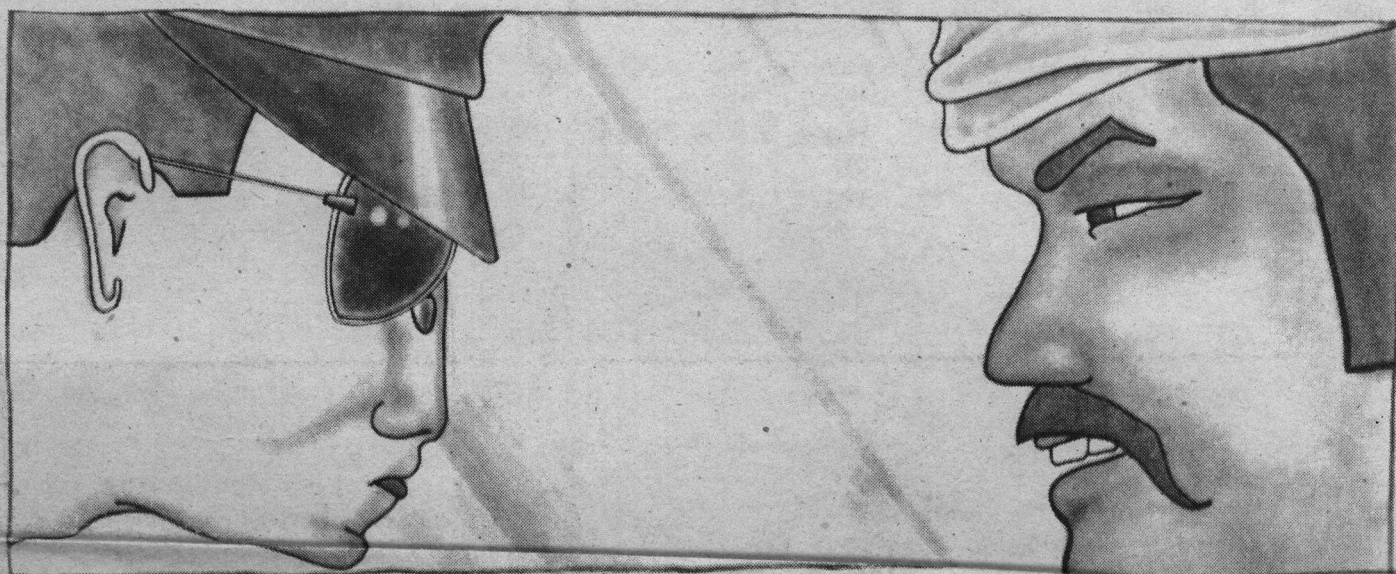


Gangs

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E D L E V I N E

ON THE STREET

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY POLICE OFFICIALS AGREE THAT YOUTHFUL STREET gangs are being recognized as a problem, although, they claim, this sort of activity is still relatively new in the county. Less than three weeks ago, there was an incident of gang-related violence and bloodshed in this city. While statements in this account have to do with chicano gangs, police at the same time recognize two white gangs in the city (the Crips and the Black Dragons) and a black gang here (the Players). To learn why gang life is a necessity for them, the *Weekly* attempted to interview members of either of three chicano gangs, the Westsiders and the Eastsiders in this city and the Northside Locos in Watsonville. But this reporter met with failure in each of several attempts. A chicano man now working to prevent gang activity amongst chicano youth said that the time was wrong to communicate with gang members, that they feel uneasy about dealing with the press. Last Thursday evening, according to an informed source, a street fight between the Westsiders and the Eastsiders was believed to have been imminent on Eastsiders' turf at 124 Leibrandt Ave.; shortly after sunset that same evening, three police patrol cars were seen in that neighborhood apparently checking out the possibility of Westsiders cruising in vehicles there. At 3:20 a.m. on June 6, a shotgun was fired from a van being driven down Leibrandt Ave.; several persons were standing outside at the time of the shooting, including resident Roberto Ruvacalba, 19, who was wounded in both his lower abdomen and pelvic region. Police arrested four persons believed to be connected with the shooting: Martin Alvarez, 19; A.C. Parales, 19, and two 17-year-old youths, all of whom reside in the city of Santa Cruz.

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ON THE STREET

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Santa Cruz Deputy Police Chief Tom Marketello told the *Weekly* that the shooting "definitely was gang related, the Westsiders attacked the Eastsiders."

"It's not a kid's game (gangs) anymore," Marketello opined. "It's an adult situation with youths acting out the parts."

The gangs, he said, are "very mobile," that they can be anywhere they want to be in the city in a relatively short period of time. "This keeps our patrol cars tied up, running around to keep the gangs from fighting," he said.

The problem of gangs is rather new to the city, Marketello pointed out. He said the problem has appeared "overnight."

"We're still finding out who's doing what to whom," he added.

Police are reluctant to release information about gangs to the press, perhaps because much of it is classified as "confidential." Officials are also aware that the chicano community can be offended by news reports like this one, largely because this type of report can put a "label" on that community.

"We feel that exposing the gangs doesn't help solve the problem at all," Marketello said. "Exposure doesn't serve any purpose. If they break the law, no matter who they are or where they're from, we're going to arrest them and it is this type of action that may have some impact."

On February 12 of last year two 16-year-old chicano youths from Watsonville were stabbed to death on the Santa Cruz County side of Mount Madonna, half of which is part of Santa Clara County Park. Both youths are believed to have been gang members. Police arrested five suspects in the slaying, some of whom are said to be members of the Northside Locos, the remainder belonging to Las Lomas, a known Monterey County chicano youth gang; the suspects are in custody awaiting a jury trial.

Sgt. Bruce Simpson, press information officer for the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Department, said that county police "are aware youth gangs are operating in the county, that there are affiliations identifying themselves as gangs."

Simpson said that gangs "are definitely a growing problem in the county." Violent gang activity, he said, is mostly contained within their rival ranks; however, gang activity in lesser crimes like burglary and vandalism affects residents elsewhere in the county, he added.

Simpson said he doesn't think the white and black gangs in the city are as "formalized" as the chicano gangs.

Watsonville Police Chief Al Williams said there are between 30 to 40 members of the Northside Locos, most of whom range in age from 14 to 18. Gang activity in his city "is not quite as bad as the press might make it out to be," he said; he thinks that a relatively small portion of all crime in Watsonville has to do with gangs.

Most gang activity in Watsonville is not pre-planned nor has there been much serious injury as a result of it, according to Williams; in the last two years there probably have been no more than six incidents which can be identified as gang fights, he said.

"The press legitimizes what might not be a gang and this makes it less easy for the community as a whole to deal with the issue," said Williams, who also believes that the youths themselves don't want to be identified as gang members by the press.

Deputy Police Chief Marketello thinks that general press coverage of gangs tends to inflate the egos of the gang members. "We don't want to feed the fire," he said.

In future editions the *Weekly* hopes to be able to report on the reasons why chicano, black and white gang members feel their lifestyle is valid.

