

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

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### GANGS & GANG-RELATED CRIME

Several years ago, Dan Kahan and I wrote a piece about addressing crime in the inner city (Meares and Kahan, 1998). Our goal in the piece was to enrich criminal law policy analysis by explaining the ways in which social science could helpfully inform policy strategies. At that time, the dominant approach to inner-city crime was to focus on increasing the prevalence and severity of prison sentences. While noting that the public demand for “get tough” law enforcement strategies stemmed from deep-seated political, ideological, and even psychological dynamics (Beale, 1997), we urged scholars to do more than simply criticize the existing policies. Pragmatic scholarship was necessary to influence crime policy, particularly scholarship that took seriously the possibility of shaping “norms” that influenced criminal behavior.

The journal *Criminology & Public Policy* is committed to the presentation of high-quality, pragmatic scholarship. And in that spirit we present here a sort of “mini-symposium” on gangs and gang-related crime. Readers will see that the scholarly agenda overarching the pieces is intensely pragmatic. The two major pieces, one by Maxson et al. and the other by McGloin, are about better describing the thing called a “gang” and how to address the problems that such groups can create.

Maxson et al. offer the first scientific assessment of the community impact of civil gang injunctions in San Bernadino. The idea behind these injunctions is a simple one: use a legal order to prevent gang members from coming into certain vulnerable areas out of a particular area, thereby increasing the sense of safety and security of residents. One would not characterize civil gang injunctions as a traditional “get-tough” strategy. Rather, the point of them is to enhance a community’s capacity for crime resistance by improving social organization and collective efficacy (Meares, 1998; Meares and Kahan, 1998). If this kind of policy option is successful, it should be preferred to longer and more prevalent jail sentences for crime-prone gang members, for there is strong theoretical and suggestive empirical evidence that mass incarceration is actually harmful rather than helpful to communities. (Lynch and Sabol, 2004; Meares, 1998; Rose and Clear, 1998). Maxson et al. provide warm, but not glowing, support for civil injunctions.

McGloin’s piece performs a different but still important service. It is difficult to have an understanding of how a particular gang-directed crime policy will impact gang-related crime without knowing how the groups are organized or, more specifically, how the group members are connected to one another. As Papachristos notes in his insightful reaction essay, which

follows McGloin's article, "we need to devise analytic strategies that help us chart the real gang landscape and not just distorted images of it." Network analysis is critical to this enterprise. McGloin's detailed work underscores Papachristos's warning that a national level Gangbuster's Bill, which necessarily proceeds on an assumption that all gangs are organized in a particular way, is likely to be ineffective and is, to take a page from Jeffrey Grogger's playbook, possibly a bad bet in terms of a cost-benefit analysis.

There is no doubt plenty of work remains with respect to crime-involved groups. (Query: should we even call them gangs?). We should proceed carefully and adhere to high standards of scientific rigor, but we must not divorce ourselves from the street. All participants of this "mini-symposium" make it clear that detailed knowledge of relevant communities is a key to understanding "gangs," what they do, and how to address problems that they can create.

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