

MS-13

**THE MAKING
OF AMERICA'S MOST
NOTORIOUS GANG**

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MS-13: The Making of America's Most Notorious Gang

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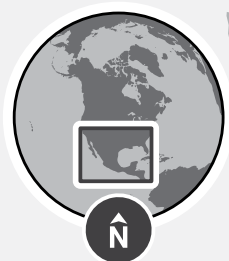
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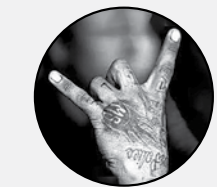
UNITED STATES

PACIFIC OCEAN

MEXICO



TIMELINE: MAKING THE MS-13 (1979–2019)



1985

First Mara Salvatrucha member gets shot and killed; MS begins to better arm itself

1983

A gang made up of mostly Salvadoran refugees calling themselves the Mara Salvatrucha Stoners appears in Central Los Angeles

1979

As civil conflict in El Salvador ramps up, Salvadorans begin to arrive in Los Angeles en masse

UNITED STATES



1987

LA issues first gang injunction; stricter laws follow as well as gang databases to try to quell violence

1989

LAPD's CRASH units and immigration authorities begin deporting gang members to Central America; Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street begin long-running feud

1996

Deportations rise exponentially after Clinton administration increases number of crimes for which ex-convicts can be deported



1993

Mara Salvatrucha become part of Sureños umbrella organization under Mexican Mafia, begin to call themselves MS-13

2000

LAPD's CRASH is disbanded following scandal in the Rampart division CRASH unit



2004

Bush administration starts first federal MS-13 task force, declaring the gang has between 8,000 and 10,000 members in the US

2013

Obama administration deports over 400,000 undocumented migrants in one year, the most in US history



2014

Tens of thousands of unaccompanied alien children (UAC) arrive in the United States, thousands of whom settle in places like Long Island, New York

2017

Amidst a surge in MS-13-related violence in numerous places around the country, the Trump administration makes the gang a law enforcement priority



EL SALVADOR

1980

Archbishop Óscar Romero assassinated; civil war breaks out in El Salvador



1986

El Salvador is the largest recipient of US aid in the hemisphere in spite of the government's continued human rights abuses

1981

US-trained Atlacatl Battalion kills more than 900 civilians in El Mozote massacre; Carter and Reagan administrations ramp up US military assistance



1989

Alfredo Cristiani elected president of El Salvador, initiates neoliberal economic reforms; guerrillas' "final offensive" gives more urgency to peace talks

1998

Violence rises as MS-13 and 18th Street's battles spread in El Salvador and other parts of Central America



1992

Guerrillas and government sign peace deal, rebels become political party; gang members arrive from the US in ever larger numbers

2004

Iron Fist anti-gang law mirroring California anti-gang laws passes Congress in El Salvador; incarceration rates skyrocket as does violence in prisons

2005

Gangs begin to systematically extort the public transportation system in El Salvador; government separates gangs inside prisons

2012

Government and nongovernmental mediators broker a truce between major gangs in El Salvador; homicides drop by half

2014

Political parties in El Salvador pay gangs for support during presidential elections; the victor, ex-guerrilla Salvador Sánchez Cerén, wins by just over 6,000 votes



2015

Not long after the unceremonious end of the gang truce, violence in El Salvador reaches levels not seen since the civil war



2019

El Salvador elects new president, Nayib Bukele, who promises to crack down on street gangs

METHODOLOGY AND NOTES

I HAVE COVERED THE MS-13 FOR A DECADE. AS THE codirector of the think tank InSight Crime, part of my purview is organized crime in Central America, where I have been traveling and working since the early 1990s, including dozens of trips to El Salvador. For this book, I also traveled to Los Angeles on numerous occasions, as well as to other parts of the United States, including Long Island. Part of my access came via colleagues—journalists and academics. Part came via authorities, who have gang members in custody and know which ones might be willing to speak to outsiders. And part came via gang-prevention specialists.

Some of the most vital access to the characters depicted in this book came via lawyers who were representing gang members and others seeking asylum or deferral from deportation under the Convention Against Torture (CAT). It's important to note that in some of these cases, I acted as an expert witness, providing affidavits on the country conditions in El Salvador. In these

affidavits, I was careful to restrict my testimony to these conditions and their possible impact on these applicants. Thereafter, I sought and got permission to use their stories or parts of their stories for this book. I spent months going back and forth with them in person, on the phone or via other digital platforms.

At the request of a few of the subjects or their lawyers or both, I have changed most of the names and identifying features of their stories. The MS-13 has strict rules about speaking to outsiders and breaking those rules can lead to severe punishment. Similarly, I did not want to put them at risk of official retaliation from the Salvadoran or the US governments.

To corroborate stories, I spoke to other gang members, authorities, family members, lawyers, gang-prevention specialists and anyone else who could give me their version or interpretation of events. In addition, I used official, mostly judicial documents but also raw intelligence reports and other government reports, many of which are official, public accounts. Although they are far from perfect, criminal indictments and testimonies under oath are arguably the closest version of the truth we have in these cases. I used these to build out the story and corroborate my subjects' accounts. Some stories are better corroborated than others, and I try to indicate in the text when that is the case. I also state when there are conflicting versions.

Part of this book was also the result of a three-year regional project on the MS-13 that I codirected at American University in Washington, DC, with Professor Edward Maguire.¹⁸ It permitted me to corroborate tendencies and patterns of gang and counter-gang activity. I worked with investigative journalist Héctor Silva Ávalos and anthropologist Juan José Martínez d'Aubuisson on the project, both of whom provided invaluable assistance in trying to get a handle on this gang and its story. Héctor has written a book, *Infiltrados* (2014), on the police that I

18 The project was funded by the National Institute of Justice, an arm of the US Department of Justice.

consulted early and often, and Juan has written two books—one, *El Niño de Hollywood* (2018), with his brother Óscar—on gangs that are must-reads for anyone who is interested in this topic. We did both qualitative and quantitative research, providing a region-wide look at the gang, which we published at InSight Crime in the spring of 2018 (Dudley and Silva Ávalos, 2018b).

In all instances, I try to be as transparent as I can in the notes for each chapter below. I urge anyone who would like to understand the process of reporting this book, or seeks more information, sources or a slightly deeper discussion about these topics, to look at the notes and, of course, the bibliography.

NOTES ON CHAPTERS

Introduction—Judging Norman

Norman and his family are the spine of this book. I spoke to him a half-dozen times, first in the detention center and later once he was released. I took written notes during those first meetings in the detention center, since I could not bring in a recorder. I also communicated with him via text.

I corroborated his stories with his sister and his wife, as well as via judicial documents that were part of his Convention Against Torture case and the cases against him in El Salvador. I went to several courthouses in El Salvador and accessed his judicial records, which I could not remove from the courthouse, so, for accuracy, I read the pertinent sections into a tape recorder, then had them transcribed.

This introduction is wrapped around Norman's testimony to the immigration judge, a partial recording of which I obtained independently. Immigration proceedings are not transcribed and provided to the public. I also spoke numerous times to Norman's legal representative and others regarding asylum law, strategies, the use of the Convention Against Torture and many other matters.

There are a lot of numbers regarding immigration in the introduction. Most of the numbers and analysis of the Salvadorans in the United States came from the Migration Policy Institute (Menjívar, 2018; Terrazas, 2010), which provides the most evenhanded understanding of migration policy in the United States. A more recent Pew Research Center look at the numbers reiterates the general tendencies of Salvadoran migration patterns and numbers of Salvadorans who live in the United States (Noe-Bustamante, et al., 2019). Remittances data came from the World Bank (Ratha, 2016).

To put the MS-13 in perspective, I drew from a *New York Times* explainer (Chinoy, et al., 2018), which drew from US Customs and Border Protection to say 228 MS-13 were captured in 2017. The same article sources the US Department of Justice to say the MS-13 is five times smaller than rival gangs, including the 18th Street. This information is also available from the FBI's annual review of gangs.

The Anti-Defamation League analyzed domestic extremism (Anti-Defamation League, 2019). The information for the Virginia Commonwealth study came from the director of that project, Michael Paarlberg, who participated in a panel with me for a Duke University-sponsored conference, then furnished me with numbers for those years. And a *Huffington Post*/YouGov survey showed that a majority of Trump voters had an outsize fear of the MS-13 (Liebelson, 2018).

For his part, Donald Trump mentioned the MS-13 on numerous occasions in speeches and in Tweets. The White House transcription of a speech in Long Island provides the source material for his depiction of the gang as “animals” (Trump, 2017). The White House does not provide transcriptions for the political speeches he gives at rallies, which provide source material for his outbursts about how the MS-13 is “occupying” towns (Trump, 2018, Montana), and how they had “invaded” the United States (Trump, 2018, Ohio). Trump’s famous reference to Haiti, El Salvador and African nations as “shithole countries” came from the *Washington Post* (Dawsey, 2018).

Democrats have their own history with gangs like the MS-13 and deportation. Clinton declared a “war on gangs” in his 1997 state of the union (Clinton, 1997). Obama deported even more people than Trump did, if you compare their first three years in office (Hauslohner, 2019).

Chapter 1—The Beginning

This chapter was done with extensive interviews with Alex Sanchez and his brother, Oscar. Alex and I sat down on a half a dozen occasions, most of

those times in Los Angeles. Oscar and I spoke at least four times, including via text messages when I was fact-checking. Alex's accounts to me coincide with stories he has told other journalists and people like Tom Hayden, who developed a close relationship with Alex during the years he was transitioning from the MS-13 to Homies Unidos (2004: 199–256).

Hayden's book *Street Wars* was also a key part of this and other chapters that touch on Alex, as well as the MS-13 and their evolution in Los Angeles. Hayden's book is a revelation and worth reading to get a history of gang intervention strategies in California during a thirty-year period he covers. Hayden, who died in 2016, was a tireless advocate for alternative strategies to tackle the gang issue. And he and Oscar became the center of Alex's support team after Alex was detained and later arrested.

The beginnings and core of the MS-13 in Los Angeles are chronicled best by anthropologist Tom Ward in his *Gangsters Without Borders* (2013). In it, Ward develops composite characters that encompass the essence of the gang's chaotic yet effective means of helping wayward youth in Los Angeles find their community. Carlos García, a researcher and writer, also helped steer me through this period and connected me to different former gang members, including with Alex Sanchez.

The study of barrio gangs in Los Angeles was led by Joan Moore and James Diego Vigil. Vigil's *Barrio Gangs* (1988) and Moore's *Going Down to the Barrio* (1991) were touchstones for me. They both wrote several other books and articles that served as my foundation for understanding the Mexican-American gangs in Los Angeles, as well as the debate concerning the longevity of these gangs. Moore, for example, explored "resistance theory" (Moore, 1991: 42) and studied this idea of "institutionalized" Latino gangs (Moore, 1978: 72; Moore, 1991: 6).

Vigil's "multiple marginality" came from an edited volume (2016), while Moore's detailed account of the White Fence came from *Homeboys* (1978: 63–69). Moore also looked at the impact of drugs on these gangs, especially heroin, which she called "a major turning point" (1991: 32). Some of the other details, such as the reference to "tomato gangs," came from William Dunn's *The Gangs of Los Angeles* (2007: 28–37).

My understanding of US history and its relationship with Latin America came mostly from my time at Cornell, where I had Walter LaFeber as a professor and Tom Holloway as an advisor. LaFeber was a realist more than a cynic, chronicling the exploits of the US in raw terms. Other writers, such as George Black (1988), also greatly influenced my thinking, but it is LaFeber (1993) who steered my thinking the most. For broader and equally critical perspectives of US history, I turned to Peter Andreas's *Smuggler Na-*

tion (2013) and Jill Lepore's *These Truths*, which provided the source material for the Calhoun quote (2018: 244).

Several books informed my understanding of Mexican and Chicano history in Los Angeles and the West Coast, but the one the most closely hewed to my topic was Tom Diaz's *No Boundaries* (2009), which I highly recommend, since it traces many of the same gang themes that I do but with more of a focus on the evolution of law enforcement's efforts to quell gangs. Diaz also frames the debate in historic terms, tracing it further back than I do and going into much more detail about Manifest Destiny and the Mexican-American War (2009: 48–49).

In addition, Diaz has a deep treatment of the development Chicano gangs up and through the Sleepy Lagoon case (2009: 57–86). The Justice Policy Institute's 2007 (Greene) overview of the evolution of enforcement is also very useful in this regard. I also consulted more than once Edward Escobar's *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity* (1999), which delved deeper into the Sleepy Lagoon and Zoot Suit Riots. Escobar provided numbers of arrests (1999: 237), an analysis of the relationship between this historic event and "identity politics" (1999: 17), and the important observation of how White society used gangs as their "metaphor" through which they saw Latino communities (1999: 10).

On the Sleepy Lagoon case, I also consulted primary source documents from the period provided by the Online Archive of California, which has made available archives from several University of California libraries and provided source material for quotes from newspapers at the time (McWilliams, 1943), the appellate court decision (Second District Court of Appeals of California, 1944) and the Orson Welles letter (1944).

For a strong but concise dose of Mexican-American history, read Paul Ramos's recent article on the Alamo in *Guernica* (2019). The *New York Times* has also had some solid work on the topic of the history and legacy of racism against Latinos, including a 2006 article from Nina Bernstein and an op-ed by historians William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb (2015). Carrigan and Webb also wrote a book about lynchings of Mexican-Americans, which is cited in the op-ed.

Chapter 2—Norman's Wars

There are many history books that chronicle the Salvadoran civil war and US-Salvadoran relations, some more radical than others. I drew from my usual—LaFeber and Black—as well as Tommie Sue Montgomery's *Revo-*

lution in *El Salvador* (1982). Black's *Good Neighbor* provided the quote from Walker as well as an accounting of his exploits (1988: 6–7), and LaFeber the summation of US motivations for its foreign policy (1993: 39).

There was also a mountain of US media coverage of the war and its aftermath. El Salvador was where some of the best US journalists in a generation cut their teeth: Alma Guillermoprieto (1982) and Raymond Bonner (1982), who wrote the first accounts of the massacre at El Mozote, to name two. There are numerous others in between, from which I drew small but important bits of information. The number of forced recruits, for example, came from a 1989 *New York Times* article by Lindsey Gruson.

Mark Danner wrote the seminal account of the Mozote massacre for *The New Yorker* (1993) that later became a book, or what he aptly called a “central parable of the Cold War” (1994: 10). I drew from Danner for understanding of the training and the buildup to the massacre (1994: 35–50), Amaya's account of the massacre (1994: 62–84), and the US involvement and response to it, including Enders's comments (1994: 208–224) and the Reagan administration's determination to certify El Salvador for its human rights record (1994: 90) in spite of the atrocities. It should be noted that the Enders quote that I used came from Crossette's *New York Times* account (1982) of his testimony and differs slightly from Enders's written testimony provided in Danner's book.

There are also firsthand accounts of the war, mostly from ex-guerrillas. *Las mil y una historias de Radio Venceremos* (López Vigil, 1992) is the most famous, but I also drew from *Del ejército nacional al ejército guerrillero* (Mena Sandoval, 1993). And then there was the Truth Commission report (Betancur, 1993), which covered everything from the beginnings of the war to the massacre at El Mozote to the murder of Archbishop Romero to a forensic accounting of child victims and US-made military weapons in the massacre. This is the closest thing to an official account of the atrocities that we have. César Castro Fagoaga—who worked with me throughout this process and helped me do a thorough fact-check and cultural-check—took me to La Joya. There I could get my own account of the war in Morazán, albeit many years later, because César introduced me to numerous people.

The resident historian of Romero's murder is Carlos Dada, the founder of *El Faro*, the incredible online news and investigative source that is home to some of the best journalists in all Latin America. Their team includes Óscar and Carlos Martínez, José Luis Sanz and, up until recently, Roberto Valencia, all of whom have become the single most important source on gangs in El Salvador and beyond. For his part, Dada wrote in *El Faro* (2010) the most complete account of Romero's assassination by tracking down one of the assassins and

interviewing him at length. Other bits and pieces came from news articles and accounts of the death, including one in Joan Didion's somber *Salvador* (1994), as well as that in the Truth Commission report (Betancur, 1993).

Liberation Theology is an entire division of religious studies, so it was hard to dip in my toe. In this, Phillip Berryman's *Liberation Theology* (1987) gave me my foundation. David Tombs's *Latin American Liberation Theology* (2002) provided me with a deeper look at the theological aspects of the movement. Tombs—who is my brother-in-law—also spent a lot of time deciphering Archbishop Romero's own theological underpinnings, and we have spoken over the years about this and other topics. Tommie Sue Montgomery (1982: 109) gave the count of the number of priests who were killed or were exiled.

For his part, Mijango wrote a number of books, including a fictional account of an ex-guerrilla, from which I took the quote about Liberation Theology and dogmatic rebel leaders (2009: 15–17). Romero's March 23 sermon is widely quoted in books and reproductions online, including the one that I used to quote it (Romero, 1980).

Chapter 3—The Making of a Street Gang

This chapter relies heavily on Alex's account. The two basic elements of it concerning the gang—the evolution of the gang as predatory rather than an entrepreneurial gang and the development of destroyers—are corroborated by numerous gang, media and academic sources that I have interviewed over the years. As part of our report on the MS-13 at InSight Crime for the National Institute of Justice, we also went through dozens of criminal indictments against the MS-13, which clearly established this pattern (Dudley and Silva Ávalos, 2018a).

Alex's story about the Fedora is corroborated by Diego Vigil's chapter in *A Rainbow of Gangs* called “‘Where Is My Father?': Arturo's Story” (2004: 146–158). In that chapter, the story of his character hews along the same lines of Alex's story regarding the Fedora Locos and the dispute with the mara. Vigil's account does differ from Alex's in one important respect: he says the MS-13 were the ones selling the drugs.

Vigil does not go into great detail on this, but if it is of interest—and it certainly is an ongoing debate—Joan Moore's monograph (1990) may offer a primer, at least as this discussion stood in the late 1980s. Malcolm Klein, et al. (1991) provide an analysis of the crime statistics from the mid-1980s in the journal *Criminology*—a study, by the way, funded by the US Depart-

ment of Justice—that bolsters the arguments of those seeking to illustrate that drug violence and gang violence are not necessarily synonymous.

The presence of the Crazy Riders and other gangs in the area was corroborated using news accounts, including a *Los Angeles* magazine report on MacArthur Park titled a “A Glock in the Park” (2013), which notes that gang’s formation in the mid-1980s in the area.

The broadest and, in some ways, most difficult topic to broach in this chapter was the evolution of the LA Police Department. The LAPD is the subject of thousands of media reports, journalistic and academic books, documentaries and movies. One of the best contemporary books on this topic is Jill Leovy’s *Ghettoside* (2015), which I do not cite but which influenced my thinking on this and many other topics.

However, I was interested in chronicling how the police had militarized over the years. In this regard, the most important source for me was Joe Domanick’s *To Protect and Serve*. The book recounts the rise of Bill Parker (1994: 85–94; 107–111) and Daryl Gates (1994: 12–17; 243–246), including discussing at length the fallout from Gates’s famous quote about African-Americans’ “veins” (1994: 299), as well as numerous other racially charged incidents over the years.

Domanick also talked about the use of television to bolster the LAPD’s image (1994: 133) and summed up how the LAPD culture shunned those who they considered “traitors” (1994: 234). And he paid close attention to details such as the number of minorities hired into the LAPD (1994: 292) and the number of Blacks choked to death by the police (1994: 264), statistics cited in this chapter.

Others, such as Escobar’s *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity* (1999) and Diaz’s *No Boundaries* (2009), were also fundamental in understanding the evolution of the LAPD and, in Diaz’s case, law enforcement in general. While I was investigating the Rampart scandal, I also came across an article in *The New Yorker* by Peter Boyer (2001) and a corresponding television documentary, “LAPD Blues” by *Frontline* (2001), that covered many of the same topics, in addition to their deep dive into the Rampart case and *Frontline*’s interview with Gates (Young, 2001).

To corroborate much of these accounts, I turned to the *Los Angeles Times*, an invaluable resource throughout this process. The details of Gates’s use of a battering ram, for example, came from a *Times* article (Editorial Board, 1985), although it was also recounted in Domanick (1994: 307); or the account of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) report about how many LAPD live outside of their jurisdiction of enforcement (Newton, 1994). The poll concern-

ing the police's and Gates's performance came from the *Times* (Freed, 1988), as well as the letter to the editor Gates wrote (1991).

To corroborate the material concerning the origins of the fight with the 18th Street, I turned to Ward (2013: 147–150), Sanz and Martínez's account in *El Faro* (2012a), and to Óscar and Juan José Martínez's recent *El Niño de Hollywood* (2018). I know, from speaking to Juan, that the Martínez brothers debate these and other points about the gang endlessly, usually under the fog of rum and cigarettes.

I also reviewed numerous primary source documents. The producer for the *Frontline* report, Rick Young, who is a good friend, gave me access to his reporting files, which included numerous reports on police conduct and interviews. In addition, I accessed Justice Department reports that were readily available online, the “Christopher Commission” report (Christopher, 1991), the LAPD inquiry into the Rampart scandal (Parks, 2000), and the Police Foundation's report (Pate, 1991) on the policing in the six largest cities in the US, among them Los Angeles.

For statistics, I relied on primary sources as much as possible. California has some good online databases, such as Open Justice, a California state database where I obtained arrest statistics of Hispanics over the years, and the state auditor has put out some strong reports, such as one that explores the question of gang databases (2015). For more nuanced analysis of statistics, I had to rely on secondary sources, such as the JAMA (Hutson, 1995) article cited. Separating gang-related homicides from other homicides is admittedly difficult,¹⁹ and the researchers' reliance on police data may trouble some people, but it is the best we currently have.

I was not nearly as forgiving as it related to the troubles around defining gangs and the repercussions that mislabeling people can have in the short and long term. This debate emerges in full force in academic journals, such as the monograph from which I drew Moore's conceptualization of the gangs vis-à-vis organized crime (1990: 165).

It is also apparent in investigative journalistic accounts, such as recent coverage of this topic in the Center for Investigative Reporting at Berkeley, California (Winston, 2016). Among the most important journal articles, I would mention Ana Muniz's account of the first gang injunction (2014) in the Cadillac-Corning area, Joshua Wright's exploration of the constitutional implications (2005) and Daniel Alarcón's *New York Times Magazine* article (2015).

19 I have researched and written about this subject at length in *InSight Crime* (Dudley, 2017).

Chapter 4—The Ghost of William Walker

To put this chapter together, I spoke with Ernesto Deras on several occasions, both in his office and as he drove around the city. I also communicated with him via Facebook. Ernesto has told parts of his story to various media outlets, and I carefully checked to make sure his stories were consistent. They were.

The war and final offensive received substantial coverage from the US media. The Guazapa volcano was a source of near endless fascination because of the inability of the army to dislodge the guerrillas, something chronicled by the Associated Press (Grant Mine, 1990).

Data about how much the US was assisting El Salvador throughout the war was harder to piece together. Assistance packages are bundled in complex ways that often differ depending on the fiscal year provided. For my part, I relied on Danner's account of the El Mozote massacre (1993), since I know the *New Yorker* has some of the best fact-checkers in the business. I also checked estimates from news accounts from the time period (Crossette, 1982).

There are years of research and debate on neoliberal economic policies. The data is mixed. I relied on the World Bank for information regarding inequality and poverty rates in El Salvador over the last twenty years (2019), which have improved. But growth has been closer to half the regional average (World Bank, 2019), and social spending in 2017 was 9.5 percent of the budget, compared to 24.5 percent in the region (OECD/IDB, 2017). Meanwhile, the urban growth, data for which came from the United Nations—DESA/Population Division (2018), continued.

The exploits of the Belloso Battalion were taken from a United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services report (2000), which also cited the *Boston Globe* story (Fainaru, 1996). The Yellow Book was produced by the National Security Archive and the Center for Human Rights (Doyle, 2014b).

The murder of the Jesuits, their housekeeper and their housekeeper's daughter was chronicled in detail by the Truth Commission (Betancur, 1993). The US diplomatic cables and memorandums from both before and after the massacre came from the National Security Archive's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests (Doyle, 2014a).

These cables included: Walker's first reaction to the massacre (1989a); the CIA's ambiguous assessment that it could have been "rightist extremists" and their accounting of d'Aubuisson's press conference prior to the killings (CIA, 1989b); Walker's assessment of Cristiani as a "decent human being" (Walker, 1989b); and the embassy's report on the attacks against their own vehicles (CIA, 1989a).

Chapter 5—Los Señores

People filmed the LA riots from numerous angles. Smithsonian Channel produced “The Lost Tapes: LA Riots” (Jennings, 2017), which compiled the footage for my account of the attack on Fidel Lopez, as well as footage of the Reginald Denny beating. “The Lost Tapes” also had an interview with Judge Karlin in which she explained her reasons for giving the Korean store owner probation instead of jail time after the owner shot the teenager from behind. This shooting sparked *Los Angeles Times* columnist Al Martinez (1992) to remark how gunning down someone Black led to less jail time than firing a weapon at a dog.

The *Los Angeles Times* also gave a timeline of events (Banks, 2012), which included placing Chief Daryl Gates’s whereabouts and comments that April day and the events at the Parker Center, where the protests began. And the *Los Angeles Times* described the famous raid on Dalton Avenue and 39th Street (Mitchell, 2001).

I researched the Mexican Mafia and its relationship with the MS-13 for months as part of our InSight Crime research project on the MS-13 (Dudley and Silva Ávalos, 2018b). The footage of the January 1992 meeting between Ojeda and the Sureños gangs in El Salvador park came from the *Orange County Register* (Salazar, 2011). The account of the August meeting came from the *Los Angeles Times* (Wilgoren, 1992). The account of the Elysian Park meeting came, in part, from a member of the MS-13 who did not want to reveal himself for security reasons. Much of this account is corroborated in Hayden’s book (2004: 211–212). The Rene “Boxer” Enriquez quote came from a video that is widely circulated on YouTube but for which I could not find the origin.

There are two other contemporary scholars who also greatly influenced my thinking on gangs, prisons and power. One is Benjamin Lessing, who has explored in depth Brazilian prison gangs and their rise and spread through the Southern Cone (2018); the other is Anthony Fontes, whose brilliant and tortured book of Guatemala gangs explores the deep, often unspoken relationship between oppressive regimes and crime (2018).

Rape inside prisons is a difficult subject, and statistics tend to vary greatly. As the *Guardian* reported (Filipovic, 2012), the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS)—prodged, in part, by the *New York Review of Books* (Kaiser and Stannow, 2011)—estimated there were as many as 216,000 victims of rape and sexual assault in the penitentiary system in 2008. Results of later surveys by the BJS (Beck, 2010) estimated there were closer to 88,000 victims of rape and sexual assault in the same time period.

The analysis of the gang-related homicides of Hispanics came from the JAMA article (Hutson, 1995). Ernesto also provided me with an account of his first meetings with Blinky and Big D, as well as his experience with the gang truces in the Valley.

Chapter 6—The Deported

This chapter is mostly based on extensive conversations with Norman and his sister, Laura. Norman's timeline and record were memorialized during his efforts to fight deportation in 2017, documents that I accessed during my research. The case for which he was convicted was detailed in El Salvador court records, which I accessed with help from a Salvadoran lawyer. As noted earlier, in some instances I could not photocopy the material, so I taped myself reading it out loud, then had it transcribed, which is how I quote the case extensively at the end of the chapter.

Deportation of gang members started as a trickle in the early 1990s and became a flood by the end of the decade and through the first two decades of this century. The information on criminal deportations—comparing, for example, the number of criminal deportees in Nicaragua versus the Northern Triangle—came directly from the “Yearbook of Immigration Statistics” (DHS, 2019), which is available for every year beginning in 1996.

There are, unfortunately, no statistics that I could find that disaggregate those who were connected to gang-related crimes in these large numbers of deportees. Nonetheless, others, most notably Óscar Martínez and Juan José Martínez d'Aubuisson (2018), have chronicled this phenomenon in depth, in particular how it related to the development of the MS-13.

There is also not a lot of academic work on this subject in these countries, but at least one connects deportation of criminals to higher levels of violence (Ambrosius and Leblang, 2018). And a 2007 United Nations/World Bank report on Jamaica reported that a small number of violent criminals is enough to change the criminal dynamic of any nation. “In such small countries, it does not take a large number of offenders to have a large impact, particularly if they assume a leadership role in criminal gangs on their return or provide perverse role models for youth,” the report concluded (UNODC and World Bank, 2007).

The *Los Angeles Times* wrote numerous articles about the INS-CRASH efforts to deport gang members, including one that describes the origins of the city ordinance that prohibits that effort (Rutten, 2009) and another in which the LAPD touts how it had “decimated” the MS-13 (Braun, 1989). A Youth Justice Coalition report (2012) provided the numbers of how many

youth were in the California gang database and how many of those were Hispanic and Black. The California State Auditor noted how the database had forty-two people who were added to the database when they were infants (2015).

Chapter 7—“We go to war.”

This chapter came from extensive conversations with Alex Sanchez, Frank Flores and two others who worked on the case against Sanchez but who did not want to go on the record. I also drew heavily from the case file, including the indictment (US v. Jose Alfaro, 2009) from the Central District of California, the wiretapped phone conversations of Alex and the gang members in El Salvador, Flores’s analysis of the phone calls, Boyle’s counter-analysis of the phone calls, and the transcripts of the bond proceedings.

A hat-tip also goes to Edward Humes for his coverage of the Sanchez case at the time (2011) in *California Lawyer*, and to *WitnessLA*, which provided critical, ongoing coverage of the trial as well as links to other sources. Celeste Fremon of *WitnessLA*, for example, was in the courtroom to chronicle Alex’s demeanor as he was led from the courtroom after his bail hearing (2009), which I cite at the end of the chapter.

Tom Hayden also recounted Alex’s odyssey in vivid detail in his book *Street Wars*, especially Alex’s persistent struggles with the CRASH unit officers, and his efforts to beat back the attempts to deport him from the US (2004: 232–256). I talked to Alex about this time period as well, but I used Hayden’s book to corroborate much of Alex’s account, such as the meetings in the Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Wilshire in which the police stood waiting at the back, ready to arrest him and others.

The efforts to vilify Sanchez were also chronicled in part by Anne-Marie O’Connor in the *Los Angeles Times* (2000a). O’Connor also covered when Homies Unidos filed a lawsuit against the city (2000c), and she covered the revelation that the FBI was pressuring the INS to help the LAPD incarcerate and deport the 18th Street (O’Connor, 2000b). Tom Diaz has a deeper account of the beginnings (2009: 116–117) and evolution of this program, as well as how it steadily went national. And Hayden gives good account of how this INS strategy overlapped with CRASH’s efforts in Rampart and surrounding areas (2004: 225–227).

Diaz did the most thorough accounting of Nelson Comandari’s life (2009: 200–208), helping steer my own queries with the one current and the one former Salvadoran policemen who spoke to me about the Comandari family. Both the policemen and press accounts identified Comandari’s uncle as

a “powerful drug trafficker” (*El Tiempo*, 1992). There were judicial documents as well, including an indictment against Comandari out of the Southern District of New York (2004), as well as a California Appellate Court case in which he is identified as only “N.C.” (2007). I also spoke directly to gang members about Comandari, including Alex Sanchez.

The statistics for homicides in California during this time period came from California Office of the Attorney General’s own online database (2019). The killing of Parks’s granddaughter was covered by the *Los Angeles Times* (Newton, 2000).

The United States government’s use of informants is chronicled in a 2011 article by Justin Scheck and John R. Emshwiller in the *Wall Street Journal* (2011). In it, they refer to Jorge Pineda, alias Dopey, one of the most legendary informants in MS-13’s illustrious informant history, and the two others I refer to in this chapter. Their article lays bare the perverted nature of the relationship, and the FBI’s seemingly wanton approach towards informants.

Chapter 8—“We ruled.”

This chapter is based mostly on two conversations I had with Alma in El Salvador. To corroborate her account, I spoke to her sister Magdalena, her partner in El Salvador and her father. I also got help from her lawyer, who provided me with sworn affidavits from Alma, Magdalena and a third sibling, as well as other court documents. They all corroborate Alma’s story about the rape by her stepgrandfather.

The *Washington Post* chronicled the rise of the MS-13 (Tucker, 2003) in the DMV, as well as the gang-related violence in the area, specifically the stabbing case (Jackman, 2000) and the shooting in front of the convenience store (Glod, 2001). The *Post* also described Mount Pleasant, the first landing area for the Salvadoran migrants in the DMV, as “the most ethnically diverse” area of people who “hardly live together” (Farhi, 1990). It was the *Christian Science Monitor* that said it was frequently described in press accounts as a “rundown Hispanic neighborhood” (Feldmann, 1991).

There have been few investigations into the MS-13’s treatment of women, and even fewer still that deal with the subject in its proper context: as an extension of the way Salvadoran society treats women writ large. Among the most thorough that I read were Tom Ward’s discussion of the topic in his book *Gangsters Without Borders* (2013: 112–140), which describes the difference between sexing in and being beaten into the gang, as well as the deep mistrust of the female gang members (e.g., *trust no bitch*). Juan José

Martínez d'Aubuisson also wrote a detailed account of how this plays out in El Salvador in *Revista Factum* (2016) that is equally useful and disturbing.

The case I chronicle concerning the brutal murder of several women came directly from a Salvadoran appellate court decision against members of the Iberia clique (El Salvador v. Armando Reyes Soriano Molina, et al., 2007). By then, the gang had most likely stopped admitting women, in part because of the Brenda Paz case. To reconstruct the Paz case, there are dozens of articles, but I mostly relied on Sam Logan's *This is for the Mara Salvatrucha* (2009). Logan's book is an incredible foundation for understanding the gang's rise in the US in the early 2000s.

Chapter 9—Escape from Zacatraz

As noted, I spoke to Norman on numerous occasions. I also spoke to his wife and sister. His legal representative gave me the timeline of prison stints and events, since he needed it to argue his case for Convention Against Torture. I also accessed case files at courthouses in two states in El Salvador, as well as the few that are online, which chronicled family efforts to get Norman transferred, and efforts to isolate Norman (and other mara) in Marióna. The case files also go through accusations and sentences for Norman (and other accused).

As part of a project on prisons in the region, Juan José Martínez d'Aubuisson and I did a long report on the El Salvador prison system and an intra-gang fight among the MS-13, from which I drew a lot for the section on Bruno's control of the prison system and the MS-13's steady take-over (Dudley and Martínez d'Aubuisson, 2017). We split up the reporting. I talked to mostly the US and Salvadoran authorities about the fight between the leadership of the MS-13 and Walter Antonio Carrillo Alfaro, alias El Chory. Juan focused on reconstructing the history of the prison system, especially during the time of Bruno. I later did more reporting on the murder of El Chory for this book.

There is no significant work on sexual assault and rape in El Salvador. The estimates for sexual torture for political prisoners during the war came from an article in Chatham House (Goodley, 2019). The Gilligan citations about rape in US prisons and how rape is employed to control the inmate population came from his masterful book *Violence* (1996: 168–175).

I gathered and cited information concerning Norman's and the MS-13's drug dealing inside the prison from an appellate court decision (El Salvador v. Erick Geovanny Quintanilla Tovar, 2003). The numbers concerning the uptick in extortions from 2003 and 2009 came from a National Public

Security Academy report, which Juan José Martínez d'Aubuisson and I cite in our story on the MS-13 and prisons in El Salvador (2017).

Chapter 10—The Gang Truce

I met Luis Aguilar in 2010, but I only approached him about being part of this book after he was charged with the crimes following the truce. We spoke about a half-dozen times to reconstruct his life and participation in the truce. I also interviewed Raúl Mijango twice, one time for a project for the Center for Latin American and Latino Studies at American University (Dudley, 2013) and one time for this project in the courthouse. Part of that interview appeared in *InSight Crime* (Dudley, 2018a).

I should also mention a profile of Mijango written by Carlos Martínez d'Aubuisson (2018), which provided the details regarding Mijango's AK-47, as well as corroborating material regarding Mijango's tangled life; and another profile in *La Prensa Gráfica* (2016), which chronicled his ambush of Munguía Payes and the unlikely friendship between them in the years that followed.

In addition, I interviewed two others who had direct participation in the truce. They both preferred to remain anonymous, but they corroborated much of the account provided in this chapter, including the way the gang used the intelligence passed to them to keep a lid on the violence. One of those cases I cite—the one concerning the murder of five students—was covered at the time by the Associated Press (2012). The other story of how the two 18th Street factions resolved their conflict relied on accounts from inside the gang truce negotiating team.

From the gang side, I spoke to several members, including Norman, although he was very reticent about this topic. Officials filed several indictments later that covered parts of the truce, among them an operation they termed *Jaque* (El Salvador v. Edwin Ernesto Cedillos Rodríguez, et al., 2016).

Finally, I spoke to Bishop Colindres and Father Antonio Rodríguez while researching the gang truce for American University. I extracted the quote that Rodríguez read from the press release issued by the gangs from prison (MS-13 and Barrio 18, 2010).

Nicholas Phillips wrote the definitive article on Dany Boy Romero in *InSight Crime* (2017). The BBC covered the 2009 “strike” in eleven prisons (Lemus, 2009) and the 2010 transport strike (Lemus, 2010). A good, concise, well-sourced description of why gang truces fail was published by Muggah, et al. (2013) in *InSight Crime*.

The descriptions of the attacks between gang members in which Norman participated came from a combination of his interviews with me and court documents. I am not identifying which case file, since that would compromise his identity.

Chapter 11—God and the Beast

This chapter was based mostly on numerous visits to Los Angeles during the investigation of this book. Both Ernesto and Alex allowed me to visit their offices on several occasions, and Ernesto invited me to go with him as he worked with his clients for Communities in Schools. I also spoke to others at Homies Unidos and Communities in Schools, including Blinky Rodriguez and one of Ernesto's colleagues, a former MS-13 member named Wilfredo Vides, alias Skippy. Vides was the one who was arrested in July 2019, as part of a RICO case against fourteen members of the gang in Los Angeles.

In general, the topic of gang- and violence-intervention strategies deserves and has numerous fantastic people writing about it. I would highlight two recent works for further reading that explores strategies in the US and beyond: Thomas Abt's *Bleeding Out* (2019) and Rachel Kleinfeld's *A Savage Order* (2018). Others, such as Rachel Locke at the University of California San Diego, have done deep work on this topic in the US and Latin America. Locke headed up a team that investigated the possibility of implementing focused deterrence in El Salvador for the USAID (Locke, et al., 2018).

I have spoken with all three of the above-mentioned scholars and worked once with Kleinfeld on a USAID-funded assessment of Honduras. Along the way, I have also had extensive conversations about this topic with current and former government officials, including Miguel Reabold and Ben Rempell, while they were at USAID; Enrique Roig when he was at USAID and later when he moved to Creative Associates; and Enrique Betancourt at Chemonics.

There is notable research cited in this chapter. Arguably our deepest understanding of current gang dynamics came with a survey led by Florida International University's José Miguel Cruz, one of the premier MS-13 researchers in the world, and his fantastic team of Florida- and El Salvador-based investigators and surveyors (Cruz, et al., 2017).

Robert Brenneman's *Homies and Hermanos* (2011) is one of the few sociological deep dives into why religion is such a central escape hatch. I should note that I wrote about this topic, including Deras's conversion, in a *New York Times* op-ed (2018b).

Much of the judicial cases came from US Department of Justice documents. To unravel Alex's case, for instance, I relied on court documents but also

some testimony of current and ex gang members who were active during the time that Lacinos killed Smokey, then Zombie killed Lacinos. I also spoke to agents on the case, in addition to Frank, as well as authorities in El Salvador.

The information on Dreamer came mostly from the two federal indictments against him in California (US v. Elvis Edgardo Molina, et al., 2013) and New Jersey (US v. José Juan Rodríguez Juárez, et al., 2013), as well as conversations with law enforcement and private investigators. His case was first reported at length in InSight Crime by Carlos García (2016b), a gang specialist who has done some of the best work on the MS-13 that I have ever seen (and had the privilege to edit). García also wrote about Lil' One in InSight Crime (2016a), which I drew from, as well as an indictment of the MS-13 leader (US v. José Rodríguez-Landa, et al., 2013).

I followed up on García's work with some of my own reporting on Larry Jesus Navarete, alias Nica (Dudley and Silva Ávalos, 2018a). Operating from a California jail, Navarete created a network that distributed small consignments of methamphetamines in the Southwestern United States. This network included Nelson Alexander Flores, alias Mula (US v. Martin Neftali Aguilar-Rivera, et al., 2018), who operated from Tijuana and eventually became a member of the Mexican Mafia, before being arrested in Mexico and sent to the US to face trial (Dudley, 2018c).

Chapter 12—The New War

I drew from the indictment to describe the Arrochera case (El Salvador v. Mario Alberto Mijango Menjivar, et al., 2014). I also spoke to Mijango (Dudley, 2018a) at the courthouse, while the trial was in a break, as well as two others who worked with him on the la mesa, about the Arrochera case. As the multiple cases against Mijango proceeded, I spoke with his lawyer.

The descriptions of the gang's "lines" of command came from the Jaque indictment (El Salvador v. Edwin Ernesto Cedillos Rodríguez, et al., 2016). The reorganization of the MS-13 outside of the prison during this time period, as well as who became leaders, also came from the Jaque indictment.

The Chory fight with Piwa was described in Jaque, and, as noted above, Juan José Martínez d'Aubuisson and I wrote a treatise on this subject for InSight Crime (2017), which included numerous corroborating interviews with gang members and authorities. Piwa's efforts to corral resources for the gang was in Jaque.

El Faro obtained video from the meeting between the gangs and ARENA (Labrador and Ascencio, 2016), as well as audio from a separate meeting be-

tween the gangs and the then–security minister of the FMLN government (Martínez d’Aubuisson and Valencia, 2016). *El Faro* and *Revista Factum* got the video from a meeting between the gangs and the FMLN (Martínez d’Aubuisson and Martínez, 2016).

Meanwhile, James Cockayne’s chapter on Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall (2016: 59–79) gave me a more theoretical, historical and comparative perspective (as well as one of the book’s motifs) on how politicians have long brokered “across the gap between the state and the street” (2016: 79).

The MS-13’s dealings with Norman following the Peligro debacle came from my conversations with him, as well as sworn statements he made to the immigration court in the United States. The descriptions of murders he allegedly committed or participated in came from his case files and other indictments that I am not identifying so as not to compromise his identity. Norman also talked to me—as well as gave written and oral testimony to the immigration court—about his half brother’s efforts to assassinate him.

The quote from Douglas Farah came from one of his many articles on this topic (2012). Farah is a friend and a colleague, but we differ on our understanding of how much the gang is involved in international drug trafficking, among other topics.

The accounting of a gang informant’s testimony against Mijango came from *El Faro* (Martínez, Martínez and Lemus, 2017), which also broke the story on the San Blas massacre (Valencia, et al., 2016). *El Faro*, specifically the meticulous Spanish reporter Roberto Valencia, who has also written an amazing book about the gangs (2018), analyzed the murders by police of suspected gang members (2016). The number of police killed during 2015, meanwhile, came from InSight Crime’s coverage (Daugherty, 2016).

Chapter 13—Nothing to Hide

To develop this chapter, I spoke with Cristian on numerous occasions in person—first in a United States detention center and later in his home of exile abroad—as well as on the phone, which included long text exchanges via encrypted platforms.

I also spoke to his mother, Rosa, his brother, his lawyer in Long Island and the paralegal. His lawyer provided me with the documents of the case, including ICE’s evaluation of his case, school records, sworn affidavits, forensic reports and materials from the murders of his father and his grandmother.

These documents are sometimes incomplete, at best. The autopsy report of his father, for instance, makes no mention of motive or the possi-

ble perpetrators, but it does confirm that two fatal bullets passed through Antonio Domingo's head at kilometer 51 on the Pan-American highway leading to Santa Ana.

The program to find and deport suspected members of the MS-13 began long before Operation Matador. Beginning in 2005, under the banner of something called Operation Community Shield, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which oversees ICE, had turned its attention and limited resources toward potentially violent undocumented migrants.

By 2012, DHS was saying it had arrested 25,629 street gang “members” and “associates” of gangs nationwide (2012); of these, DHS said that 3,910 were “members” or “associates” of the MS-13. By 2018, DHS (2018a) claimed the number of MS-13 “leaders,” “members” or “associates” arrested as part of the initiative had topped 8,200, which included results of Matador. In November 2018, the DHS gave Operation Matador an award for “excellence” (2018b).

To recount the arrival and proliferation of the MS-13 in Long Island and their battles with Salvadorans With Pride (SWP), I relied on Sarah Garland's terrific *Gangs in Garden City* (2009), which chronicles the lives of members of the SWP and the MS-13, including the leader of the MS-13 who tried to start an organization to help ex-gang members but refused to denounce the gang (and was eventually deported). Carlos García also wrote a great account of the emergence of the MS-13 in New York for InSight Crime (2018).

John Moreno Gonzales of *Newsday*, who I cite, wrote about how the SWP was perceived (2000). I drew from a half-dozen US indictments to draw out the names and cases of MS-13 attacks on the SWP during that time period. I also went through recent indictments, including the one that I cite concerning the soccer field massacre in 2017 (US v. Edwin Amaya-Sanchez, et al., 2016).

I spoke to numerous Suffolk County authorities and the lead federal prosecutor on the MS-13 regarding the uptick in murders to gain their perspective on the who, how and why of the MS-13 surge. I also cite an indictment to illustrate the chaotic, haphazard nature of the gang along the East Coast (US v. Edwin Mancía Flores, 2017).

Sini gave his estimates on the number of UAC, as well as his accounting of the 287(g) agreement, to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (2017). DeMarco spoke on Fox News (2017). Sini was evaluated for his efforts to establish a “bias-free” police force by the US Department of Justice (2018). Sini's office did not respond to numerous requests to be interviewed on the record for this book.

To be fair, there is little consensus over 287(g). But it is worth noting

that, as chief of the LAPD, Daryl Gates implemented Special Order 40, which forbade the police from interacting with suspects about their immigration status (Smith, 2017). And that a 2011 US Department of Justice investigation (2011) into Maricopa County Sheriff's Office under Joe Arpaio found that Arpaio's office "has implemented its immigration enforcement program in a way that has created a 'wall of distrust' between MCSO officers and Maricopa County's Latino residents—a wall of distrust that has significantly compromised MCSO's ability to provide police protection to Maricopa County's Latino residents."

The Huntington district superintendent's response to Cuomo's proposal to militarize his schools came from a local news outlet (McAtee, 2017), which provided a link to the press release on the district's Facebook page.

I drew heavily on Hannah Dreier's great ProPublica story on other Huntington High students who were picked up by ICE in Operation Matador (2018). Dreier talked to the SRO, as well as the principal. She also cited the immigration lawyer of the Honduran who was deported after the sweep, who tape-recorded the principal saying, "We don't send anything to Immigration and Customs."

There are other reports that I consulted that cover Operation Matador, most notably "Swept Up in the Sweep" (Arastu, 2018), which details the SRO's role and complaints about how they became the de facto immigration authorities inside schools. And the ACLU filed a lawsuit in August 2017 (Lorenza Gomez, et al. v. Jefferson Sessions, et al.), which details numerous cases.

In its introduction, the ACLU alleges that: "Under the guise of a 'crack-down' on transnational street gangs, federal immigration authorities and the federal agency responsible for the care and custody of unaccompanied immigrant children have undertaken a concerted effort to arrest, detain, and transport children far from their families and attorneys, and to deny them immigration benefits and services to which they are entitled under US law, based on flimsy, unreliable and unsubstantiated allegations of gang affiliation."

Chapter 14—The Monster

As noted, I spoke to Norman on numerous occasions. He also submitted written statements regarding parts of his story as part of his efforts to receive deferral from deportation, to which I had access. I spoke with his legal representative after Norman got a deferral and saw him during that time period.

I traveled to see Cristian and Alma two times each. There I spoke to them and others cited in the text. I went to El Congo twice, once with

one of Cristian's uncles, who drove me around, and once to see the family friend whom I cite. I also obtained police intelligence reports about the area, which included a map delineating which gang controlled what part of the town. After Cristian tried and failed to get into the United States again, I spoke to him, his brother and his mother.

I spoke to Raúl Mijango for the last time for this book in the courtroom during a break in the trial. His lawyer was present. Part of this interview appeared in *InSight Crime* (Dudley, 2018a). And I talked to Luis several times before and after his trial ended.

The statistics for Norman's judge came from an online tracking tool called Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), a Syracuse University-based initiative that tracks several aspects of the US government, including immigration (2018). I purposely did not provide the exact page so as not to reveal who Norman's judge was.

I did, as noted, obtain a partial recording of the proceedings in which Norman testified and the judge gave him a deferral under CAT. And I visited Norman and his family a little more than a year after he was released.

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GLOSSARY OF MAJOR GANG TERMS USED IN THIS BOOK

EL BARRIO – Literally, "neighborhood"; gang; also spelled *varrio*.

LA BESTIA – Literally, "beast" or "the devil"; something evil or a reference to the criminal life.

BRINCAR – Literally, "to jump"; to initiate into a gang.

BRINCO – The act of being initiated into a gang.

CALMADO – Retired or semiretired gang member.

CHAVALA – Girl; punk, coward; a rival gang member.

CHEQUEO – Second-stage recruit in a "probation" period when given increasingly more difficult and compromising tasks; not yet a member.

CHOLO – A male gang member or gang wannabe; often a reference to Mexican American gang members or their style.

CLICA – Literally, "clique"; gang's smallest unit of organization.

CORTE – Literally, "court"; internal gang trial or justice system.

DESTROYER – Crash pad, hideout, party house, meeting place, torture chamber, weapons depot.

FEDERATION – The leadership of the gang outside of the prison in El Salvador.

GATILLEROS – Assassins.

HANGEAR – To hang out.

HOMEBOY – Clique or gang companion (masculine); often a term of endearment.

HOMIE – Fellow gang member; fully initiated.

HUILA – Secret message passed in prison; also spelled *wuila*.

JAINA – Girlfriend; woman.

LÍNEA – Committee designed to deal with major issues in El Salvador.

LOCA/O – Crazy girl or boy; gang member.

MARA - A small group of friends; a gang or someone who belongs to the Mara Salvatrucha.

MARERO – Gang member, usually in reference to someone from the MS-13 (18th Street uses the term *pandillero*).

MIRIN – Meeting.

NARCO – Drug trafficker.

ONDA – Mood, attitude, groove.

PARO – Gang initiate, often doing errands or small jobs; not yet a member.

POSTE – Gang initiate, often doing errands or small jobs; not yet a member.

POSTEAR – Keeping watch; surveilling or spying.

PROGRAM – A part of the gang that groups together a number of cliques.

RANFLA - Lowrider; the national gang leadership in El Salvador.

RANFLERO – Gang leader.

RENTA – Extortion payment.

SALVATRUCHA – Savvy Salvadoran; reference to those who fought against William Walker's forces in the 1800s.

SHOT CALLER – Maximum leader.

SUREÑOS – Umbrella organization for gangs working under the Mexican Mafia prison gang.

TAKA – Pseudonym; often only name fellow gang members know.

TRAQUETERO – Local drug peddler; also spelled *traketero*.

TRUCHA – Savvy, watchful.

VATO – Man, guy; dude.