Chapter Two

FROM STREET ORGANIZATIONS TO CLIQUES

Black Street Gangs in Chicago Today

The rebellions within Chicago's black street gangs during the first decade or so of the twenty-first century rendered the leadership structures and organizational arrangements that had distinguished these gangs for decades effectively obsolete. In the wake of these rebellions, youthful gang members have refashioned their gangs in radically new ways that often stand in direct contrast to the traditional corporate-style gangs that they supplanted. This chapter describes these newly reconstituted black street gangs on Chicago's South Side, focusing, in particular, on their organizational configurations and leadership structures, culture and ideologies, bases of solidarity, issues related to collective and personal identity, and their involvement in drug dealing. The ways in which these gang characteristics and dynamics diverge from those that predominated during the corporate gang period of the 1980s and 1990s will also be emphasized. In general, the findings presented here signify a radically new era in the history of street gangs on Chicago's South Side during the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

FROM OBEDIENCE TO AUTONOMY: GANG CULTURE AND STRUCTURE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

As described briefly in chapter 1, beginning in the 1960s, the leaders of Chicago's major African American gangs had built their respective

organizations into broad-based, cross-neighborhood, hierarchically structured gang nations. The neighborhood branches of these gangs fell under the jurisdiction of their respective central leadership bodies, which typically wielded autocratic power in dictating gang policy, enforcing discipline, conferring promotions, and controlling gang warfare. The rebellions explored in chapter 1, however, put an end to these long-standing arrangements, freeing neighborhood sets from this often coercive and exploitive control and restoring autonomy at the local level. Indeed, study participants were unequivocal in declaring that their gangs operate independently and govern themselves, and that the days of external oversight and authority are over. Lacking legitimate central leadership, moreover, formalized coordination between the one-time chapters of these traditional gangs has all but disappeared, as local gangs have retreated into the comfort of what they are best able to understand and manage: their immediate neighborhoods. Many larger and more geographically dispersed sets, which once may have boasted upward of one hundred members and twenty square blocks of territory, have split into two or three or four independent groups, each with as few as a dozen members and a couple of blocks to claim as their own. In short, today's gangs are not sets or even "factions" of cross-neighborhood gang organizations like their forebears, as those organizations have effectively ceased to exist as such. Marco explains these dynamics as they relate to his neighborhood as follows:

MARCO: Everybody doin' they own thing. Everybody independent. We govern ourself.

RRA: What's the relationship like between y'all and the BDs from other hoods?

MARCO: I would say we really don't got one with 'em. Not because we dislike each other, it's because my block, that's our world, you feel me? Our problems ain't they problems, just like they problems ain't our problems. . . . So it's all sixteen [friendly] between us, like, "Oh, what's up, bro?" "Yeah, what's up? Woo, woo, woo." But them dudes down there ain't bro right there [*motioning in the direction of the next room, where his friend is waiting*], you know? [The bond is] stronger between us, though.

In this sense of neighborhood independence and self-governance, today's gangs might be understood as a throwback to the adolescent street-corner

groups that represented the predominant gang typology in Chicago prior to the formation of the black and Latino gang nations beginning in the 1960s. This archetype was immortalized most famously in Frederic Thrasher's foundational 1927 tome, *The Gang*. Crucial differences between these periods, however, both in terms of their historical contexts as well as the specificities of gang dynamics, preclude such simple comparisons. Importantly, for example, not only have the central leadership hierarchies of Chicago's black street gangs been rendered obsolete—if not eradicated entirely—but, in a break from all periods of the city's gang history, formal positions of leadership at the neighborhood level have also been largely, if not universally, eliminated.[1]

In place of traditional chains of command or even the established predominance of one or two local gang leaders, Chicago's youthful African American gang members have established egalitarian arrangements based on a delicate balance of collectivist ideals, mutual respect, and personal autonomy. These horizontally oriented arrangements represent an unmistakable repudiation of the vertical organization and culture of obedience that had characterized Chicago's street gangs for decades as well as the ideologies, codified in each gang's respective literature, that had legitimized them. The city's young gang rebels have been decidedly uninterested in replacing their gangs' deposed leaders and assuming their autocratic power. Rather, they have focused on reshaping their gangs in ways that are distinctly more democratic. Thus, while natural leaders may emerge organically within a neighborhood, the battles young gang members waged against former gang leaders should be understood as a rejection of conventional gang ideologies rooted in authoritarian power hierarchies and as a manifestation of new ideologies founded on egalitarianism and autonomy. Here, Carlos and Montrelle offer insights into the democratization of Chicago's black street gangs and the ways in which current gang dynamics contrast from those of past eras.

CARLOS: It's just a mutual respect now, you feel me? You still got the old heads out here, you know what I'm sayin', the big Folks . . . [but] it ain't no chief or no kings or none of that shit no more. Nah, it ain't like that no more, like in the nineties and shit. Everybody for they own, G. . . . [There] used to be structure and all that shit, but you your own man out here.

MONTRELLE: We usually come together and talk and weigh out the pros and cons of things. You know, so it's mainly mutual decisions. . . . Certain people got more influence than others because certain people been around longer and survived more, but there's no set leaders or anything. We all together. . . . He may be the man on the block 'cause he might got this amount of money or he may have did this and that, but at the same time he just like the rest of us.

Although participants often talked about their gangs as having "no structure"—a common refrain among older former group members when speaking about today's gangs as well—these egalitarian arrangements do not simply reflect an inevitable abolition of internal gang stratification, passively accepted by youthful gang members in the wake of gang fracturing. Rather, they reveal the adoption of fundamentally new ideologies among young African American gang members, the nature of which is apparent in not only these horizontal gang structures but also in how new gang members are being socialized by their counterparts. Under the premise of collectivism in service of broad-based gang nationhood, gang socialization during previous decades stressed obedience to an authoritarian and often coercive and exploitive chain of command. In direct contrast, the socialization of new gang members today emphasizes ideals of equality and autonomy alongside traditional gang principles like collectivism and loyalty. The culture of obedience that long defined Chicago's traditional black street gangs, in short, has been supplanted by a culture of autonomy. Indeed, young gang members are encouraged to consciously and vigorously resist the types of autocratic domination that pervaded the city's gangs during previous decades.

In practical terms, this means that established gang members in their late teens and twenties are telling the fourteen- and fifteen-year-old youngsters in their neighborhoods who are just "jumping off the porch" that they are their "own man" in the streets and that they should not let anyone—not even the older gang members themselves—exploit them, bully them, or otherwise control them. In contrast to previous gang dynamics, when messages of brotherhood and unity often contrasted with gang members' structural subordination to authoritarian intragroup power hierarchies, the ideologies of today's gangs are remarkably consistent with the daily experiences of gang life.[2] As such, they can be understood as behavioral

prescriptions. Consider the following passage from my interview with Zeke, in which he explains the ideologies of autonomy and resistance with which he was socialized by his fellow gang members. Note the congruence between these values, his description of expectations for member behavior, and the internal group processes and structural arrangements within his gang.

ZEKE: All of us got say-so.

RRA: What do you mean by that?

ZEKE: Like, you know how the clique have that one big homie? All of us big homies. We make our own decisions, you know? Like how they be tellin' me, like, "Don't let nobody send you off [take advantage of or manipulate you]. If your gut tellin' you 'no,' listen to your gut. Don't let nobody make you be a send-off or nothing like that. Listen to what your mind tellin' you. If you think it's not right to do it, don't do it. If you think it's right, well go on 'head." You know, and stuff like that.

Only one study participant, Marco, described the existence of an official leadership title within his gang that was recognized as having legitimacy in the eyes of its current members. Unlike positions of gang leadership in previous eras, however, this position—"first Demetrius," a traditional Black Disciple leadership position—was purely symbolic and did not involve formal authority or concrete benefits of any kind. Rather, the title represented an honor the group bestowed on one of its own, as opposed to a promotion or a formalization of conferred power or authority. Indeed, that none of the other three members of Marco's gang who were interviewed for this study even mentioned this position of leadership at all—despite being asked questions on the subject—seems a clear indication of the strictly honorary and intimate nature of the position. Moreover, in contrast to the top-down approach to gang leadership development in the 1990s in which gang leaders wielded authority over promotions, the first Demetrius position described by Marco can be understood as emerging from the bottom up, as it was voted on democratically by all of the group's active members. In fact, in spite of the existence of this position of leadership, Marco and his comrades espoused perhaps the most coherent and consistent commitment to the ideologies of autonomy, democracy, and resistance of all participants in this study. Marco explains these

prerogatives and their relation to symbolic leadership in his neighborhood in recounting the democratic process by which that leadership was transferred:

MARCO: It's *no* type of authority with us. All our opinion[s] count. 'Cause you one of my brothers, you know? So that's the only type of thing. On our block, ain't no "big I's" and "little you's." Like, when they was havin' a vote to who gon' have the block, you know, it's called first D—that's first Demetrius. It's a old term for it, but . . .

RRA: So when you say "have the block," what do you mean?

MARCO: Basically, the face of the block. Ain't nothing different, though. The face of the block, you the one who gon' say, "Hey, man, we gon' have a meeting on Sunday." That's all he do, you feel me?

RRA: So who was talking about doing the vote?

MARCO: My homie, Rillo, he's one of the older guys. He been with the shit since he was thirteen, you feel me, he been gangbangin' hard since he was thirteen. He said, "Man, I'm finna give the block up. Y'all have a vote." So it's just like that. . . . We had a vote. . . . My homie, Jay, ended up gettin' the block, you know, he had [the most] hands raised.

Even in Lamont and Rasheed's neighborhood, where the local Black P Stones have maintained a reputation for their traditional gang structure, the power of former gang leaders over younger members today has diminished to the point of virtual nonexistence. Many of these older individuals, perhaps recognizing their waning influence with—much less control over—younger gang members, have transitioned into jobs with local community agencies and grassroots organizations. Lamont, who had also been able to parlay his experiences and reputation as a gang member into a job with a local nonprofit organization, describes these dynamics as follows:

How has it changed? It's no structure. It's no leadership. . . . The structure in my hood amongst the older men is still there. Amongst young people like me, it's not. It's a lot of people dead, it's a lot of disloyalty, it's a lot of people that turned state's [evidence] on cases, you know, things of that nature. But as far as that older group of people who were around for the original piece, they're still around, they're still active, they're still involved in the community. Their outlook is different. They're not pushin' drugs—they're pushin' jobs, they're pushin' education, they're

empowering youth. They're doin' what they should have been doin' from the jump, but except they were young men at that time, and [the streets] had them swallowed up.

This transformation from gang leader to youth advocate and community worker described by Lamont has conceivably allowed former gang leaders to maintain, to some extent, a well-defined role within the neighborhood that carries with it some degree of esteem. While such efforts by one-time gang leaders were generally respected and, in some ways, even admired by current gang members, Rasheed emphasized the generational disconnect described by Lamont and made it clear that current gang members in his neighborhood were taking no orders from the "old heads." Indeed, although his references to "order" and "keep[ing] shit tightened up" seem to suggest the maintenance of more traditional notions of gang collectivism and obedience, Rasheed ultimately describes ideologies, group structures, and processes of socialization that are nearly identical to those explained by Zeke and Marco.

RRA: So is it still directive as far as, you know, the older guys saying, "This is how it's gonna be"?

RASHEED: Nah. Now, it's like, fuck what they said, [whether] I'm right or wrong, you feel me? So if a mu'fucka bogus, they bogus, so it ain't really about what the old heads say. It's about who gon' say something when shit get out of order. 'Cause they old. They ain't movin' no muscle. So it's really up to the mu'fuckas around my age, lil bit older, to keep shit tightened up, you feel me, make sure the younger guys stay on point. 'Cause they don't got no relationship with [the younger members]. The older heads might rap with 'em every now and then, but that shit probably go right in one ear and out the other. I'm kickin' it with these lil niggas so they lookin' at me eye-to-eye, know what I'm sayin'? I'm just a couple years older than they are.

Here Rasheed contrasts the relationship between the "old heads" and the younger generations of gang members, which he describes as nonexistent, with his own relationship with his comrades a few years his junior, relationships that he characterizes in egalitarian terms as being "eye-to-eye." Rasheed goes on to describe one of the guys a few years his senior—a

"crucial Brother"—who had a profound impact on him as well as the broader cultural shift within the neighborhood.

RASHEED: He like, "Man, don't let a mu'fucka trick you. Don't let a mu'fucka go on you [discipline you], woo wop the bam." . . . He the first one who put it in our head like *we* the law.

RRA: So do the younger guys take direction from y'all? Like, if you come on the block, are you tellin' somebody that's fourteen or fifteen, "Hey, look, this what you gonna do"?

RASHEED: We ain't on no—we ain't *tellin*' a mu'fucka to do nothing. . . . I think they be listenin', but they still do what the fuck they wanna do, just like we was doin' what the fuck we wanted to do. I just hope they listen for [their own benefit].

The ability to "do what [you] wanna do" represents a central organizing principle—indeed, perhaps *the* central organizing principle—of gang life for young gang members on Chicago's South Side today. This fierce ethos of personal autonomy is readily apparent in the horizontal form of organization that characterizes today's gangs. In accordance with their ideologies of autonomy and egalitarianism, moreover, these groups have abolished the practice of violations, the physical beatings long employed by gang leaders as a tool of discipline and coercion. Study participants made it clear that, while internal disputes might be resolved in a variety of ways, including fistfights, the type of authority necessary to order and carry out violations no longer exists in their gangs in any form. When asked about the use of violations today, for example, Memphis simply replied, "Man, that shit *been* over with." (The nearly boundless nature of personal autonomy and the extent of the ideological rejection of violations and other mechanisms of collective social control within today's gangs, as well as the effects of these developments on the nature of gang violence, are explored in greater detail in chapter 3.)

Alongside the eradication of central and local leadership hierarchies and the establishment of egalitarianism and autonomy as essential governing ideologies, the increasing importance that young gang members place on personal relationships, alluded to in many of the quoted passages included in this section, represents another striking new dimension in the

evolution of Chicago's black street gangs. Indeed, this development has contributed not only to the further reorganization of the internal dynamics of these groups but has also fundamentally transformed intergang dynamics across much of the South Side as well.

THE DECLINING SIGNIFICANCE OF TRADITIONAL GANG AFFILIATION

Perhaps an even more stunning development than the abolition of gang leadership structures has been the declining significance of traditional gang affiliations (e.g., Gangster Disciples, Mickey Cobras) in shaping the nature of contemporary relationships among gang members on Chicago's South Side. As discussed briefly in chapter 1, gang members are now openly forging alliances and even formally unifying with members of longtime rival organizations. This dynamic, generally referred to as "cliquing up," is taking place both *between* today's independent neighborhood gangs as well as *within* these gangs. In other words, not only are gangs with historically rival affiliations developing informal cross-neighborhood alliances, but individual gangs themselves increasingly comprise members with various traditional gang affiliations. In accordance with the framing of this practice as "cliquing up," gang members today often refer to these amalgamations as "cliques." Jabari succinctly describes this new form of gang as follows: "A clique is a group of people who don't represent the same organization, but they form an organization. . . . You a Gangster, I'm a Stone, he BD. We all together."

Table 2.1, which specifies the traditional gang affiliations represented in each of the study participants' gangs, reveals the near-ubiquity of such intergang unifications. While eleven of the fourteen gangs to which participants belong have retained a traditional gang affiliation as the predominant identity within their group (represented in the table by bold text), only three of these gangs consist of members who all share the same traditional gang affiliation. The remaining eleven represent a mixture of various traditional identities.

Clearly, such affiliations no longer function as the incontrovertible basis for association among Chicago gang members. Like the breakdown of gang leadership hierarchies and the establishment of local egalitarian forms of internal gang governance, the declining significance of traditional gang

TABLE 2.1
Traditional Gang Identities in Participants' Gangs

Participant(s)	Traditional gang identities represented in gang
Floyd, Montrelle, Terrence, Rick	**Mickey Cobras**, Black Disciples
Durrell, Memphis, Kevin	**Black Disciples**
Roosevelt, Melvin, Cassius	Outlaw Gangster Disciples, Mickey Cobras, Black P Stones
Lamont, Rasheed	**Black P Stones**
David, Bibby, Cedric	**Insane Gangster Disciples**, Black P Stones, Mickey Cobras
Carlos	**Black Disciples**, Gangster Disciples, Black P Stones
Cortez, Daequan	**Gangster Disciples**, Black P Stones, Four Corner Hustlers
Ronald	Gangster Disciples, Black P Stones, Vice Lords
Aaron	Gangster Disciples, Black Disciples, Black P Stones, Vice Lords
Antonio	**Black P Stones**, Black Disciples, Gangster Disciples
Reggie	**Insane Gangster Disciples**
Javon	**Gangster Disciples**, Black Disciples, Black P Stones, Mickey Cobras
Harold, Marco, Weezy, Zeke	**Black Disciples**, Gangster Disciples
Bernard, Jabari, James	**Gangster Disciples**, Insane Gangster Disciples, Black Disciples, Black P Stones

Note: Bolded names of traditional street gangs indicate numerical and/or symbolic predominance within a particular gang. Where no street gang name is bolded, no one identity predominates.

affiliations signifies a radical departure from the city's gang customs and a fierce rejection of conventional gang doctrines by young members. These gang members generally view the city's decades-old ideological gang rivalries with disdain and openly flout these customary antagonisms by building alliances across once-unassailable gang fault lines. Participants' rejection of ideological gangbanging is apparent in the following quotes from Carlos and Rasheed, in which they characterize these traditions as impractical "bullshit" and a form of divisive "segregation," respectively. The ability to build relationships across gang lines, moreover, is simply taken for granted in these statements and can therefore also be understood as a manifestation of the emphasis on individual autonomy among contemporary gangs on Chicago's South Side. In other words, gang members today have embraced the notion that the license to determine relationships on the streets rests with individual gang members themselves, as opposed to being contingent on traditional gang affiliations.

RRA: So is everybody from your hood BD, then?

CARLOS: Nah, not necessarily. It's a lot of renegade shit goin' on—a lot of barnone shit goin' on out here in the field right now, so it really ain't even mu'fuckas

goin' by them laws, you feel me? . . . It's just really who you know. Like I say, it ain't even about, oh, I'm a Stone, he a Lord, and he a Gangster. Or he Folks, and he such-and-such. It ain't even like that no more. It's really: Is you tryin' to get to this money or you on some bullshit? It's really common sense out here now, you feel me? I fuck with everybody, man.

RASHEED: I don't really give a fuck what [traditional gang] a mu'fucka is. That shit personal. . . . Real fuck with real, so at the end of the day, that gangbangin' shit [is] really all fucked up. That's segregation. That shit real—that segregation shit real, B. They segregated us with that shit, know what I'm sayin'?[3]

RRA: Is everybody from your block Stone, then? 'Cause you know, depending on where you're at, sometimes it be a mixture.

RASHEED: Yeah, we all [*pounds his right fist over his heart, a Stone salute*]. Ain't none of that other shit. Well, it's other people that we know that's something else, but the main squad, everybody from my block, is Stone. Now, everybody got they friends that might come to the block who ain't Stone and shit. Like, my homie who locked up right now for the hit that I could've been on, he was GD.

In place of traditional gang affiliations, personal relationships have become the primary foundation through which associations are shaped within and between Chicago's street gangs. Along with the rejection of customary gang ideologies and the increasing centrality of personal autonomy among the city's youthful gang members, this shift has been driven by a number of interrelated factors. As described earlier, today's gangs have become more insular, shunning the type of high-level city and prison gang politics that had shaped Chicago's gangland since at least the 1970s and shifting their focus toward local concerns. Accordingly, the loyalties of current gang members are no longer shaped by identification with now-defunct cross-neighborhood traditional street gangs, but rather with their immediate circle of comrades with whom they share close personal relationships and much of their daily lives. In addition, the heightened insularity and diminished organizational complexity of today's gangs has reduced the need for broad-based membership, and most of the participants in this study reported having less than twenty core members in their respective groups. These shifts have also made once-essential divisions of labor unnecessary, pushing women further toward the margins of these gangs and leaving

little room for members beyond their mid-twenties.[4] Indeed, study participants were essentially unanimous in reporting that their comrades were all between sixteen and twenty-five years old and exclusively male.

The near-wholesale demolition of Chicago's public housing developments, moreover, has meant that these comrades are increasingly likely to identify as members of different—and, often, rival—traditional street gangs. As thousands of project-based gang members were displaced into gang territories throughout the city's black neighborhoods, contact with and familiarity between members of longtime rival gangs rose dramatically. This dynamic was a primary catalyst for a paradigm shift that has persisted even after these demolitions and displacements largely wound down late in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The waning influence of gang leaders and conventional gang ideologies has meant that young gang members are increasingly amenable to building relationships across traditional gang fault lines, with shared experiences in the streets serving to cement these intergang bonds. In the following passages, Harold and Aaron expound on these dynamics.

HAROLD: It go off sets now, you know? It could be BDs, GDs, they just together 'cause they off that same block. That's how it be now.

RRA: So it's not whatever organization you are as much as it is who you with?

HAROLD: Basically, who you with and what set you be at, yup. . . . People stay on they block and they just get to kickin' it and then they respect them as them bein' that gang. [If] somebody get killed, they'll just name it after that person. And if you knew that person, but you a different gang, you [are going to be] with them, too. You just call it a set. Like, I'm from Tre World—we call ourself Tre World [named after a member who was killed by the police]. We BDs, but it might be some GDs that's cool with us, you know what I'm sayin', that's already been with us, though. Back in the day, it was just straight: y'all all BDs, y'all all GDs, woo, woo, woo, all Stones. But now it's cliques.

AARON: Man, it ain't no structure. It's gang-on-gang shit, really. It's just neighborhoods. Mu'fucka claim that gang shit, but it's all about your neighborhood—where you from. Like, it's Terror Town, O-Block, all that. That's what the fuck it is. It ain't no GD, BD, shit like that. That's all it is, basically: where the fuck you grew up at and who you with.

The supplanting of traditional gang allegiances with a new paradigm of loyalty rooted in individual autonomy and personal relationships has thrown Chicago's streets into a type of disarray not seen since the tumultuous early days of cross-neighborhood black and Latino gang organizing in the 1960s. Gang loyalties that had endured for decades have been called into question, dissolved, and/or imploded, and new relationships and alliances have been formed. These dynamics have routinely given rise to conflicting expectations and loyalties, forcing gang members to make difficult choices and leading to intragang violence. This process of allegiance renegotiation, in turn, has further contributed to the splintering of Chicago's traditional gang structures.

These idiosyncratic and often-complex dynamics are evident in Terrence's account of the violent fracturing of his Mickey Cobra set, Free Block, after a fierce war between two nearby gangs with whom Free Block was allied created an intergenerational rift within the gang. On one side of the war was Bang City, a Cobra set adjacent to Free Block and a longtime ally. On the other side was D-Mob, a nearby set of Black Disciples with whom younger members of Free Block like Terrence and Rick shared close friendships. In short, the young MCs from Free Block sided with their friends from D-Mob in the conflict, while the older MCs from Free Block sided with their Cobra neighbors and allies from Bang City. These divided loyalties ultimately shattered Free Block's decades-old Cobra stronghold, which devolved into open intragang warfare as an extension of the original conflict between D-Mob and Bang City. The bond between the young members of Free Block and D-Mob, moreover, eventually led to a merger of sorts in which some members of D-Mob, including Floyd and Montrelle, began claiming Free Block as their primary affiliation, while simultaneously maintaining their Black Disciple identity and their bonds with their D-Mob comrades. The salience of personal relationships, the declining importance of traditional gang affiliation, and the imperviousness of young gang members to the control of older gang leaders are all evident in Terrence's account of this process.

TERRENCE: With me, it's not really about what gang you is, it's more of how the *person* you is that makes me dislike you. That was the problem with us and the MCs, too, 'cause we associate ourself with more of the BDs. Like D-Mob,

Goodfellas, KPB, them the people we hang with. And the MCs didn't like that. And we didn't care. . . .

Basically, [that's] the story of how we got into it with Bang City. Like, I was cool with most of them [*pausing*] . . . majority of them [*pausing*] . . . cool with all of 'em! . . . The whole Indiana all the way back to Federal, [during] my brother era, all them was together. They grew up together. They was the gang—they was the MCs. We MC, but as we growin' up, it got segregated. Like, our older guys, they was still messin' with certain people down there. But as we grew up, we wasn't goin' down there talkin' to them like that. We stayed on our side, from Indiana to Wabash, [and] they stayed on they side. That's when it started separatin' like that between our neighborhood. . . . Certain people didn't get along with them. You know, Montrelle, Black [both Black Disciples originally from D-Mob], they didn't get along with 'em.

RRA: What kind of position did that put you in?

TERRENCE: Man, it put me in a bad predicament at first 'cause I was still goin' to MC meetings and all that. So, basically, all the attention was fallin' on me. After a while, I just stopped caring. So I don't like nobody now. I don't talk to none of them—none of the older guys. We actually into it with them, too. Like, we shoot at them, too. I don't talk to nobody but my crowd I know.

RRA: So what made you make the decision as far as, okay, these the guys that I'm riding with?

TERRENCE: [The older guys] started givin' Bang City guns. And, basically, they givin' them guns to shoot at us. . . . That left me with a choice: I have to pick sides. I've been knowin' Black and Montrelle almost all my life, so [I sided with them].

Even as gang members have rejected long-standing alliances based on gang affiliations and united with traditional enemies on the basis of locality and personal relationships, however, the legacy of Chicago's traditional black street gangs remains deeply embedded in the fabric of the city's gang culture. Remarkably, present-day gang members, including the study participants, have not abandoned their traditional gang identities as Black Disciples, Mickey Cobras, Gangster Disciples, Black P Stones, and the like. Even those too young to remember—much less have taken part in—the era when these gangs existed and functioned as formidable street organizations/gang nations have adopted these identities, and this practice

continues unabated among subsequent generations of gang members today. Given the reorganization of gangs on Chicago's South Side as independent neighborhood-based collectives, it would have been easy and seemingly rational for these youthful gang members to simply abandon these old labels and assume new, exclusively neighborhood-based group identities. Yet they have almost universally retained these identities.[5] Clearly, association with these traditional street gangs remains an essential element of identity among the city's gang members.

The nature and implications of these identities, however, are drastically different today than during previous decades. More specifically, identifying with one of these traditional street gangs no longer entails "gang membership" in the conventional sense of the term, as, for all intents and purposes, these gangs no longer exist as organizations unified in any substantive sense—certainly not as hierarchically structured gang nations and, increasingly, not even as homogeneous neighborhood sets. Instead of functioning as a basis for formalizing and sustaining collective ideologies and bonds, then, these traditional gang identities are now viewed in largely individual terms, as gang members draw on them in fashioning their personal identities, mannerisms, styles, and ideologies. "That shit personal," as Rasheed proclaimed. The adoption of renegade gang identities as well as the rare instances in which a gang member "flips" and changes their traditional gang identity entirely push this individualistic paradigm to even further lengths. In previous eras, these practices were treated as treasonous defections; today, they are routinely regarded as a logical extension of personal autonomy and a legitimate form of individual identity construction.

Consider the following examples described by James and Jabari, who hail from the same block in the midst of one of the Gangster Disciples' largest traditional strongholds. The shattering of the gang's organizational structure had fractured their sizable neighborhood set into a number of smaller, independent gangs, which coexisted uneasily for a period of time under a façade of friendship and unity before festering tensions eventually bubbled over into open internecine warfare.[6] These dynamics created something of an identity crisis for James and Jabari. The respective ways in which they resolved this crisis reveal both the continued significance of traditional gang identities as well as the contemporary emphasis on resistance, autonomy, and individuality in the construction of these identities.

For his part, Jabari adopted an identity as an "Insane" Gangster Disciple, an example of the overtly renegade identities increasingly popular among today's young gang members. These identities typically involve the addition of "Outlaw," "Nolaw," "Insane," or "Renegade" in front of the name of a traditional street gang, a practice that allows gang members to both maintain their original gang identities as well as symbolically repudiate notions of subordination to the ideologies and hierarchies traditionally associated with these gangs. This has been a particularly common practice among disgruntled members of the Gangster Disciples, long Chicago's largest and most fully corporatized street gang, which had rebellious factions developing during the organization's 1990s peak, if not earlier.[7] Cassius, for example, describes the Outlaw Gangster Disciples as follows:

CASSIUS: The Outlaws, they ain't really got no board of directors. So they ain't really got nobody who lay the game plan for mu'fuckas. They really do what they wanna do, the Outlaws.

RRA: So what's their relationship with the traditional Gangster Disciples?

CASSIUS: They branched off from the original Gangsters and made theyself the Outlaw Gangsters. . . . They wanted they own, you know, set of laws or—which they don't have [*laughing*]. So, shit. Yeah, they wanted to do things on they own.

In practical terms, these titles no longer denote renegade factions of a broader gang organization as, again, such organizations no longer exist. Rather, they represent identities—sometimes collective, sometimes individual—that are increasingly being adopted by young gang members from a wide variety of the city's black street gangs.[8] Those who embrace these identities often assume a stance as categorical enemies of the street gangs from which they consider themselves renegades. At the very least, a central element of such identities involves a willingness, if not an outright desire, to engage members of the renegades' traditional street gangs in violent conflict. In the following passage, Jabari describes both the psychology as well as the practical implications of such renegade identities within the context of contemporary Chicago gang culture. He reports that his adoption of an "Insane" identity was essentially unremarkable in the eyes of his comrades, most of whom, nonetheless, chose to maintain their traditional identities as Gangster Disciples. As Jabari points out, however,

those who embrace these renegade identities often run into problems in Illinois jails and prisons, where traditional gang structures have retained greater influence.

JABARI: Everybody renegadin' it, throwing up "L's" and "I's" and shit. . . ."I," that's Insane. I got that [tattooed] on my neck. We Insane Gangsters—IGD.

RRA: So do y'all differentiate yourselves from the regular GDs?

JABARI: We the same, but an Insane GD will get into it with other Gangsters. Like, I get into it with other Gangsters, that's why I'm Insane GD.

RRA: So are y'all still cool with some of the regular GDs, too, then?

JABARI: All of my homies regular GDs; ain't none of them "I." I'm still trying to make them "I"—put the "I" on they backs.

RRA: So what's the whole Insane thing, then?

JABARI: You can be Insane anything—it's renegades. Just like "L's." Like, if I go to the joint and I'm yellin' "Insane," the GDs gon' beat my ass. 'Cause they: "Leave that shit in the world." When you come on the deck, it's all Folks—it's Larry's guys. On my mama: seven, four, fourteen.[9] I be like, "Fuck that, I'm Insane!" They gon': "What? Take him to the back. Matter of fact, get him off the deck. Whoop him—send him to ATG." I keep fightin', I keep fightin', I'm 'a go to ATG—against the grain [a segregated unit]. That's where I'm 'a have to be. And that's where all the "L's" and them niggas be. That's how the County rockin' right now—ATG. Everybody ATG in there.

For James, the infighting and betrayals in his neighborhood fueled intense feelings of uncertainty and distrust that eventually colored his views of not only his gang's ostensible allies from adjacent blocks but of some of his closest comrades as well. Following a reflective period of incarceration, he resolved to leverage his recently forged relationship with a number of Black P Stones—the Gangster Disciples' oldest and fiercest rivals—to "flip Black Stone."[10] He explains his decision as follows:

JAMES: I was a Gangster at first. I flipped Black Stone, you know what I'm sayin', 'cause I wasn't really rockin' with the guys like that no more. And all the older niggas I fuck with, we just fuck with each other on money-wise, so really that gangbangin' shit didn't really come into hand with them, you feel me? But as far as that, I told myself I couldn't see myself saying, I'm one of the guys shaking your hand, shakin' up [performing a gang handshake] with you, and

kickin' it with you outside, parlaying with you, knowin' that I'd kill you. Knowing that me and you done had bad words and knowing that certain situations that got took so far to the point where, shit, nigga, I'm 'a kill you. You a man like I'm a man, but I'm 'a kill you first. You feel me, because I done seen shit—the guys robbed the guys, the guys done *killed* the guys.

RRA: In the same mob?

JAMES: Yeah, in the same mob, same organization. So, shit, I don't want to be a part of that. I can't say you my homie if I know he gon' kill me down the line if I do something he don't like or we come across each other on bad terms, you know what I'm sayin'?

RRA: So the hood that you were originally from, that's the hood you still kicking it in now, or a different area?

JAMES: I'm still in the same area, [but] I also be in different areas 'cause by me being Black Stone. Other than that, it's still cool. I know niggas don't like what I did when I did flip, but niggas ain't gonna do nothing. 'Cause they know who I am, so they ain't gonna do nothing. They know what I can do.

Although driven by a similar desire to alter his Gangster Disciple identity within the context of organizational implosion and internecine warfare, James's conversion to the Black P Stones was interpreted among his comrades as a repudiation of this identity, whereas Jabari's adoption of the "Insane" identity was viewed as a less offensive modification. Yet, in spite of defying popular sentiment among his peers on the block, James's decision was ultimately regarded by these peers as an acceptable expression of personal autonomy and individual identity construction. The Stones that James joined up with were not direct enemies of his original Gangster Disciple neighborhood, and as long as he did not formally denounce that neighborhood, his GD peers would tolerate his conversion. Indeed, as he expresses below, Jabari even believed that this transition would ultimately prove beneficial for his friend—that being a Stone would "help him be better as a man."

JABARI: Bro just left. Like, he ain't talk to nobody. He talked to me, but he was locked up. And then I'm like, "Man, you ain't even gotta do that shit, bro. Niggas is gon' look at you different. It ain't like we gon' love you different, just respect out of a man. Like, people on the street look at that shit."

RRA: So why do you think he did that, then?

JABARI: Because he felt uncomfortable around niggas he was Gangsters with. But still, them niggas ain't never did nothing to you. At the end of the day, them niggas gon' kill somebody for you. At the end of the day, nigga, this is the hood you servin' [selling drugs] in. You could have been Insane first [as opposed to flipping to Stone]. . . .

It's just certain shit you don't do. He ain't have to do that, though. He just felt like, "Man, I don't wanna be Gangster no more. I'll kill one of them Folks." "Nah, bro. What you think you doin' now? You was just Gangster and you was just beatin' up the Folks. What you mean? It's the same thing, it's just these are our guys we know." . . . And he flipped strong. He fuckin' with some niggas who was Stonin' it. Shit, he like how them Moes move, I guess.

RRA: How did the guys on your block take it?

JABARI: They took it as, "Shit, oh well. James, he Stone? Oh well. He cool with us, shit, he still Rico World, woo, woo, woo," you feel me? Long as he ain't turn his whole back on us, like, he just gave us the [*sticking up his middle finger*]—you know? . . . But, see, this the thing when you a clique now—see, we went from a mob to a clique, right? I'm twenty-one. If this was back when we was like, let's say fifteen, fourteen, sixteen, he would have got his head knocked off. Like, they would've pumpkin-headed him, for real. That's what the GDs do—pumpkin heads. They'll take you to the back and beat your head 'til your shit literally look like Halloween. On my mama. . . .

But he good, though. I feel like the Moes gon' help him be better as a man. Folks really wasn't teaching him nothing. . . . A Moe gon' sit you down, show you how to do this and that, tell you how to be about it, be smart, woo, woo, woo. You know, they really brotherhood-ing it. We the Folks, like, it sound rugged—it sound just bad and grimy.

While young gang members have fundamentally refashioned Chicago's gang landscape in their image, localizing and democratizing governance, emphasizing autonomy and personal relationships, and rejecting traditional gang ideologies and divisions, external forces have also continued to have enormous effects on these gangs as well. Perhaps most notably, the declining urban drug economy, discussed in chapter 1 as a chief contributing factor in the weakening and eventual shattering of Chicago's traditional black street gangs, has continued to shape the city's gangs in important ways in the early twenty-first century.

ON (NOT) GETTING BY IN THE MARIJUANA-BASED DRUG ECONOMY

Chapter 1 explored the catastrophic effects that, in conjunction with several other major historical events, the waning demand for crack cocaine had on Chicago's corporate-style, outlaw-capitalist black street gangs at the dawn of the millennium. For many young rank-and-file gang members, shrinking drug revenues meant that they were increasingly marginalized within their gangs' drug-selling operations or even excluded from them entirely. The emergence of marijuana, typically a much less profitable drug from a distribution perspective, as the substance of choice among urban drug consumers during this period and its persistence as such into the present day has only exacerbated this dynamic. Thus, while selling drugs represented the focal point of gang life in Chicago during the 1980s and 1990s, the findings from this study emphatically indicate that, in the early twenty-first century, this is no longer the case. To the extent that participants in this study discussed selling drugs, it was often within a context of highlighting its decline within their communities and gangs. Few participants, moreover, described selling drugs other than marijuana, and the low levels of profitability associated with selling marijuana have left increasing numbers of gang members without even the most basic opportunities for income generation in the illicit drug trade. Their marginalization in the formal economy, in other words, now increasingly characterizes their experiences within the underground economy as well. The inability to earn money selling drugs has made basic survival increasingly difficult for many Chicago gang members, who are overwhelmingly excluded from conventional employment opportunities and whose families are typically poor.

While I had been keenly aware of these realities from my pre-research days working with young people on the South Side of Chicago, they came into even sharper focus during the course of my research. On one occasion in the field, for example, I was hanging out with some guys with whom I had previously worked outside of a corner store on a busy thoroughfare near the large apartment building where most of them live and that serves as their collective home base. It was a balmy eighty-degree summer day, and the streets were full of both car and pedestrian traffic, the latter driven in

part by two nearby public train stations. The group of guys on the block grew from four or five to about a dozen or so as the afternoon wore on, and I eventually pulled a few of them away individually to conduct interviews. During one of these interviews, Memphis told me that he was the only one of his comrades on the block actively selling drugs. One of his peers later verified the veracity of this claim, which was also seemingly supported by the various phone calls that Memphis fielded from his friend whom he had left in charge of selling his drugs and who was attempting to make a sale to a haggling customer during our interview. That this was the dynamic in a neighborhood with a good amount of both car and foot traffic and proximity to both major public transportation and the Dan Ryan Expressway suggests the extent to which selling drugs has become a marginal part of gang life on Chicago's South Side. More generally, Memphis describes here the bleak realities he and his peers face in trying to survive on the streets as well as their desperate and escapist attempts to cope through their own substance abuse.

MEMPHIS: Like, right now—okay, you just seen . . .

RRA: Like, ten guys on the block.

MEMPHIS: And who you think hustlin'?

RRA: You tell me!

MEMPHIS: Me. Out of ten niggas! This what I'm sayin', everybody else just out there. It's just a typical day. And they only out there 'cause ain't no mu'fucka wanna be in no crib [house]! They ain't got no job, and a mu'fucka ain't got no money, so they just out there. Why you think everybody tryin' to jump on this [interview]? They broke—everybody broke. You know what I'm sayin'?

After you brought up in something for so long, you know, you gon' become condemned to shit. You gon' fall right in line with however the usual routine you been doin' every day. Most niggas wake up every day broke, tryin' to find a high, B. You know, that's fucked up, but it's the truth. . . . You ain't even buy yourself a fuckin' meal to eat! I'm sayin' this 'cause I witness—I done did this shit a couple of times. I done grew out the shit now, but it's fucked up that I know that's what's goin' on.

Beyond the problem of low demand, this desperate dynamic has also been fueled by the switch from open-air drug markets to the delivery-based drug-selling practices described briefly in chapter 1. Indeed, while

made possible by the ubiquity of cell phones in the twenty-first century, this switch was also precipitated by the declining profitability of fixed, open-air drug markets driven by the decline of the crack era. In a mobile drug delivery model, fewer people are needed to serve as retail-level drug dealers, and the need for lookouts, security, runners, and other ancillary positions (read: jobs and attendant operating costs) associated with open-air markets are largely eliminated. The realities of rampant gang conflicts and police occupation, moreover, make selling drugs on a street corner a rather unattractive proposition in the face of a viable alternative.

That said, a number of participants made unprompted remarks about the persistence and continued profitability of open-air drug markets, particularly heroin markets, on Chicago's West Side. "The best heroin always been out West," Lorenzo, a West Side native, explains. "People came even from out South to get heroin from out West." The available evidence seems to corroborate these insights. A 2016 report from the Illinois Consortium on Drug Policy and Roosevelt University, for example, notes that the five communities that make up the core of Chicago's West Side each rank among the six communities with the highest rates of arrest for heroin possession in the city. The average rate of heroin possession in these communities, moreover, is more than four times higher than the average in the five South Side communities with the highest such rates, which include Englewood, New City, and Washington Park.[11] While a full empirical exploration of these dynamics is beyond the scope of this research, the important thing to note is that participants' references to ostensibly lucrative West Side drug markets functioned specifically to distinguish the relative poverty of their South Side counterparts. Floyd describes both the drug delivery sales model and the West Side's drug market predominance as follows:

FLOYD: Ain't no money really bein' made on no blocks, you know? All the money is in traffic, so you really not makin' no block hot from makin' money 'cause ain't no money really out there.

RRA: So when you sayin' the money is in traffic, you talkin' about dudes ridin' around, making they drop-offs and all of that?

FLOYD: Mm-hm. Pick-ups, drop-offs. You know, there's no block—well, not on the South Side. I can't speak for no other side of the city. But the South and East Sides, everybody in traffic because don't nobody wanna risk standin' on the block and gettin' shot at. . . .

> It's still out there, though. You know, I was out with some of my people out West earlier this year. And they still got money. Like, I recently seen my first brick of heroin. I didn't believe this shit was still goin' on in Chicago! I was shocked to see the shit!

Those participants in this study who reported selling drugs, moreover, admitted that their earnings from these activities were generally far below a basic subsistence wage. Indeed, as discussed in chapter 1, even during the height of the crack epidemic, when the earnings potential for retail-level drug dealers was likely at its peak, the wages for most of these dealers barely cracked the legal minimum wage.[12] Marijuana's displacement of crack as the substance of choice among most urban drug consumers, then, has only served to further erode these meager earnings. Although heroin use has made a major resurgence in recent years and selling heroin—like crack cocaine—is often much more lucrative than selling marijuana, the longtime predominance of West Side heroin markets appears to have rendered the markets on Chicago's South Side largely redundant. Thus, while a couple of participants talked about selling heroin, and their reports, as well as what I know from conversations with other individuals whom I know to sell heroin but did not interview formally, indicate that they tend to earn substantially more money than their counterparts who sell weed, the demand for heroin on Chicago's South Side simply does not appear high enough to make this an industry with broad-based employment opportunities for today's gang members. So while selling heroin provides a decent income for a relatively small number of South Side gang members, the drug's recent explosion in popularity has had little impact on the economic prospects of this population on any meaningful scale.[13]

In practical terms, many gang members today have difficulty earning enough money to ensure that they are able to feed themselves, indulge in their minor vices, and occasionally purchase a new outfit or pair of fashionable shoes. Of the thirty active gang members interviewed for this study, for example, only six owned a car at the time of their interview, and only two of these six had purchased their cars with money they earned from selling drugs; the others did so with money earned via conventional employment. In addition, as described by Memphis in a previous passage, gang members often turn to drug use, particularly marijuana, as a means

of coping with their everyday experiences of marginality and despair. The fact that many gang members smoke marijuana themselves has the effect of sending whatever meager profit margins they might enjoy from their drug sales, quite literally, up in smoke. In short, although selling drugs was never very lucrative for the vast majority of Chicago gang members, contemporary patterns of drug consumption and distribution have intensified this harsh reality. In the following passage, James explains the near impossibility of effectively sustaining oneself as a retail-level marijuana dealer. Both the financial struggles associated with low-wage, menial—and, in this case, illegal—work, as well as a reliance on substance abuse as a coping mechanism in the face of such hardship are apparent in his account.

It's a slight struggle, because you gotta understand—say if you buyin' weed. Okay, I'm finna buy a zip [an ounce] for $300, you know? I'm finna bag up $550, so I'm finna bag up fifty-five bags, all sawbucks [ten-dollar bags of marijuana for resale]. So I just spent $300. And I smoke weed, so now I'm finna smoke at least, by the time I been done sold the whole thing, if I ain't got a good line [a high demand], I done smoked $100 worth already. So now I'm goin' back to the store [mid-level drug supplier] with my $300, 'cause I'm puttin' $150 up [saving $150]. But, really, I ain't even put $150 up 'cause I'm smoking, so that mean I gotta buy Swishers.[14] And they two for a $1 or $0.75. So that's another $30 gone. You know, and I'm smokin' cigarettes, and now they, what, $12.75 a pack, $13 a pack. . . . And that depends on how many packs I go through a day. Then I'm buyin' food all day 'cause I'm high and I'm hungry. Then I gotta pay my phone bill, it's $50 a month, you know?

So, really, it be hard to maintain. . . . You still gotta buy the weed, you gotta buy sandwich bags, you gotta buy a scale to weigh your weed, make sure they gave you the exact amount—the right amount for your money's worth. All that. It's a lot [of hassle], man. It's a lot.

The eradication of the organizational hierarchies of Chicago's traditional black street gangs, moreover, has made opportunities for mobility in the drug business all but nonexistent for the average Chicago gang member. As such, the few opportunities for drug business promotions that exist today are no longer attainable via traditional standards for advancement, such as "putting in work" for the gang as an effective salesperson or

obedient soldier or being the beneficiary of internal gang politics. Instead, mobility in the drug game is increasingly dependent on key personal, and frequently familial, relationships with individuals in prominent positions within drug distribution networks. Crucially, these networks are no longer synonymous with the city's street gangs: Drugs are sold readily across gang lines, and drug networks, like today's gangs, often include members from a variety of traditional street gangs who are not beholden to traditional gang leadership structures. A Black Disciple from a predominantly Mickey Cobra gang might sell drugs for a Gangster Disciple. The old model of street-gang-as-drug-organization is largely, if not entirely, defunct at this point on Chicago's South Side. In the following passages, Carlos and Floyd describe a number of these dynamics. Carlos discusses the opportunities afforded him through his father's position as a drug distributor a couple of layers removed from the streets and alludes to the persistence of the drug trade as a highly stratified and fundamentally exploitive business. Floyd emphasizes the scarcity of opportunities for substantive entrée and mobility within the drug game, similarly framing these possibilities in terms of existing, often familial, relationships.

CARLOS: My daddy, he one of the big—he one of them niggas out here. . . . It's a saying. I don't know if it's the full saying, but like, it's people that do shit, and some people that [shit] gets done to them. I'm one of the people that benefit from the shit that's gettin' done, you feel me? I might not be the person that's doin' it, but I get beneficial off that shit that's happening. Just off the simple fact who I'm plugged with and who I'm related to out here.

FLOYD: [You] had to already been sellin' drugs to be in the drug game. It's kinda like a union, you gotta be grandfathered in now. So if you ain't already in it, you ain't gon' be in it. 'Cause you ain't got the clientele—you ain't known by nobody. You gotta *know somebody*, know somebody. You have to be grandfathered in to what they got goin' on and be gettin' on through they clientele.

RRA: But it ain't no gang-type shit that's runnin' the drug shit at this point, right?

FLOYD: Not on the black perspective. Maybe the Latinos. You know, the Latinos still got access to the cartels and stuff. But on the black side? You had to have already been doin' this for twenty—you have to already be plugged in, you feel me?

RRA: Like, Tito's big brother was kinda in play with that, too, right?

FLOYD: Oh, yeah. Like him, he another person—he grandfathered in from the early 2000s, late '90s. He been gettin' money, so he was able to come home [from prison], and he still seein'—he makin' a lot of money. And Tito, he was able to get put on by his big brother. But, you know, for the next person [they don't have that opportunity].

As Carlos and, especially, Floyd describe here, access to opportunities for advancement and the chance to make even decent money in the drug game are increasingly rare for African American gang members and are often based on factors beyond their control. The study participants, in the throes of the desperate struggle for daily subsistence associated with selling—or, even worse, not selling—marijuana and other drugs at the retail level, were acutely aware of this reality. They harbored no illusions about the fallacy of "fast money" so often linked to gangs and drugs in the public imagination and popular discourse. The vast opportunities and bold ambitions described by older gang members early in chapter 1 in reference to the glory days of the crack era have given way to the sober recognition among today's gang members that gangbanging and selling drugs no longer constitute a viable career path. Given the lack of profitability and nearly nonexistent potential for advancement associated with selling drugs on the South Side of Chicago today, the continued participation of the city's gang members in the underground drug economy can only be understood within the broader context of the acute un- and underemployment experienced by Chicago's black youth: Nearly 90 percent of the city's working-age black teenagers and more than half of those in their early twenties are unemployed, the highest rates for black youth among the nation's ten largest metropolitan areas.[15]

When presented with opportunities for conventional employment, no matter how menial and precarious, participants reported that they and their peers took advantage of such opportunities virtually without exception. The "guaranteed check" associated with standard employment was preferable to the inadequacy and instability of "hustling." These perspectives are consistent with my experiences running a half-dozen state- and city-funded youth employment programs that collectively employed hundreds of young people during my time working on Chicago's South Side. It would be difficult to overstate the demand among young people in these communities for these jobs, which are temporary, part-time, and typically

pay just above the state's minimum wage for youth workers ages fourteen to twenty-four. In particular, I recall my surprise during my first summer running these programs, as young gang members with big reputations on the streets, who I had assumed would scoff at such menial job opportunities, desperately scrambled to secure the paperwork they needed to render them eligible for the program. *Why on earth would these guys want these jobs?* I wondered. The answer, I soon learned, was simple: They were not making much money on the streets. More generally, navigating the blitz of young people eager for work as they sought to claim slots for these programs was an unenviable challenge that, based on basic numerical realities, inevitably left many desperate youth on the outside of these programs looking in. Indeed, recent reports for the city's One Summer Chicago, a public–private youth employment initiative, show that the city turned down more than 160,000 young jobseekers between 2014 and 2017 alone, nearly 60 percent of the program's total applicants, due to inadequate funding.[16]

While study participants' perspectives on and experiences with the conventional labor market will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, one final illustration of the financial desperation experienced by today's gang members bears inclusion here. In the following excerpt, Marco describes the fate of Rillo, the former first Demetrius in Marco's neighborhood, whose retirement had prompted the vote for his replacement that Marco described earlier in this chapter. The most venerated member of his gang, Rillo left the streets behind at the age of twenty-five for what was, in all likelihood, a minimum-wage, dead-end job at a neighborhood convenience store. Having attained the experience and local status on the streets that once may have opened the doors of opportunity for him within a traditional drug-oriented gang structure, Rillo had hit a dead end in today's fragmented South Side gangland. Apparently unable to carve out a decent subsistence on the streets, he bitterly resigned himself to low-wage conventional employment. As Marco explains:

Folks been workin' in the store around the hood, you know, Folks couldn't really be out here all like that. . . . He didn't feel like doin' this shit no more because, I guess, he gettin' that age, and he feel like this shit is stupid. Last time I tried to talk to him about something like, "Hey, Folks, why are we—" He: "Man, listen. You said opps? Man, I don't give a fuck about that shit." That's all he would say. He was

with Jay recently, though. He [told Jay], "Man, I don't care about that shit." So I stopped talkin' to Folks about what we got goin' on 'cause [if] you don't care, I ain't finna tell you, you feel me? So we just been holdin' it down and shit.

The dearth of prospects for mobility in the illicit drug trade, and in the underground economy more generally, has likely contributed to the adoption and maintenance of egalitarian gang governance over the last decade or so. While rank-and-file gang members during previous decades also faced long odds of actually making a decent living in the drug game, the gang hierarchies of that era provided the illusion of the possibility of such ascendance. Indeed, the erosion of this illusion, resulting from the increasing marginalization of young members in their gangs' drug operations, was among the chief factors that brought about the internal rebellions that shattered these traditional gang hierarchies in the first place. Gang members on the South Side of Chicago today are mostly stuck "petty hustling" in an attempt to fulfill their basic needs and desires—food, bus and train fare, cigarettes, marijuana, and the occasional new outfit. While a repudiation of the coercion and exploitation that often characterized the gang leadership of yesteryear has clearly shaped today's egalitarian gang ideologies and structures, the sober recognition that few, if any, tangible opportunities for advancement in the underground economy remain for present-day gang members has likely informed these developments as well: Within a context of near-ubiquitous dispossession, hierarchies make little sense.

Taken together, the dynamics described in this chapter and chapter 1 represent nothing less than a paradigm shift in Chicago's gang landscape, a departure from decades-old traditions in terms of leadership, organization, culture, ideology, identity, relationships, alliances, and involvement in the underground economy. While processes of gang fracturing and reorganization have played out idiosyncratically, and thus somewhat unevenly, across neighborhoods, the unequivocal trend has been a striking shift in gang culture and structure away from obedience and toward autonomy—from street organizations to cliques. Though the names of the city's traditional street gangs live on in varying forms and fashions, those names are essentially all that remain of the corporate-style street gangs of

the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, from the perspective of today's gang members, the chief legacy of those traditional gangs is how little their current gangs resemble them. As Carlos succinctly puts it, "It ain't like that no more, like in the nineties and shit. Man, hell nah."

The older, transformed gang members interviewed for this study generally responded to these developments in two related ways. On one hand, they often insisted that the traditional gang structures still exist in some capacity. Daniel, for example, points out that the Gangster Disciples "still have board members. I'm not even sure if there's a means of takin' away a board member's spot after they appointed to the board. . . . Larry Hoover's still the chairman." Indeed, many older individuals who were a part of these traditional gang structures have maintained their longtime networks of friends who were also part of those organizations, many of whom held—or hold, as the case may be—leadership positions. So it is understandable that, from the perspectives of these individuals, the traditional gang structures still exist; after all, they and their friends essentially *are* the traditional gang structure. How, in other words, can the gang structure be said to no longer exist if many of the people who made up the structure are still around keeping the legacy alive?

On the other hand, there is an unequivocal recognition among these gang traditionalists that things are very different today than they were in the 1980s and 1990s. Daniel, for example, qualified his remarks about the persistence of the Gangster Disciples' organizational hierarchy by saying that it remains relevant primarily "for those who were part of the structure," but not for the younger generations. Indeed, to whatever extent the traditional gang hierarchies might remain in existence, they have very little, if any, bearing on contemporary forms of gang organization and culture among today's youthful gang members. In this sense, transformed gang members accurately perceive the dynamics among today's gangs as profoundly different from those of previous eras. These individuals admittedly had difficulty understanding these contemporary dynamics, as they do not conform to—and, indeed, often exist in diametrical opposition to—their own experiences and expectations. As Daniel and Paris elaborate:

DANIEL: I mean, I would say, in honesty [*laughing*], it's evolved to something I don't even really understand. . . . I'll give you an example. I read an article in one of the newspapers, and it was sayin' they got these guys in Cook County

Jail who were Gangster Disciples, and when they were asked who's they leader, they said they didn't have a leader. Right? So I'm like, well, how did you become a Gangster Disciple? I mean, can I just say I'm a police officer [*laughing*], you know what I'm sayin', and go to the police station and say, "Hand me a gun and a badge. I'm an officer"? Like, what are you talkin' about? So it's the same thing, right? How can you say you a Gangster—who made you a Gangster Disciple? You just picked up the name and runnin' with it? And I'm not sayin' people can't do that, they can do whatever they wanna do. All I'm sayin' is, in my mind, that's not how it works. . . . If they sayin' that there's no structure, what did you sign up for? Why you walkin' around with that name? What does it mean? What does it mean to *you*?

PARIS: I say, you know, some of these guys are like hip-hop gangsters. They didn't take the sworn oath. They don't live by the rules. They've never paid dues or nothing. So to be part of an organization is no different than if you was a member tithing at the church, you was part of a fraternity or sorority or something—you'd be dues-payin'. That's when you part of an organization. Not the way we've gotten away from it to the point where people just say they this based on what they neighborhood is. So it was totally different then. . . .

You know, I carried myself in a manner where you gon' be able to recognize that I was in the vision based on who I was, how I was, I would be demonstrating like, I'm a part of this. Just like bein' part of a fraternity—if you say, "Man, you gotta do this, you gotta do this, you can't do this." Like bein' part of a religion—the religion say you can't do this, you can't do that. If you gon' be part of it, you gon' be part of it. Nowadays, I don't think that people understand the essence of what the real organization ideology is.

Lorenzo offered that the contemporary dynamics among Chicago's black street gangs today perhaps more closely resemble the gang dynamics in Los Angeles than they do their own historical antecedents. "If you've ever been to California, it's a thousand kind of Crips, and it go by whatever street you on. And that's really how Chicago done turned into and got so segmented." Interestingly, Bibby, a twenty-two-year-old recent transplant from Los Angeles, was able to provide a comparison of the two gang cultures based on firsthand experience with both: As a teenager, he was active with the Rollin 60s Crips back in his hometown, and he had also been hanging out with a gang in his current area of residence in South Shore

after moving to Chicago. In his interview, he recounted in great detail his "put on" with the Rollin 60s, an elaborate initiation process that involved a period of regular social interaction referred to as "programming," formal sponsorship by a neighborhood "OG" (original gangster), a weeklong process during which he had to fight members of various sections of his neighborhood to prove his mettle and earn recognition, and, finally, the conferral of a "hood name," or gang moniker, as a formalization of his status as an "official" member. Conversely, Bibby expressed confusion about the relative fluidity and chaos that characterized the gang landscape in Chicago, particularly the mixing among individuals with rival traditional gang identities, a strict nonstarter in Los Angeles. "The gang culture in LA and the gang culture in Chicago is different," he observed. "They gang shit that they got goin' on [in Chicago], I don't know what's really the catch to it, but to me, this shit unorganized, bro. This shit too crazy, bro."

For their part, the Chicago Crime Commission, the civic organ of the Chicago Police Department, is apparently vaguely aware of some of the developments among the city's black street gangs. Their ideological commitment to criminalizing gang members and painting them in the worst light possible, however, appears to have precluded their ability to accurately assess the city's contemporary gang landscape: "Street gangs, both large and small, have splintered into subgroups, or factions, each with its own distinct leader. . . . Since there are fewer members in each faction, juveniles can rise through the curtailed ranks much more quickly. . . . The current disorganization of gang structure reflects [gang members'] base desire to seek positions of authority and use their fellow gang members as means towards this end. . . . Gang members are now ruled by their own greed, rather than any sort of devotion to their brotherhood or leaders."[17] Aside from their mention of gang fracturing, this research bears out that everything in this statement is erroneous, and everything, including the alleged cause of gang fracturing, is manufactured to depict gang members as morally bankrupt savages. The black gangs on Chicago's South Side today, moreover, are not really "factions" at all, as this term implies that these independent neighborhood-based groups remain part of broader, coherent gang organizations that, in reality, no longer exist. Equally misguided are the commission's continued references to the historic People and Folks coalitions that have been effectively defunct on the streets since the mid-1990s.[18] Conversely, there is no mention of emergent forms of

gang identity, such as Insane and Renegade, that have supplanted these traditional coalitions as one basis for loose-knit alliances on the streets.

Like contemporary gang organization and culture, the nature of gang violence today is also markedly different from that of previous eras. The ways in which the gang dynamics explored in this chapter have transformed contemporary gang violence in Chicago are taken up in the following chapter.