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# GANGS AND RACE: A LOOK AT NEW JERSEY POLICE PERSPECTIVES ON AFRICAN AMERICAN AND HISPANIC GANGS

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GANGS AND RACE: A LOOK AT NEW JERSEY POLICE PERSPECTIVES ON  
AFRICAN AMERICAN AND HISPANIC GANGS

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science  
Applied Sociology

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by  
Jeanette Alyece Medina  
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## **ABSTRACT**

In the United States the presence of gangs and gang activity is a common occurrence in lower socio-economic communities; however, local law enforcement agencies often have little information about the racial and ethnic composition of gang activity in their areas. As a result, gangs are often categorized without respect to important demographic differences between them. The purpose of this paper is to examine the New Jersey State Police Gang Survey 2007, which is a statewide assessment of gang composition and activity. I use the data from this survey along with conflict theory to analyze differences between African American and Hispanic gangs in New Jersey. These differences include distribution across the state of New Jersey, location (rural or urban) and types of crimes associated with particular gangs.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE .....	i
ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
INTRODUCTION .....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	4
What is a Gang? .....	4
History.....	7
Traditional v. Contemporary Gang .....	9
African American v. Hispanic Gangs .....	11
Rural v. Urban.....	14
Conflict Theory.....	16
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES .....	19
METHODOLOGIES .....	22
Data.....	22
Measures .....	23
RESULTS.....	27
Univariate.....	27
Bivariate.....	29

Table of Contents (Continued)

Cross Tabulation .....	37
CONCLUSION.....	41
Limitations and Future Research .....	43
REFERENCES .....	45

## LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Frequency Statistics- Gangpresence .....	27
2	Frequency Statistics-Countygang .....	28
3	Frequency Statistics- Residence .....	29
4	African American and Hispanic Drug Trafficking: Marijuana.....	30
5	African American and Hispanic Drug Trafficking: Cocaine .....	32
6	African American and Hispanic Drug Trafficking: Heroin .....	33
7	African American and Hispanic Violent Crime: Aggravated Assault.....	35
8	African American and Hispanic Violent Crime: Homicide.....	36
9	African American and Hispanic Violent Crime: Armed Robbery.....	37
10	Crosstabs Gang Presence Based on Residence .....	39

## INTRODUCTION

In the United States the presence of gangs and gang activity is a common occurrence in lower socio-economic communities. According to surveys conducted by the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC), from 1996 to 2000, the numbers of gangs and their members have been declining (Egley 2002). Subsequently, the number of youth offenders has also decreased. However those, who are involved with a gang are more likely than their counterparts to be offenders (Taylor 2008; Klein 1995). Accordingly, this study will look at the foundations and development of African American and Hispanic gangs, likelihood of criminal activity for each race of gangs, and locations of gangs. Furthermore, their specific characteristics and criminal activity will be assessed based on a survey created by the New Jersey State Police.

To begin, it is essential to consider the seminal work of sociologist Frederic Thrasher, most noted for his work regarding gangs of Chicago in 1927. Dimitriadis (2006) states that, “Thrasher’s *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago* is a panoramic, multilayered, richly detailed account of youth gangs” (Dimitriadis 2006: 335). The book is well-known for incorporating different key issues including the functioning of a gang as a social organization (Dimitriadis 2006). Thrasher writes that gangs form just like any other social group in that they develop in specific and conventional ways. They begin with simple neighborhood play groups and in the face of conflict they are joined together, which creates a sense of necessity and belonging (Thrasher 1927). Thrasher (1927) established several characteristics that lead to youths joining gangs. These characteristics include insufficient family life, low socio-economic

standing, poor neighborhoods and lack of religion, education, and recreation. While he discusses several different types of gangs the most relevant to this study is the criminal type gang. The criminal type gang is called this due to the involvement in criminal activities such as robbery and murder (Thrasher 1927). This point is essential to this study because the gangs are being assessed based on their criminal activities. Thrasher (1927) states that gangs that cannot integrate into the community successfully will inevitably develop delinquent behaviors and habits. Thrasher (1927) documents the transition of youth into adulthood by discussing the different societal factors and stages that they face. Based on his study researchers were also given a definition of what constitutes a gang. Since his definition has influenced many academic researchers a more in depth description of his definition and its durability will be discussed in a later section.

Understanding the history of gangs and the transitions is significant when understanding modern gangs. While they may have different characteristics they have the same fundamentals. For this particular study, the focus will be on race composition of the gang as well as gang activity. Specifically, the difference between African American and Hispanic gangs will be discussed. Current literature tends to focus on one specific race at a time; by combining them in one study I will be able to compare the two groups, based on the same variables, to see which is more likely to participate in certain criminal activities. These two types of gangs were chosen based on the data from the state of New Jersey. This data will not only allow us to see the differences in gang activity but also where the gangs are residing. The results could benefit future anti-gang programs by allowing them to utilize the information to tailor programs for specific races of gangs. If a

program knows how the two gangs differ, they will be able to focus in on how to help change them based on the individual characteristics they possess.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *What is a gang?*

To begin this study, it is important to first formulate and set a definition for the word gang because it can often times be ambiguous. When defining a gang a multitude of responses can be generated based on knowledge and interaction. Factors such as demographic location, law enforcement affiliation, political issues, or academic research can cause a variation in meaning. Definitions need to be specific to the community in order for them to be useful. In saying this, academic definitions need to be malleable so that they can be sure to include future discoveries concerning gangs (Pitts 2008).

A definition that is often referenced to is that of Frederic Thrasher. Thrasher stated that gangs differ from other groups because they are incorporated into society through conflict, their close interactions with other members of the group and their movement as a group. Also, the development of traditions, their specific hierarchical structure and the territory that they belong to and protect set them apart from the rest of society (Thrasher 1927). While Thrasher's definition was the best of the time period, it is important to reiterate that he designed this definition with the thought that gangs would eventually disappear. The "ganging process" is continuously changing and has little permanent presence in the community because the youth tend to grow and develop other interest (Thrasher 1927). Thrasher's gang definition is still considered a foundation for the expanding knowledge on gangs and influences from Thrasher's ideas can be seen in the evolution of gang definitions.

To add to the uncertainty of what a gang is government agencies have their own set of definitions to follow. The collaboration between the National Youth Gang Survey and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) produced a definition that simply states that a gang is a group of young individuals, in a particular jurisdiction that responsible persons in law enforcement agencies deem as a gang (Shelden 2004). Essentially, this means that a gang is what an agency says is a gang. While this definition is severely lacking not all government agencies follow this definition. For example, South Carolina states that “ ‘criminal gang’ means a formal or informal ongoing organization, association...who form for the purpose of committing criminal activity and who knowingly and actively participate in a pattern of criminal gang activity” (Criminal Gang Prevention Act, Section 16-8-230). Specifically for the New Jersey Street Gang Survey the definition of a gang was more in depth. For this survey a gang is at least three people who are connected, have a group name, identifiable signs, tattoos, or other indicators, and have committed criminal acts related to gang activity ((New Jersey State Police Street Gang Survey, 2007). This explanation provides a more concrete vision of a gang. Specifying particular characteristics enables those who participate in the survey to have a common ground when deciding if a group should be considered a gang.

After reviewing the literature, there are particular elements that are continuously seen when determining what constitutes a gang; they include the age of the participants and presence of unlawful behaviors (Esbensen 2001). The definition proposed by Walter Miller, integrates the idea of delinquency as a characteristic of a gang and provides a

foundation for the research and hypotheses proposed in this study. Miller (1975)

describes a gang as:

*“a group of recurrently associating individuals with identifiable leadership and internal organization, identifying with or claiming control over territory in the community, and engaging either individually or collectively in violent or other forms of illegal behavior”*(p.32)

This definition incorporates the distinct characteristics, such as organization and leadership, but it also introduces the idea of individual and group delinquent behavior. This factor is essential to this study since part of the research focuses on violent and drug related crimes.

To continue with the explanation of gangs, it is essential to state that the newer generations of youth gangs are more serious than the youth gangs defined by Thrasher due to crimes involving drugs and connections to organized crime networks. Gangs are increasingly involved in sophisticated criminal activities as they evolve in society. In the United States, admission into the gang usually begins between the ages of twelve to eighteen and the membership continues into the member's twenties and sometimes even older (Alleyne 2011; Rizzo 2003). When it comes to gang gender composition, it is historically noted that more than 90 percent of members are male (Esbensen 2007). Mentioning of female gang members mostly occurred when discussing their engagement in sexual activities or tomboy behavior. They were rarely considered as part of the gang

(Esbensen 2007). Further explanation of female presence in gangs will be discussed in a later section.

### *History*

When reviewing the history of gangs in the United States, the first sign of gang activity began after the American Revolution, around 1783 (Howell and Moore 2010). The growing presence of gangs came out of the different waves of immigrants and the extreme poverty of their surroundings. Historically, gangs have a propensity to develop during social transformations and political instability. Gangs tend to be more prominent in urban communities that are experiencing unemployment and economic distress (Esbensen et al. 2007; Spergel 1990). While this characteristic is true of most gangs, it is essential to note that gangs can now be found in rural areas and members come from different socio-economic levels.

While gangs have similar developmental characteristics, there is a difference between how the Northeast and West Coast gangs were first formed. The Northeast gangs developed in three waves, the first wave began after the American Revolution ended and consisted mostly of non-criminal youth groups fighting over neighborhood territories. However, in the 1820s the increase in Irish immigrants to the Five Point district in Manhattan brought about more serious gangs due to the consistent disorder of society (Kinnear 1996). Gangs such as Forty Thieves and the Five Points gang came out of this first wave and were seen as influential to the evolution of gangs (Howell and Moore 2010). The second wave began around 1880 with appearance of more Polish, Italian, Jewish and Chinese immigrants (Kinnear, 1996). Due to the influx of immigrants,

there was not enough sufficient housing available to the immigrants. This caused more conflict over territory and allowed gangs to become more established in their communities. The final wave is when most of the African American and Hispanic gangs began developing. This wave came about in the 1950s due to Caucasian opposition to the integration of African Americans and Hispanics. The gangs were created as a form of protection and were mostly located in public housing areas (Howell and Moore 2010).

When it comes to gangs on the West Coast, signs of arrival began around the 1890s (Howell and Moore 2010). There were also three phases of gang development with Hispanics dominating the first two and the African Americans becoming prominent in the third. Most of the gang activity can be traced to the arrival of Mexican immigrants which was greatly impacted by the Mexican Revolution. Although the gangs were small to begin with, they were involved in violence and destruction in their neighborhoods. Conflict with law enforcement and other gangs caused the Mexican youth to become very territorial of their *barrio* (Gillig and Cingel 2004; Howell and Moore 2010). The increase in conflict combined with the negative influence from the media spurred iconic incidents, such as the Zoot Suit Riots and the Sleepy Lagoon murder, which shaped how Mexicans were treated (Lucas 2009). The discrimination that they faced helped to turn the gang from a social group to a violent gang. African American gangs were first seen around the 1940s in response to the violence and resistance shown to them by Caucasian groups (Howell and Moore 2010). African Americans formed clubs as a result of this hostility in order to provide a sense of protection. As the hostility continued into the 1950s the African American gangs became more violent than those in the 1940s. The newer, more

aggressive, African American gangs soon adapted the Hispanic characteristic of protecting gang territory (Howell and Moore 2010).

### ***Traditional vs. Contemporary gangs***

In keeping with the history of gangs, it is necessary to look at the development of the gangs. By comparing new generation gangs and old generation gangs, we will be able to view their differences and similarities. Sheldon et al (2004) states that, youth gangs are a new strain of gangs and the differences can be seen in the gang's behaviors and methods of activities. In the last few decades gangs have become more involved with illegal drug trafficking due to an increase in economic success and positive reinforcement from the gang. Also, gang members are increasingly carrying and using more sophisticated weapons. The relevance and association with female gang members has increased along with the age of the gang member. Members now participate in gangs well into their twenties.

Involvement in and acceptance of drug usage has been increasing over the years. However, the increase varies among the different drugs. Marijuana continues to be the most accepted and used drug of choice among gang members. In saying this, over the past two decades the issue of gang membership and illegal drug trafficking has become an important issue (Bjerregaard 2010). When it comes to a possible explanation for an increase in drug trafficking, one is that membership in the gang promotes involvement in drug activities. These activities lead to economic success that can be given back to the gang (Bjerregaard 2010; Decker et al 1998). Essentially, drug trafficking is seen as a

norm among gang members and will continue to have support due to the positive reaction within the gang.

The next difference is the use of more sophisticated weapons. In the 1970s, the availability of guns increased significantly (Shelden et al 2004). Possession of a handgun is more common in the United States than in any other developed nation. Weapon usage among gang members is a regular occurrence. The carrying of weapons can be seen as a means of attaining certain goals such as security, coercion, and destruction (Brennan and Moore 2009; Hepburn and Hemenway 2004). If an individual interacts with others who carry weapons they are likely to have weapons themselves for protection. It provides a sense of security as well as establishes a normative behavior (Brennan and Moore 2009). Along with this, the weapon itself represents a threat and induces fear, often times those who use the gun as a threat do not end up using it to cause physical harm.

Another difference between older generation gangs and more contemporary gangs is the involvement of female members. Shelden et al (2004) state that there are three forms of female involvement: “1) membership in an independent gang, 2) regular membership in a male gang as a coed, and 3) as female auxiliaries of male groups” (Shelden et al 2004: 142). Historically, most females have fallen into the third category, meaning that they were associated with the gang through relationships with the male members. However, now females are joining gangs for many of the same reasons as males. These include need for family-type relationship, authority, safety, fear and respect. While females may not be considered on the same level as the male members, they are still considered members and not just associates.

The final difference is the duration of gang membership. Gang members from past generations of gangs tended to age out of the gang. Once they reach a certain age they would find jobs and start families. As gangs have evolved, there has been an increase in age for many gang members, meaning that they are staying in the game well into their adult years, compared to the gangs that Thrasher studied. This could be due to the lack of economic opportunities, increase of gang members in prison, or increase in criminal sophistication which allows continual opportunity. The main point is that more and more members are staying involved in gang life and activity (Shelden 2004). This increase in gang members is important to the longevity, strength and sophistication of the gang.

### ***African American and Hispanic Gangs***

African American and Hispanic gang members come from communities that are stricken with poverty, social instability, and social isolation. They form due to extreme racial discrimination from their communities and/or other gangs. The gang members come together as a form of self-defense and continue to develop into stronger, more sophisticated entities. While the Hispanic and African American gangs may be from historically similar back grounds and share common characteristics such as protection and pride for their neighborhoods (Coughlin and Venkatesh 2003), each gang has their own set of characteristics that separate them from each other. For example, Shelden et al (2004) state that African American youth are drawn into the gang life because the gang provides a sense of belonging, identity, power, security and discipline. Also, African American gangs tend to be more involved in drug trafficking due to economic survival

(Coughlin and Venkatesh 2003). When it comes to Hispanic gangs family and community relationship are important and span several generations. Hispanic gang members are expected to assist other members in times of need and carry on the name of the neighborhood (Shelden et al 2004).

For the purpose of this study we will look at a specific set of African American and Hispanic gangs. The focus of the African American gangs will be on the Bloods and the Crips since they are represented in the NJSP Gang Survey. It is important to note that since the study is looking at East Coast Bloods it is necessary to state that they are identified and recognized as United Blood Nation (UBN). The UBN was formed in Rikers Island Prison, in New York, and provided protection from the Hispanic gangs in the prison system. They are mostly located on the east coast, mid-atlantic, and the southeast. Unfortunately, the data set does not make the distinction (United Blood Nation (East Coast)).

When it comes to understanding the Bloods and the Crips it is pertinent to understand their history in order to establish their foundation in society and the rivalry that has lasted for several years. Both gangs began in low income housing projects in Los Angeles and they provided African American youth with an identity. The Crips were the first to develop and included a multitude of neighborhoods that came together and “fashioned themselves as the most omnipotent street gang in South Central” (Curetin 2008:357). However, there were some neighborhoods/groups that rejected the Crips but did not have the strength to stand up against them. These groups then banded together and the Bloods were created (Cureton 2008). Due to the creation of the Bloods, the

rivalry between the Bloods and the Crips began and still continues today. During the 1970s the two gangs began to establish their territories by marking them with graffiti symbols (Howell and Moore 2010). The gangs have their own set of characteristics and each gang is associated with particular colors, hand symbol, rules and traditions. Within each gang, Bloods and Crips, there are different gang sub-sets and while there are too many to mention, it is important to note that each subset has identifying characteristics that make them unique.

The Hispanic gangs in this study are 18<sup>th</sup> street, Dominicans Don't Play (DDP), La Mugre, Latin Kings, MS-13, Neta, and Vatos Locos. These Hispanic gangs were reported as being active in New Jersey. While some gangs may not be as well known, others such as MS-13 and Latin Kings are known for their violence and size. Mara Salvatrucha 13, MS-13, is a transnational gang that is well-known in both the United States and Central America. The gang was first noticed in the U.S. in California, in the 1980s, when El Salvadorians escaped from their country due to a civil war. However, they were not received well by the other African American and Hispanic gangs that were already located in that area (Campo-Flores and Romano 2005). Due to the extreme discrimination they received, they began to use violence as self-defense mechanism. They quickly became known for being notoriously vicious when carrying out robberies, homicides and drug distribution (Wolf 2010). When it comes to the Latin Kings, they are considered one of the most organized gangs due to their strong presence in the streets and the prison system. Due to its size it is considered one of the largest Hispanic gangs in Chicago (Brotherton and Barrios 2004; Decker 1998). While these two

gangs are well documented, it is important to reiterate a common characteristic among Hispanic gangs. The relationship with the community and their family is essential to their identity and the importance of this commitment has been passed down through generations (Shelden et al. 2004).

When it comes to African American and Hispanic delinquent gang activity, Howell (1997) states that the gangs tend to specialize in a particular criminal area. Meaning the gang is either significantly more violent or entrepreneurial in their activities. He accredits the increase in entrepreneurial skills of the Bloods and the Crips, to the growth of drug trafficking. Since this claim is over 14 years old, I will be testing to see if the African American gangs in New Jersey follow the same pattern as those that Howell (1997) discusses or if this pattern has changed over the years. For the Hispanic gangs, Howell (1997) claimed that violence tends to be the main activity attributed to the gang (Howell 1997). This is due to the fact that the Hispanic gangs are more likely to protect their neighborhood. For this study, the Hispanic gangs of New Jersey violent crime rates will be tested to see if they are higher than those of the African American gangs. This will determine if New Jersey follows the same pattern outlined by Howell (1997) or if they have evolved to include drug commodity crimes.

### ***Rural vs. Urban***

Results from the National Youth Gang Center report that gangs are present in at least forty-nine states (Esbensen 2007). The residence of a gang, within a state, is often perceived to be within city limits. Essentially, gangs are more prominent in low socio-economic urban areas. However, research from law enforcement surveys shows gang

presence in suburban and rural areas. The spreading of gangs to rural areas could be attributed to the actual migration of gang members, the transfer of gang ideals and symbols, or better economic opportunities (Shelden et al 2004). Other factors that could contribute to gang presence are “poverty, unemployment, the absence of meaningful jobs” in urban communities (Esbensen 2007: 25).

According to Shelden (2004) there are six different factors that may precipitate the increase in gang activity in rural communities (Shelden et al 2004). The first is *displacement* by which urban gang members move to rural areas due to pressure from law enforcement. Next is a situation called *branch office*, which is when a drug operation is established in a rural community. Pressure from police officers is also a factor in creating a “branch office” because it is less likely that police will find the operation in a rural area. The third factor is *creation of a franchise*. This is usually done when a drug dealer from the rural community create a relationship with a gang in an urban community. The fourth factor is *social learning* and it relates to the connections that youth make while they are incarcerated. Youth from rural communities learn about gangs and make connections with those who are in gangs while they are serving time in correctional facilities. Another factor in the rise of gang presence is *urban flight*; this is much like the idea of white flight. Families from urban areas move to rural communities in order to escape the violence in urban communities. Families who are leaving could include youth who are involved in gangs. The final factor is *social reason*, which is attributed to employment or social programs (Shelden 2004:34). These factors help to explain the movement of gangs

from urban to rural communities and provide a foundation for understanding the growing activity of gangs in rural areas.

The National Gang Center 2004-2006 data shows that 43.6% of rural law enforcement report having African American gangs present in their communities (National Youth Gang Survey Analysis, 2009). With the increase in gang migration to rural communities, I wanted to see if the state of New Jersey demonstrates the same or similar rural migration pattern among the African American and Hispanic gangs. The counties, in accordance with the U.S. Census, will be used to determine which areas are considered rural and which are urban.

### ***Conflict Theory***

As a well grounded theory in the areas of criminology and sociology, the concepts and ideas of conflict theory are beneficial when understanding gang members and their activities. Specifically, conflict theory has the ability to explain why individuals become involved with crime and how criminal groups form. Before discussing how conflict theory relates to gangs, gang activity, and race it is important to discuss the foundations of the theory. The theories origin is accredited to the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The theory focuses on the struggle and differences between those who have power and those who do not (Lilly et al 1989). There are a few core concepts that need to be identified. To begin, society is controlled by those groups who have the most power and resources. Once this group proves its dominance over another group, they begin to exercise their power in order to reinforce their higher status. Along with this power comes that ability to control lawmakers, laws, and law enforcement. These new laws are

in favor of and serve the purpose of those in power. Therefore, the laws will inevitably provide a harsher punishment to those who are not in the powerful group (Petrocelli et al 2003; Colvin and Pauly 1983; Williams 1977).

As the theory continues to progress, we begin to see an increase in literature relating conflict theory to crime. Due to the division that develops between the different classes, powerful and powerless, crime will inevitably exist because of the inconsistency between the classes. Those who hold the power define the parameters of a criminal act. Thus, the law will continue to expand based on rulings of those in power in order to keep order and compliance in the lower classes (Chambliss 1975). Those groups that are seen as culturally different from the powerful are especially viewed as threats to the order of society. In the United States, racial minorities are seen as a threat and therefore tend to experience a great presence of law enforcement in their communities (Petrocelli et al 2003). At the same time, there are some instances in which a group of lower class individuals come together to ask for changes in the laws. For example groups who want to change the law based on reasons of ethics, equal rights groups, or those who create conflict through riots or revolutions (Chambliss 1975).

When it comes to incorporating conflict theory and gangs, the ideas discussed above can be utilized. Many gangs develop out of low-socioeconomic communities where resources are scarce. Gang members join in order to feel acceptance and connect with those who are experiencing the same pressures from the powerful. In these particular communities, law enforcement presence is a regular occurrence, which serves as a constant reminder that they are under the watchful eye of those in power. Being seen as a

minority group and coming from poverty, African American and Hispanic gang members are considered more of a threat to those who control the law. Conflict theory also provides a reason for gang criminal activity. As stated above, the conflict between the different classes causes friction which can lead to a rebellion. This rebellion can lead to violent criminal activities which is a way for the gang to show the power they have in a particular community and over other gangs. In order for a gang to function and exist, it must create its own power and another way this is done is through economic resources. However, due to the poor economy and the lack of employment opportunities gang members are turning to illegal activities to obtain economic success. These concepts, rebellion and economic success, support the ideas put forth in the earlier sections which state that African American and Hispanic gangs are involved in drug trafficking and violent crimes. Essentially, it could be argued that gangs participate in criminal activity for survival. Gang members are not only expected to follow the laws set forth by those in power but they must also follow the laws set forth by those in power within the gang. However, the laws that are set are very different which causes a rebellion against the powerful and creates an allegiance to the gang. Based on this theory and the concepts of rebellion and economic success, the hypotheses and research questions will include different drug trafficking and violent crimes that are associated with gangs.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

After reviewing the literature and applying the idea of conflict theory, that gangs develop and create conflict due to the lack of power and resources available to them, there are three main research questions and seven hypotheses that are addressed in this study. The first research question is a general question that relates to the respondents responses about gang presence in their municipality. The question asks: *What is the distribution of African American and Hispanic gangs in New Jersey?* The purpose of this question is to examine the state of gangs in New Jersey as a whole and see how many municipalities report having only one particular race of gang present or both gangs present in their jurisdiction. By looking at the distribution between African American and Hispanic gangs one can determine which race of gangs is most prominent in the state of New Jersey. The answers to this question will then be used to help answer the other two research questions.

The second question focuses on the idea that one of the main characteristics of a gang is the criminal behavior of the members; however this characteristic can vary across the different races of gangs. To test if there is a difference between African American and Hispanic gangs, the research question asks: *Is one gang more likely to be associated with a particular crime?* These particular crimes are separated into two categories, violent and drug crimes. To be more specific about the criminal activities, violent and drug related crimes are broken down into three categories each. Violent crimes encompass aggravated assault, homicide, and armed robbery. Drug crimes will include the selling of marijuana, cocaine and heroin. Since African American gangs have

historically been more involved in illegal drug trafficking, the following three hypotheses test if that is the case for African American gangs in New Jersey (Coughlin, 2003; Howell, 1997).

Hypothesis One: African American gangs are more likely to be involved with marijuana trafficking relative to Hispanic gangs.

Hypothesis Two: African American gangs are more likely to be involved with cocaine trafficking relative to Hispanic gangs.

Hypothesis Three: African American gangs are more likely to be involved with heroin trafficking relative to Hispanic gangs.

According to the literature, Hispanic gangs engage in more violent crimes than African American gangs (Wolf 2010; Howell 1997). Therefore, the next three hypotheses were created based on the idea that Hispanic gangs have a violent and vicious reputation when it comes to carrying out many different types of crimes (Wolf 2010).

Hypothesis Four: Hispanic gangs are more likely to be involved in aggravated assault crimes relative to African American gangs.

Hypothesis Five: Hispanic gangs are more likely to be involved in homicides relative to African American gangs.

Hypothesis Six: Hispanic gangs are more likely to be involved in armed robberies relative to African American gangs.

The final research question for this study focuses on the type of areas that are reporting the most gang presence. The literature suggest that gangs are beginning to move

towards more rural areas, with this being said the third research question is: *Are African American or Hispanic gangs more likely to be located in urban or rural communities?*

This purpose of this question is to establish which areas in New Jersey, rural or urban, have the most gang activity and which race of gang is more present. This question will take into account demographic data, from the U.S. Census Bureau, pertaining to the particular county, which will provide characteristics for gangs that have formed in certain communities, since gangs are growing and spreading into many different areas and communities (Esbensen 2007; Shelden 2004).

Hypothesis Seven: African American gangs are more likely to be located in rural areas relative to Hispanic gangs.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Data*

The New Jersey State Police (NJSP) Gang Survey was originally created in response to the National Youth Gang Center's (NYGC) survey in hope that the surveys could be used in comparison against one another. The NJSP Gang Survey was first administered in 2001 to 206 respondents, which included municipalities, offices of county prosecutors, and sheriff departments (New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety 2008). The outcome of the survey proved to be beneficial when understanding gang composition and activities. As a result, the survey is administered every three years. The year that this study focuses on is the NJSP Gang Survey 2007. While some of the 2001 survey's original questions remain, others have been revised or taken out and replaced with questions that focus on specific gangs. The NJSP Gang Survey 2007 contains a main survey that is administered to all municipalities and sub-surveys that ask questions about specific gangs. The purpose of the main survey is to collect the demographic information from the different municipalities. Also, the answers from the main survey determine which sub-survey the respondent takes. The sub-surveys were designed to gather more in-depth data about the different gangs in New Jersey. This survey includes information concerning the different sub-groups and possible criminal activities of the gang. Both survey's are multiple-choice based questionnaire and are accessed through the internet. They are administered in person by an interviewer and given to the person within the municipality who is deemed most knowledgeable about gangs. The interviewer connects them to the survey, which is password protected, and is

present to answer any questions from the respondent (New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety 2008). All 566 New Jersey municipalities were eligible to participate in the study and a total of 562 responded to the survey (New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety 2008).

### ***Measures***

The variables for this study were taken from the two different surveys, main and sub-surveys, and chosen based on their relevance to the hypotheses and research questions. To obtain consistency with all of the variables, the responses will be recoded so that yes=1 and no=0. By adapting a specific set of codes it will make for less confusion when processing results.

*Gang Presence.* The presence of street gangs is an essential component of this study. This variable was derived from the main survey and utilized when examining which municipalities reported having gangs in their jurisdiction. In doing this, I am able to work with only the variables that answered yes to having gang presence. This variable was originally coded as a string variable; however, through a process of recoding I was able to convert it to a numeric variable. After this conversion takes place the variable is renamed *gangpresence*. In order to stay consistent with the preset coding, the responses are recoded so that 1= yes, there are gangs present in the jurisdiction and 0= no, there is no presence of gangs in the jurisdiction

*County Gang.* Specifically for the final research question, the dependent variable is county gang. County gang represents the type of gangs located within the particular municipalities with respect to race. Specifically, if there is a presence of only African

American gangs, only Hispanic gangs or both. By utilizing a series of “if, then” statements in SPSS, I was able to combine the African American presence and Hispanic presence variables. The final responses were coded so that 0=no gangs in the municipality, 1=only African American gangs in the municipality, 2= only Hispanic gangs in the municipality, and 3= both African American and Hispanic gangs in the municipality.

*Drug Trafficking Crimes: African American Marijuana/Cocaine/Heroin, Hispanic Marijuana/ Cocaine/Heroin.* To begin the dataset preparations, all necessary variables needed to be converted from a string variable to a numeric variable. This process was done using an automatic recode option available in SPSS. When looking at the responses to the question of does the gang participate in a particular drug crime, there are three drug areas that are focused on. These areas are marijuana, cocaine, and heroin; however, each is separated into three levels: retail, midlevel and wholesale. Due to this, these choices needed to be combined into one variable. This was done by utilizing a compute function in SPSS. This function allowed me to create a new variable that would encompass the three different levels of drug trafficking by adding them together. Once this was completed the responses were recoded so that 0=no drug commodity involvement and 1=some kind of drug commodity involvement.

*Violent Crimes: African American Aggravated Assault/Homicide/Armed Robbery Hispanic Aggravated Assault/Homicide/Armed Robbery.* The variables for violent crimes were handled in a similar manner as the drug trafficking variables. To begin they were converted from string variables to numeric through the process of automatic recoding.

Once this was completed the variables were computed using a function in SPSS that combined them based on their race, either African American or Hispanic. This allowed for the creation of two variables per violent crime: for example African American Aggravated Assault and Hispanic Aggravated Assault. The responses for these variables were coded in the same manner as the other variables in the study, 0=no involvement and 1=yes there is involvement.

*Urban/Rural Residence.* The relevance of this variable becomes apparent when analyzing the third research question and the final hypothesis. The residence variable is an independent variable that looks at whether the county is located in a rural or urban area. The information for this data was gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. Census only specified to types of areas, rural and urban. It provides a list of Urban Areas and Urban Clusters and after reviewing them I was able to determine which areas fell into the two categories. The residence variable was then created with the response coding being urban area=1 and rural area=0.

Once the process of conversion and recoding was completed the variables that have been manipulated were transferred to a new dataset. Thus, all of the essential variables from both surveys, main and sub-surveys, are in one place. This is done by saving the specified variables under another name. Once this has been done the different shortened data sets are merged. The datasets were merged based on two identifying variables. These variables are the county codes and the municipal codes, specifically written as county\_codes and muni\_codes respectively. The cases were first sorted by the county code and then the municipal code; from here they are merged into one data set

using a function available in SPSS. This combined all of the data and created a new data set, which was easier to work with because all of the variables are now in one place and specified by gang.

## RESULTS

### *Univariate*

When assessing the first research question which concerns police perceptions of gang distribution, a frequency table was constructed (Table 1). The frequencies show that, out of a total of 562 respondents, 43.7% reported having gang presence in their jurisdiction while 56.3% reported no gang presence. In relation to this, I wanted to establish the racial distribution among the municipalities.

**Table 1: Frequency Statistics- Gangpresence**

<b>Gangpresence</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
No Gang Presence	313	56.3%
Gang Presence	243	43.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Table includes all municipalities that responded

The gangs chosen for this study were separated by their racial composition into their two groups, African American and Hispanic, which were then analyzed to determine their frequency. The data shows that out of the 43.7% that reported having gang presence in their municipality, 54.9% (118 municipalities) stated that they have both African American and Hispanic gang presence in their municipality.

**Table 2: Frequency Statistics- Countygang**

<b>Countygang</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
No African American or Hispanic Gangs	20	9.3%
Only African American	67	31.2%
Only Hispanic	10	4.7%
Both	118	54.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Table includes only municipality responses to African American and Hispanic Gangs

Over half of the respondents, that claim to have gang presence in their jurisdiction, reported having both races of gangs present. Out of the remaining counties that have gang presence, 31.2% (67 municipalities) have only African American gangs present while 4.7% (10 municipalities) report only Hispanic gangs. The final 9.3% of respondents state that they have neither race of gang in their jurisdiction. It is important to note that several gangs were listed in the NJSP Gang Survey. However for this study only those gangs classified as African American or Hispanic, by the NJSP Gang Survey, were utilized. That is, 9.3% may have gangs in their area just none that fall under the two race categories for this study.

The final frequency table (Table 3) that was conducted, portrays the results of the municipalities locations by reporting how many are considered rural or urban based on

the U.S. Census definition. The results show that 540 municipalities are considered rural while only 22 are urban, based on the definition provided by the U.S. Census.

**Table 3: Frequency Statistics- Residence**

<b>Residence</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
Rural	540	96.1%
Urban	22	3.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Table includes results for all municipalities

### *Bivariate Analysis*

The next three hypotheses, in combination with the second research question, incorporate the ideas surrounding current illegal drug trafficking. To reiterate, these results are based only on the number of responses from those who claimed to have a gang presence in their jurisdiction and have drug related crimes associated with gangs. For this reason, the total numbers will be different from the total number of municipalities. For hypothesis one concerning marijuana, the data was examined with respect to the null hypothesis equaling no association and the alternate hypothesis that African American gangs are more likely to be involved in marijuana trafficking. The frequency distributions results are shown in Table 4 along with the mean level of involvement for each race of gang.

By looking at the mean levels for marijuana trafficking, we see that the mean for African American (1.0509) is larger than the mean for Hispanics (0.5321). For further validation of these means, an independent mean t-test was conducted using the mean values for each racial group.

**Table 4: African American and Hispanic Drug Trafficking: Marijuana**

	<b>African American</b>		<b>Hispanic</b>	
<b>Number Valid</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
0 - 0.4	63	29.20%	81	56.60%
0.5 - 0.9	17	7.90%	18	12.60%
1.0 - 1.4	69	31.90%	26	18.20%
1.5 - 1.9	16	7.40%	9	6.30%
2.0 - 2.4	26	12.00%	5	3.50%
2.5 - 2.9	3	1.40%	1	0.70%
3	22	10.20%	3	2.10%
<b>Total</b>	216	100%	143	100%

**Mean Involvement: African American= 1.0509 Hispanic= 0.5321**

Based on the results of the t-test (t-value=5.910, df=350.34, p-value<.001), I was able to conclude that there is a difference between the two means. Meaning, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean value of African American marijuana drug trafficking involvement and Hispanic marijuana trafficking. Since there is a significant difference I can conclude that African American involvement in marijuana

trafficking is larger than Hispanic involvement. Meaning, African American gangs are most likely to be reported as being involved in at least one level of marijuana trafficking. Therefore, I am able to reject the null hypothesis, which concludes that hypothesis one is supported.

The next hypothesis under the research question concerning drug commodity crime is the trafficking of cocaine, based on the responses from those who claimed to have gang presence. Table 5 displays the frequency results for both African American and Hispanic involvement with cocaine. The mean results for cocaine trafficking are also displayed and we see that the mean cocaine trafficking involvement for African American gangs (0.9326) is larger than the mean involvement for Hispanic gangs (0.4706).

**Table 5: African American and Hispanic Drug Trafficking: Cocaine**

	<b>African American</b>		<b>Hispanic</b>	
<b>Number Valid</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
0 - 0.4	83	38.60%	91	63.60%
0.5 - 0.9	15	7.00%	15	10.50%
1.0 - 1.4	57	26.50%	22	15.40%
1.5 - 1.9	13	6.00%	5	3.50%
2.0 - 2.4	23	10.70%	4	2.80%
2.5 - 2.9	3	1.40%	1	0.70%
3	21	9.80%	5	3.50%
<b>Total</b>	215	100%	143	100%

**Mean Involvement: African American= 0 .9326**

**Hispanic= 0 .4706**

The means for these variables were analyzed in the same manner as the means for hypothesis one. A t-test was conducted to test for a significant difference between the means. The results from this analysis (t-value= 5.034, df=347.26, p-value< .001) conclude that there a significant difference between the mean values of cocaine trafficking. African American gangs are perceived as being significantly more involved in cocaine trafficking than Hispanic gangs. Therefore, African American gangs are more

likely to be reported for participating in at least one level of cocaine trafficking. These results allow one to reject the null hypothesis and are consistent with hypothesis two.

For the final section concerning drug trafficking, heroin is the last drug that was assessed. The results for this variable were achieved in the same manner as the previous two hypotheses. In the relation to the previous results, the heroin trafficking mean result for African American (0.4741) involvement is larger than those for Hispanic (0.2774) gangs.

**Table 6: African American and Hispanic Drug Trafficking: Heroin**

	<b>African American</b>		<b>Hispanic</b>	
<b>Number Valid</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
0 - 0.4	147	69.30%	113	78.40%
0.5 - 0.9	6	2.80%	8	5.50%
1.0 - 1.4	29	13.70%	13	9.00%
1.5 - 1.9	7	3.30%	3	2.10%
2.0 - 2.4	10	4.70%	6	4.20%
2.5 - 2.9	2	0.90%	0	0.00%
3	11	5.20%	1	0.07%
<b>Total</b>	212	100%	144	100%
<b>Mean Involvement:</b>	<b>African American= 0.4741</b>		<b>Hispanic= 0.2774</b>	

An independent sample t-test was then conducted to determine if the means were significantly different. The results (t-value: 2.587, df= 353.66, p-value < .05) demonstrate

a significant difference between the means. There is a statistically significant difference between the involvement of African American heroin trafficking and Hispanic heroin trafficking. Therefore, African American gangs are more likely to be reported for participating in at least one level of heroin trafficking, while virtually no respondents reported Hispanic gangs being involved. Since the difference is significant and African Americans have a higher mean involvement, the results support the hypothesis.

To continue with research question two, the next set of hypotheses look at the violent crimes that involve gangs. Again, these results are based on the response about African American and Hispanic gangs from those municipalities that claim to have gang presence and violent crimes associated with the African American and Hispanic gangs. Specifically, these crimes are aggravated assault, homicide and armed robbery. These violent crimes were compared based on racial composition of the gang, African American or Hispanic, in order to determine which gang police recognize as the most likely to be associated with the crimes.

For the first violent crime variable, armed robbery (See Table 7), the results include the mean values for each racial group. The African American mean (0.4312) is larger than the Hispanic mean (0.2571). A t-test was then conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between the means

**Table 7: African American and Hispanic Violent Crime: Aggravated Assault**

	<b>African American</b>		<b>Hispanic</b>	
<b>Number Valid</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
0 - 0.4	108	49.50%	101	69.70%
0.5 - 0.9	32	14.70%	19	13.10%
1	78	35.80%	25	17.20%
<b>Total</b>	218	100%	145	100%

**Mean Involvement: African American= 0.4741 Hispanic= 0.2774**

Based on the results (t-value= 3.866, df=338.25, p-value< .001), I conclude that there is a significant difference between the mean results of African American and Hispanic gang involvement in aggravated assault. However, since African American gangs have a higher mean, they are more likely to be reported as being involved with this type of crime, while Hispanic gangs are rarely being reported. These results do not support the hypothesis that Hispanic gang are more likely to be involved with aggravated assault crimes.

The fourth hypothesis took into account the perception of gang involvement in homicides (See Table 8). The hypothesis is centered on the idea that Hispanic gangs are more likely to be involved with homicides. However, after the frequency test was conducted, the mean value for African American (0.0968) was higher than the mean for Hispanic (0.0249) involvement.

**Table 8: African American and Hispanic Violent Crime: Homicide**

	<b>African American</b>		<b>Hispanic</b>	
<b>Number Valid</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
0 - 0.4	186	85.70%	142	97.90%
0.5 - 0.9	20	9.20%	1	0.70%
1	11	4.80%	2	1.40%
<b>Total</b>	217	100%	145	100%
<b>Mean Involvement:</b>	<b>African American= 0.0968</b>		<b>Hispanic= 0.024</b>	

An independent t-test was calculated to determine if there was a significant difference and the results (t-value= 3.518, df=341.30, p-value < .001) show that there is a significant difference between the mean for African American and Hispanic gangs. It is important to note that the African American mean is larger, which means that law enforcement is more likely to report African American gang involvement in homicides, while barely any respondents reported having Hispanic gang involvement. Therefore, the results do not support the hypothesis that Hispanic gangs are more likely to be involved in homicides.

The final section under the second research question is the hypothesis concerning armed robbery. The hypothesis concludes that Hispanic gangs are more likely to be involved with armed robbery than African American gangs. Table 9 outlines the frequency analysis for all those who reported a gang presence. The results find that the

mean for African American gangs (0.2936) is larger than the mean for Hispanic gangs (0.0922). In keeping with the pattern of the previous hypotheses a t-test was conducted to ensure that there was a significant difference between the mean value of African American and Hispanic armed robbery.

**Table 9: African American and Hispanic Violent Crime: Armed Robbery**

Number Valid	African American		Hispanic	
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
0 - 0.4	136	62.40%	131	90.30%
0.5 - 0.9	36	16.50%	9	6.20%
1	46	21.10%	5	3.40%
<b>Total</b>	218	100%	145	100%

**Mean Involvement: African American = 0.2936**

**Hispanic= 0.0922**

Based on the t-test results (t-value=5.963, df=353.78, p-value< .001), I conclude that there is a significant statistical difference in the mean values of African American and Hispanic armed robbery involvement. Since the mean value for African American involvement is larger, African Americans are more likely to be reported as being involved in armed robberies while barely any respondents reported having Hispanic gang involvement in armed robbery. These results do not support the hypothesis.

*Cross Tabulation (Crosstabs)*

The final hypothesis, with regards to the third research question, was assessed using cross tabulations. To reiterate, the dependent variable is the racial composition of

the individual municipalities. The responses for this variable are no African American or Hispanic gangs, only African American, only Hispanic, or both gangs present. The independent variable used in the cross tabulation analysis was the *residence* variable. This variable was derived from the U.S. Census definition and data results for the state of New Jersey. The Census data was instrumental in identifying a respondent municipality as being a rural or urban community.

The crosstab results are based on gang presence in the rural and urban areas (Table 10). To reiterate hypothesis seven states that, African American gangs are more likely to be located in rural areas. Also, these results include only the responses about African American and Hispanic gangs from those municipalities that originally said they had gang presences. Due to this the total for this cross tabulation analysis is out of 215 municipalities. For the respondents in the category “none”, they do not have an African American gang or Hispanic gang presence in their municipality; however it does not mean that they have no gangs. For those reporting only an African American gang presence in their municipality, the data shows that rural areas are more likely to report having African American gangs.

**Table 10: Crosstabs Gang Presence Based on Residence**

<b>Countygang</b>	<b>Residence</b>	
	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>
<b>None</b>		
Count	19	1
Percentage	9.20%	12.50%
<b>Only African American</b>		
Count	67	0
Percentage	32.40%	0%
<b>Only Hispanic</b>		
Count	9	1
Percentage	4.30%	12.50%
<b>Both</b>		
Count	112	6
Percentage	54.10%	75.00%
<b>TOTAL</b>		
Count	207	8
Percentage	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Table totals based on responses pertaining to African American and Hispanic gangs

While the rural areas tended to report only having African American gangs, they also are more likely to report having only Hispanic gangs. The final area of interest for gang presence is which area is most likely to have both gangs presence. The data show that urban municipalities are more inclined to report having both gangs present.

After reviewing the results in Table 7, the Chi-squared value ( $\chi^2=4.394$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p>.10$ ) was not significant. However, even though the Chi-squared is not consistent with the results, the pattern of the results is consistent with the hypothesis and literature. Since the surveyors received results from all but four of the municipalities in New Jersey, the results are still informative regarding the distribution of gangs in New Jersey

municipalities. I found that overall African Americans (86.5%) are more likely to be reported in rural areas compared to Hispanic gangs (58.4%). For urban areas Hispanic gangs (87.5%) are slightly more prevalent than are African American gangs (75%).

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to look at the differences in police perceptions of African American and Hispanic gangs with respect to violent and drug commodity related crimes. The ideas expressed through conflict theory were pertinent when interpreting these results. The criminal activities of these gangs can be explained by their low socioeconomic standing, their need for economic success in order to obtain power in their community and their rebellion against the laws set forth by society. The research questions and hypotheses were developed to incorporate all necessary variables for this research. To reiterate, the first general research question is, *What is the distribution of African American and Hispanic gangs in New Jersey?* Through this research question I was able to conclude that 43.2 percent of participating New Jersey municipalities have some form of gang presence that is known to the local police. In accordance with this, out of those who claimed to have a gang presence a little over half state that both African American and Hispanic gangs are present. These two findings are beneficial because the first six hypotheses look at the mean values of drug-related and violent crimes based on the mean values of those who reported having both gangs in their community.

The outcome for the crime related research question, *Is one gang more likely to be associated with a particular crime*, the hypotheses produced mixed results; however, all of the results are supported by the concepts related to conflict theory. The hypotheses that incorporated the drug trafficking crimes of marijuana, heroin and cocaine, were all supported by the results. African American gangs are more likely than Hispanic gangs to be reported as having at least one level of involvement in marijuana, cocaine and heroin

trafficking. In relation to this, the hypotheses concerning violent crime involvement produced the same results. The data concluded that African American gangs are more likely to be reported as being involved in aggravated assaults, homicides, and armed robberies. However, these results did not support the original hypotheses. The overall results showed that African American gangs in New Jersey were more likely than the Hispanic gangs to be reported as being engaged in violent and drug related crimes. When I compared the results to the claims made by Howell (1997), over 14 years ago, we see that his claim that African Americans are entrepreneurial is consistent with the New Jersey gangs. However, they are also more likely to be involved in violent crimes. Therefore, the gangs that are covered in the New Jersey State Police Gang Survey are more evolved than those discussed by Howell (1997) because they are not only involved in drug trafficking but also violent crimes.

The final research question concerns the location of gangs. The question asked, *Are African American or Hispanic gangs more likely to be located in urban or rural communities?* The hypothesis concerning rural and urban areas was the most difficult to analyze. Due to the lack of information regarding urban areas of New Jersey a cross tabulation was used to analyze the data. While the chi-squared results for gang presence in rural and urban areas was not significant the results are still worth reporting due to their pattern consistency. The results show that rural areas are more likely to report having African American gang presence. Therefore, the hypothesis seven, that African American gangs are more likely to be reported in rural areas, was supported by the data. Also important to note is that both African American and Hispanic gangs were found in

the rural municipalities of New Jersey. These results can be beneficial to research concerning gang location because it provides support to the pattern of migration that is developing.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

During data analysis, there was one major limitation and it is that the survey responses were based on of perceptions from police officers. While there could be truth to these perceptions it is difficult to know if they are accurate. We are unsure if those who reported having no gang presences at all are correct or if they are simply covering up the problem. Over or under-estimating the problem is a concern when looking at the data. Also, there was no control or consistency when it came to who filled out the survey. For the past NJSP Gang Surveys, the person who filled out the survey was the person who participated in a gang awareness training program, however that was not the case for the NJSP 2007 Gang Survey. Therefore, it is not clear whether or not the person who filled out the survey was the most qualified to answer the questions.

The results of this study provide information about the difference between African American and Hispanic gangs on three levels: violent crimes, drug trafficking, and gang location. While the results did not support all of the hypotheses, the information proves important because it contradicts our original thinking. This could fuel other researchers into discovering whether or not different states follow the same patterns as New Jersey. Other future research in this area could expand upon the different criminal behaviors that were tested as well as compare the two races of gangs to a new set of criminal acts. In doing this, the literature would be expanded to include more studies that

look at the comparison and difference of African American and Hispanic gangs as opposed to just keeping them all in one category. In relation to this, other races of gangs could be used for comparison, such as Chinese gangs, which would allow for an expansion of the gang's literature. A final suggestion for future research is a longitudinal study which would track the migration patterns of gangs over several years. In doing this, researchers and law enforcement will be able to detect patterns in migration and predict future communities that could be at risk.

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