Chapter One

THE SHATTERING OF CHICAGO'S BLACK STREET GANGS

Chicago's major black street gangs were all founded between the late 1950s and early 1970s on the city's South and West Sides. These gangs, which have historically been among the largest and most organized gangs in the country, include the Black Souls, Four Corner Hustlers, New Breeds, and various Vice Lords branches, all based primarily on Chicago's West Side, and the Black Disciples, Black P Stones, Gangster Disciples, and Mickey Cobras, based mainly on the South Side. As discussed briefly in the introduction, the most recently documented chapter in the collective history of these gangs involves their post-1960s reconfiguration as vertically organized outlaw-capitalist organizations during a period when Chicago's African American neighborhoods were ripped apart by deindustrialization and soaring unemployment, retrenchment and abandonment, the crack epidemic and the war on drugs, and skyrocketing incarceration rates.[1] Indeed, Chicago's black gangs had proven remarkably resilient in the decades since their respective inceptions, adapting to changing historical conditions and circumstances, navigating internal clashes and power struggles, and managing to remain essentially intact at the close of the twentieth century. For the black gangs on the city's South Side, however, this remarkable continuity did not survive the first decade of the new millennium.[2] While the names of these traditional gangs largely live on, today's

gangs are organized very differently than—indeed, in many ways, in diametrical opposition to—their hierarchical, corporate-style predecessors.

Before delving into exactly what today's gangs look like, however, this chapter will explore how this fundamental transformation occurred. The chapter begins with a brief revisiting of the particularities of gang organization and violence during the 1990s, providing an essential context for understanding the trajectory of these gangs since that time. Following that section are detailed treatments of the various precipitating historical factors and internal processes by which the black street gangs on Chicago's South Side weakened and eventually shattered during the first decade or so of the twenty-first century. Simply put, we cannot understand today's gangs without understanding their history.

PRELUDE: CHICAGO'S BLACK STREET GANGS DURING THE 1990S

From the 1960s through the 1990s, Chicago's black street gangs were organized as cross-neighborhood gang federations that members referred to as "street organizations" and/or "nations" (e.g., the Almighty Black P Stone Nation). These gangs comprised a number of neighborhood-based chapters, or sets, each with its own local leadership hierarchy, and collectively organized under the control of a central leadership body. Most of Chicago's major gangs had at least a dozen sets, and many gangs had substantially more than that: The Gangster Disciples, long the largest gang in Chicago, had upward of one hundred sets throughout the city during their peak. Membership at the neighborhood level—that is, within each set—tended to be rather large, typically numbering several dozens, with members' ages often spanning multiple generations. Leadership structures were relatively rigid and hierarchical, with divisions of labor that often included various committees as well as demarcated roles for women and younger members. Central leadership formalized and coordinated instrumental relationships and mediated disputes between their gangs' various chapters. Organizational "literature" detailing each gang's history, values, symbols, laws, practices, and prayers served to legitimize these leadership hierarchies, delineate prescriptions for behavior, and socialize members by providing a comprehensive framework for collective identity, values, and action.

Gang scholars refer to this complex, durable form of organization as "gang institutionalization." In his examination of Chicago's black street gangs, John Hagedorn explains that institutionalized gangs can "persist for decades despite changes in leadership and police repression" because they represent "'living organisms' instilling in their members, as well as the community, a belief in the organization itself . . . handed down as tradition through generations."[3] In this sense, like the African American and Chicano gangs of Los Angeles, Chicago's traditional gangs were decidedly institutional in nature. Paris, a study participant who came of age during the organizational prime of these traditional street gangs, offers compelling support for this position, arguing that the pathologizing, perfunctory stereotypes evoked by the term "gang" work to obscure the complexity of these groups and impede the depth of analysis necessary to understand them.

PARIS: I use the word "street organization" strategically 'cause, again, I think we should abolish the word "gang." Because the word "gang" and guns change the whole dynamic of a conversation. The definition of a gang is a radical group of people. But if this was an organization, then that organization structure look like there's something to it.

RRA: There's a logic to it?

PARIS: Right. There's a methodology, there's an ideology to it. You can see it. It's substance there. If you researched it, you'd be able to identify with some of the people. You may not be part of it, but you could understand.

Lamont, one of the older active gang members who participated in this study, offers a striking illustration of this "substance" in his discussion of the workings of the Black P Stones during his adolescence:

LAMONT: Every decision that is made is made by a top leader in the Black P Stone Nation, which is a general. And if any decision is made without a general, the next person that's in charge is the mufti.[4] If the mufti have not made a decision, and somebody act on a decision that has not been agreed upon, violations will be taking place.

RRA: So there are formal leaders—people with certain ranks and positions?

LAMONT: Yes. Nobody without no rank within the Black Stones of what I'm speakin' about—I don't know what go on in other communities—but in

my community, *rank* outweigh everything. . . . Headquarters dictate and control—look, they want this general to get elected. If he gettin' elected, he need to visit the body [the organization's central leadership]. The body have to question him: "You a general. What's act one?" You know, the Stones got different laws—it's called acts. If you break a act . . . it's a jury that hear that. So that separate a soldier from a mufti to a general. Because as you get up, you need certain papers [pieces of organizational literature] at certain levels. The Stones are real [*pausing*] . . . iffy on knowledge that you received and who you givin' it out to. They got they own prayer, they got they own laws, they got they own everything—they own world . . .

My duties varied because I was a young soldier. So I may be workin' on this particular committee. So what a lot of people don't know is gangs are broken up into committees. Right? So when a war is about to occur in the community or amongst two gangs, if they're structured the right way, the way that I've seen it is, it's not just gonna be someone sayin', "Oh, we're goin' to war." It's a group of guys who are in charge of those particular things . . .

RRA: What about women—were there any women that were involved?

LAMONT: A few. And we don't call 'em Stones, we call 'em Roses, right? 'Cause they're sisters. The way the Black Stones are structured is different from the Gangster Disciples. The Black Stones is brought up on such of a structure of Islam and things of that nature. And with that, it's not a woman duty to get dirty. A woman would keep drugs, guns, or, you know, cook, chill, count money, get the drugs together. They'd be your lookout people. A woman could take a pound of weed—you give it to her, put it in her purse, the police would never stop her. Things of that nature. So those are your disguises. Little kids like me were used to move certain things 'cause I wouldn't get stopped.

As Lamont alludes to here, drug distribution was the central function of Chicago's black street gangs during the 1980s and 1990s. These gangs had forcibly taken over control of retail-level drug distribution in the city's black neighborhoods from the Outfit, Chicago's mafia organization, during the late 1960s.[5] The transition from clandestine to open-air markets for heroin and other drugs over the following decade or so and the explosion of crack cocaine use in the mid-1980s created new economic opportunities for Chicago's black street gangs, whose control of neighborhood territories provided a basis for the establishment and control of these emerging

public drug markets. Gang leaders, many of whom had been incarcerated since the early 1970s, perceived the economic opportunities at hand and began reorienting their organizations more fully around the illicit drug trade. Where drug crews and organizations emerged in New York and other cities independently of street gangs, in Chicago the street gangs themselves essentially became the drug organizations.[6] Daniel, who had left Chicago in the early 1980s and did a short prison bid out of state, explains these dynamics on his return to the city in the mid-1980s:

> When I moved back to Chicago at twenty-four, twenty-five, you know, of course this is the time when cocaine and crack cocaine had become an epidemic. And it was also a time where the open markets for sellin' heroin had occurred. So then you could see the spread not only of those drugs and the effects, but you could also see the strength and spread of how street organizations created and leveraged havin' territories. So then if you wanted to participate in those markets, you could only participate where you had membership—where you had a license. . . .
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> The catalyst—everything came from jails and prisons. I mean, that was the driving force. The driving force for the structure and enforcing the structure was what was goin' on in jails and prisons. 'Cause guys were tryin' to create business opportunities for themselves while they were incarcerated that they could utilize once they came home.

Given their economic focus, the hierarchical leadership structures of these gangs approximated those of conventional corporate organizations, in function if not in form. In practical terms, gang leaders reaped a disproportionate amount of the profits from these economic endeavors and autocratically dictated gang policy. For a number of gangs, the economic predominance of gang leaders over rank-and-file soldiers even extended to mandates to participate in the periodic sale of drugs whose profits were funneled entirely to the gang's central leadership. In a study of the financial records of a black street gang operating in Chicago's notorious Robert Taylor Homes during the height of the crack epidemic in the early 1990s, Steven Levitt and Sudhir Venkatesh found that set leaders earned as much as $130,000 per year, while foot soldiers earned an average of less than $3,000 annually. Members of the gang's central leadership, moreover, collected 20 percent of all revenues from dozens of sets throughout Chicago as tribute, easily raking in hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.[7]

Failure to comply with gang policies often resulted in "violations," as Lamont alludes to in the passage quoted earlier, which consisted of various forms of physical beatings and, in some cases, financial penalties. Violations, then, were employed as a means of enforcing organizational policy and compelling members' compliance with the dictates of gang leadership. The actual or perceived mismanagement of drug operations and accounting errors were common grounds for violations. Similarly, a member's failure to carry out hits and other acts of violence against a group's opposition or to refrain from violence that had not been authorized might also result in violations. Gang leaders, in other words, largely monopolized the sanctioning of violence both internally and with respect to gang warfare. Gang literature and appeals to collectivism were employed by gang leaders to justify their inordinate power and income and the subordinate position of gang soldiers. Rank-and-file members' aspirations of gang mobility also worked to sustain these arrangements, as being an effective drug dealer and loyal soldier were generally considered the primary criteria for promotion. Taken as a whole, these dynamics promoted a distinct culture of obedience within Chicago's black street gangs during the 1980s and 1990s. Roosevelt describes these dynamics as they existed around the turn of the century:

> We'd have days where we'd have "nation packs"—where you have to serve drugs just for the nation. You wasn't gettin' paid for it, this is for our organization to make sure we had money for our parties, our guns, takin' care of our blocks, makin' sure we had taken care of our Brothers, and makin' sure we had our work [drugs] every time. So you wouldn't get paid for that, it was just for the nation. It was just makin' sure that we always had something to keep our organization going. . . . And if you was comin' up short with money, you was gon' get violated. . . .
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> You had to be out there every day with us—during the wars, during the struggle, you know? . . . If you didn't come to the blocks to participate and come to service [gang meetings] or something like that, that was a violation. . . . When the Brothers told you to go out there and take care of your business [perform acts of violence against the gang's opposition], you had to do it. Or if you didn't do it, your ass was gettin' dealt with.

In line with their economic inclinations, the gang wars of this era were typically fought over control of illicit drug markets and economic and

organizational predominance on the streets and in prison. The allure of unprecedented profits and power during this period effectively shattered Chicago's long-standing People and Folks gang coalitions, which had been organized in the Illinois Department of Corrections in 1978, as wars broke out between fraternal gangs like the Gangster Disciples and Black Disciples and the Insane, Maniac, and Almighty gang "families" of the Latin Folks' Spanish Growth and Development.[8] Dictated by powerful leaders, the gang wars of the 1990s were fought primarily by rank-and-file members and were among the bloodiest in the city's storied history of violence. Driven by these conflicts, Chicago's homicide rate hit an all-time high of 33.1 per 100,000 in both 1992 and 1994, an increase of roughly 50 percent over the city's homicide rates throughout the 1980s.[9] In short, the rampant gang violence of this era was largely directed from the top down and fueled by instrumental, especially economic, imperatives. "People with money had power. It's just like in the real world," Lorenzo explains. "But the only difference about Chicago, man, you could be the most savvy businessman, [but] if you ain't no killer, then people gon' end up takin' your shit." Recounting the bloody war fought between the once-allied Four Corner Hustlers and Unknown Vice Lords during the 1990s, Lorenzo elaborates:

> That's really one of the reasons we was into it so long with the Unknowns. Willie was extortin' Vice Lords, and Angelo was like, if any Foe give him a dime, then *he* might as well extort him. He was like, "We ain't givin' you shit." And, really, the Unknowns and Foes war was, like, a war of the old against the young. 'Cause you gotta think, me and Angelo is the same age, at that time we twenty-two, twenty-three. And Willie Lloyd in his forties.[10] So it's some old men tryin' to extort us. And we like, "Shit, we out here every day. Hell nah!" . . . If you think about it from just a natural sense and not even a gang sense: You a king. Who gon' relinquish all of their authority and come under the umbrella of somebody else?

For a number of reasons, however, the dynamics of Chicago's gang landscape during the 1990s ultimately could not be sustained. Beginning around the turn of the century, the black street gangs on the city's South Side underwent a process of destabilization that culminated in their eventual shattering. The following sections detail the contextual shifts that created this instability, their effects on internal group workings, and how youthful gang members responded to and shaped these evolving dynamics.

These developments were not sudden, and they unfolded unevenly from gang to gang and from neighborhood to neighborhood. Nonetheless, the broader contextual factors that drove these dynamics ultimately affected all of the major black street gangs on the South Side of Chicago in strikingly similar ways.

CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION: THE CONTEXT AND BEGINNINGS OF ORGANIZATIONAL DECLINE

A number of major historical shifts created the conditions for and initiated a process of organizational deterioration within Chicago's black street gangs beginning in the late 1990s and carrying over into the new millennium. The first of these shifts involved the declining profitability of the city's drug markets, particularly those on the South Side. A variety of factors contributed to this downturn, perhaps the most salient among them being changing patterns of drug consumption. As the 1990s came to a close, the crack cocaine epidemic that had seized dispossessed urban communities across the United States beginning in the mid-1980s was in major decline, and demand for crack plummeted.[11] This trend has continued unabated into the twenty-first century: While more than half of Chicago arrestees tested positive for cocaine in 2000, less than one-fifth did so by 2012.[12] Law enforcement agencies have claimed credit for these declines, framing them as the result of their successful disruption of cocaine supply chains in South and Central America. Yet diminished demand is clearly responsible for reduced crack use, as cocaine prices have fallen by nearly 75 percent since the mid-1980s. A reduced supply in the face of consistent demand, on the other hand, would have sent prices skyrocketing.[13]

As children during the late 1980s and 1990s, most of the study participants recalled growing up during the height of Chicago's crack era, and a number of them reported that their mothers and fathers had been addicted to crack cocaine. By the time they had come of age and became involved in gang life, however, the market for crack had drastically diminished. People had seen the effects that crack addiction had on families and communities, and the drug was increasingly shunned, particularly by the young people who sold it on the streets and their peers. "Crackhead" entered the urban lexicon as a derisive term denoting a desperate, impulsive, fanatical person who lacks self-control and fails to maintain basic personal care.[14]

Crack was officially "wack" in the eyes of urban youth, who increasingly turned to marijuana as a safer, less destructive alternative. Data from the National Institute for Drug Abuse, for example, indicate that among a probability sample of male arrestees in Chicago from 2000 to 2010, two-thirds of those born before 1970 tested positive for recent cocaine use, while only 10 percent of those born after 1989 tested positive. On the other hand, approximately three-fourths of this younger group tested positive for marijuana, compared with less than one in four members of the older cohort.[15] These statistical trends are reflected in Cassius's firsthand account of evolving patterns of drug use on the South Side of Chicago:

CASSIUS: People sell crack, but these days, people work off they phone. They don't just be outside talkin' 'bout, "What's up? Rocks and blow!" People work off they phone, so if you want some crack, you gon' call a mu'fucka like, "Bring me one down."

RRA: So it's not like it was in the nineties?

CASSIUS: Like, the *nineties*? Nah. Hell nah! It was scorchin' hot for crack. Now it's, like, calmed down. It's just the basic addicts every day who call the phone and shit. . . . But weed is—shit, I don't think that's never gon' fade out, shit. If you smoke weed, you smoke weed [you're dedicated to it].

RRA: So weed is more popular nowadays?

CASSIUS: Yeah, the weed is more popular. It's more, like, a friendly zone drug. So it's a lot of more people do it.

Cassius's statements also lend insight into another dynamic that has reshaped the nature of the illicit drug trade in the early years of the twenty-first century, namely, the transformation of drug markets themselves. The open-air drug markets that dominated public housing developments, street corners, and other public space in dispossessed urban communities in the 1980s and 1990s have increasingly disappeared from these neighborhoods in recent years. Like their brick-and-mortar retail counterparts in the formal economy that have been devastated by the rise of online shopping, technological developments have rendered drug markets rooted in stable, public physical spaces increasingly irrelevant and unprofitable. In this case, this transformation is largely a result of the ubiquity of cell phones. Gang members today no longer have to stand on a street corner to sell

drugs, waiting for customers that may or may not be coming, subjecting themselves to potential arrest and prison time, and exposing themselves to attacks by their opposition. Instead, they can conduct business from their cell phones and make drop-offs to familiar customers as necessary. The rise of cell phones and, more recently, the internet as tools for conducting drug sales, however, has also served to shift retail-level drug distribution points away from their traditional inner-city locales more broadly, as suburbanites and other outsiders are no longer forced to depend on the reliability of these public urban markets to purchase drugs. Instead of sojourning to the inner city to buy drugs on a street corner, suburban drug users can just text their local dealer—typically a white suburban peer—to set up transactions locally. The "use of mobile devices has quietly revolutionized drug dealing. . . . Low-income black and Latino communities are no longer needed as drug super-markets," as the authors of a 2017 article on the recent heroin epidemic conclude.[16] Indeed, by 2013, less than one in five Chicago arrestees who tested positive for or who described using cocaine reported buying crack cocaine outdoors, and nearly three-quarters purchased these drugs from a "regular source," that is, someone they knew and patronized often.[17]

What these changes in drug consumption and drug markets have meant for black street gangs on Chicago's South Side is a dramatic reduction in drug revenues, which had served as the gangs' primary economic lifeblood since the 1980s. The higher cost of cocaine as well as the shorter, more intense high of crack and its higher level of addictiveness make the potential profit margins associated with selling crack substantially higher than those for selling marijuana. The proliferation of mobile, clientele-based drug dealing, moreover, drained clients from Chicago's once-prominent, gang-controlled open-air drug markets. Combined with gangs' corporate organizational structures that funneled the bulk of drug profits to gang leaders, drastically declining drug revenues meant that gangs could no longer sustain their status as populist employers of their respective memberships. Chicago gangs' involvement in the illicit drug trade during the crack epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s had made "the gang the new hiring hall for young men" in black communities "overwhelmed by the irresistible tide of joblessness" wrought by deindustrialization.[18] But if the crack trade had once brought about new employment opportunities, then the end

of the crack epidemic was akin to the loss of yet another major industry, and its workers—in this case, gang members—likewise suffered widespread occupational displacement.

As gang leaders struggled to maintain their own earnings in the face of these challenges, youthful gang members were increasingly marginalized within and even excluded entirely from the gang-controlled drug-selling operations in their neighborhoods. The drug game, then, increasingly failed to ensure even basic subsistence—or pocket change, for that matter—for growing numbers of gang members. The economic benefits that had served as a cornerstone of gang membership during the 1980s and 1990s did not apply to the generation of gang members coming of age in the early twenty-first century. Moreover, opportunities for mobility within the gangs' organizational structures, which had existed to some degree in previous decades and that had constituted a common aspiration among young gang members, were likewise evaporating alongside profit margins. Despite these considerable shifts in the gang landscape, however, youthful gang members were still expected to conform to their gangs' leadership hierarchies and follow the directives of their superiors. Yet the lack of even meager wages, diminishing avenues for and aspirations of organizational mobility, and declining moral support from gang higher-ups compromised the control that gang leaders were able to exercise over their rank-and-file members and fostered rebelliousness among young gang members. Terrence explains these dynamics as they played out in his neighborhood during his teenage years:

TERRENCE: They [older gang members] was gettin' money, [but] they didn't used to help us with nothing. They used to leave us out there stranded. . . . They didn't give us no guidance, no nothing. . . .

RRA: Why do you think that they didn't provide the type of leadership for you all that they got when they were comin' up?

TERRENCE: On the South Side of Chicago, it's not too much drug dealin' goin' on. . . . When the older generation was doin' they drug dealin', it was on the decline, so they wasn't makin' as much money as the [generation before them]. So they couldn't provide for us like they was provided for—like, people who had bought them drugs, guns, and all that. They couldn't do that for us. 'Cause the lil money they made off [selling drugs] was just for them to survive . . .

> [When] we was in age about fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, we start gettin' into it with them hard 'cause they wanted us to stop fightin', stop gangbangin' more. They was older than us, so they was more about money—gettin' they money outside. We was younger, we was fightin' every day, makin' it hot [increasing police scrutiny], and they didn't want—they didn't like that. . . . They said we used to gangbang for no reason 'cause we wasn't doin' it for no money.

Another significant factor that contributed to the declining profitability of Chicago's drug markets was the near-wholesale demolition of the city's public housing projects. Between 1995 and 2010, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) razed more than twenty-one thousand public housing units, with clearance efforts ramping up in earnest in 1999 with the release of the CHA's ten-year *Plan for Transformation*.[19] While a good portion of these demolitions took place on the West Side and at the Cabrini-Green projects on the Near North Side, CHA demolitions were largely concentrated in Bronzeville, the historic black South Side ghetto where city officials had originally clustered public housing projects as a means of fortifying racial segregation in the postwar era.[20] Indeed, upward of 60 percent of all public housing demolitions took place in this area, which black Chicagoans commonly refer to as the "Low End," owing both to its geographic location in the lower-numbered streets of the South Side and, as sociologist Mary Pattillo points out, "the neighborhood's lowly status."[21]

I first arrived in Chicago in the midst of these demolitions in 2004, although I was living and going to school on the city's North Side, a figurative world away from the Low End. Friends I knew from Minneapolis came to Chicago that fall for a visit and brought me to the Robert Taylor Homes on the South Side where they had grown up. They talked about the dramatic changes to their old community, where only a few of the original twenty-eight sixteen-story high-rise buildings were still standing. By the time I moved to the South Side in 2008, the remaining buildings had been demolished, along with nearly all of the other nearby projects: Stateway Gardens, Clarence Darrow Homes, Madden Park Homes, 41st–Cottage Grove, Randolph Towers and various other Washington Park Homes scattered sites, and most of the Ida B. Wells Homes, Prairie Avenue Courts, and Lakefront Properties.[22] The Harold Ickes Homes and the remainder of the Wells Homes soon followed in being reduced to rubble.

The Raymond Hilliard Homes were emptied of families and converted to senior housing.

Chicago's public housing developments had long housed many of the city's most lucrative, defensible, and violently contested drug markets.[23] The gang sets based in the projects, moreover, were often among the city's most organized and powerful. "It was *unity*. It was *structure* when them projects was up," as Memphis explains. "That's exactly where it all started from: the buildings, B. Mu'fuckas makin' $100,000 a day." The demolition of nearly all of Chicago's public housing developments, then, not only served to eradicate many of the drug markets that had been the most profitable for the city's street gangs, it also served to eliminate gang strongholds and disrupt long-standing gang networks. This disruption occurred on two fronts: both within the former project developments, where local sets were effectively eradicated, and in the neighborhoods to which former project residents—including thousands of gang members—moved following their displacement. Indeed, despite political rhetoric justifying public housing demolition as a vehicle for racial and class integration, the realities of entrenched segregation and a dearth of affordable housing in most Chicago communities meant that the majority of displaced project tenants moved to neighborhoods that were among the poorest and most racially segregated in the city. More than 70 percent of former CHA residents who moved into private housing with a Section 8 voucher between 1999 and 2005, for example, relocated to sixteen Chicago communities—all on the South and West Sides—that were, on average, 91 percent African American and had an average household poverty rate of 32 percent.[24] A 2011 CHA report on relocation revealed a similar pattern, with the highest concentration of former public housing residents relocating to South and West Side communities that, with few exceptions, rank among citywide leaders in terms of segregation, poverty, unemployment, and violent crime.[25]

The arrival of thousands of gang members from demolished public housing developments into existing gang territories in other distressed black neighborhoods in Chicago in the early years of the twenty-first century frequently led to violent clashes within these receiving communities. These conflicts were fueled by a number of dynamics, more than one of which may have been pertinent in any particular situation. In many cases, for example, gang members moving from the projects into other communities

hailed from rival gang organizations. In some cases, the influx of formerly project-based gang members created competition and conflict over control of drug markets in receiving communities.[26] Even in instances where rival gang affiliations and economic competition may not have been pertinent issues, broader considerations of neighborhood "ownership," relational dynamics, and ignorance of and misunderstandings over local traditions and standards of comportment often created tension and fueled conflicts, even between members of the same traditional street gangs. In the following passage, Paris describes some of these dynamics as they played out in receiving communities.

> Just use one CHA property—one high-rise, like the high-rise I was born in. This was the phenomenon: you get one CHA high-rise that's got fifteen floors, ten apartments [on each floor]. So just picture, you got 5 people in every family—that's a mother, father, 3 kids. Right? So that's 50 people on one floor, times 15 'cause it's 15 floors. Now just picture displacin' 750 people. You gon' take all these families and put 'em in whatever part of the city. What happened with CHA was people who had Section 8, certain buildings and certain community people went to certain areas. So even if the people that was in that area was from that group [gang], they upbringing was different. You could be from Africa, but you come from a different tribe, your upbringing may be different . . .
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> So you could have that internal feudin' with the people that's from there. They feel like this they shit. And if enough of us come from the projects, shit, this our shit now. I'm bein' honest, I know this firsthand. I watched how Englewood's shit got flooded. I watched how Chatham get flooded. I watched how the East Side get flooded with project-ass people. How do I know? 'Cause I came from there [the projects] and went to the community.

Yet these transitions did not always—or at least did not *permanently*—result in violence. As participants in this study describe, gang members from the projects were often integrated into established gangs in receiving communities via existing relationships, increasing neighborly familiarity, and/or flat-out necessity. This integration happened both within and, in a stark reversal of long-established Chicago gang practices, across traditional gang lines. In previous decades, gang members would typically make efforts to avoid moving into neighborhoods or attending high schools dominated

by an opposing gang. Indeed, under certain circumstances, it was difficult or even impossible for gang members to safely visit family members or friends in enemy territories. When moving into a neighborhood or school controlled by an enemy gang proved unavoidable, gang members were often forced to switch allegiances and align themselves with their former enemies for the sake of survival. Consider, for example, Lamont's response when asked if the gang members in his neighborhood growing up all identified with the same traditional gang: "Yes, sir. No other way. If you was anything else, you'd get the life beat out of you 'til you Black Stone [*laughing*]. Stone to the bone!"

With the influx of unprecedented numbers of gang members from public housing and as the structure of Chicago's black street gangs weakened in the early years of the twenty-first century, however, the will and ability of these groups to effectively enforce traditional gang allegiances within their neighborhoods diminished substantially. Thus, gang members displaced from the projects, as well as those simply moving across neighborhoods into areas dominated by rival gangs, were increasingly able to—and did—retain their original gang identities even as they were integrated into gang life in their new neighborhoods through developing and/or strengthening relationships. Below, Memphis and Harold provide examples of these dynamics as they pertain to their respective neighborhoods. Memphis, who grew up a few blocks away from the southern section of the Robert Taylor Homes and attended elementary school with many of the development's youthful residents, including many young gang members, explains how his block was a natural landing spot for many displaced gang members given their existing friendships. In this case, all parties shared a common traditional gang identity as Black Disciples. Harold, on the other hand, describes the integration of gang members with varying traditional affiliations in his neighborhood, offering a notable counterpoint to the traditional gang dynamics described in the previous quote from Lamont.

MEMPHIS: Around '98, we was goin' to John Farren, and we met up with some more guys who was from the projects—you know, the projects still was up. So I met my man and them.

RRA: So what happened to your friends when they started tearing the projects down?

MEMPHIS: Then they came back here [to our block].

RRA: So is everybody from your block a BD or is there people with different affiliations?

HAROLD: Aw, yeah. But since we grew up with 'em and they hang with us a lot, we show 'em love, we don't never disrespect them. We don't treat 'em like no opp 'cause they be with us, you know what I'm sayin'? We respect that. It's cool, we ain't ask 'em to flip or nothing. Well, we asked them, but, you know . . .

RRA: They wasn't with it?

HAROLD: If one flip, that's cool. But if one don't flip, that mean he true to it. Like, man, he ain't flip. Aw, okay, he with it, then. Like, we gotta respect him—he a Gangster, that's what it is, then. . . . We still kick it with 'em every day. They our brothers, too.

The eradication of powerful project-based gang sets through the widespread demolition of public housing and the introduction of members from those gangs into other gang territories throughout Chicago, however, were not the only factors contributing to the disruption of longstanding gang networks. The incarceration of increasing numbers of gang members and, especially, gang leaders also had the effect of weakening existing gang structures. The convergence of a number of factors during the 1990s—most notably, the crack epidemic, the escalating involvement of Chicago's gangs in illicit drug distribution, the focus of the war on drugs on retail-level drug markets, and tough-on-crime policies, including mandatory minimum prison terms and truth-in-sentencing laws—meant that gang members were being arrested and incarcerated at unprecedented rates and facing increasingly lengthy prison sentences. The use of federal drug laws and organized crime statutes, moreover, moved growing numbers of gang leaders, including many of Chicago's most powerful gang chiefs, into the federal prison system. Table 1.1 lists a number of major federal prosecutions of black Chicago street gangs over a quarter-century beginning in 1989, when the first of such investigations culminated in the indictment of sixty-five alleged members and associates of the Black P Stones (then identified as El Rukns), including Stones chief Jeff Fort. Most of these cases resulted in criminal convictions for major leaders of the various gangs listed. In short, as Memphis put it, federal authorities "went and locked all the heavies up."

The scores of Chicago gang leaders sent to federal prisons across the country drastically weakened their capacity to provide leadership and

TABLE 1.1
Major Federal Prosecutions of Black Chicago Street Gangs, 1989–2014

Street gang	Years of indictments	Total number of gang members indicted*
Black Disciples	1998, 2004, 2013	86
Black P Stones	1989, 2001	85
Four Corner Hustlers	1992, 2005†, 2005	72
Gangster Disciples	1995, 1999, 2002, 2013‡, 2014	115
Mickey Cobras	2001, 2006	62
New Breeds	2006, 2010	82
Vice Lords	1994, 1995, 2004, 2010, 2014§	148
Total	1989–2014	650

Note: This table likely omits a number of relevant cases, as I compiled these data myself through internet searches and did not have access to any official government data related to such cases.

* While not every one of the individuals indicted in these cases may have been convicted in court, a 2013 Human Rights Watch report reveals that 97 percent of federal drug defendants plead guilty. Moreover, of the 3 percent who choose to go to trial, 90 percent are convicted. Thus, these numbers are likely to be largely reflective of the numbers of alleged gang members who were actually convicted in these cases. It should also be noted that, in many of these cases, state charges were brought against both those facing federal charges as well as other individuals not included in these numbers. See Human Rights Watch, *An Offer You Can't Refuse: How US Federal Prosecutors Force Drug Defendants to Plead Guilty* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2013).

† Indictment also included members of the New Breeds.

‡ Indictment also included members of the Black Disciples.

§ Indictment also included members of the Traveling Vice Lords, Black Souls, Gangster Disciples, and New Breeds.

dictate and enforce policy among their members on the streets. While most of Chicago's gang chiefs had been incarcerated in the Illinois Department of Corrections since the 1970s, they had long been able to maintain control of their gangs from the state's prisons. Indeed, imprisonment had actually served to strengthen their organizations, expand their ranks, and enhance their authority. As James Jacobs details in *Stateville*, his ethnography of the eponymous Illinois prison, by the early 1970s Chicago's black street gangs had become "the predominant inmate force" at the prison, completely transforming long-standing inmate patterns of organization, acting as power brokers with the prison administration, and swelling their respective memberships via recruitment within the inmate ranks.[27] Hagedorn notes that Stateville quickly became "known as the 'White House' because that is where major decisions were made" related to gang policy in Chicago.[28] In contrast, after being scattered across the country in the Federal Bureau of Prisons system, often in solitary confinement or other "supermax" conditions of custody, gang leaders were increasingly hard-pressed to maintain control of their organizations.

Further exacerbating these issues was the growing prevalence of snitching within Chicago's gang organizations, as increasing numbers of gang members turned on their comrades in exchange for judicial leniency in the face of lengthy federal sentences.[29] This dynamic further decimated the ranks of gang leadership, eroded organizational cohesion, and created uncertainty on the streets. As younger gang members increasingly dominated the street ranks due to the incarceration of their older counterparts, mechanisms of control and accountability broke down, and gang members had greater latitude to act autonomously. As Roosevelt explains:

> Over the time, people was gettin' locked up for murders, you know, and catchin' drug cases and stuff like that. That's what was slowin' most of the guys down. . . . Couldn't nobody eat 'cause the police was always comin' through the block, shuttin' the blocks down. People was snitchin', tellin' the police where we was hidin' our stuff, where we was havin' stash houses, everything. . . . And then, over time, when most of the people got killed and was locked up, that's when some of the structure was messin' up. 'Cause people wasn't around, so some of the people thought they can get away with doin' things as far as steppin' on other people turfs and goin' out of bounds, you know? And doin' things on they own without tellin' nobody.

The gang leaders who remained on—or at least close to—the streets were beginning to lose control both at the neighborhood level and, even more definitively, at the broader, cross-neighborhood level. The loss of many of the most talented gang leaders to federal correctional institutions was producing a crisis of leadership, and, lacking leaders who possessed the authority and legitimacy to mediate and settle disputes between sets, gangs increasingly lost their capacity to maintain organizational cohesion across neighborhoods. These internal conflicts, then, whether based on money, power, or personal animosities, increasingly spun out of control and fueled further organizational erosion. In some ways, the stage had already been set for this dynamic with the process of gang corporatization during the 1980s, which had refashioned social relations within Chicago's black street gangs in ways that prioritized often-competitive profit seeking over traditional ideals of brotherhood. In *The Hidden War*, a study of crime and government neglect in Chicago's public housing projects, for example, Susan Popkin and her colleagues describe the Harold Ickes Homes as a "war zone" in the late 1990s after Gangster Disciples that had been displaced

from other projects slated for demolition had moved into the development and begun battling the GDs native to the Ickes for control of the local drug trade.[30] Similarly, in their book *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation*, Natalie Moore and Lance Williams describe violent competition between adjacent Stone sets over control of diminishing drug markets in the late 1990s.[31]

Participants in this study discussed similar dynamics of intragang conflict, although, tellingly, the conflicts they described in the early years of the twenty-first century did not revolve around control of drug markets. Lamont, for example, whose description of the strong central leadership of the Black P Stone Nation during his early days of gangbanging was quoted at length earlier in this chapter, recounted an incident in which an older gang member from his neighborhood, Tone, was killed in a drunken argument with another Stone from a nearby set. Lamont explains the subsequent fallout:

> The general who in my hood, [*pounding his chest*] he mad. You know, Tone come out of his hood, he raised him, been knowin' him since he was a little boy, blessed him to bring him in and everything. So I'm like, how they gon' do it? Because the guy who shot him, his uncle a general. So he's sayin', "Man, my uncle a general. Yeah, I popped his ass. [So what?] My uncle a general." Tone—nah, his uncle ain't a general, but the man who love him like a uncle a general, you see what I'm saying? So now it's really *fuck them*. So what they wind up doin' was tellin' ol' boy uncle like, "Look, we just wanna holla at your nephew for a lil bit. We ain't even gon' kill him, murk him, nothing." . . . His uncle told him, "Go down there. They ensured me you gon' be okay." He get down there. Mu'fucka get to talkin' to him, they start whoopin' him. Car pull up with some more of the guys, you know, shit get ugly . . .

Notably, while street justice appears to have been served in this instance, this justice—or, perhaps more accurately, vengeance—was not the result of transparent organizational adjudication or even centralized autocratic authority; rather, it was achieved through deceptive internecine power plays.

In summary, a number of shifts in the wider context within which Chicago's street gangs existed served to drastically weaken the organizational structures and capacities of these groups around the dawn of the millennium. Most notable among these shifts were the decline in the crack

epidemic, the demolition of public housing, and the incarceration of scores of gang leaders in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The ways in which gang leaders and rank-and-file gang members interpreted and responded to these changes, moreover, often further exacerbated their corrosive effects. Taken together, these developments set the stage for the popular rebellions within Chicago's black street gangs that followed.

THINGS FALL APART: THE DELEGITIMATION OF GANG LEADERSHIP AND RANK-AND-FILE REBELLION

Within the context of declining drug revenues, ruptured gang territories, and leadership crises, young rank-and-file gang soldiers began to call into question the structures and practices of their respective organizations and to reevaluate their position within these hierarchies. Most significantly, these gang members increasingly recognized the vertical structures of these organizations as essentially exploitive, with rank-and-file members selling drugs and committing acts of violence at the command of gang leaders who reaped an inordinate share of the money and power derived from these activities. In the course of street-level drug selling and gang warfare, moreover, gang soldiers risked arrest and bodily harm on a routine basis, while gang leaders typically assumed relatively little risk in directing these activities from the safety of the suburbs or the distant confines of the state's penitentiaries. In addition, while the failure of gang soldiers to follow orders or meet expectations typically resulted in violations—that is, violent sanctions—ranking gang leaders and others who were particularly close or useful to gang leadership were often able to defy organizational protocol without repercussion. Whatever financial support might have been available to incarcerated gang members or to those fighting criminal charges during earlier times of greater organizational profits and structure had largely disappeared as well, and young gang members became increasingly frustrated with the lack of material and social support they received from their gangs during periods of incarceration.

Although many of these dynamics had long characterized the inner workings of Chicago's street gangs, rank-and-file gang members had generally accepted these conditions as an unalterable reality. Research with Chicago gangs during the 1990s conducted by Venkatesh, Felix Padilla, and others suggests that members had two options under these circumstances:

hold out hope that they might one day rise through the ranks to a position of power within their organization or quit in disillusionment.[32] But as opportunities for internal mobility evaporated with the waning of the crack epidemic, gang structures weakened with the federal imprisonment of top gang leaders, and bloodshed on the streets wore on, young gang members accurately interpreted their marginal positions within their gangs as increasingly permanent. The dissonance between gang appeals to collective identity and interests and the realities of highly stratified organizational arrangements and coercive, exploitive leadership strategies had come into sharp focus. In short, youthful gang members deemed the status quo unjust and intolerable, and gang leaders lost legitimacy in the eyes of rank-and-file gang members. The following quotes from James, Carlos, and Jabari serve to illustrate the various dimensions of this emerging consciousness among youthful gang members and their rejection of the established culture of obedience within their gangs.

JAMES: A lot of niggas started to realize like, what are you doing for me, for me to even listen to you? Are you providing for my household? Are you takin' care of my kids or my girl if I get locked up? Is you bonding me out? Is you gon' be there when I'm out there [on the front lines during gang wars]? No. And then we out here taking the most risk and you getting all the money. . . . Why should I even listen to what you tellin' me? Why should I let you lead me, when I'm a born leader myself? . . . That's over with. . . . And then it just got to the point where, shit, they knew what we was about, and they knew they couldn't tell us shit.

CARLOS: It's the niggas that's sittin' in them big-ass cribs in the 'burbs that's really runnin' the hood, you feel me? And not even in the hood seein' what's goin' on, but they callin' shots: "Hey, man, go shoot that mu'fucka up." Don't give no fuck, you feel me? It's crackin' out there and *we* out there . . .

'Cause it's like this, shit. It can be two months straight, big Folks ain't even been out here. It been the lil Folks out here holdin' this shit down. So when big Folks and them pull up tryin' to organize some shit, Folks and them be like, "This our shit now," you feel me? "Y'all still from right here, but we got shit poppin' right now. It's our turn to get it crackin' out here." So it could be an altercation in the mob.

JABARI: You ain't gon' let nobody hit you in your mouth for something that you made a mistake. That's just like—okay, I go on a hit. I supposed to killed him, but I shot him and missed him, though—ain't hit nothing. "You ain't hit nothing? You gotta get violated." "Damn, that's my first time shootin' a gun. So you gon' hit me in my mouth? I ain't ask you to go shoot that—y'all told me to do that." You feel me? That's how it be. So you might not like that, and you gon' hit him [the leader] in his mouth. . . .

Then dude[s] just come out of jail—know everything about everything—come to you and tell you, "Man, you gotta do it this way. You gotta abide by these rules and policies." And you might not like some of these rules and policies. You like, "This what I gotta do?" "Yeah, or we gon' have to violate you," or something. You not gon' go. You not gon' honor that. You gon' be like, "Fuck these rules. Fuck this structure. Who *is* you? I don't even know you." That's how you gon' be. . . . [The older guys] get locked up, come home, [there are] new faces on the block. Then you thinkin' this still your block, whole time, it's something different.

As these passages reveal, young rank-and-file members of Chicago's black street gangs had grown increasingly disillusioned with and resistant to what they perceived as the oppressive and hypocritical conditions within their respective organizations. In turn, young gang members channeled this disillusionment into rebellions against gang leaders and other older, more established members. These rebellions typically involved verbal and physical challenges to long-standing gang arrangements and customs, as gang members refused to follow orders, challenged claims to authority, violently opposed violations, subverted inequitable economic arrangements, and developed new identities rooted in their emergent resistance. Such dynamics represented a dramatic break from historical precedent, whereby authority and violence flowed unequivocally down the chain of command, and violent clashes with gang leaders who were loath to relinquish their power and authority were widespread. Clearly, a new day was dawning on the streets of Chicago's South Side.

Consider, for example, the passage below in which Rasheed recounts a physical altercation between himself and an older gang leader in the neighborhood where both he and Lamont grew up. Following an incident in which Rasheed and a friend "did some cutthroat shit" by robbing a fellow

Stone who was not from their neighborhood but who lived in the area, the robbery victim and Rasheed's superior confronted them about the incident. During the encounter, Rasheed not only verbally challenged the authority of his superior, but beat him up when he attempted to physically reassert his authority. The contrast between the dynamics described by Rasheed and those detailed earlier in the chapter by Lamont—only five years Rasheed's senior—as he recounted his early days of gangbanging are striking and serve as a clear illustration of the tremendous shifts in gang dynamics that had taken place within a relatively short period of time. That the altercation described below occurred in a Black P Stone stronghold long known for its durable organizational structure, and as a result of a situation in which Rasheed openly admits that he was at fault, moreover, further reveal the ubiquity and enormity of these changes. As Rasheed explains:

So after we robbed him, he come walk straight into the hallway with one of the big homies while we in there chillin'. So that shit was awkward as hell, know what I'm sayin'? He like, "These two right here." They like, "Aw, y'all out of order, woo wop the bam." . . . I'm like, "Fuck what you talkin' 'bout! We ain't tryin' to hear that shit. You can go ahead and save that shit for somebody else." He like, "What you mean, 'Fuck what I'm talkin' 'bout?' This is my building." He get to power trip now. You know me, I'm—"Shit, what? Man, this *my* building." On Chief, he *rushed* me—like, swift.[33] I ain't even know he could move that fast. He rushed me, hands around my neck. I'm shocked! I'm gettin' loose [*wrestling imaginary hands off his neck*]. I ain't gon' lie—I hope you don't think I'm lyin' 'cause we havin' this interview or whatever. . . . I whooped big homie ass, you hear me! I patched him up—*psh, psh, psh* [*slamming his fists into his palms*]. On Chief! . . .

So we right up in the building the next morning. He walk past me, say some slick shit. I steal on [punch] Moe ass—*bing, bing, bing*! 'Cause he was on some "it ain't over" shit, anyway. So, shit, I'm on that shit, too! I ain't gon' let you steal on me first.

Likewise, Kevin reported witnessing a strikingly similar altercation between his older brother and a gang leader—"one of the old heads"—over claims of ownership and control of their neighborhood during his early adolescence. Although the gang leader was ostensibly able to reassert his authority in this particular situation, he was ultimately powerless to stop

the erosion of the neighborhood's gang structure, which, by the time of Kevin's interview, his comrade Memphis characterized as "completely out the window."

KEVIN: He was a older mu'fucka, about thirty, thirty-four, thirty-five. . . . He was the man of the block, I guess. And my bro said, "This ain't your block." You know, shit went from there. . . . I was in the store. I just come out, nigga hittin' my brother with a bat. They get to fightin'. He beatin' my brother up and shit. . . .

RRA: What about your other brother, he wasn't out there?

KEVIN: Nah, he was locked up at the time. He was just about to get out when the shit happened. . . .

RRA: What happened when he got out?

KEVIN: They was ridin', tryin' to catch his ass. . . . He locked up [now], so, shit, we gon' wait for him when he get out.

The rebellion of youthful gang members involved not only defiance in the face of gang leaders' attempts to assert authority over or dominate them, but also challenges to the economic inequalities that defined both the structural arrangements of Chicago's corporate-style street gangs as well as the illicit drug trade more generally. One such strategy, for example, involved young gang members intentionally failing to repay gang leaders for drugs that they were given on consignment—in short, stealing from their superiors. As a relatively older member who had achieved a degree of success in the drug game and parlayed that success into a budding career as a self-employed barber and a drug supplier one level removed from the streets, Roosevelt explains his frustrations with having had to deal with such situations:

RRA: Did you have any issues with guys trying to beat you out for some money?

ROOSEVELT: Yeah, I had a couple of issues where somebody—a few of them tried to get over on me. Yeah, I did have some issues, I'm 'a be real with that. 'Cause people think they can be slick and run off with your money thinkin' I don't need it, which I do. And that's a real issue. . . .

RRA: And these were the lil homies or what?

ROOSEVELT: Yup. Some of the lil homies that I fronted something to. I probably fronted, like, $1,000 worth [of] some Kush or something, and he ain't bring my money back. So we had to go find his ass and fuck him up.

Yet it was precisely the type of arrangement described here by Roosevelt that young gang members increasingly took issue with: rank-and-file gang members having to assume all of the risk involved in retail-level drug distribution while absentee higher-ups reap the lion's share of the profits. In addition, the erosion of gang leaders' ability to control their ranks emboldened young gang members to subvert these arrangements. In short, young gang members increasingly—and, in general, correctly—doubted the ability of older gang leaders to punish such transgressions. As Rasheed put it, "They old. They ain't movin' no muscle." Weezy explains these dynamics clearly and more generally from the perspective of the rank and file:

> Most of the older guys, they don't really fuck with us no more 'cause they fronted us weed, gave us shit, and we ain't never bring them shit back, you know? 'Cause, shit, man, they ain't out here with us. They somewhere with they family and stuff, but they wanna claim something, you know? I don't know how you could ever claim something but you not out there.

Another, more aggressive, form of economic rebellion described by participants involved robbing older gang leaders outright. Similar to failing to repay money they earned from selling drugs they received on consignment, many young gang members viewed such robberies as, at the very least, an acceptable by-product of the cutthroat capitalist dynamics established by gang leaders themselves, if not a fully justified form of redistributive economics. Perhaps even more so than in other forms of rank-and-file resistance, the potential for severe violence in these incidents was particularly high. In their work on the Stones, Moore and Williams describe the dynamics of the "stickup era" in the early 2000s, noting that, within a context of diminishing drug revenues, "those who could no longer eat by selling drugs began to rob those who had either drugs or drug money."[34] As participants in this study described, in some cases this practice eventually extended to heavyweights even within one's own gang, as declining drug revenues pushed younger members further to the margins of the drug business—or even out of it altogether—exacerbating inequality within the ranks.

In the passage that follows, for example, Carlos describes the robbery and murder of Dolla, a flashy, well-paid gang leader at the hands of members

of his own gang. As the man killed was one of Carlos's mentors, Carlos attributes this particular incident to the "jealousy" of the soldiers who took his mentor out. Nonetheless, these dynamics serve as a concrete example of Carlos's own comments, quoted earlier, about rank-and-file rebelliousness in the face of exploitive leadership and flagrant inequality on the streets. If, as Carlos describes, Dolla was a "get-money nigga" who prioritized profits over camaraderie and relationships, his subordinates apparently came to see things in much the same way.

CARLOS: Dolla was a get-money nigga. . . . He wasn't one of them niggas that sit on the corner with the lil Folks—nah. He don't play games. He a grown man. But he was about that money, and some niggas in the mob got him, you know, the homies. Hell yeah. That shit deep, boy.

RRA: What happened with that?

CARLOS: I don't really wanna speak on they situation or nothing, 'cause some niggas that's still in jail right now [for] forty, forty-five years for that situation that's goin' on in that whole lil mob right there. But it was jealousy, you feel me? Like, everybody was gettin' money, but some had more than others. And, I guess, it was sometimes when he [Dolla] can do something you couldn't do at the time. You got three thou' in this pocket, but he walkin' around with twenty thou'. You got seven thou', he got thirty thou', you feel me? You just can't even win in his boat right now.

In some cases, participants described disputes between young gang members and gang leaders as giving rise to the wholesale splintering of neighborhood sets and to wars between the resulting factions. These divisions were often the manifestation of pervasive intergenerational hostilities within a set, although in some instances deepening rifts between a few individuals eventually forced all members to choose sides between the quarreling factions. Under these circumstances, loyalties might have been determined by not only generational allegiances but also by personal relationships and, within larger sets, geographic considerations. Indeed, in some cases, bigger sets splintered simply due to the growing inability of gang leaders to maintain formal cohesion among relatively large memberships with sizable geographic territories. Under such circumstances, these sets might have split into two or more factions yet maintained friendly

relations. Nonetheless, in all cases, the resulting dissolution of these gangs illustrates the intensifying crisis of legitimacy faced by gang leaders and their inability to exert authority and effectively resolve internal discord. Below, for example, Aaron details the sequence of events that led to the splintering of his neighborhood gang and the resultant war between the gang's younger and older members:

AARON: It been a couple of shootings over some shit like that—younger niggas and older niggas gettin' shot from shootin' at each other type shit, robbin' each other.

RRA: Guys from the same hood?

AARON: Yup, same hood. That's why it's a war now between the two sides, you feel me?

RRA: So tell me about that. What happened with that?

AARON: A couple of years [ago], one of the big homies got killed, and they was sayin' it was another one of the [younger] guys' fault. But it really wasn't his fault. . . . But they was tryin' to make it like they was mad or some shit. So he like, "Aw, you mad, and you wanna tell everybody it's my fault?" So him and one of the lil homies, they had robbed [the big homie] for some loud or some shit—took that shit and was like, "Man, you lucky we ain't kill you." . . .

But it's more than that lil story. Mu'fuckas got into it with some niggas off 103rd Street, and they felt like one of the older heads was supplyin' them with guns. . . . So they caught him over there in the hood, and they killed him.

RRA: The lil homies killed him?

AARON: Some of the lil homies killed one of the older homies, yup. So that's what really started the feud. Once he died, that's what started the gang-on-gang shit. Mu'fuckas just got to choosin' sides from there—who you gon' be with? Either you rockin' with them niggas or you not, shit.

From the perspective of gang leaders themselves, the dynamics described in this chapter contributed to a fundamental transformation in the risk-benefit analysis that made holding such leadership positions increasingly less appealing. On one hand, the monetary profits that accompanied gang leadership roles had generally declined precipitously by the early years of the twenty-first century. In other words, compared to the crack era of the 1980s and 1990s, the material benefits of being a gang leader had

substantially diminished. In addition, the pressures and rebellions from disgruntled rank-and-file members challenged the very existence of these positions. Gang leaders were not only faced with external conflicts with other gangs but besieged by internal ones within their own organizations. Finally, the unenviable prospect of being a central target of a federal drug or organized crime case and spending decades in prison also likely figured prominently into this calculus. Taken together, the prospect of managing a declining enterprise, contending with disaffected and violently rebellious subordinates, and facing the real possibility of living out one's days in a federal penitentiary all likely contributed to the eventual acquiescence of gang leaders and their potential successors to the youthful gang rebels. As Lorenzo put it, "They made it so don't nobody *wanna* be a leader of a gang."

The internal rebellions waged by young gang members against gang leaders ultimately proved successful, and gang leaders lost control of the organizations they had long ruled with an iron fist. These rebellions, however, did not materialize out of thin air; they were precipitated by a number of major historical circumstances that, in combination, set the stage for these intragang conflicts. If just one of those ingredients had been missing—if the demand for crack had not declined, the projects had not been demolished, or scores of gang leaders had not gone to federal prison—perhaps things would have played out differently. As it happened, however, the collective weight of these circumstances effectively shattered the black street gangs on Chicago's South Side during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The older gang members interviewed for this study expressed two conflicting, yet not incompatible, views and feelings about these dynamics. Having been brought up within the traditional gang structures and ideologies and having experienced their youthful primes during their organizations' heydays understandably gave these individuals an affinity for the halcyon glory days, so to speak. They pointed out that the older generations of gang members and leaders against whom youthful members had rebelled had earned their stripes by "putting in work" on the streets to build their respective organizations, effectively laying the foundation for those younger members. Thus, in many ways, they understandably

lamented the demise of this era and the historical disconnect that they perceived among the younger generations.[35] On the other hand, these older individuals—a number of whom held prominent leadership roles within their respective organizations—also admitted in their interviews that sound and fair leadership during the era of hierarchical gang structures was often compromised by ego, nepotism, exploitation, and manipulation of the rank and file. In part, they interpreted these dynamics as a by-product of the prioritization of economic imperatives within their organizations, which sometimes worked to privilege effective earners over quality leaders, as well as the removal of more talented and committed gang leaders via federal prison. Roosevelt and Eldridge offer insights into each of these respective perspectives:

ROOSEVELT: Most of these young cats don't know that the older guys is the reason why they can stand out there. 'Cause if it wasn't for the older guys to put the work in and make the organization strong, they wouldn't even be out there doin' what they doin' now! So they have to realize where they come from. . . . They only live the fast life and be gone quick 'cause they don't have no history. They don't know they background. And they think they know everything [*laughing*]. But they don't have no structure behind it.

ELDRIDGE: Some people get in play and be in power strong and not thinkin' with a clear mind. You know, they had a lil money so somebody could put 'em in play. They was somebody favorite, so somebody put 'em in play. And then just don't know how to handle it. You know, they say with great power come great responsibility. Or power with no perception is no power at all. So a lot of people that was in play were probably takin' advantage of it. . . . And as you get older, you start to see a lot of shit was foul. Like, damn, man, they was manipulatin' us. Man, they was takin' advantage of us. But in a manner, hey, well, we was shorties.

These perspectives point to the complex and somewhat conflicted legacy of Chicago's traditional institutionalized gangs, even among older gang members. "Gangs are more than one thing," as Hagedorn argues.[36] Indeed, perhaps nowhere has this been truer than in Chicago, where the city's traditional street gangs embodied elements of both broad-based

quasi-religious brotherhoods as well as exploitive outlaw-capitalist drug organizations. In any event, the shattering of these traditional black street gangs during the first decade of the twenty-first century set the stage for the fundamental transformation of gang dynamics on the city's South Side. The particularities of this transformation are explored in chapter 2.