

Oral History

Palatine IL, a suburb northwest of Chicago--a town of wealth and poverty, diversity, where one highway separates public housing from spacious houses. In the 80s, a fight prompted a fourteen-year-old resident to start a chapter of the Latin Kings street gang. Within a few years this organization grew to more than one hundred teens across the Northwest Suburbs of Chicago. After years of a relatively benign street gang run by kids, the community would witness “their own killing their own” and feel the pain that comes along with life sentences being handed down to their children. What led to this event and how might it relate larger state violence and the production of interpersonal violence?

My final project was to conduct an oral history with a former Inca of the Palatine Latin Kings. In doing this I hoped to glean some insight into the reasons this chapter of the Latin Kings was founded, as well as understand the circumstances that lead to the aforementioned event. Through this I hoped to discuss a darker part of social change: the failures that come along with liberal “representational” modes of change and the harm that can be caused when structural violence is left unaddressed in individual solutions for poverty and discrimination.

Through this project I began to understand how a systemic lack of care for children of color, which I understand as the set of underappreciated but necessary strategies for enduring precarious worlds, is related to interpersonal violence.¹ The absence of systemic care, combined with masculine ideals surrounding the need to protect one's community and form fraternity with one another, produces the circumstance in which care looks like a street gang. At the same time, the later introduction of exceptionalist and individualist ideas of social change to this community created instability, which when combined with care as kingism, produced violence. Ultimately, when considering the gendered and racial realities of the youth in this community, combined with the state's withholding of care, ensured that the way in which young men chose to care for themselves would eventually lead to violence. In this way, care is a criminal act as it seems these subjects were not intended to survive, let alone find worth in themselves and their community. In a society that incentivizes self preservation, and criminalizes the youth in this community, there was not a scenario in which violence would have not broken out.

In summary the need to create strategies of survival in a precarious world becomes dangerously reworked through the masculine ethos of communal protection, ownership, and fraternity. When understanding that the need for children to invent care is an artificial one produced by macro-level processes of criminalization and systemic racism, one can begin to understand the relationship between macro-level violence and the violence of “our own killing our own”.

¹ Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart, Tamara Kneese, “Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times” *Social Text* (2020) 38 (1 (142)): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-7971067>