

**Testimony of Joseph C. Madenspacher,
District Attorney of Lancaster County,
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Whether it is mere coincidence or not, detectives in the Juvenile Offender Section of the Lancaster Police Department first began receiving information concerning youth gang formation in Lancaster immediately after the movie "Colors" (a movie that portrayed gang activity in Los Angeles) premiered in 1988. In fact one of the first groups that came to the Police Bureau's attention was a group of primarily African-American youths that called themselves "Colors". Within a year we were aware of as many as a dozen such groups at any given time. These groups were constantly disbanding, merging and new groups forming. The groups adopted the term "Posse", (which Jamaican drug dealing gangs have been nicknamed). Some of the groups were "Lime Street Posse", "Green Street Posse", "Ann Street Posse"; names which represented their "turf".

These groups were and are still today, essentially segregated along territorial and ethnic lines. In 1988 there were a number of Hispanic, African-American, White, and even a mixed race group (Beaver Street Posse). There was usually a clear leader and the attraction for youth seemed to be more novelty than actual commitment to gang life. Intelligence gathering was relatively easy as most of the youth bragged about their involvement and were quick to admit membership. Most of the groups criminal activity involved occasional assaults of other group members, (without using weapons) and petty thefts.

Today our gangs are primarily Hispanic in ethnicity and strongly territorial. There are some African-American youth in the gangs, but we are presently unaware of any White or Oriental gangs in Lancaster City. Leadership is now obscured and often difficult to determine and intelligence gathering is much more difficult because the members have become secretive about their involvement. The groups have "matured" exhibiting more hardcore gang characteristics. Most of the gangs today are involved in drug

dealing. The drug dealing is not per se for the financial gain of the gang itself, as most members seem to be individual entrepreneurs, but the gang does provide security resources to protect the dealers and the gang's "drug turf". This has led to competition which conversely has led to a dramatic increase in violence especially involving the use of firearms. The youth range in age from about 14 to 22 with some exceptions (younger/older).

The members fit the traditional profile: male, mid to late teens and early twenties, high school drop outs, no desire to work, with a long history of incorrigible, criminal, and anti-social behavior. The gang provides the "family" that they may not have had, but more importantly provides security and protection for their criminal activity, which besides drug dealing includes weapon sales, auto theft, and theft from autos especially car audio systems.

There has been a reoccurring influence on the gangs from New York City drug dealers. These people bring with them the "big city" experience and are particularly vicious with a strong propensity for violence. This influence has encouraged "locals" to resort to violence to settle most disputes and has obviously been a significant factor in the explosion of violence in the City in the past two years. Five years ago "drive by shootings" were unheard of in Lancaster and it was rare that a gang confrontation resulted in gunfire. Today it is a weekly, sometimes daily occurrence. The weapon of choice is a semi-automatic handgun. Revolvers and "sawed off" shotguns are also used. When recovered by the police, these guns are usually found to be stolen, often locally.

The gangs originally were confined to the Southeast section of the city, but have moved into the Southwest Section and their influence is slowly moving north. The violent nature of the groups has created an atmosphere of fear among residents living in areas of high gang activity, which permits the gangs to commit crimes,

including murder, with impunity. The single biggest obstacle to the successful prosecution of a number of recent murders, has been the stated fear of reprisal against eye witnesses should they cooperate with the police.

Currently we know of the following gangs operating in Lancaster.

- West Side Posse (At least a dozen members)
- The Little Family (At least 30 members)
- Mad Circle (At least 25 members)
- The Hoodlum Brothers (membership uncertain)
- The Outlaws (membership uncertain)
- South Side Gangsters (At least a dozen members)
- Green Street Posse (At least 20 members)

H.B. 2670 and 2671 offer both real and psychological help for dealing with these gangs.

First, the creation of the new crime of gang activity will let the gang members, and the community they are holding hostage, know that law enforcement is serious about this problem.

Second, the sentencing enhancements for crimes committed near schools, community centers, parks, public housing, and bus stops will help prevent and punish gang activity in the areas we are trying to provide as safe havens from their activities.

Finally, The creation of the Gang Deterrence Fund and the resultant funding to community based organizations will offer every community an opportunity to provide realistic alternatives to our youth, and enable them to channel their activities away from the criminal gangs they are now joining.