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Conclusion

REDUCING GANG VIOLENCE FROM THE STREETS UP

As the discussion in chapter 5 indicates, our understandings of street gangs and urban violence fundamentally shape our strategies for addressing these issues. On a societal level, gangs are generally understood as criminal enterprises whose members are inherently pathological and committed to a deviant subculture of senseless violence and predatory criminality (for example, see the discussion on pages 3–6 of the introduction). This one-dimensional, sensationalistic discourse informs the view that the only logical and appropriate response to gangs involves massive surveillance, severe police suppression, increasingly harsh prison sentences, and mass incarceration for those deemed to be members of these groups. Such approaches have effectively monopolized the public response to street gangs over the last four to five decades, despite startlingly little evidence of their efficacy in reducing violence or eradicating gangs.[1] Indeed, a growing body of research reveals not only the general inadequacy of such approaches but also their often-counterproductive effects: Aggressive policing, for example, often alienates communities and pushes young people into gangs, and incarceration tends to both increase gang membership and power and further destabilize distressed neighborhoods.[2] An extensive review of existing gang research published by the Justice Policy Institute, moreover, concludes that "the official response to an emerging gang problem is rarely based on a solid understanding of gang issues or a coherent theory of what

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an intervention should accomplish," but, rather, on "political and institutional considerations" that provide the illusion that officials are "doing something" while simultaneously maintaining the status quo.[3]

Despite their lack of demonstrable efficacy, to say nothing of their astronomical costs, police suppression and mass incarceration remain the dominant responses to street gangs throughout the United States. In Chicago, local, state, and federal officials have made it clear that they have no intention of deviating from this course. Following the lead of the Justice Department, for example, the Chicago Crime Commission's 2018 edition of *The Gang Book* promotes a "historical conspiracy strategy" for investigating and prosecuting gang members. Touted as an adaptation of traditional conspiracy cases to the city's fractured gang landscape, the strategy involves the identification of individuals believed to be violent gang members by law enforcement officials, who then seek out evidence in support of their theories in the service of building a criminal conspiracy case. Such an approach appears to invert the purpose and process of criminal investigation, taking as its starting point not a crime that must be solved, but a group of targets to which crimes must be attributed. Even more troubling, under this strategy, "every act committed by a gang member in furtherance of the gang or faction"—what this means, exactly, is not elaborated—"whether this act is a crime or not, is an explicit act of the conspiracy."[4] Framed slightly differently, once law enforcement officials decide that someone is a "violent gang member," any and everything they and their friends do might be interpreted as part of a nefarious criminal conspiracy. Police and prosecutors, then, appear committed to a problematic investigatory and prosecutorial strategy that involves tailoring the facts—whatever they may be—to fit their a priori theories, as opposed to building theories rooted in the facts as they actually exist. Given the dramatic transformation of black street gangs on Chicago's South Side into relatively small, leaderless collectives with marginal involvement in the drug game, moreover, conspiracy cases based on outdated notions of gangs as hierarchical criminal enterprises appear to make little sense.[5]

Focused deterrence policing and the Cure Violence public health model represent the proverbial cream of the crop of alternative, "evidence-based" approaches to addressing gangs and violence. Yet both of these interventions have decisively failed to put any discernable dent in levels of violence in Chicago. I argue in chapter 5 that these failures can be attributed, in

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part, to the erroneous assumption that gangs and violence are invariable, and that eliminating such violence within any context, therefore, simply requires the application of one of these purportedly fail-proof strategies. Indeed, the analysis presented over the course of this book has demonstrated that street gangs and gang violence are emphatically *not* invariable, but rather are shaped in fundamental ways by the particularities of the sociohistorical contexts within which they exist within a given time and place. For a variety of reasons specific to the prevailing dynamics among Chicago's black street gangs and the nature of contemporary gang violence—most notably, today's gang culture of autonomy, the unpredictability of contemporary violence, the dubious power of former gang leaders to stop violence, and the ineffectiveness of Chicago police—these one-size-fits-all strategies were and are ill-equipped to substantively reduce violence in Chicago.

As discussed in chapter 5 as well, the failures of focused deterrence and Cure Violence are also a result of leaving untouched the desperate conditions sustaining gangs and violence on the South Side of Chicago, as delineated in chapter 4. For the architects of these models, their alleged ability to eliminate violence without addressing such conditions serves as a distinct point of pride. Yet there is an additional layer to their arguments, namely, that eliminating violence actually represents "the essential pathway to a neighborhood being able to develop, for the schools to be able to get better, for the kids to get rid of their stress disorders, for businesses to feel safe enough and well enough to be able to come into these neighborhoods."[6] While high levels of violence no doubt further compromise community life in already-distressed neighborhoods, this argument effectively treats gang violence as if it were the primary cause of racist and predatory housing policies and lending practices, global economic restructuring, the proliferation of precarious part-time and low-wage employment, disinvestment in public education, welfare state retrenchment, and the vast expansion of the criminal justice apparatus since the 1970s. At worst, then, this perspective implies that the violent pathology of the residents of these neighborhoods is to blame for all of the ills plaguing America's abandoned urban core. At best, such a position accepts the premise that the provision of basic resources and services and a decent quality of life for the millions of people living in such communities throughout the country justifiably hinges on the local homicide rate—a phenomenon, it should be noted, that proponents of both focused deterrence and Cure Violence contend is driven

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by a tiny fraction of these residents. In both cases, these arguments belie a perspective that improving life in these communities should be determined by the market-driven imperatives of the private sector—that the state has no proactive role to play in such a process aside from policing and incarcerating.[7]

The findings from this study, on the other hand, indicate that gangs and violence on Chicago's South Side are the products of a complex, interrelated set of conditions, experiences, and perceptions shaping the lives of poor and working-class youth in these communities, particularly those related to marginalization and despair, poverty and economic exclusion, and pervasive community violence. For young people struggling to cope with such desperate circumstances, street gangs provide a range of vital material and psychosocial supports, including opportunities to earn money, caretaking, assistance in violent and potentially violent situations and conflicts, acceptance and love, emotional support, and, perhaps most centrally, resistance identities that facilitate the reconstruction of dignity and self-esteem systematically undermined by a lifetime of marginalization and vilification. Participation in collective violence, in turn, cements bonds and strengthens community among gang comrades and gives meaning to hard lives and early deaths. Gangs and violence, in short, serve a wide range of functions and play a variety of roles in the lives of thousands of marginalized and alienated young people in Chicago. Addressing street gangs and reducing violence on the city's South Side, then, will require substantive intervention in the various conditions fueling these issues.

Building on the analysis presented throughout the preceding chapters, this conclusion outlines an approach to this work that synthesizes both theoretical considerations and concrete action. This approach is laid out in three parts: the first makes the case for understanding gangs and violence as historical phenomena, the second aims to clarify the sociopolitical dynamics that create the conditions that perpetuate gangs and violence, and, finally, the third delineates an approach to intervention. As John Hagedorn argues, "If we pay attention . . . we are likely to question what we *think we know* about gangs. This might lead us to some different conclusions about what *we think we should do* about gangs."[8] The analysis delineated here suggests no simplistic fix, nor does it fit into a neat intervention package that can be marketed around the country or globe. Indeed, while the lessons and insights presented here are likely to have relevance in other contexts,

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they are firmly rooted in an analysis of these dynamics as they pertain to the South Side of Chicago in the early decades of the twenty-first century.

UNDERSTANDING STREET GANGS AS HISTORICAL PHENOMENA

The research described in this book makes a case for a historical approach to understanding street gangs—that is, a recognition that these groups are not immutable monoliths, but dynamic phenomena shaped in important ways by the prevailing conditions in the communities, cities, and world in which they are situated. Changes in these conditions, then, can and often do have effects on gang organization, ideologies, and internal dynamics. This reality likely has no better illustration than the stunning ascendance of Chicago's traditional black street gangs in the late 1960s and their remarkable shattering some four decades later: The crack epidemic precipitated the full-blown corporatization of these gangs during the 1980s; its waning proved a key factor in their shattering in the early twenty-first century. Deindustrialization caused widespread occupational displacement among Chicago's black working class, leaving gangs as one of the few sources of employment for poor and working-class black youth; the end of the crack epidemic and the transformation of drug markets, in turn, caused widespread occupational displacement among this same demographic. The concentration of public housing in poor black neighborhoods and their decades-long neglect by federal and local authorities set the stage for street gangs to assume informal governance in these developments; their eventual demolition played a decisive role in the eventual breakup of those gangs. The suppressive response of Chicago's Democratic machine to black street gangs and their wider criminalization in the post–civil rights era facilitated their expansion and consolidation of power in the Illinois Department of Corrections; the federal prosecutions that moved scores of gang leaders and other gang members to the Federal Bureau of Prisons beginning in the late 1980s hastened their demise.

As indicated above and as delineated over the course of the preceding chapters, moreover, street gangs have histories of their own. The rebellions that shattered Chicago's traditional black street gangs and their reconstitution during the early twenty-first century again serve as a quintessential case in point. A holistic approach to understanding street gangs, then,

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must include a multilayered analysis of a gang's history, the particular sociohistorical context(s) within which the gang developed and exists, and the ways in which these histories intersect with and bear upon the group and its members.[9] A reliance on established perspectives, even those generated through rigorous empirical research, can obscure accurate readings of these groups outside of the specific context(s) within which those perspectives were developed. Studies conducted on or about Chicago's street gangs during the 1990s, for example, which stress their rigid, centralized leadership hierarchies, their emphasis on drug distribution, and the exploitation and coercion experienced by rank-and-file gang soldiers, utterly fail to describe the gangs on the city's South Side as they exist today. On the other hand, this research, including the work of Felix Padilla, Sudhir Venkatesh, John Hagedorn, and Natalie Moore and Lance Williams, provides invaluable insights into the histories of these gangs that help anchor the historical analysis presented here, both with respect to the internal rebellions that shattered these gangs as well as their profoundly divergent reconfiguration.[10]

This type of contextual, historical approach to exploring street gangs has been advocated in various fashions by a range of distinguished scholars from a variety of disciplines, including critical criminologists Joan Moore, John Hagedorn, and David Brotherton; anthropologists James Diego Vigil, Dwight Conquergood, and Laurence Ralph; sociologists Sudhir Venkatesh and Robert Durán; and historians Deborah Levenson and Andrew Diamond.[11] In spite of their important contributions, however, these scholars represent a distinct minority in the broader field of gang research and operate largely outside of mainstream currents.

Mainstream gang researchers, on the other hand, tend to treat street gangs as self-contained groups effectively divorced from the world around them. This narrow, positivist approach to research eschews any analysis of history, the prevailing social order, or even more proximate contextual factors in order to isolate and analyze a priori, generally individual-level variables of interest as they relate to gang membership and/or criminal behavior. For example, perhaps the most ubiquitous area of study in the gang literature over the last three decades or so has been the exploration of correlations between gang membership and criminality and violence (alternately framed as "patterns of offending"). The veritable deluge of research on this topic, however, has shed remarkably little light on the phenomenon

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of gang criminality and violence beyond the conclusion, repeated with minimal variation in scores of articles, that gang members commit offenses at higher rates than nongang members and that this dynamic is a result of gang membership.[12] There is little to no examination of discrete processes that might produce these patterns, possible differences across time and space, the potential effects of variations in gang structure or culture, the specific nature of criminal and violent behavior, or its immediate and/or structural causes.[13] There is certainly no assessment of broader contextual factors or any sense of historical perspective. Criminologist Lorine Hughes derisively labels this approach a "variables paradigm" that treats gangs and their members as "social facts to be described rather than explained. . . . none of which adequately addresses the questions of how and why."[14] Such statistical correlations, moreover, are positivistically interpreted as the discovery of universal, objective truths about gangs, which are treated as monolithic, and their members, who are reduced to amalgamations of personal risk factors and criminality.

Within the mainstream perspective, then, street gangs and their members are—to borrow the term historian Eric Wolf ironically uses to describe the scholarly neglect and one-dimensional exoticization of non-Europeans in Western society—"people without history." Indeed, the conventional gang research paradigm represents a quintessential example of the scholarly tendency to "[turn] dynamic, interconnected phenomena into static, disconnected things."[15] Echoing Wolf, David Brotherton points out that, intentionally or otherwise, these limited approaches to exploring and understanding street gangs contribute to the proliferation of superficial and often demonizing representations of these groups as "highly plastic folk devil[s] outside of history."[16]

Even much of the gang research that seeks to address questions of how and why, however, fails to incorporate a historical perspective and falls into one or more intellectual traps in assuming that gangs are monolithic, can be categorized by static typologies, or follow a uniform developmental trajectory. While insightful in their own right, many studies describing gang formation and development, organizational structures, internal gang processes, and/or the relationships of gangs and their members to their families and wider communities retain a positivist orientation and treat their findings as universal insights into these phenomena—another step

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closer to fully discovering the ostensibly essential nature of gangs, as it were—as opposed to recognizing them as historically contingent and subject to transformation. One study, for example, claims to provide "the definitive account of 'how gangs work.'"[17] Similarly, although such research may include contextual information, contextual factors are often treated as static background scenery, with little consideration of their historical nature, the broader sociopolitical context within which they emerged, or how these factors and/or changes in them over time shape in any substantive way forms of gang organization, intra- and intergroup dynamics, or violence.[18] In its positivistic focus on universalism, then, the empirical approach of mainstream gang research largely mirrors the focused deterrence and Cure Violence models of violence prevention described in chapter 5. The radical reconfiguration of Chicago's black street gangs presented over the course of the last five chapters demonstrates the serious shortcomings of such attempts to essentialize gangs and violence, which fail to consider, much less examine and understand, variations that develop idiosyncratically as groups of young people interact with and respond to dynamic, evolving environments.

BROADENING THE ANALYTIC SCOPE AND CLARIFYING THE SOCIOPOLITICAL PREDICAMENT

As described in the preceding chapters, the conditions and prospects confronting poor and working-class black youth on the South Side (and West Side) of Chicago today are incredibly bleak, and it is from these realities that the gang violence that continues to plague these communities in the early decades of the twenty-first century flows. Indeed, gang members themselves cast their gang involvement and the violence in their communities in precisely these terms—that is, as by-products of the oppressive conditions with which they are forced to contend: pervasive poverty, near-absolute segregation, rampant un- and underemployment, hostility from law enforcement, widespread incarceration, crumbling infrastructure, routine violence, severely underfunded schools, and the like. With a sociological perceptiveness that would make C. Wright Mills proud, they understand the challenges in their lives not just as personal problems but as manifestations of broader community conditions and social issues.[19]

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But what forces are responsible for the myriad issues confronting low-income African American communities on the South Side of Chicago? How did these issues arise as such in the first place, and why do they persist? When they change, why and how does this happen? At the societal level, these issues have been largely normalized through cultural narratives and social arrangements that cast them as natural, and they are generally accepted (often subconsciously) on those terms through rationalizations such as "that's just the way things are," "there's nothing we can really do about it," and "it's their own fault."[20] The reality, however, is that these issues are not intrinsic features of human civilization. Rather, they emerge within specific historical circumstances and are produced via mechanisms embedded in the prevailing social order. Like street gangs themselves, in other words, these phenomena must be situated within a broader sociohistorical framework and examined in relation to the cultural, social, political, and economic contexts in which they have been shaped.

The dynamics that precipitated the shattering of Chicago's black street gangs discussed in chapter 1, for example, did not materialize out of thin air or by happenstance. Rather, they reflected a culmination of trends taking place both in Chicago and nationally over the last half-century. The near-wholesale demolition of Chicago's public housing projects was driven by the convergence of a wide range of factors that facilitated the deterioration of these developments and then justified their eventual clearance. Among the more notable of these factors were: the ideological and economic imperative that public housing not compete with housing in the private market, thereby restricting residence in public housing to extremely low-income tenants; cost restrictions for public housing construction that undermined quality in terms of design, materials, and craftsmanship; maintenance and security problems derived from these shortcuts that intensified over time as buildings descended into utter disrepair; grossly insufficient federal operating subsidies; decades of extraordinary managerial incompetence, corruption, and neglect; a shifting political climate in which the welfare state came under ideological assault and fiscal retrenchment; and, ultimately, widespread acceptance of the neoliberal imperative of "accumulation by dispossession" whereby the desirable real estate near the downtown Loop on which public housing was situated was privatized and commodified and its residents displaced.[21] The imprisonment of

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increasing numbers of gang members and other poor and working-class Chicagoans, the incarceration of gang leaders in federal prisons, and the intensification of urban policing since the 1970s most fundamentally reflect emergent strategies for containing and warehousing "a huge and growing surplus population" made obsolete by urban deindustrialization and the rise of the global finance and information economy. Within this context, political scientist Cedric Johnson argues, "the carceral state . . . has come to replace the welfare state as the chief means of managing social inequality," as the prison population has skyrocketed while programs like public housing and federal income support have been dismantled.[22]

The conditions and dynamics explored in chapter 4 that continue to fuel gangs and violence on Chicago's South Side are driven by similar prerogatives of neoliberal "pro-growth" economics, the dismantling of public services, attacks on organized labor, privatization, and the containment and displacement of "undesirables" that collectively serve the interests of investors and developers at the expense of low-income communities of color.[23] The 2016 edited volume *Chicago Is Not Broke* provides a useful blueprint with respect to a number of these dynamics. Its contributors identify nearly $10 billion dollars that have been cumulatively "stolen" from the public via corruption, bad city banking deals, and payouts from police abuse; "hidden" in tax-increment financing (TIF) district tax shelters; or "not collected" due to regressive taxation policies and inadequate municipal systems.[24] A 2018 report by the Cook County Clerk's Office, moreover, reveals that nearly one-third of all Chicago property tax revenues are diverted from the city's coffers into TIF districts, and nearly half of the $660 million in 2017 TIF revenues were funneled to fewer than 10 of the city's 143 districts—nearly all of them in wealthy, predominantly white areas.[25] So while the city cries broke as a justification for closing public schools, shuttering its mental health facilities, privatizing public housing, and its broader disinvestment in low-income neighborhoods on the South and West Sides, business is booming for the city's moneyed elite, the downtown and the North Side are thriving, and Chicago police enjoy an ever-expanding budget while having no discernable impact on levels of violence and solving ever fewer crimes.[26] While study participants may have lacked a fully elaborated analysis of the interests fueling these dynamics, they were nonetheless remarkably discerning in casting their predicament

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as part and parcel of the prevailing social order and their marginal place within it. Rick and Lamont, for example, explain their views on the persistence of these issues as follows:

RICK: They already resulted to reducing the population. Shit, that's what they doin' right now. They *lettin*' mu'fuckas kill each other. They *want* for the population to be reduced, man. They want mu'fuckas to kill each other. They want this to happen so they—you know, they ain't doin' nothing but making jails bigger. That's all they wanna do. So I don't even know what to tell him [the mayor, if he asked Rick about reducing the violence]. I'd probably get mad, if anything, 'cause he the reason why the shit goin' on.

RRA: So you feel like, basically, if they wanted it to stop . . .

RICK: They could've stopped this shit. They want this shit to be goin' on.

LAMONT: Police officers need jobs, judges need jobs, lawyers need jobs, prisons have to stay full. Politicians wanna stay in office, [so] there needs to be issues for people to work on. Right? So if they wanted to fix this problem, they could have been fixed it. We look at all of the other countries that we give packages of money to, to do this and do that and do this. If we gave Chicago a $10 billion package, the violence would automatically cease.

Notably, these dynamics have evolved and persisted in Chicago within a context of absolute predominance by the Democratic Party in city government for nearly a century. The vast majority of this period was dominated by the city's Democratic political machine, most famously under the mayorships of father and son Richard J. and Richard M. Daley, each of whom served over twenty years in office, from 1955 to 1976 and from 1989 to 2011, respectively.[27] While early decades of machine rule were noteworthy for the marginalization of African American political factions despite widespread black electoral support, the city's most recent mayors, Richard M. Daley and Rahm Emanuel, consolidated considerable black (and Latino) electoral support via the more substantive integration of political and civic elites of color into their governing coalitions.[28] Yet this shift has done remarkably little, if anything, to improve the quality of life in the city's poor and working-class black communities, as the Daley administration prioritized "pinstripe patronage," directing resources toward "real estate developers, lawyers, financiers, and other [businessmen]"; and Emanuel

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intensified this brand of elitist, "business-friendly" politics to a degree that earned him the derisive nickname "Mayor 1%."[29] As Pernell, a study participant who was schooled in the Woodlawn community's unique blend of street and formal politics, observes, Emanuel is "all about big business. If it's nothing that has to do with big business and dollars, he don't want anything to do with it."[30]

In some ways, moreover, the diversity of the Daley and Emanuel governing coalitions has likely helped facilitate the continued marginalization of Chicago's low-income communities of color. Indeed, African American bureaucrats have routinely been deployed to oversee the dismantling of public services in these communities, providing racial "cover" that has functioned "to legitimate and help impose racially charged redevelopment."[31] This has been especially true with respect to efforts to privatize public housing and public education. Vincent Lane, a black man, ran the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) from 1988 to 1995, before it was placed under federal control. Lane implemented a series of controversial, draconian policies during his tenure, including Operation Clean Sweep, a series of predawn raids in which police conducted warrantless searches of entire project buildings. These sweeps netted few major arrests but cost the CHA $175,000 each, draining $78 million from the organization's budget annually by 1994, when they were halted by a federal judge. Lane was also a prominent advocate of public housing demolition and privatization, and, as chairman of the National Commission on Severely Distressed and Troubled Public Housing, played a vital role in pushing for passage of the HOPE VI program in 1992 that would serve as the major vehicle toward these ends in the ensuing decades.[32] More recently, the closing of forty-nine of Chicago's public schools in 2013, almost all of them in low-income African American communities, was overseen by then schools CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett, a black woman. Both Lane and Byrd-Bennett later served time in prison for fraud and corruption, respectively.[33] Perhaps sensing these dynamics, study participant Cassius, who initially declared, "I think we need a black mayor to fix our city," quickly clarified his stance: "I ain't gon' say black mayor, but we need a mayor that really give a fuck about the black people on this side of town."

Thus, while the $10 billion figure cited earlier by Lamont in reference to a proposed government aid package for distressed communities in Chicago may be somewhat arbitrary, its enormity reveals an accurate assessment

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of both the scope of the challenges facing Chicago's neglected black neighborhoods as well as the reality that the amelioration of these issues will require a vast investment of public resources.[34] (Ironically, it is the exact amount *Chicago Is Not Broke* argues is being stolen, hidden, and not collected in the city due to corruption, government dysfunction, and handouts for developers and investors.) The suggestions of study participants themselves provide a useful blueprint for policy prescriptions to address the marginalization and despair, poverty and economic exclusion, and presumption of violent victimization that continue to fuel gang violence on the South and West Sides. These include a vast expansion of meaningful employment opportunities, the rebuilding of neighborhood infrastructure, better-funded schools, recreational resources, mental health services, and an end to police harassment and brutality and the criminalization of black youth. The exigencies described by study participants and their proposed solutions parallel the analyses of prominent scholars such as Mary Pattillo and Loïc Wacquant, whose research in Chicago informs their own respective calls for public "invest[ment] in poor black neighborhoods 'as is,'" and "a concerted attack on labor degradation and social desolation in the decaying hyperghetto."[35]

Adequately addressing these issues will require a massive shift in public policy involving a fundamental redistribution of resources away from the Loop, the city's upwardly mobile and predominantly white communities, and the Chicago Police Department. While the realization of such a policy agenda will unquestionably be an uphill political battle, like the discussion in the previous section that challenges the reflexive tendency to essentialize gangs and violence, the analysis delineated here confronts the tendency to reify the conditions that fuel these issues as ahistorical and naturally occurring. Thus, this is not a purely theoretical exercise, but one that is crucial to informing social action to address these issues. Gangs and violence are neither easy nor impossible to address; rather, we should recognize that doing so effectively will require the redeployment of public resources necessary to ameliorate the desperate conditions that drive them. Even more fundamentally, this will require the development of the political will to pursue an agenda aimed at transforming the highly stratified social order in Chicago. The analysis that follows, then, proceeds both from the self-evident reality that this political will does not currently exist and from the conviction that cultivating it is possible. Indeed, only in challenging the

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hegemonic ahistorical paradigm for understanding these issues can they be resituated where they rightfully belong: firmly within the scope of history, amenable to transformation via human action, just as they have been produced by it.

OUTLINING A STRATEGY FOR INTERVENTION: RELATIONSHIPS, RESISTANCE, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

A final, essential element of this historically oriented analysis that has been intimated but not yet elucidated is that history is not simply *done to* street gangs and their members; they are not passive objects only capable of reacting to their experiences and realities in involuntary, predetermined ways. Rather, these individuals and groups possess agency as historical actors. To be certain, like all people, gang members are embedded in a web of social, political, and economic structures that shape their experiences and perspectives in fundamental ways. These realities, however, do not mechanically control their individual or collective values, cultures, ideologies, practices, or behaviors: Individually and collectively, gang members have the capacity for conscious, purposeful action. Indeed, the internal rebellions waged by young rank-and-file gang members that shattered Chicago's traditional black street gangs in the first decade of the twenty-first century and the radically divergent reconstruction of new gang forms in their wake represent prime examples of this capacity for historical agency. While these events were certainly shaped in important ways by a wide range of historical dynamics, there were no guarantees that the actors involved would respond to these evolving historical circumstances in the particular ways that they did. What ultimately happened in Chicago, then, as described in this book, was an understandable and perhaps even likely outcome of these dynamics, but certainly not the only one possible.[36]

Understanding this is vital to imagining and charting a new way forward. Just as the trajectory of black street gangs on Chicago's South Side over the last two decades was not predestined, neither is their future. Indeed, there is a unique window of opportunity for intervention today with black gangs on the city's South Side. Gang members are overwhelmingly marginalized in the underground economy and harbor few, if any, illusions about the viability of a career in the drug game. They have also rejected both the authority of former gang leaders as well as the ideologies that long

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gave Chicago's traditional street gangs a quasi-religious quality. In short, a number of forces that may have impeded effective intervention during previous gang eras have diminished substantially, if not entirely, in the contemporary moment. Individually and collectively, then, today's young gang members are "up for grabs" more so than at any time in nearly half a century.[37]

The remainder of this conclusion outlines a strategy for intervening with young gang members on the South Side of Chicago today rooted in both the analysis developed over the course of this book as well as the direct insights of gang members on these matters. This analysis converges on a central program around which intervention efforts might be effectively organized: specifically, one that involves engaging gang members in grassroots organizing and social movements to address the injustices that fuel gangs and violence in their communities in the first place. Such a strategy has the potential for both positive short-term effects with respect to moving young people away from gangs and violence as well as longer-term implications for challenging the conditions that underlie these issues at a more fundamental level. Indeed, as discussed in the previous section, the redistribution of resources into low-income black communities in Chicago to address these issues would represent a radical departure from the prerogatives of benign neglect, outright abandonment, containment, and displacement that have alternately characterized official city policy toward these communities for the better part of a century. Deviation from this course is unlikely in the absence of adequate social, political, and economic pressures being brought to bear on City Hall and beyond.[38]

To be certain, the notion that building collective power among poor and oppressed people to alter the systems deleteriously affecting their lives represents the essential cornerstone of both the practice and scholarship on organizing and activism, prescribed by luminaries from Frederick Douglass and Eugene Debs to Frances Fox Piven and Adolph Reed Jr.[39] Saul Alinsky, widely considered the "father "of modern community organizing, distilled this axiom as follows: "Power has always derived from two main sources, money and people. Lacking money, the Have-Nots must build power from their own flesh and blood. A mass movement expresses itself with mass tactics . . . [against] the status quo."[40] On this point, the participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed with the experts. As

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alluded to in the discussion above, when asked about their recommendations for addressing violence in Chicago, study participants contended that substantively reducing violence would require a broader transformation of the intolerable conditions in their communities that would necessitate a massive investment of resources, a prospect participants regarded as unlikely: If these issues had been allowed to persist for decades, why would that precedent change now? In the eyes of study participants, then, the only—or at least the most reasonable—possibility for changing this dynamic involves organizing and mobilizing around these issues in order to pressure elected officials and other powerful actors to respond to these needs. In the passages below, for example, Antonio and Marco draw on the legacy of insurgent African American social protest and collective action in describing their recommendations for reducing violence in Chicago. Indeed, although the question to which they responded was framed in terms of advice they would give the mayor to address this violence, their responses, like the passage from Rick cited earlier, reveal their complete lack of faith in the will of the political establishment to take meaningful action toward this end—at least in the absence of the proper pressure (see also the discussion on pages 113–15).

ANTONIO: When [people] say Obama's gon' help us, fuck that. I don't believe in that shit, man. He supposed to be from the same streets as everybody—as Chicago—but what the fuck is he doing? . . . So when people say, "Oh, we need a change"—get your ass up, go downtown, protest. Let these mu'fuckas know what the fuck is goin' on. But one person can't do it, man, for real. . . . You gotta use your own voice to make everybody else hear you to join in. You feel me? Think about Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, all them, man. One person ain't enough. You gotta have of a bagillion mu'fuckas come behind you. . . . One person in a room full of thousands of people, you can't hear them. But a thousand people talkin' over one person, you ain't got no choice but to hear what the fuck they sayin', especially if they all sayin' the same thing.

RRA: So if you were the mayor of Chicago, what would you do to reduce violence in the city?

MARCO: If I was the mayor, I don't know how I would reduce violence. But what I know I would do as far as—like, okay, let me say it like this. Back in the 1960s,

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you know, black people was all together back then because we all basically had a common enemy, though, it was police brutality and shit. I always hear the old people say black people used to talk a lot and make sure everybody good, and it was, like, a *community*, you feel me? Mu'fuckas just gotta remember that. It's like people don't remember where we came from, man, and how we used to fight for our rights back then and shit. Now police do anything the fuck they want because we don't got that same drive no more. . . .

I feel like the only thing that'd get everybody on the same page is if we had a common enemy, man. Like, say if you was to get into it with the police, you feel me, that'd be different than gettin' into it with [other] niggas, 'cause it's like, damn, that's the police, though—everybody hate the police, you know? That'd have to be the only way to get back on the same page—if it was back like the 1960s.

The argument presented by Antonio and Marco here, that grassroots organizing and social movements hold the key to reducing gang violence, is almost entirely absent from research on street gangs and violence.[41] Yet, as will be delineated in the following pages, this approach is highly consistent with the broader analysis presented in this book, even beyond its potential as a strategy by which the conditions that breed gangs and violence might ultimately be addressed. Meaningful and sustainable efforts toward these ends will likely involve the following elements, each of which builds on the others: building relationships, developing critical consciousness, reconstructing resistance identities, and finding common ground. The basic parameters of each of these elements will be described here in a way that offers theoretically grounded guidance on the practical matter of working with gang members to shift their energies from fighting one another toward fighting the injustices that fuel gang conflicts at the structural level.

First and foremost, any attempt to intervene with gang members today must begin with concerted efforts by community organizers, activists, social workers, and other caring and committed individuals to build meaningful relationships with them. As the findings from this study have demonstrated, there is perhaps nothing more important to black gang members on the South Side of Chicago today than personal relationships, which have superseded both traditional gang affiliations as the principal basis for gang solidarity as well as drug dealing as the primary raison d'être of gang

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life. These shifts bode well in terms of the potential for intervention. Developing such relationships can be challenging work, however, as these young people have often been ignored, abused, and/or exploited by those charged with helping and protecting them, including their parents, foster families, teachers, social workers, and police officers, and they can be understandably guarded in whom they place their trust. Thus, building trusting relationships with gang members can take months of persistent effort and may require demonstrations of genuine commitment and care that go beyond the parameters delineated in a job description. These relationships are also best forged on the streets, where gang members spend much of their time and where those interested in working with them are often hesitant to venture. On the other hand, most gang members are open to assistance, especially from those they feel have their best interests at heart, and most yearn for a viable alternative to gangbanging. Yet their life experiences tell them that such assistance will likely never come—hence, their reticence in placing their trust in those who say they wish to help them. In the following passage, Montrelle explains the necessity of building strong relationships with gang members, as well as the hard work required to do so, as a precondition to effectively working with them. Also evident in his remarks is that an outreach worker or activist's background in the streets means little in the absence of a long-term, caring relationship.

RRA: What have been your experiences with violence reduction programs or organizations in the community, if you've had any?

MONTRELLE: I really haven't had too many. They just think comin' to tell us—some dude will come tell us a one-time story about what he used to do. Or somebody just tellin' us not to [gangbang]. It's nothing that's really benefittin' us. It's just a moment. That's all it be. It's nothing that's really life-changing. So with these dudes now, they need to really care. They need to be out there with us. . . . That's the only way y'all could get us to change our thinking.

Consistent with this emphasis on personal relationships, however, it is unlikely that gang members will be fundamentally swayed by the types of passive, cyber-oriented organizing of groups like Black Lives Matter. A tweet by an activist announcing and encouraging participation in a downtown protest is unlikely to spur most gang members—or most other people, for that matter—into action, much less help facilitate any type of more

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fundamental personal transformation. Indeed, while gang members certainly sympathize with the goal of addressing police violence, none that I know are involved in Black Lives Matter in any substantive way, and questions about the group elicited little response from study participants. My sense is that this disconnect stems, at least in part, from the discrepancy between today's impersonal organizing tactics and foundational lessons from community organizing and social movements, which indicate that people become active in these efforts through involvement in neighborhood groups, local churches, and other primary groups in which they are embedded. This was the rationale for Chicagoan Saul Alinsky's strategy of creating an "organization of organizations" in his work, which facilitated the consolidation of broader membership bases by tapping into and empowering existing group networks—churches, labor unions, and the like. Similarly, Aldon Morris's seminal analysis of the civil rights movement reveals that what many consider a monolithic movement was in reality a collection of local movements rooted in networks of established groups, most notably African American churches, whose members shared close personal relationships.[42] These historical lessons appear particularly important to engaging gang members in social movements today given the intensely interpersonal focus of contemporary gang structures and ideologies. This may also help explain their indifference to Black Lives Matter and similar contemporary "movements" that have developed in the near-complete absence of meaningful face-to-face organizing efforts.[43]

Moving gang members toward prosocial collective action, moreover, will likely require the development of a new form of critical consciousness that can serve as a foundation for politicization. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, his seminal work on popular education and social transformation, Paulo Freire argues that the mobilization of the dispossessed is dependent on their reinterpretation of the oppressive conditions shaping their lives and their communities as historical and changeable, rather than natural and inevitable. Freire refers to this process as *conscientização*, or conscientization, which he explains as "critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be 'in a situation.' Only as this situation ceases to present itself as a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and they can come to perceive it as an objective-problematic situation—only then can commitment exist. Humankind *emerge* from their *submersion* and acquire

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the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is unveiled . . . [through] the *conscientização* of the situation."[44]

As the analysis presented in chapter 4 suggests, many gang members remain "submerged" in their "situation" and conceive of it as essentially unchangeable. For Freire and other social theorists like Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu, this is an understandable state, since people are socialized to assume the legitimacy and naturalness of the prevailing social order in which they live.[45] Yet the passages from Antonio and Marco cited earlier indicate that the seeds of a more fully formed critical consciousness that rejects the invulnerability of the unjust status quo already exist within many gang members as well. Indeed, the internal rebellions that shattered Chicago's traditional black street gangs and the subsequent, radical refashioning of these gangs were only possible through a critical consciousness among young gang members in which exploitive and coercive gang structures and practices were perceived as not only problematic but also transformable (see, especially, the quotes from James, Carlos, and Jabari on pages 36–37). In this sense, there is a precedent for both the development of critical consciousness as well as the possibility of translating that consciousness into collective action within the purview of gang members' own lived experiences. Lamont, who works with a community organization and grew up in Woodlawn, a South Side community with a long history of grassroots organizing and action, suggested conducting civic education and engagement trainings as a means of demystifying the political process and equipping gang members and other community residents with a blueprint for changing the conditions in their neighborhoods. The latent theory embedded in Lamont's recommendations largely parallels Freire's description of *conscientização*:

> You can't reduce violence until you educate the people. And a lot of times the reason why [powerful] people don't want to educate the people is because politicians get put out of office when people really learn what civic engagement is. I would create workshops where people in the community can learn civic engagement. So, me as the alderman of that community, if I'm not doin' my job, they can empower themselves to get me out of office because I want to be held accountable. Most people don't teach people how to get a gun and shoot 'em, right, because I wanna rule and do whatever that I really wanna do.

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Another component of the process of politicizing gang members and moving them toward participation in social movements will involve helping them reimagine and reconstruct their resistance identities. As delineated in chapter 4, the concept of resistance identity is useful for helping elucidate many of the psychosocial functions and meanings that street gangs fulfill in the lives of their members. On one hand, these resistance identities have helped gang members reassert a sense of dignity and self-worth in the face of intolerable conditions and placed them at odds with an oppressive social structure they understand to be responsible for these conditions. On the other hand, these identities also promote internecine violence and other (self-)destructive behaviors that further imperil and marginalize young gang members and undermine the social fabric in their communities. As they are currently constructed, in other words, gang members' resistance identities situate them in opposition to the oppressive status quo, but do so in ways that are largely self-defeating.[46] Indeed, as Manuel Castells argues, resistance identities are neither inherently positive nor negative; rather, they can function in multiple, even conflicting, ways and have the capacity to evolve over time.[47] The challenge, as these dynamics pertain to addressing gang violence, then, involves helping gang members refashion their resistance identities in ways that facilitate redirecting their energies away from (self-)destructive street parochialism and gang warfare and toward prosocial collective action. Brotherton astutely frames the central question, or challenge, relating to gang resistance in terms of "whether this resistance has the potential to become transformative."[48]

Other studies of gang interventions offer some insights into what such a process might look like. In his research on the work of Christian barrio ministries with Chicano gang members in Los Angeles, for example, Edward Orozco Flores reports that these ministries promoted a "reformed barrio masculinity" among "recovering" gang members that effectively reoriented them "from the street to the household." Importantly, however, Flores notes that these interventions "did not attempt to discard all facts of gang masculinity, or masculine gang embodiment," as "reforming all facets of embodied gang masculinity was unlikely." Instead, their intervention models "allowed men to appropriate facets of gang embodiment in order to facilitate recovery from gang life and progress toward conventional manhood."[49] In another example, David Brotherton and Luis Barrios describe how reformed leaders of the Latin Kings and Queens in New York

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City incorporated a variety of "nongang traditions," including radical politics, spirituality, and self-help principles, into the ideological fabric, organizational policies, and daily rituals of the gang as part of their transformation toward a prosocial community movement during the 1990s.[50] A number of the older participants in the research for this book, moreover, talked about using the traditional literature from their gangs as a guide for personal transformation. This was especially true among the older Gangster Disciples I interviewed, who were at the height of their street involvement when the gang was both the largest drug distribution organization in Chicago and simultaneously making inroads into legitimate social and political endeavors under the banner of "Growth and Development."[51] Daniel explains these dynamics as they unfolded in his life during a period of incarceration as follows:

> I read a lot of literature that these organizations write—their organization literature. And all of it is positive, instructive, uplifting words. All of 'em have laws and policies that restrict unhealthy behavior. So I was able to use that as a way of rehabilitating myself. Not to say I didn't seek God's help. I did. And I read the Bible, and I also read the Quran. But it's nothing like reading something your brothers wrote and usin' that as a daily guide. It's nothing like it. I don't know who wrote the Bible. I don't know who wrote the Quran. I know who they say did. But I know who wrote that literature—I know these people personally. You know what I'm sayin'? And I know where they got some of the stuff from. I know these guys are scholars, in a sense. But when they were writin' this, they were writin' this with people like ourselves in mind. So it was easy for me to use those words to turn my life around. And I'm glad that as I was doin' so, so were they—in deed, not just in words. So that when I returned to society and they returned to society, we were on the same page. And there was no stigma attached to tryin' to be an example of those words and not the stereotypical view of how people would view somebody from an organization called the Gangster Disciples.[52]

Each of these examples differs in important ways from the current challenge in Chicago: Unlike the ministry programs described by Flores, the goal would not be to move gang members toward "conventional manhood"; there are no leadership structures through which the gang identity reconstruction processes might be facilitated, as in Brotherton and Barrios's study; and the rejection of traditional Chicago gang ideologies—both the

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good and the bad—by young gang members in the early twenty-first century precludes their use as an effective blueprint for gang resocialization today. Nonetheless, these represent useful examples of processes of identity reconstruction among gang members involved in transitioning away from (self-)destruction and toward prosocial values and commitments.

As alluded to in these examples, moreover, specific elements of gang identities within a particular context may lend themselves to the creation of healthier forms of identification. For gang members on the South Side of Chicago today, these elements include their commitment to solidarity, the tremendous value they place on relationships, and their devotion to their neighborhoods. While these aspects of gang identity often manifest in limited, if not destructive, ways—solidarity and relationships, for example, often function to isolate gang members from those outside their immediate circles, and neighborhood devotion often entails shooting at members of the opposition from adjacent neighborhoods—these are not the only manifestations imaginable or possible. The identity reconstruction process, in other words, would not necessitate the wholesale repudiation of gang members' current identities—an unappealing and unlikely prospect for any group of people. In one gang study, for example, gang members were asked, "What would be the best way to get rid of your gang?" When participants responded that all of their members would have to be killed to eliminate the gang, the researcher interpreted this as evidence of the centrality of violence to gang culture—that gang members were so engrossed in violence they could not see beyond its narrow, lethal horizons. Apparently, he did not consider that participants may have been responding defiantly to a hostile question in which they and their friends were framed as something "to get rid of."[53] Realistically, who would respond well to being told that who they are and what they represent are worthless and need to be eradicated? While some elements of gang identity may indeed require outright abandonment, much of this process would instead involve helping gang members reinterpret the constituent elements of their identities and redefine how they might manifest in prosocial, transformative ways.

Finally, part of this transformation process would inevitably involve helping gang members recognize the common ground they share with members of rival gangs, in particular, their shared conditions and the common sources of those conditions—their "common enemy," as Marco put it. Political theorist Adolph Reed Jr. frames the challenge of developing social

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movements straightforwardly as "organizing, working . . . to build support and solidarity among real people in real places around concrete objectives that they perceive as concerns."[54] As described over the course of this book, the concerns of young gang members today are myriad and severe. Importantly, however, they also cut across gangs, neighborhoods, and communities. The commonality of these concerns and the objectives designed to address them, then, constitute a potential foundation for the transcendence of gang antagonisms and the redirection of gang members' energies away from internecine violence and toward prosocial collective action.[55] In this capacity, these processes hold the potential to reduce violence even beyond the reductions that would accompany the policies, programs, and reforms secured through such efforts. They also represent a logical basis for strengthening ties between gang members and other constituent groups in their communities in the pursuit of common objectives around, among other issues, living wage employment, affordable housing, community infrastructure, neighborhood schools, and police accountability. These issues affect broad segments of residents in these communities, and therefore might serve as a foundation for deepening intracommunal relationships more generally.[56] Indeed, if these issues only affected gang members, or if gang members were the only ones that might be mobilized around them, substantive transformation on these fronts would be essentially unthinkable.

While they certainly need a great deal of cultivation, the seeds for building bridges across gang boundaries by emphasizing common concerns and interests are already present in many gang members. Indeed, the gang members interviewed for this study and many more with whom I have worked closely over the years yearn for peace. On their face, such antiviolence sentiments may seem paradoxical given gang members' direct involvement in the violence they say they wish would stop. Considering the toll that this violence takes on them, however, both as victims and perpetrators, their position is quite intelligible. To be sure, no one has more to gain from the end of gang hostilities than gang members themselves, as they are its principal victims: They are the ones who must operate on high alert anytime they are outside, even in their own neighborhoods; who cannot walk or take the bus a handful of blocks away from their homes in any direction because they are besieged by rivals; who are coping with posttraumatic stress; who face near-daily harassment and the prospect of

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brutality at the hands of the police; who are being shot, killed, and incarcerated at alarming rates. This reality clearly contradicts the image of gang members as irredeemably pathological so often promoted by the media, law enforcement, elected officials, and mainstream gang researchers. The truth is that, in their quiet moments of reflection, gang members almost universally talk about wanting a different life for themselves and their families. Incredibly, few gang studies or gang interventions actually ask gang members what they think about the high levels of violence in their communities, their participation in such violence, or what strategies they think might be effective in reducing this violence. This is quite remarkable given that efforts to address street gangs and reduce gang violence are, by definition, designed to directly or indirectly change the behavior of gang members.

Consider the following passage from my interview with Marco in which he describes both the burden of having to cope with the trauma associated with the constant specter of violent victimization as well as his longing for peace. In a remarkably perceptive display of empathy, moreover, he observes that he and one of his mortal enemies are, in essence, "the same nigga" and laments that they are not working together toward a mutually beneficial peace.[57]

MARCO: Being outside [gangbanging], it comes with havin' to worry about the police and the opps and stuff, so you in that mode [to use violence to defend yourself] already. So, man, I just don't see that shit stoppin', bro. I don't know. I wish it would, though. Sick of worryin', you know? Like, me and the guys, sometimes we'll just go downtown and shit, just to walk around 'cause it feel good not havin' to do this all the time [*looking behind him over each shoulder*]. You know, that's a habit—steady lookin' over your shoulder on all these cars. . . .

RRA: So how important is it to you that the violence be reduced? And why?

MARCO: It's important 'cause, man, I know how it feels to lose somebody. That shit hurt, bro. That shit ain't cool. And regardless, like, okay, it's a lot of niggas I'd like to see die, right? But I know they got loved ones, too, that's finna feel like I feel, you know? So that's the reason why it should stop.

The second reason 'cause, man, mu'fuckas got kids and stuff. I just had a lil girl, she finna be four months on Thursday. She pretty as hell. . . . And the nigga who came on my [social media] page and said "bitch-ass nigga," he got a daughter, too, you know? And it's like this: Like, we the same nigga. He tryin' to do

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> [kill] me, I'm tryin' to do him. But it's like, damn, Folk. Now, in the back of my mind, I'm tryin' to change, and I can change—I want to 'cause I got something to live for. But this nigga still doin' the same shit, though. It's like, I wonder how he feel. 'Cause I'll take his ass out this shit. But it's like, damn, I don't want to, but if I have to, you feel me? Niggas be crazy, man. Like, how you got a lil girl, right, but you still doin' that type of shit, though? But even with me—I ain't no hypocrite, I be thinkin' about me, too. But [*pausing*] . . . I don't know, man.
>
> But that shit need to stop, though, for real, so people could feel safe again. 'Cause that's a good feeling. That's why we be havin' the peace treaties, man—niggas wanna feel safe and shit. But even with a peace treaty, you still gotta watch. Maybe he just want a peace treaty so we can be comfortable so we can kinda get us off our Ps and Qs so y'all could snake [betray] us, you know? . . .
>
> The violence, it ain't gon' stop. It's not, bro. I know it. I wish it would, though, 'cause it be so petty. But it's like, people just be lost, man. People be lost in they own world—they own block.

The desperation and uncertainty Marco conveys here are palpable. He does not know what the future will look like for his daughter or the daughter of his sworn enemy, both of whom may end up growing up without their fathers. He does not know how his enemy feels about the path of mutual destruction on which they have both embarked. He does not know if building connections with his enemies in the name of solidarity, peace, and social justice is possible. He does not know, moreover, if anyone cares enough to help him try to do so.

This book has described in detail the transformation of street gangs and violence on the South Side of Chicago since the 1990s and the nature of these phenomena today, situating all of these dynamics firmly within a broad historical framework. Integral to this analysis has been an examination of the desperate conditions facing young people in the city's poor and working-class black communities, as an accounting of these realities is essential to understanding not only what has taken and is taking place but also how we might move forward from here in addressing these issues.

Celebrated intervention models like focused deterrence policing and the Cure Violence public health model have failed to curb levels of violence in Chicago. These failures can be attributed to both their faulty assumptions

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about the invariability of gangs and violence as well as their failure to situate these issues within a broader framework that goes beyond the problematic behaviors and norms of gang members and/or the communities within which they are embedded. The findings from this study and the realities of persistently high levels of violence in Chicago indicate that attempts to reduce gang violence that do not deal more comprehensively with the conditions driving this violence are likely to achieve limited success, at best. While proponents of "universal" violence prevention models like focused deterrence and Cure Violence claim that their interventions are capable of eliminating violence without comprehensive action, their respective track records in Chicago belie this assertion. In making his case against addressing oppressive community conditions as a strategy for reducing violence, David Kennedy states that "the way we've been trying to do it" is not working.[58] This statement suggests that resources have been flooding into poor and working-class black urban neighborhoods for decades, and that violence has persisted nonetheless. The evidence, however, indicates just the opposite: These communities have typically experienced severe declines over the last half-century, as decent jobs have disappeared, poverty has increased, and abandonment and physical deterioration have intensified.[59] With these realities in mind, Kennedy's statement actually makes perfect sense: We cannot reduce violence the way we have been trying to.

But all hope for peace on the streets of Chicago is not lost, and contemporary gang dynamics and ideologies actually present crucial openings for intervention and transformation. The ultimate focus of intervention efforts should be the massive investment of public resources in low-income black communities on the city's South and West Sides aimed at addressing the intolerable conditions that continue to fuel gangs and violence, namely, marginalization and desperation, poverty and economic exclusion, and pervasive community violence. Toward these ends, community organizers, activists, social workers, and other concerned individuals can engage gang members in grassroots organizing efforts and social movements aimed at such transformation. This will likely be difficult and painstaking work that will need to occur primarily on the streets of gang members' own neighborhoods—the places they congregate and the places they care most about. The gang interventions of the 1960s, in which the commitment of a handful of gang leaders dictated the participation of thousands

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of gang members in the social movements of that era, are irrelevant to today's situation. The smaller scale of today's gangs and their emphasis on egalitarianism and autonomy mean that relationships with gang members today will necessarily be built on a much smaller scale. This egalitarian ethos also complements social justice goals rooted in the strengthening and expansion of democratic processes and the more equitable distribution of societal resources, potentially helping facilitate the transition from the streets to activism.

Transformed gang members will likely play an important role in this work. As discussed in chapter 5 and briefly in the preceding section, a gang background is a decidedly inadequate basis for intervention workers to exert any type of influence on young gang members today. Nonetheless, such a background may assist in building the relationships necessary to develop such influence. Coming from the same communities, having dealt with similar issues, speaking the same language—these are all factors that can help facilitate the development of meaningful relationships. Indeed, to whatever extent Cure Violence may be effective in assisting specific individuals and preventing particular instances of violence, it is likely that relationships are driving much of that efficacy. "The power of violence prevention is relationships," as Paris points out. The key question that remains, however, is what are those relationships being leveraged for? To what end? As Eldridge, another seasoned street outreach worker, puts it, "If I'm askin' you to put a gun down, I'm askin' you to put that pack [of drugs] down, what am I replacing that gun and that pack with?" The sheer enormity of the challenges facing gang members and other desperate youth in Chicago forcefully contradicts the notion that simply "increasing access" to severely inadequate resources and opportunities within the existing, highly stratified social structure or throwing a few dollars at new programming represent anything approximating a viable solution to these issues. The goal must be to challenge and eradicate the inequities that lie at the heart of the social order. Toward that end, transformed gang members can and likely must play a central role.

The analysis presented in this book is obviously derived from the experiences and perspectives of black gang members on the South Side of Chicago. While it is possible, and even likely, that some of these themes will be relevant in other contexts, the lessons from this study demonstrate that understanding the nature of gangs and violence requires a careful analysis

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of these phenomena as they exist within a particular time and place. Indeed, the extent to which the transformations described in this book extend beyond the black gangs on Chicago's South Side to other gangs even within the city of Chicago itself is unclear.[60] Insights into how gangs might be addressed and how violence might be reduced, then, requires a careful, contextual exploration of these dynamics, including an examination of community conditions, social policy, local politics, the perceptions and experiences of gang members themselves, the particularities of gang dynamics and gang history, the nature of violence, and issues of identity and resistance. To be certain, we need fewer narrow, deductive, one-size-fits-all violence prevention efforts that impose rigid, predetermined models on situations in which their assumptions may have no bearing. What we need are analyses and interventions developed inductively by the realities and conditions on the ground and that engage gang members where they are—in other words, from the streets up.

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