What Better Time Than Now?

…notes on consciousness and unity in US cities and prisons

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

The following is a piece written by a prisoner and comrade currently incarcerated in Western North Carolina. Drawn from his personal experiences of prison life and gang membership, as well as from the theoretical and political insights of New Afrikan, anarchist, and/or anti-colonial writers like Lorenzo Komboa Ervin, Russell Maroon Shoatz, Kevin Rashid Johnson, and Frantz Fanon, this piece attempts to answer some burning questions regarding the despair and self-destruction of the environment in which the author finds himself. In doing so, it opens the door to a number of poignant discussions on topics like the forming of identity through historical consciousness and revolt, the co-optation of such identity through musical and artistic forms, and the role of street gangs in the rebellions of the future.

And we can be sure that such rebellions *will* come. The widespread labor and hunger strikes which occurred in the last year and half in Georgia and California prisons were one image from this future; a recent riot at an immigrants' prison in Natchez, MS, which resulted in the death of a guard and prisoners' holding the facility overnight, is another. On the outside, rage against the shooting of Trayvon Martin, the unbelievably callous execution of Troy Davis, austerity measures and unemployment, and the police murder of Oscar Grant in Oakland also speak of this reality.

All of these "rebellions" were repressed, isolated, or mediated in some way, but they have also managed to successfully communicate themselves to large groups of people, and have lived on through the experiences and relationships of those whose lives they changed. Moreover, the rage we see in the anonymous crowds which form these upheavals is increasingly difficult to manage. Certainly, these surges of activity eventually subside—but the State seems more and more incapable of providing any kind of long term pacification. Gone, it seems, are the days of polite, social democratic reforms. We are met with a combination of hard repression and soft dismissal, ensuring that our next outburst will be even greater as we build on and learn from our experiences.

From Greece to Cairo to Oakland, we see more and more the reflection of entire classes of people left out or made redundant by a shrinking economy to which they are basically useless. Some of these people have been the excluded for generations, while others are the first of their family to encounter a world which will give them no future. Even the Occupy movement, characterized initially by the meek pleas of a newly despondent middle-class, has either shifted to or been overshadowed by this trend of uncontrollable rage by the dispossessed. This is

SUGGESTED READING

Blue Rage, Black Redemption, by Stanley Tookie Williams

The USA Patriot Act, by B Scheppler

Black Gangsters of Chicago, by R. Chepesiuk

The Almighty Black Peace Stone Nation, by N. Moore

The Black Hand, by C. Blatchford

This for the Mara Salvatrucha, by S. Logan

My Bloody Life: The Making of a Latin King, by R. Sanchez

Inside the Crips, by C. Simpson

Monster, by Sanyika "Monster Kody" Shakur

Blood in My Eye & *Soledad Brother,* by George Jackson

Anarchism and the Black Revolution, by Lorenzo Komboa Ervin

The Wretched of the Earth, by Frantz Fanon

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ENDNOTES

1. World Almanac and Book of Facts: 2011
2. "Kill Yourself vs. Unite and Liberate Yourself," by Kevin Rashid Johnson
3-5. *Liberation or Gangsterism*, by Russell Maroon Shoatz
6. Right On! #1
7. *The Wretched of the Earth*, by Frantz Fanon
8. *The 21st Century Anti-Recidivist Booklet*, by Clarence Anthony Taylor (Talib Rasheed)
9. ibid.
1o. "Kill Yourself vs. Unite and Liberate Yourself," by Kevin Rashid Johnson
11. ibid.
12. *Blue Rage, Black Redemption*, by Stanley Tookie Williams
13. "Kill Yourself vs. Unite and Liberate Yourself," by Kevin Rashid Johnson
14. *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, by Lorenzo Komboa Ervin
15. ibid.

perhaps more obvious or "advanced" in the European theater, with Spain's general strike on March 29th, or with the constant attacks and social breakdown in Greece, but we see it too in the US, with flash mobs, school and workplace shootings, property destruction and riots, and the renewed focus of the repressive apparatus on "black bloc anarchists."

Some readers might object to some of these last examples, arguing they have more to do with a self-destructive impulse towards social decay than radical political consciousness. But as this piece points out, there is an intricate relationship, both of conflict as well as identity and growth, between the self-destruction and self-hatred we learn under capitalism and the righteous, "constructive" rage we feel at those who oppress us.[1] This may represent a conflict or paradox, but it is one that shapes our movements and our individual selves, and is worthy of our engagement.

Finding a way to create affinities and unities in this context of self-destruction is centrally related to the project of gang truce efforts, and to the larger project of revolutionary struggle amongst the dispossessed. Decrying outright the self-destructive urge, or in this case the gangs that facilitate it, is to miss the point. To take aim at the institutions and systems of thought that oppress us is by definition self-destructive, because these systems have so completely subsumed our identities and relationships as to render us inseparable. To some extent this explains how the following article can both decry the "glamorization of gangsterism" on one page, and call for the growth, unity, and coherence of gangs as a liberating force, on the next.

As this article points out, the self-destructive subsumption of our current relationships and identities under oppression does not mean we cannot grow beyond the world we live in now, or that we cannot find new ways to establish affinity or identity. But it is a bitter truth we have to face head on, without which we cannot begin to understand the forms of rebellion which increasingly shape our world.

For love and rage in the dirty south,
sweet tea

1 Perhaps nowhere is this more clear than on the streets of Athens, Greece, where anarchists and "nihilist youth" and "hooligans" continuously find themselves in both cooperation and violent conflict over goals and tactics.

WHAT BETTER TIME THAN NOW?

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"Certainly, the 'gangs' have comprised a subculture that has been a thorn in the side of the ruling class, one that either had to be controlled and used – or eradicated." - Russell Maroon Shoatz

We have come to a point in time where the country we are currently living in is being transformed into a militarized police state, where certain groups are vilified. These groups—under the banner of the "war on terrorism" or "war on gangs" or "war on drugs" – are mainly Muslims, gangs, and other lower-class peoples. Gangs, as I will call them from here on out for better understanding, are within the domestic arena in which the US is waging an all-out open war. There are believed to be over 2 million "gang" members in the US. By sheer numbers, gangs outnumber all of the full time law enforcement officers in this country at 1,021,456.[1]

It is critical to question the original and modern purpose of the existence of gangs. This is due to the drastic increase in their membership and also to understand why law enforcement is relentlessly attempting to eradicate or control gang members.

I must say, being such a member myself, that the vast majority of street nations were founded for the primary purpose of uplifting their communities and people. This led to fighting the police brutality and oppression within their hoods that was aimed directly at people of color. The black and brown nations comprise most of the gang members in this country, and are all from lower-class, poverty-stricken 3rd world colonies in America.

However, this original purpose was decimated by the US government in a divide and conquer strategy, first with the destruction of our leaders in the Black liberation and Civil Rights movements. This ultimately led to "the people being left leaderless, divided and confused," where people "generally don't realize they are under constant enemy attack."[2] Thus, we began to oppress each other, and became each other's nemeses. There were numerous tricks and gambits used to destroy the more radical and revolutionary elements of the gangs, which I will discuss in detail in this article. This piece is not aimed at or meant to offend any one street tribe, but to criticize *all* of our street gangs by identifying the clear subterfuge that has occurred, and by re-highlighting our original purpose and the freedom, peace, and justice we strive for. I do ask that all readers approach theories and facts with open minds. We must create and adopt tactics and strategies from the past and present to transform our potential nations into fighting formations for all our people.

The root of the problem is that in our present state of "gangs" we all suffer from a kind of historical amnesia, meaning both a disconnection from our past as gangs under the "original" purpose discussed earlier, as well as from our past as oppressed and rebellious peoples. If this disconnection continues, we will become "like zoo lions and elephants, raised in captivity. Never having been taught by other lions and elephants in the wild, they don't know how to hunt or forage to survive in their natural habitat. They are easy to control and harmless to their controllers."

Our communities and our homies must wake up and defeat the gang mentality that we have. Our goal is to transform our image of a gang into one of an organization where our people will understand our views and beliefs. Whatever this image is to look like is not for me alone to decide, but for our street gangs and communities as a whole to decide. Since war is being waged on us now, I say it is time to put the petty beef aside and defend ourselves by any means necessary, instead of busting each others' heads. We must take heed to Comrade George Jackson's words from more than 40 years ago:

"Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that there are people already dying who could be saved, that generations more will die or live poor, butchered half-lives if you fail to act. Do what must be done, discover your humanity and love in revolution. Pass on the torch. Join us."

Solidarity,
Comrade Robin Hood

"War on Poverty," "War on Gangs," "War on Drugs," "War on Terrorism..." We can clearly see that the majority of the people worldwide who fit these labels are people of color and poor. If we use history as our guide, then why should we trust a government that is destroying our people?

We are living under a 21st century COINTELPRO, but they no longer need to wage these wars clandestinely. They have things like the Patriot Act, which allows them to frisk, search, and seize without a warrant, put anyone under surveillance and disrupt your privacy at anytime. They pass bills like the Proposition 187, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act, "Operation Gatekeeper," HR4437, SB1070, and the most recent HB 56. Many of these acts target all Americans, some are more specific. They even had an "Operation Wetback," which is a blatantly racist vilification of Latin people. Much of this legislation can be directly tied to fear-mongering around issues of gangs of poor black and brown people; by pandering to this fear more and more segments of the "people" enable the government to broaden the scope of repression and incarceration. That such actions are supposedly for the welfare of our own communities makes the pill taste that much more bitter.

The study of history to recover from our "historical amnesia" is not only for our homies. It's also for the only people who can really help solve the problem of "gangs"- our communities as a whole. Ladies and gentlemen, stop giving these pigs permission to criminalize our young people who have been misled by the glamorization of gangsterism.
Our homies must become conscious of our history as oppressed Black, Brown, Red, and Yellow people. We have to know where we've been before we can know where we are going. Our problems are manifold and I cannot simplify these problems to make things look sweet. But I do hope to bring to light a few main issues, so we can more forward with them. The people in our communities must "begin to realize that only the community will effectively deal with the matter, not the racist capitalist system, with its repressive police, courts, and prisons. Only we have the psychology and understanding to deal with it; now we must develop the will. No one else cares." [15]

Gangs have existed for decades, and they have been railroading us into prisons at record pace since the 80s. How is gang membership still rising? How is gang violence still at the forefront after decades? Only two answers are possible: 1) The government genuinely tried but failed to solve the problem of crime and violence, or 2) The authorities never intended to fully eliminate these problems in the first place, but rather if anything sought to channel these problems in a politically convenient and profitable way. I strongly believe that the proliferation of prisons must play a part—being that they have to be filled and are big money. In either case, the social system of America does not want to or cannot get to the root of the problem. As Lorenzo Ervin writes, "We have to seriously examine the social institutions: Family, schools, prisons, jobs, etc., that cause us to fuss, fight, rob, and kill each other, rather than the enemy who is causing our misery."

You may ask: what does "all our people" have to do with me? This selfish mentality is part of the reason we are in this predicament now. How did we get to this point of self-destruction? How and why do we continue to let this go on? To understand what happened, we must examine some main tricks used to slow down, misdirect, control, and defeat us. There are a colossal amount of questions being asked on this subject and some are yet to be answered. I hope to answer some key questions in the aim to transform our street nations. Education is key to correcting and preventing some issues facing us, and history must be examined to fully understand our place at the present time.

ONLY THE BEGINNING

After the Europeans "discovered" the New World, they began the most macabre era known to mankind. Greed and the desire to rule and conquer every place and thing they laid eyes on willed them to enslave, murder, kidnap, coerce, bribe, deceive, assimilate, rape, segregate, destruct, and obliterate the cultural, spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical well-being of the Natives, Africans, Latinos, Asians, and even other European nations. These vicious acts of sadism led us to the present stage we are at now.

But to fully understand our present stage, we must also recognize the emotional and mental damage that was bequeathed to us from our ancestors—which mostly went uncured. The kidnapping of Africans from the Motherland first required assistance from our African brothers and sisters in power on the African continent. They were blinded by the potential wealth that could come along with satisfying European demands. As this demand for human property increased, wars of Africans vs. Africans increased as well, in an effort to make the soldiers of defeated armies into prisoners of war who would be sold as slaves. Betrayal became rampant. Africans, mainly of lower-class status, were betrayed by their own kind for money and power. Sound familiar?

After the capture of other Africans, the prisoners were sold into slavery and faced a lurid passage ride. On these ships, slaves were stuffed at the bottom decks for days or weeks. They had little food or drink, and were forced to live in their own feces and entertain their captors with shackles on. This, along with other factors, led to the mental anguish and damage of our ancestors which was also never cured. This kind of internal damage, along with the structural repression of KKK terror, lynchings, Black Codes, etc., was a detriment to the Black nation. Different but related histories of exploitation and repression of other groups all contribute to our current state.

Enslavement forced us into foreign lands with a foreign people, language, and culture that was not our own. We adopt this dominant culture to a large extent, though we did manage to invent new cultural forms, and preserve older elements as well.

"Emancipation" led to slaves having to either stay at the plantations they knew, or fend for themselves with no resources

in a hostile country. After centuries of forced dependency on slave masters for food, shelter, and clothing, we were stuck between a rock and a hard place. Many former slaves were re-enslaved less than a generation later through a variety of legal economic means, including share-cropping, debt slavery, and the emerging convict lease system. Decades after slavery was "abolished," unpaid black labor continued to be the backbone of industrial capitalist development in large parts of the United States.

In brief summary, we see the deprivation in our main internal conflicts:

-psychological slump due to white supremacy and oppression
-trust issues from betrayal and disloyalty
-dependency issues which encouraged patriarchal relationships and relations of political and economic dependency on the rich
-broken families that often lead to searching for love in all the wrong places, and created a "rolling stone" tradition.

All of these early internal dynamics played into "divide and conquer" strategies discussed later in this piece. The stripping of all dignity, pride, respect, family, love, and affection ultimately led to our present state. This brief history was only the beginning of the road of trials.

"Understanding these tricks, their various guises and refinements, is the key to everything. You will never really understand what happened to get us to this point, or be able to really move forward until you master their recognition and devise ways to defeat them." [3]

-Russell Maroon Shoatz

We must pay critical attention to the loss of pride, dignity, and self-respect which occurred during slavery and after "emancipation" in Black communities. This major deprivation was key and our people sought to regain this by any means. Patterns of domestic abuse and deeper patriarchal trends can also be tied to this, as men who were humiliated in the outside world brought their rage and frustration home with them. This not only led to domestic disputes but fratricidal violence. As comrade Russell Shoatz says, "They became easy to control and are harmless to their controllers."

Our main purpose for this piece is to illuminate the self-destruction within our street gangs, how to solve these problems and how to maintain that transformation. Note that this can only be shown to non-bangers in a call for their understanding of the street gangs' original purpose and the problems facing bangers, as well as in a call for their assistance in restoring this original state without the "help" of police, government, or any other institutions that made us the way we are now. I will try to make clear cut points on the blindness not only of my fellow homies, but also the people of our communities who rely on the government to do the job of the community, for example allowing the farce of public schools along with prisons and jails to raise our kids.

A lot of these conflicts have been discussed in Shoatz' "Liberation or Gangsterism," Kevin Rashid Johnson's "Kill Yourself or

If we look back at history, the evident oppression and brutality against gangs is nothing new—as they even considered the Panthers a gang for a while. The exact same treatment we are facing as gang members is what the militant revolutionaries of the 20th century faced. If we were to delve deeper into history, we would see these same tactics were used to repress slave revolts. In the South, the historical origins of many modern police forces lie in white supremacists being deputized into posses in order to capture escaped slaves, and later to "police" the fault lines of race and poverty after "emancipation."

So by no coincidence, the present era sees laws being passed such as the Anti-Gang Bill, which is overtly a violation of the 1st amendment right to free assembly (which demonstrates we don't really have this, anyway!). An article in Wilmington's Star News reports:

"Police Chiefs from North Carolina's largest cities, along with prosecutors and city officials, are trying to mobilize support for a bill idling in the State Legislature that supporters say would give cities another weapon in their fight against gangs. The measure would essentially allow prosecutors to seek a restraining order against gang members, barring them from hanging out on "turf," throwing up gang signs, and whatever else a judge may find appropriate to dismantle the group."

Pay attention to the end where it states, "a Judge may find appropriate." It didn't say, "what the people find appropriate," that is, the people of those communities. The people don't decide what happens in their communities. What if the people want us in the community?

Again, this bill would "allow a court..." rather than the people to deal with the situation. And let's look at the consequences if these stipulations are violated: "Six months in jail and $1,000 fine...!?" This won't solve the problem of crime, and neither will prohibiting people from wearing red, blue, black, yellow, or any other "gang" color. And how can you bar someone from hanging out in their own neighborhood?

History teaches us that crime is largely a manifestation of socio-economic deficiencies. Crime doesn't occur simply because people wear different colors. It's not because of turf. The real root of the problem is a complete lack of economic opportunity and self-determination, because we are broke and don't have a job and don't control the land and resources around us, because of a related absence of self-respect and dignity in communities that have been all but systematically annihilated by hundreds of years of slavery, debt servitude, prison, racism, addiction, and brutality. Taking more money that we don't have will not solve the problem. Throwing us in prison will not solve the problem. "Prisons are only human trashcans for those that society has discarded as worthless."[14]

History shows that people of color—of which most US gangs are comprised—have always been targets of some unjust actions by the government under banners that scream, "In the Name of the People."

Do we not see the war against us? If not, peep this, Rashid again:

"In response to a prisoner hunger strike at the New Folsom Prison, where prisoners were protesting to receive yard time with prisoners they got along with instead of with rival groups, CDOC Ombudsmen Ken Hurdle refused to negotiate, stating: 'Then you'd have two groups normally aligned on the yard at the same time. They would only have the staff as their enemy." [13]

The 2000 issue of California Prison Focus found that riots that happened between 200 rival prisoners earlier in the year were the result of deliberate efforts by the CDOC to foster tension between rival groups.

Homies of all street gangs, this was only 12-13 years ago. Some of us have been banging longer than that, and we should be hip to the game. As a matter of fact, the majority of NC close custody prisons were recently put on lockdown due to gang-fighting and warring. We must consider that this too may have been instigated by STG officers in order to place more control "their" prisoners. I am a firm believe that a large majority of gang violence we see in prisons and on the outside is the result of some kind of police or FBI instigation. Why should I believe anything different? Why should we play into their hands?

HISTORICAL AMNESIA

"Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to people who prepare for it today."
-Malcolm X

The original Black Panther Party and even the New Afrikan Black Panther Party-Prison Chapter stated words that rang out loud and clear: "We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society." However, our historical amnesia and failure to educate our homies on our true history stagnates our progression in transforming our gangs into true "nations."

Currently we are under a full-fledged attack from the government with the "War on Gangs" and its laws. How is this so? Well, let's take off the blinders for a minute and peep this. The US government has launched a "War on Gangs" where the stated plan is to dismantle gangs as a solution to crime. They say gang members commit the most crime and violence, so dismantling the gangs, would, in the words of one police sergeant, "... help us to allow the lower-income areas, the housing developments, the residents to live a normal life and not be scared to come out at night." These are the same cops who brutalize and harass our residents, who threaten longer and longer prison sentences which do nothing but transfer the "crime problem" to another place, rather than solve it, and in doing so steal family members and money from our communities. And now they want to help us?

Unite Yourself," and in Clarence Taylor's "21st Century Anti-Recidivist Booklet." I will be quoting from these articles and more being that they hit directly home with how the gangs are being internally destroyed. The main problems facing our tribes are as follows:

1. Glamorization of Gangsterism
2. Raw Fear
3. Pride and Egotism
4. Historical Amnesia

GLAMORIZATION OF GANGSTERISM

This continues to be the most harmful trick played against the lower-class elements, and men in particular continue to be the most susceptible to this gambit. This tactic was ushered in by the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) in their fight to destroy militant movements (particularly those comprised of Blacks and Hispanics). We must realize that after the destruction of groups like the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, I-Wor Kuen, the Young Patriots Party, the American Indian Movement, and the Brown Berets, gangs were separated from the radical ideas and leadership they needed.

Having little or no guidance and teaching from our people, we were taught and raised by the TV, music, reactionary remnants of our militant groups, and of course movies. Hollywood took advantage of not only this opportunity, but also the future crack epidemic that was largely ushered in by the US government: "The glamorization of gangsterism was something that various ruling class elements had begun to champion and direct towards the Black lower classes, especially after they saw how much attention the black arts movement was able to generate. Indeed, they recognized it could be used to misdirect youthful militancy while still being hugely profitable."

Shoatz goes on to correctly acknowledge,

"They had, in fact, already misdirected Euro-American and other youth with the Bond, I-Spy, secret agent man, and other replacements for the "old west/cowboys and indians" racist crap, so why not a black counterpart? Thus was born the enormously successful counter-insurgency genre collectively known as blaxsploitation movies; Shaft, Superfly, Foxxy Brown, Black Casear, and their like, accompanied by the wannabe crossovers like Starsky and Hutch with the notorious black snitch Huggie Bear: psychological warfare!"

It was made cool and acceptable to be ultra gangster, which was evident in Huey Newton's years after his release from prison. The effect was to divert our energies away from freedom fighting to "turf" and "hood" beef. Fighting over land none of us actually own, competing for the finest clothes, jewelry, women, and money – we began looking for self-worth in all the wrong places. The material trappings drove our gangs into "mental exile," searching for the missing basic psyche of self-worth. The new trend began to emulate the mafias, the Scarfaces, the Cocaine Cowboys, Ace in Mitch in Paid

in Full, Frank Lucas' Belly. We wanted to be the Boyz in the Hood, a Menace II Society. We failed to capture the moral of the story like John Singleton and Spike Lee tried to relay, that all these gangsta stories end the same way: dead, in prison, or snitching.

It wasn't just the gangsta movies. Hip Hop plays a major role in our thought process too. As Quest Love states, "Hip Hop was created thanks to the conditions that crack set: easy money but a lot of work, the violence involved, the stories it produced – crack helped birth Hip Hop." [4]

In the 21st century, Hip Hop has turned into a fuel tank for gangsterism with MCs talking "gangsta" shit that they haven't even lived—all for money, because it sells. It's all for show. Artists taking after real gangsters: Rick Ross—name from the real "Freeway" Rick Ross without permission; 50 Cent – taken from Kelvin Martin, the real 50 Cent, without permission. We witness most of our homies listening to "rider" music before they do dirt, or club music that gets somebody "fucked up" in the club, leading to more violence. Look at Gucci Mane, Waka Flocka Flame, Plies and so on.

We even have hip hop artists who make gang banging look like a sport and is just about wearing flags and tattoos everywhere like Lil' Wayne and Baby. As Maroon recognized, "Hip Hop is daily being co-opted in ways so obvious it needs no explanation." He continues to correctly acknowledge, once again, something we are blinded to:

"It is fascinatingly simple to understand how the 2nd wave [1980-2005] was tricked and continues to be bamboozled into destroying itself, while just about all of the pillars upholding this giant con-game are familiar to everyone through the movies, TV, street culture, and our own experiences with friends, family, associates, cops, courts, jails, prisons, death, and our own unfulfilled yearnings for respect and dignity."

Our street gangs went from having meaningful names such as the Bounty "Hunters," Vice "Lords," or Latin "Kings and Queens," to everything pertaining to "gangster." This new gangsterism, of course, was never shown in those movies fighting the police, the FBI, the CIA, corrupt politicians, CO's, or any of the big CEO's who profit from our misery. None of the gangs in the movies listed above mentioned their number one nemesis as the police. This psychological war was waged solely to control our gangs so we wouldn't become a force to be reckoned with.

You may ask still, what does gangsterism look like?

"The lumpen mentality mirrors—on a smaller scale and with less sophistication-- that of the Big Gangsters (the monopoly capitalists): a ruthless drive for immediate self-gratification, power, control, and 'respect' (even though their lifestyle is anything but respectable), through deception, corruption, violence, and the intimidation of others. These tendencies are what lies behind certain lumpen aspiring to be seen as 'crazy' and

it decades ago but they won't do it now, you are sadly mistaken. As part of this strategy, psychological warfare has also been employed. Knowing how the mind will most likely react to certain situations is critical to this strategy. Gangsterism makes one's reaction almost predictable if an assault is waged on a rival. This was seen in the broken peace treaty between the Bloods and Crips in 1989 and 1994. The 1989 murder of Bobby Lander and the murder of OG Crip Raymond Washington, which was blamed on the Gangster Disciples, are two such examples. Both treaties, it must be noted, were broken due to police instigation with hood cops murdering rivals while dressed as gang members. [11]

New Afrikan Black Panther Party Chairman Shaka Zuzu points out,

"Some comrades will inevitably be brought into the Party by their friends and family members, and people will inevitably form close personal friendships within the Party. This is natural and we have no problem with it. It only becomes a problem when favoritism and nepotism start to creep in. This is a manifestation of individualism which can divide and weaken the Party."

Our homies begin to "let matters slide for the sake of friendship" or because they "hail from the same neighborhood, city, region or county, or who have done time together." This is what causes cliques to form within the gang as a whole, and this makes it easier to put us against one another. Moreover, it's not the beef with other gangs that's the major obstacle we're facing, it's the internal conflicts which expose us to the tricks of manipulation and destruction. Yet we are totally blinded to it.

One of the gang members who realized this a little too late is Stanley Tookie Williams. He witnessed, "hood cops, with immunity, commit drive-bys and other lawless acts." He also knew that it was "common practice for them abduct a Crip or Bounty Hunter and drop him off in hostile territory, and then broadcast it over a loud speaker. The predictable outcome was that the rival was either beaten or killed on the spot, which resulted in a cycle of payback."[12] Do we follow the psychology here or what? This blatant instigation of gang warfare is the same that occurs today but we're so caught up in our gangster life that we don't see it. As Sun-Tzu said, "all warfare is based on deception."

Even in the prisons, instigation of gang warfare is more prominent. As Rashid observed,

"The 1997 documentary film 'Maximum Security University' exposed the 'gladiator fights' set up from 1989-1994 between prisoners at California's Corocan State Prison. Many involved were seriously injured or murdered by rival prisoners or guards, who shot them rifles for fun under the pretext of breaking up the fights they'd arranged....In fact, in 1999, the California DOC officials admitted facilitating and manipulation violence between rival prisoners' groups allegedly to keep control of the prisons."

condition of self-hate, otherwise the pride system will simply switch from one compulsive expression to another." If this isn't cured then it will do what it's doing now, not only destroying the person but the entire group or community.

This neurotic pride blocks and clouds our judgment, which is something a leader should never let happen. And the main problem is everyone wants to rush to be the "big dawg" when they're not quite ready yet. They don't want to accomplish and master the follower role, the student and the pupil. But this is our pride talking for our conscious mind. Our pride lets us not want to obey higher rank and file because we feel we can do it better. Maybe jealousy and envy plays a role also. That clear definition of "arrogance, conceit" takes over where your self-discipline is supposed to be.

We also seem to have pride issues with settling personal squabbles between so-called leaders. The grown-ups used to teach us it takes the bigger man to squash the beef and walk away. It couldn't be more true. The search to fill our gangster ego overrides the need to put aside minor conflicts and attack the major conflicts. This exact pride conflict existed with the slaves in the "house" and the field "niggers"--house slaves projected a sense of superiority, but were in fact equally inferior in the eyes of the owners. If this is not cured, it will surely destroy us.

FACTIONALISM

"Approximately 28% of the [FBI's domestic covert action] efforts were designed to weaken groups by setting members against each other or to separate groups which might otherwise be allies and convert them into mutual enemies. Techniques used included...encouraging hostility up to and including gang warfare between rival groups..."

-Church Committee, US Congressional Report: Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, Report No. 940755 (1976)

It would be difficult for the unconscious homies to believe these words to be true about the US government, even more so for the passive US citizens of our communities. Even as Comrade Shoatz noted that the glamorization of gangsterism is one of the most harmful tactics, I believe this factionalism is the most detrimental to us internally. Comrade Keven Rashid Johnson detailed this divide and rule strategy perfectly in his text. As we noted earlier, factionalism played a large role in the destruction of slaves communities and Indian's tribes. The Europeans' goal was to keep slaves divided because they represented a threat if united. "Groups of slaves from different plantations...would often fight each other over whose 'owner' was 'superior.'" Moreover, "the Indian "removal" and genocide was accomplished in large part by the Europeans playing different Indian nations against one another—the historical equivalent of gang warfare." [10]

Here, we can clearly point out our enemy. If you think that the government did

unpredictably violent.

Lumpen literally means 'broken.' The lumpen, of which most gangs are comprised, make their living by illegal or illegitimate means, as petty gangsters, drug dealers, pimps, con-artists, and thieves. They reflect the mentality of the Big Gangsters and feed parasitically off the people." [5]

As discussed earlier, our history left us in a mental daze that made us vulnerable to the manipulation which we are seeing here. It is thought control, where the ruling class controls what the masses think about daily. Why would we divert our frustration, anger, and pain away from the people causing it? Besides being ignorant to what is going on, I would have to say the answer lies in "raw fear."

RAW FEAR

"The colonized and oppressed are quick to grab their knife against a neighbor or stranger, thereby in a sub-conscious way ducking their fear of directing their pent up rage at those responsible for their suffering: their colonial oppressors." - Shoatz

Our raw fear of the "consequences" of fighting the pigs or the system forces us to act in a punk way. It seems we're scared to be killed or shot or tased, beat with sticks, locked up for life. But this is our life that's being played with. It's the same consequences we receive for beating the hell out of each other, shooting and killing each other; it's almost the same for resisting the system! But the key point here is "getting away:" "If I could do it and get away I would."

This raw fear was leveled against many black militants during the 60s and 70s, as well as against our OG's during the 80s and 90s. There is a major difference between the conscious and the unconscious with regards to raw fear. But I must say that all gang members are conscious of their oppression to some degree. Perhaps not in its full scope, but they know who makes their heart beat fast when the see red and blue lights and hear sirens. They know who puts those handcuffs on them and carts them off to jail,; who makes them pay court fees probation restitution, commissary and phone money while in prison. They surely know who watches their hood everyday, who frisks and pats them down and harasses them. It damn sure is not that Crip or Blood or Vice Lord, that Gangsta Disciple or Latin King homie across the street. It's not the dude who stepped on your shoe at the club or who had sex with your girl. No. It's the one that rips you away from your seed, takes you away from friends and family, miles away from home. Every homie knows who beat the hell out of Rodney Kind, Emmett Till, Marques Fry, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

But still "we are at each other's throats to acquire the material objects and prestige denied us by the oppressor, so like rabid cats and dogs we fight and kill each other for the measly crumbs from the oppressors' table of world wide exploitation of people that look like you and I." [6] If our frustration was to turn on our common enemy, we wouldn't have to fight each other. We only do the latter because we're attempting to hide and divert our own

fear to show the next man's "softness."

The worst that can happen, as the enemy sees it, is "If he shows fight, the soldiers fire and he's a dead man." But death falls on all men alike. Death is inevitable, but on the contrary, " If he gives in, he degrades himself and he is no longer a man at all: shame and fear will split up his character and make his inmost self fall to pieces."[7] We must face the truth, that most of our homies are no longer men. They have indeed degraded themselves.

Don't let this fool you; it is not death that scares us—we deal with that already in the gangster life. It can't be prison that scares us, either – that's one of the main results of the street life. And it can't be ass-whooping—we get those every week, for everything from school suspension to hood beef. It can't be court, probation, pig harassment, or the like—we see that more than we do our own kids. What could it truly be, then, that scares us away from confronting the systems that exploit and oppress us? The excuse of "consequences" seems to lack validity. If gangsters don't like to be lied to, robbed, pimped, manipulated, kidnapped, held at gunpoint, money messed with, family disrespected, and so on, why do we let the government do this day in and day out? It surprises me, still, that our homies will "catch a body" for someone that looks like you and I calling you a "bitch!"

I see it like Comrade Shoatz sees it:

"The big dawgs [the government and capitalists] witnessed a clear example of what was to come by war of the posses that cropped up in the black communities...it's lower classes' attempts to throw off the economic and social effects of it's former slavery and colonial oppression... The big dawgs' had obvious anxieties about stopping these gunslingers before they got over their mental blocks about using their weapons against the police or the system. They wanted to stop them while they were still hung up on imitating their hollywood or Euro-mafia icons, who made a mantra out of instructing their gunmen *not to use their weapons against the police."*

PRIDE AND EGOTISM

Egotism: 1. The tendency to speak or write of oneself excessively or boastfully 2. An inflated sense of one's own importance and conceit.

Pride: 1. a sense of one's proper dignity or value. 2. Self-respect 3. Arrogance, conceit

Based on the above definitions, these characteristics, pride and egotism, have been the impetus for too many individualistic acts of unnecessary violence. There is unhealthy and healthy pride, which breaks down as neurotic pride vs. healthy pride. "The difference is that...neurotic pride is not based on substantial achievements or qualities within oneself. It is based on the all consuming need to glorify oneself, to raise oneself above one's real condition and status, not by actual work and achievement, but by imagination."[8]

You may begin to inquire how does this fit the bill of gangs. As you see in the beginning of our history, women in our communities began to lose respect for us—being that we were quick to abuse them but did not do the same to the White man or police who were oppressing us all. It began a competition between our Black men not only to win women's respect back, but also that of their peers. Within a context of patriarchy, our mental damage gave way to low self-esteem and self-hatred. "The pride is not the product of some conscious decision, but the end result after years of suffering and emotional-psychological torment form the basic-needs deficit within." The third definition of pride is the pseudo-solution we seek to cover this absence of self-worth and self-respect.[9]

We began to seek acceptance from others and lose touch with healthy pride, which is the first or second definition. The homies who say they are in no need of filling that missing basic need of self-worth are the unconscious ones who also deny having unhealthy pride. The arrogance and conceit begins to flow so heavily it drives us to reject any humility or concern for the well-being of the others. Within our street gangs, the proud one rejects any significant responsibility, any criticism or any command coming from above the—in particular if it doesn't come directly from their "big homie." This breaks up the unity of action and unity of command. These egotistical acts make the gang vulnerable to the simple divide and rule strategies by the common enemy, as it is now.

Big ego prevents humility and eventually prevents the gang from fully uniting for any cause. It also leads to factionalism and individualism which we will discuss later in this piece. Pride and ego "can manifest itself as comrades only wanting to perform easy tasks and not hard ones, or only 'important' tasks and not mundane ones, or seeking 'glamor over obscure work...Some would rather pose with guns that get up early in the morning to feed breakfast to poor children..."

How does this pattern of "pride" come about? As Talib Rasheed stated in his *21st Century Anti-Recidivist Booklet:*

"At some earlier point in life the conditions of his or her relationships robbed the individual of self-esteem. This lack of self-esteem undermined the development of self-confidence, which in turn thwarted genuine efforts towards achievement, which denied feelings of self-worth. Eventually, these reinforced one another until self-contempt and self-hatred developed, both of which had to be repressed, and hence the pride system comes to the desperate, artificial rescue."

The homies need to see that this unhealthy, artificial solution is destroying our street gangs from within. How can you achieve a goal when the leader or higher rank and file gives a much needed order which his or her subordinates deny because their ego is too big? And let's not get it twisted that this kind of pride and ego exists only in men. Women's pride and ego can be just as out of control as men's.

In order to weaken this "pride system" you must "simultaneously decrease the