow with a sarcastic laugh and with an angry attitude threw his books to the floor and concluded by saying, "You know what lady? I've had enough with you!" He took out a .38 automatic and pointed it at the teacher. This really tripped everyone out. . . . Paul, in the background, jokingly said to Lil Crow, "Go ahead, Homeboy, be a little crazy, shoot her!!" This phrase was also repeated by another student, everyone in the class was in suspense. . . .¹²⁰

The Transcendent Fascinations of Street Life

All the emotionally compelling activities examined thus far—battles and reviews of strategic intelligence, parading, strategies for expressing an inviolable superiority over mundane authorities—seduce their adherents with a common emotional logic. All are ways of enacting the transcendent superiority of what is subjectively "here"—a local neighborhood, a group of intimate friends, a sensual involvement—over what is encountered "there," at a distance, as anonymous strangers—those who live in other neighborhoods, passersby on the street, school officials who may not even be known as "teacher" but as "lady," whose normative world may be appreciated only as incomprehensible "noise" produced by a "flapping mouth." But even considered cumulatively, overt battles, parades, and acts of rebellion in the face of mundane authority still are relatively rare mo-

ments; by themselves, they are insufficient to sustain an involvement in the deviant spirit of an elitist street group.

"Street life" is the indispensably rich font for making participation in an intimidating elite an everyday experience. While in school, the adolescent may employ sartorial devices that constantly and subtly strike up an essential affiliation with street life. On the East Coast in the 1950s and 1960s, adolescents reproduced the sound of the streets in high school corridors by wearing metal taps on the soles of their shoes. Hats—bowler types for American black youths in the 1960s, furled knit caps among Mexican-Americans, and Rastafarian knit caps among London-born blacks—have also been popular for indicating that one's relationship to an enclosing institution is, at most, a temporary pause in a transcendent journey conducted outside.

"Streets," referred to with no further particularization, are generic devices for going from "here," an established, immediately familiar starting point, to "there," an initially removed destination that can be occupied and possessed as "here" only in the future and with effort. Adolescents—even those who "got a good brain," get high marks, and do not cut class—generally revel in "street life"; the phrase evokes a romantically mysterious, independent place, where dangerous, vaguely evil, downright sexy events transpire.¹²¹ "Street walkers" and "girls of the street" are prostitutes; runaways "live on the streets," and, although all cars are literally machines for transportation over streets, "street machines" are especially designed for the challenges of drag racing and are figuratively "bad." Members of fighting youth groups are fascinated with being *street* groups. They celebrate the transcendent accomplishment of treating as their emotionally natural home what is treated conventionally only as a means of passing from "here" to "there."

Consider the conversational terms that have a special charm in street talk. Adolescents who have known each other for years may refer to each other as "man" to begin turns in a conversation and then to punctuate their speech with the flavor of street life. "Man" may be attractive for its elevation to maturity of males who might well be seen as boys, but the age reference is not essential to the charm. "Dude," rendered as *vato* in Southwestern hispanic communities, often substitutes for "man." It is not age emphatic; it has a respectful overtone in that it identifies the other as someone surviving out in the world, like a nineteenth-century cowboy from the Wild West who was also slick or learned in the ways of the city. "Jack," long popular in black street talk, can accomplish a similar effect even though it could as easily be applied to a child as to a man. As with "man," "dude," or "vato," with "Jack" the speaker can transform a familiar friend into an anonymous other, thereby lending to whatever ensues the significance of affairs conducted not on the safe turf of home but out there in the world, among adult strangers, where one encounters unfamiliar challenges.¹²²

Another theme from street life is the attempt by one acquaintance to con another. The best ethnographic material for examining such tactics comes from black street life (although it certainly is not limited to the black culture), where the process has been known as, among other things, putting on a "front." Keiser presented a rich example from the Vice Lords. Tico asked Goliath for twenty-five cents to buy wine and Goliath replied, "I'll take care of you"; but he made no move to provide the money.

[Tico:] Shit man, we Vice Lords. We supposed to be brothers. Come on, Jack, I gotta get me a taste.

[Goliath:] I'll take care of you. You know that. Now I need forty for a Polish [sausage], twenty-five for carfare, fifty to get my baby some milk . . . shit! I'm fifteen cents short. Say man, can you loan me fifteen cents?

Tico shook his head, and walked away in disgust.

Keiser added that Goliath had ten dollars in his pocket and that Tico also had sufficient money that he did not need the loan.¹²³

Note how devious wit transcends the potential humiliation of poverty. Disingenuously, Goliath exploited a lack of funds—a powerful sign of vulnerability and dependence—as an interactional resource for a dramatic personal triumph. Poverty became relatively insignificant in contrast to a capacity to move gracefully in a potentially humiliating social world out "there." Tico and Goliath knew each other well; to conduct their example of "whuffing the game," they had to pose as strangers to each other, each presenting to the other an artificial, potentially subordinating line of action, each testing the other's ability to see through a foreign guise and recognize a familiar, and then no longer threatening, ploy. In the end, Goliath triumphed, not by convincing Tico that he did not have the money but through showing Tico that he knew this ploy (or "play"). His triumph was transcendent in a double sense; he emerged a master not a victim of artificial style, and he showed that he had no emotional need for Tico's affections. For in this setting, to satisfy Tico's request would be a humiliating demonstration of gullible naivete, of a fear of being out in the world without the support of friends, or both.

The same testing of a graceful personal competence to transcend potentially humiliating foreign challenges can be seen in the "mock" fighting in which young males of all ethnicities engage on street corners in low-income urban areas.¹²⁴ In this interaction, friends square off in boxing stances and conduct something more unique than a fight or a mock fight. Each does not go all out to beat up the other. The challenge is not simply physical dominance; it is essential to retain some semblance of an institutionally regulated boxing style, even if the style is unconventional and includes, for example, some karate-like leg kicks. But neither do the participants simply cooperate in a dramatization of the maneuvers of a real fight.

The challenge is not simply to enact a fighting form, as in a cooperative dance.

The mock fight is a more interesting, uncertain process in which one or both play with the mock or serious character of the blows thrown. This puts meanness specifically at issue. Some blows will be thrown to raise the questions, *Does the other mean it? Has this become a real fight? Can I hold my own in this interaction both in the physical sense of not being beaten up and in the moral sense of not breaking form and sacrificing dignity to effect a successful defense?* As in intergroup battles, the outcome may be decided clearly when one side breaks style and runs off a little way from the battle scene.

The essential fascination of the street elite is as an outpost of spiritual creativity—a collective base located beyond the member's primary home from which he can work up an arrogant posture directed toward potential threats of humiliation emanating from some socially distant "there." Many studies have found that the status of group leader (whether formal, as in white, black, and Puerto Rican groups, or informal, as in Mexican-American barrios) does not depend on physical, athletic, or fighting prowess. Esthetic leadership appears to be the key. Depending on the ethnic setting, this type of leadership may involve a striking elegance in dancing:

[Duke, despite being small in stature, was leader of the "King Rattlers," a black gang in Chicago in the late 1950s. Duke was not only] fearless and effective. . . he could dance well enough to "turn out" most anyone in the neighborhood—other dancers typically cleared an area for him and his partner.¹²⁵

Or it may require an everyday demeanor in which a laconic toughness is combined with an aristocratic, well-traveled air:

[Dick, known as "the King" of one of the fighting teams in Glasgow, maintained an exceptionally elegant appearance. Entering a local bar, he would make a round, shaking hands like a visiting dignitary, looking] for all the world like the Duke of Edinburgh.¹²⁶

Such leadership may also call for the mastery of street talk that the leader uses not so much to put down other members as to sustain the group's legends and the personal myths of members. Among London's skinheads, Dave had an admired reputation for patter such as, *Who the 'am spam do you think you am, you think you're body everyself, pick on somebody your own long enough, if you get the opportunity rub off.*¹²⁷ Carlos Parkin, aka Frijole, aka Bean, displayed the street poetry that helped sustain his informal leadership of the Sesentas, a combative barrio group from Oakland, in the following poetic resolve concerning outside youths:

They fuck around, they lay around.
 They play they pay
 They do they through.¹²⁸

Krisberg, commenting on his observations and extensive interviews with black gang leaders in Philadelphia, was especially struck by the leaders' esthetic burdens:

The gang leader possessed a keen insight into the personal myths of each of his gang fellows. . . . Past activities were glorified and portrayed as dramatic events. . . . buttressing self-images and attenuating self-doubts. [Explained one leader] "You know, Barry, the most important thing in the world to a dude is recognition. Pay attention to them, man, and they'll do anything you want." Another . . . explained: "I know that shit I say to them guys is bullshit—but they did [*sic*] it, man and they dig me."¹²⁹

In effect, the leader's task is to charm his fellows into a faith that, as members of the group, they can go into that world beyond their primary home where one meets anonymous, potentially humiliating strangers and retain their pride. Leaders must exhibit a special charm, literally a saving grace, when they go out onto the streets. Bloch and Niederhoffer observed, among white street gang leaders in New York City in the 1950s,

the spectacle of a young hoodlum, known to be a terror in gang fights, an expert burglar, and an accomplished ladies' man, to boot, who suddenly stops to use a store window for a mirror, takes out a comb, and carefully pats a wave in his beautifully set pompadour.¹³⁰

The whole group, as well as the leader, provides analogous support for the street lives of the members. The transcendent significance of the group is recreated constantly in the routine conversational juxtaposition of demeaning personal names and inspiring collective titles. The nicknames of individual members are often denigrating: "two boys in our Los Angeles gangs with severe skin problems were known as 'Cornflakes' and 'Potato Face,' a boy with glasses was called 'Goggles,' and a Mexican boy given a mascot role in a Negro gang was called 'Taco'";¹³¹ *Espestoso* (Stinky), *Flaco* (Skinny), *Fool*, and *Fat Rolls* are not uncommon. But the group's name is never demeaning, and often it is glorious. The essence of the group's appeal is indicated by the poetic labels given to intergroup violence. Terms are drawn from music, as in "bopping" or "diddy bopping" (be-bop in jazz); from literature, as in "humbugs" (Scrooge's memorable phrase of disgust); and from dance, as in "jitterbugging." They all indicate a soaring delight in the violence that others regard as horrifying.¹³²

On a daily basis, group support for the members' glorious transcendence

from a familiar "here" to the larger world of anonymous strangers out "there" may include the provision of a refuge from "the streets" in the form of a "corner" (a clubhouse or store) that the group is known to dominate and within which members can relax and from which members can prepare a proud demeanor for excursions through the streets. From his observations in San Francisco in the early 1960s, Werthman described the demeanor of black and Mexican-American gang members on their group's corner:

A noticeable relaxation of physical posture. Shoulders slump, shirt tails appear, and greetings are exchanged with an abandon. . . . As soon as the boys leave the street corner, however, they become self-consciously absorbed in the demands of public role. Careful attention is paid to uniform—either carelessly immaculate ("looking sharp") or meticulously dishevelled ("looking bad")—and the territory is covered in the characteristic hiking style ("walking pimp").¹³³

The transcendent significance of the street elite for members is nowhere more concrete than in the practice of what might be called urban camping out. At one time or another, many members will "live in the streets": sleeping in cars, sheds, stores, and abandoned apartments or with friends; drinking wine, using drugs, shooting craps; "hustling," a form of urban hunting in which one seeks money and food through theft, petty extortion, and conning "loans"; and moving around the neighborhood independent of school and workday schedules. For living on the streets, the street elite is a significant source of assistance for locating food and temporary residences and a locally recognizable symbol useful for extorting money from younger or independent youths. Perhaps more important, the street elite supports members through its role as an audience that is uniquely well situated to appreciate one's mysterious comings and goings. While maintaining a discreet distance from his parents, the street hustler can demonstrate to his observant peers that he is "out there," "making it" on his own.¹³⁴

Phenomenal Foreground and Structural Background

The recipe for the creation of a street elite is one part exotic status pretensions; some ingredients of dread, including at least enough violence to counter attacks that ridicule the elite pretensions; and stirring esthetics that promise the glorious mastery of a larger, anonymous, morally threatening social world that is vaguely apprehended out there. Each pattern may exist independent of the street elite but when combined they bring it to life.

But what social conditions lie behind the experience of becoming involved in a street elite? How do these processes relate to biographical and ecological dimensions, such as age, urban setting, social class, and ethnicity? If the preceding analysis accurately explains the foreground of constructing the world of the street elite, what is the background to which members respond when they assume the elitist posture, implement it in public through an aura of dread, and stir themselves to its distinctive transcendent project?

CIRCULAR REASONING IN THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH

It has been traditional in American sociology to define the problematic phenomenon as that of the gang and to look for ultimate causes in the conditions of urban, minority group, adolescent poverty. But the guiding definition of the "gang" is not only somehow uncomfortable for its subjects; the concept is a fateful step in a process of circular social analysis. As long as we define the problem to be explained as that of the "gang," we tend to seek relevant data only in the adolescent segment of ghetto society. We then find that key background factors lie in the struggles of adolescence, the pressures of urban life, the bitterness of poverty in an affluent society, the resentment of ethnically oppressed populations, and so forth. After over fifty years of work, the now dogged-edged sociological explanation of the gang has not yet broken out of this circular pattern; the appreciation of the phenomenon still chases its explanatory tail.

One route of escape is to look as closely at the experience of the subjects as qualitative data, in the most widespread and rich forms available, will allow. Immediately, we run into difficulties for some of the standard background explanations. In Great Britain—East London, Glasgow, and Northern Ireland—there are prominent examples of gangs that are dedicated to intergroup violence, the members of which often commit burglaries and occasionally attack adults.¹³⁵ British theorists cannot point convincingly to minority ethnic status for explanations; instead, they emphasize the tensions of class inequality. In the United States, recent research on Mexican-American neighborhood group fighters, many of whom have substantial criminal records for burglary and assault, has presented problems when explanations emphasize class oppositions. In their studies of the 32nd Street community in Chicago, Ruth Horowitz and Gary Schwartz discounted the explanatory value of social incompetence and frustration of material aspirations:

On the whole, the members of this community meet the basic requirements for inclusion in what mainstream America views as the socially respectable and politically significant segments of the working class. Mexican-Americans hold steady jobs and make a decent living. Very

few intact families are on welfare. . . . The majority of young people in this community speak English fluently and command the verbal skills necessary to negotiate their way through urban institutions. . . . gang members have not opted out of the American dream.¹³⁶

Not finding a basis to emphasize the causal relevance of economic inequality, the authors must emphasize the status of their subjects as ethnic aliens ("Mexican-Americans are outsiders in the urban community").¹³⁷

If sociological theorizing looks just across the edge of adolescence, it runs into the disturbing phenomenon of motorcycle clubs like the Hell's Angels. The collective *raison d'être* of these groups of white, ethnic-majority young men of working-class backgrounds, from large and from small cities, was originally the dreadful practice of parading over highways and the conduct of battles, not with the police or the innocent folk portrayed as choice victims in media accounts, but with other proud, terrifying motorcycle clubs.¹³⁸

The social distribution of street elites cannot be universally related to minority ethnic status, consistently attributed to class tensions, or empirically limited to the stresses of adolescence. Indeed, as I will suggest later, the phenomena to be explained are not even necessarily urban. Yet, class, ethnic, age, and urban factors are not randomly represented in the background of street elites. As I detailed in the first section of this chapter, if we compare ghetto and middle-class forms of collective, youthful deviance in the West since the end of World War II, we find the characteristic structure of street elites clearly concentrated in urban ghettos.

We can make sense of this complex of patterns in two steps. First, we may note that deviant adolescent cultures include a shared moral concern, with transcendence expressed in a spatial metaphor. Across social classes and ethnic groups, adolescents in the modern West have developed forms of deviance in response to sensed challenges for moving from local environments to an anonymous, strange world out "there." Second, I suggest that deviant projects of transcendence differ when the local environment differs. In particular, Western adolescents have developed collective forms of deviance that embrace the fears or powers that haunt and intimidate their elders. In the recent history of the West, these lines of anxiety and apprehension have differed by social class and ethnicity and, therefore, so has the social distribution of street elites. In other times and places, the background of humiliation to which street elites have formed a transcendent response has not been concentrated in the urban, adolescent, ethnic-minority and lower-class sections of society.

SPATIAL MOBILITY AND COLLECTIVE DELINQUENCY

The distinctive adolescent celebrations of deviance that have flourished in the modern West, at least since the Second World War, display innu-

merable metaphors of spatial mobility. Thus, in numerous American and British cities, adolescent men have dressed themselves up in symbols of high-risk movement, donning costumes of motorcycle jackets, boots, and gloves, and viciously attacked other, similarly dressed adolescents, over "turf" boundaries. That the combatants may have no motorcycles, and that the territorial "control" they seek may have no economic or material significance, gives them no necessary pause.

Generally, the names of street elites give the identities of members a geographic significance.¹³⁹ When names of streets of neighborhoods are not incorporated, adolescent ghetto fighting groups may take titles that boast more generalized geographic powers. Like totemic tribes, they imagine themselves animals that range widely and freely: Eagles, Lions, and Sharks. Or they recall distant, ancient, obscure images of forceful or heroic Rangers, Crusaders, Marathons, Nomads, and Barbarians. Lords, Barons, and Dukes are common, but names that would place members at the top of powerful, wealthy, or prestigious hierarchies without suggesting that their dominance also has a geographic dimension—CEO, Millionaire, or Champion—are rare.¹⁴⁰

The placement of graffiti similarly reflects a special sensitivity to the movements of people from "here" to "there." In New York City, graffiti writers run substantial physical and legal risks to "write" (spray paint) names, slogans, and images, some of them emphatically threatening, on subway trains. They have not developed a similar attraction to sites that dominate purely through vertical ascendance, such as the top stories of prominent buildings. Notably, New York graffiti writing became known on the streets as "getting up" only in the mid-1970s, when graphic forms of graffiti began to attract conventional indicia of success (art school scholarships, university classes, museum shows, and intellectual commentaries). Originally, the "writers" produced a simple combination of their name and street number (for example, Pete 188 was Pete from 188th Street) and talked about their activity as "getting around, getting over, and getting the name out."¹⁴¹ In East Los Angeles, buses and highway overpasses are favored sites for graffiti (and sometimes the legend, "Sal si puedes"); alleys, fences, garages, and walls of buildings that form borders between barrios are the targets of the most challenging and threatening graffiti.¹⁴²

As was already noted, "streets" share only the feature of facilitating movement from here to there, and across the country, as well as across youth subcultures, "street life" and "street people" conjure up an aura of deviance.¹⁴³ In black and Hispanic ghettos, the position that sociologists often label "gang leader" may more commonly be referred to by members as the "runner." Often it is difficult to discern from interviews with street gang adolescents the legal forms of the deviance with which they so proudly associate because they prefer to express themselves in the rich metaphor of spatial mobility:

My life ain't been no playtoy. I mean, I had to really get out there and get it myself. Cause, like, I was traveling so fast like, it was a hell of a thing.¹⁴⁴

If these examples point to a natural experience among ghetto youths of deviant freedom and power as a matter of spatial mobility, this adolescent fascination is not limited by ethnic and class lines. In the 1970s, Chicanos and Anglos in a suburban high school east of Los Angeles related to each other in threatening postures as "low riders" relating to "surfers."¹⁴⁵ In the rest of the country, "surfer" may provoke memories of peachy-cheeked, benignly smiling Beach Boys, but in adolescent circles on the east and west sides of Los Angeles, "surfer" frequently suggests an ill-shaven, overly physical, and vaguely threatening young man.

Adolescents are even likely to package activities with powerful hedonistic attractions in a spatial metaphor to enhance the pleasure of consuming deviance. Affluent adolescents have long concentrated their nonviolent deviant pleasures on cars and vans. Thus, an observational study in a Los Angeles suburb in the early 1960s found that deviance essentially consisted of presumptively enjoying the hedonistic privileges of adult status, of which the car was literally and figuratively the vehicle. A mobile parlor, bedroom, clubhouse, and bar, the car "was at once the setting and symbol of much of adolescent deviant . . . sociality and sexuality."¹⁴⁶

A few years later, youths from the same backgrounds were elaborating a fascination with spatial mobility through the hippie movement. As an English observer noted:

There was a concern both with travelling, often to the East in Europe, and across the United States in America, or to South America. This was seen both as a geographical and a symbolic journey. It was also felt that one should move oneself, by drug use, mysticism, religion or by self-exploration. Any journey was then both physical and existential.¹⁴⁷

The quintessential hippie experience was the "trip."

THE MORAL DIALECTICS OF YOUTHS AND ELDER

If there is a cross-class adolescent fascination with deviance as a matter of spatial mobility, the vertical dimension of mobility is given radically different meaning in the class-specific forms of collective youth deviance. Middle-class, ethnic majoritarian adolescents oppose convention as if from below, whereas lower-class, ethnic-minority youths strut above the social order. Tying both forms together is the logic of generating a powerful presence by embracing the fears of the older generation, which vary by class and ethnicity.

It is crucial to appreciate that the thrust of collective violence between

youth groups is defined less through adolescents' independent orientation to what may lie "out there" beyond local worlds (such as, their apprehensions about their economic futures) than as their moral transcendence of the social order with which they are intimately familiar. There are indications that involvement in street elites is inversely related to a direct focus by members on their disadvantaged class or ethnic status in the larger society. For example, Krisberg was struck by the distance of members of black gangs in Philadelphia in the 1960s from the emergence of civil rights consciousness within the black community as a whole. He noted that members had to be instructed repeatedly that it was no longer acceptable to use "colored folks," especially before whites.¹⁴⁸ And in a study of Mexican-American gang activity in Los Angeles, Howard Erlanger examined historical trends in incidents of intergroup violence and found evidence to suggest that the emergence of an ethnic civil rights self-consciousness in the early 1970s was responsible for a decrease in warfare in the barrio.¹⁴⁹

The natural history of membership in adolescent street elites also suggests that involvement is inversely related to a focus on the relationship between the ghetto and conventional life outside. Although the age of desistance varies from one setting to the next, everywhere the most fanatical recruits enter at the earlier ages, and attrition accelerates toward the end of adolescence. From 18 to 22 or so, as members become more practically attentive to their place in the larger social order, membership becomes less attractive.

Just as youthful middle-class white beats, hippies, and punks have drawn disgust and a moral horror from their elders by mapping out various lines of their parents' moral fears, so do lower-class, ethnic-minority street fighting groups dramatically embrace forms of social power to which their elders have shown moral horror.¹⁵⁰ The tensions in collective youth deviance are shaped in dialectical relationship to the unspeakable fears in their elders' lives. Thus, middle-class youths represent dirt, the violation of all neat boundaries, lower-class rebellion, insidious esthetic attacks on the conventions of bourgeois, rule-manipulating, rationality-celebrating classes. In contrast, working-class youths embrace fascist forms that give a surreal, lock-step representation to the mechanical institutional disciplines that threaten to constrain their parents;¹⁵¹ and ethnic-minority lower-class youths strut in the style of aristocratic authority, acting out a version of historical caste sentiments of humility and indignation that remain vivid for their elders.¹⁵²

In the generational or social ecological background of U.S. ghetto gangs has been one or another recent immigration in which the moral feelings and symbolic systems of peasants, tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and migrant laborers have been kept alive. Behind the New York City gangs of the 1880s described by Asbury was the massive immigration of impoverished, rural Irish people. Behind the extraordinary variety of Chicago's

Southern and Eastern European youth gangs of the 1920s, as described by Thrasher, was the Polish peasant, the Italian peasant, and so on.¹⁵³ After the legal shutdown of massive immigration of foreign poor people to the United States, the ethnic character of the gang problem became black in the North and Midwest as poor blacks abandoned family histories of tenant farming and sharecropping to move north in the 1950s and 1960s. Behind the 1960s' British "rude boy," with a crop of hair plaited in "the ubiquitous natty or knotty style" and "wardrobe of sinister guerilla chic," was a wave of politically and socially conservative West Indian immigrants in the 1950s.¹⁵⁴ Behind much of contemporary urban American gang fighting is the uniquely continuing access to the United States of impoverished people from rural areas and small towns in Mexico and Puerto Rico.¹⁵⁵

In England, the skinheads' famous proclivity for "Paki" bashing, carried to the point of unprovoked murder, was part of a broader racism that attacked hippies; the Jews who had been moving up and out of East London; and the colored immigrants from East Asia and the West Indies, who came in large numbers in the 1960s. Most directly, the antagonism is to groups that may be treated as inferiors in a caste-ordered society, not to more affluent classes. This hostility is vividly expressed in the following excerpt:

We've still got the yids, Pakis, wogs, 'ippies on our backs. They use us and live off us. . . . We're in the middle, ain't we, and what can we do? I'll tell you what we fucking do, we go Paki-bashing and 'ippie-bashing. . . . Why should we be tolerant to people that they have invited into the country? We didn't invite them.¹⁵⁶

In American materials, a similar downward prejudice is found, and not only among protofascist whites. The following dialogue occurred among members of the Sex Boys and Sex Girls, a Puerto Rican (and substantially black) street elite of the 1970s from Essex Street in Brooklyn:

America really doesn't want foreigners like me coming in, but right now Puerto Rico isn't foreign.

Yeah, Dominican. Cuban. All those kind of people.

They can come on a boat. They can come on a boat from Santa Domingo to Puerto Rico. A lot of them get caught though, but a lot of them get in. And that's what fucks up the country.¹⁵⁷

Ethnographies and unedited firsthand accounts from Mexican-American fighting barrios show an ironic hostility toward poor, *campesino*-styled Mexicans. In recalling his days as a barrio warrior in East Los Angeles, Gus Frias did not retouch the ugly prejudice that his U.S.-born homeboys enacted toward "wetbacks" or *mojados*, the recently arrived Mexican immi-

grants whose Indian appearance and rural ways have frequently subjected them to ridicule by U.S.-born, adolescent Mexican-Americans. He recounted

an incident in which a wetback, a name we gave to those individuals that did not know how to speak the English language, decided to give a hard time to one of the homeboys whom we called "Chito." This homeboy, in a demanding tone of voice, asked the wetback for a dime. The wetback stubbornly refused, and in return pushed Chito to the ground. . . . [later] around thirty homeboys headed toward the wetbacks' special hang-out. . . .¹⁵⁸

This was not an isolated incident. In Chicago, American-born Mexican-origin youths use "brazier" (from *bracero*) to disparage "newly arrived Mexicans" who "dress in straight-legged pants, cowboy boots, and hats . . . speak only Spanish . . . [and are] not too smart."¹⁵⁹ In a description of two East Los Angeles high schools, a student researcher quoted Rosie B:

Students at ["Evergreen"] High School respect the Mexican from Mexico in a awful manner, they push him around, call him names, make fun of the way he dresses, make fun of his family.

From the other side, a recent arrival from Mexico, Mario A, wrote for the same report that "the problem between Mexicans and Chicanos are that the Chicanos think they are bad."¹⁶⁰

Today, barrio warriors are likely to be surrounded by neighbors or by older relatives who, as children, worked as poorly paid, stoop farm laborers and who did not dare raise a note of protest in public, much less adopt the demeanor of superiority. The prejudice they generate toward *mojados* was in many cases suffered not long ago by their kinsmen. Despite the long history of the Mexican-origin population in the United States, immigration policies and market pressures have made the contemporary Mexican-American population in California overwhelmingly either Mexican-born or the U.S.-born children of Mexican-born parents.¹⁶¹ In Chicago, Horowitz and Schwartz wrote, the Mexican-American youths living around 32nd Street seemed to be in constant contact with relatives moving up from the world still referred to as that of the *bracero*; when they got in trouble with the police in Chicago, they often escaped temporarily to agricultural valleys in Texas.¹⁶² Many turf fighters display a dutiful respect for parents who sacrificed dearly to move the family from northern Mexico or from an agricultural valley in the Southwest to the big city of Chicago, Los Angeles, or Oakland, California.¹⁶³

Members of the two major, mutually hostile street gangs in the densely black ghetto of south central Los Angeles are now a generation or two away from southern migrant roots. But they have kept alive the symbolic

lines of racial oppression with a neat symbolic scheme. The Bloods, identifying with red, and the Crips, with blue, can and regularly do attack each other simply and specifically on the basis of color.

Within the social worlds of black ghetto street elites, caste sensitivities remain vivid in the sensual realms of taste and distaste. A young black woman from southeast Brooklyn recalled from her early teenage days in the Puma Crew, a shoplifting group of friends that was part of the local intergroup street fighting scene, why she broke off her relationship with Sam, a thief who had given her money liberally:

To a degree I wanted to have sex with Sam and stuff, you know, but he turned me off.

[Researcher:] Why? Not good-looking?

He is very good-looking.

[Researcher:] So why did he turn you off?

Because it's the way he talk.

[Researcher:] His whole attitude?

Yeah. The way he talked. Stupid. Don't make no damn sense. I tell him everything. Take him to the store, you got to tell him to buy. . . . He heard me talking about him like this, he'd want to kick my ass.

[Researcher:] But he was good-looking, gave you stuff, thought you were great. Why didn't you like him?

'Cos he gave me everything. A man can't give you everything. 'Cos he spoiled me, that's why. I kicked him in his ass, shit.

[Researcher:] So he wasn't much of a man?

No. Down south. Don't even know how to speak proper English, you know? Don't even know how to read, write. Naive motherfucker.¹⁶⁴

Being "Down south" and a "Naive motherfucker" go together. Rural naivete means humiliating subordination; anyone who is more urbane, even a woman, can kick your ass. These moral concerns are more important than the unusual amount of money Sam provided. As in the gaming interaction between Tico and Goliath reviewed earlier, for the speaker here, poverty is less humiliating than being a fool. Black street culture keeps alive the feel of the naive country "down south" in the figure of that eternal premodern figure, the fool. Adolescent street elites will make sense in black ghettos where Suttles' observations of twenty years ago continue to hold true: "Among the Negroes in the Addams area, the major identities that have to be avoided are those denoted by the labels 'country,' 'savage,' 'nigger,' and 'Uncle Tom.'" ¹⁶⁵

Consider whether the following features of street elites point to conditions of poverty, adolescence, minority group status, urban location, and so forth, or to historically recurrent forms of authority for lording power over the rural masses of an agrarian society and over the working class in a fascist social order.

Right-Wing Militarism. Street elites often sport swastikas and German crosses. Some black and Puerto Rican adolescents in New York City enjoy calling themselves the Gestapo, and others adopt the imagery of the Chinese warlord and the Japanese samurai. Yet long, scraggly beards that are reminiscent of Marx and Castro never seem to come into fashion, despite their value for indicating masculine maturity. Members are not comrades; their militaristic parading does not celebrate the washed-out sartorial banality of peasant armies. The hammer and sickle are not worn on motorcycle jackets,¹⁶⁶ despite the wonderful outrage and fear that would be produced. When inducted into a Polish-Hungarian-German-Italian gang in 1950s Brooklyn, Ellison recalled being asked, "Are you a Jew or a nigger or a communist?", but not whether he was a fascist.¹⁶⁷

Aristocratic Status. Like members of high society, in a tradition now going back at least thirty years, Southern European, black, and Hispanic male street elites have recognized their female counterparts as "debs" or "debutantes." In Chicago, Mexican-American society around 32nd Street celebrates the Catholic confirmation of girls at age 15 with elaborate parties called cotillions, which members of fighting gangs attend in the dress and demeanor of *galanes* from traditional Mexican society. Some leaders of the Blackstone Rangers favored wide-brimmed southern planter's hats and riding crops. The nicknames that are almost universal in street elites reflect the same celebration of status as do the informal names by which members of High Society recognize each other: a delight in signifying that one's essential identity is not really known or controlled by birth certificates or the other bureaucratic instruments of the modern, rational-legal social order.

Physiocracy. Violence is concentrated in public spaces, such as parks, and tensions recurrently focus on the control of "turf." Instead of simply robbing victims, street elites manifest their collective elite status by exacting tribute. Like urban physiocrats, street elites act as if all social respect ultimately comes from the control of landmarks, homelands, and residential territory. Like idle lords and barons who manifest the privileges of their status by not rationally organizing their holdings, members of street elites make taken-for-granted references to "running" a school, "owning" a movie theater, or "controlling" a neighborhood, although they do not exact tribute systematically, collect the revenues from a theater, or attempt to control much of anything that goes on behind the private doors of their neighborhood.

Collected across their various ethnic and historical versions, street elites make for extraordinarily bizarre populations. Considering the foreground themes of street elites, the search for causally essential background conditions does not stop with poverty, ethnic-minority status, adolescence, or even urban location, but reaches to the press of peasantlike populations to enter the modern world. From there, it extends to an ironically incompatible set of analytic bedfellows: postadolescent members of white working-

class motorcycle clubs; Ku Klux Klanners, outfitted like ghosts and ritually stratified, bent on terrifying poor blacks into a symbolic acknowledgment of white territorial rule; demagogic juntas that rule by martialing terror in the streets of Latin America; and the historical mythologies of European and Asian fascism.

Of course, modern English and American urban adolescent street elites have no practical function in forcefully oppressing the peasant masses. They must deign themselves Lords and Emperors because, even though they act like samurai or knights, no land baron keeps them on a retainer. In effect, "gangs" are primarily an urban, minority-group, adolescent phenomena in North American and British cities because the ways of street elites have not found broader economic or political markets for their services. When street elites have found such markets, such as the Calabrian and Sicilian mafiosi in Southern Italy, an analogous aggressive/elite culture has not been primarily an urban phenomenon. In Japan, the *yakuza* organize corrupt labor relations for bosses, most famously in the entertainment industry, and make secretive alliances with extreme right-wing political movements. Like the American street elites, the *yakuza* tend to come from ethnically disadvantaged populations—*sangokujin* (or "third country" Korean and Chinese) and *eta*, a feudal class of untouchables whose family lines have not been forgotten in modern Japan—and they are mostly *burakumin* (or ghetto dwellers). Unlike American "gangs," however, they organize a collective social world that governs not just adolescence but the whole lifespan.¹⁶⁸

I am suggesting that the longstanding association in the United States of street elites with urban, ethnic-minority, adolescent poverty groups is causally spurious. None of these social conditions, alone or in combination, is necessary for the social construction of the phenomenon. What is essential is the existence, in the generational background, of a culture humbled at the prospect of entering modern, rationalized society. In the United States, this culture has been constituted recurrently by masses of recently arrived, previously rural, and initially deferential poor people and continuously by the caste-segregation of blacks. In the experience of the would-be terrifying elite, this humbled background, by way of juxtaposition, elicits and makes sense of the postures of arrogant domination.