

Venkatesh, Sudhir A. *Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets.* , 2008. Print.

Reviewed by Ahmed Abdulkareem

Venkatesh brings an interesting and exciting view on communities. In particular, a community that has suffered and gone through a lot in Chicago. In this book, Venkatesh focuses on a black/gang/poverty community. While there are many slashes to this community name, it has been the main focus of the book. A guy like Sudhir doesn't belong to such a community, and he learns that as soon as he tries to study it. However, Venkatesh never thought of what happened could ever exist, which is to befriend a gang leader who goes by JT. He never thought someone like JT would be so ambitious yet so far apart. Venkatesh is fascinated about the life in the Chicago housing projects. He leaves the survey and the clipboard he has aside and starts focusing on the people in this community and how they're living.

As mentioned above, this book focuses on a very common community throughout the U.S. This community exists even here in Portland. It really does a lot for its members. However, in what way? This community destroys lives, jobs, families, and many more. This community let its members hang out in urine smelling places and sell all kinds of drugs. As mentioned in the book, "As I started to climb the stairs, the smell of urine was overpowering. On some floors the stairwells were dark; on others there was a muted glow" (Venkatesh 30). A gang community experiences what Venkatesh said everyday, which is a very sad reality. It also brings violence. When Venkatesh entered the 4040 building, he was looked at as if he was a criminal. Everyone there thought he was trying to kill somebody and that he's a member from a different gang. This alone tells you that in order to live in such a community, you need to know what you're doing (i.e perhaps be a member of gang or something)

This community faces many challenges. For example, this community is a poor one. Poverty plays a big role in people's lives. When a community is poor, its members will do anything just to live. As a result, the members of this community are selling crack, killing each other and promoting violence just to survive. As mentioned in the book "But if Otis stole something, then we have a bigger problem. You have to beat the shit out of that nigger, not just hit him twice. And he has to work for free for a month" (Venkatesh 129). This quote shows how violent members of such a community can get. I myself used to live in Baghdad, where gang/poverty communities do exist and such an act shows a lot of violence. In a community where Venkatesh belongs to, stealing would probably be looked at differently. Perhaps the cops would be involved or something similar to that, but never beating people and making them work for an entire month for free.

The leaders of such a community are basically the gang leaders. They are leading the community by their act which really raises a question of whether the leaders shaped this community the way it is, or the community actually shaped them. JT (the gang leader) is very ambitious. Even though he's a gang leader, he is very interested in Venkatesh and what he does. To me and Venkatesh, this really shows that JT is shaped the way he is. It seems like JT doesn't really know what's really going on in the outside world. As JT asks "Why do researchers use multiple-choice

surveys like the one I was using? Why don't they just talk with people? How much money can you make as a professor?" (Venkatesh 29). This really shows what JT is like. While all the questions he asked are good questions, they aren't questions you would normally hear from an educated person, especially the first question. Guys like JT shouldn't be shaped the way they are and it's the community he belongs to that shaped him the way he is.

There are external factors that contribute into shaping this community the way it is. For example, other gang members who live in the Chicago housing projects. The people JT's members hang out with also contribute here. Specifically, the people who buy drugs from JT. These people have a huge impact on this community. As a result, gangs are formed and the community is shaped the way it is. While this community has many negative impacts on its members, it does supply its members something. For example, it's pretty cheap to live in the housing projects. You can live in these houses making \$30,000 a year.

For Venkatesh, being in such a community has taught him a lot. It taught him how communities vary across specific neighborhoods within one state. It taught him how there are really smart people out there who just need an opportunity to "break the chain". It also taught Venkatesh that communities do shape its members. As a result, JT is one smart guy who has been "jailed" in this community, until he met Venkatesh. Every once in awhile, They both taught each other something. They both focused on what they're doing. Venkatesh was the one busy with his schooling, while JT was busy with drug dealing. Venkatesh had no position in this community. He was completely different in every way possible. He's just a college student.

JT eventually realized what he's doing is not the way to go. Drug dealing career could only take you so far. JT could've been killed for some silly reason because he was a gang leader. He eventually started managing his cousin's dry-cleaning business where violence doesn't exist. While drug dealing made him more money, dry-cleaning business manager is a much better option. JT also ended up starting a barbershop which unfortunately failed. However, it didn't put him down. "Man, as long as I'm not behind bars and breathing, every day is a good day". (Venkatesh 282). JT became a huge part of Venkatesh's life, since they hung out often in Chicago and learned from each other. To experience such a community is not easy, especially for Venkatesh. It's definitely something you never forget