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J. Pablo

Writer, "Bizarre Ride"

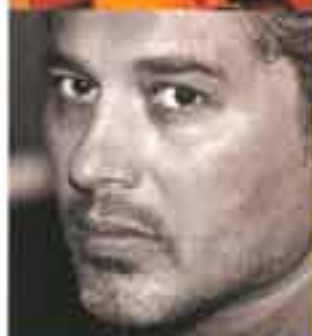
J. Pablo is *The Source's* Researcher Reporter. Residing in NYC since 1993, the 28-year-old writer loves reading up on his city's history. His work has also appeared in the Village Voice, *Wired*, *Blaze* and *Scratch*. When he's not making the most of his hustle, he's in Manhattan's Lower East Side, hanging on the corner.



Jennifer Sexsion

Photographer, Young Boyz

Born in Oakland, CA, the 23-year-old had a lot of gigs, including *El Paso*, *San Diego* and *Los Vegas*. She relocated to NYC to attend the School of Visual Arts where she received her BFA and now co-creates the Big Apple home. She admires the works of Richard Avedon, Mary Ellen Mark, Irving Penn and Albert Watson, and is a frequent contributor to *The Source*.



Lionel Deluy

Photographer, *The Game*

French born photographer Lionel Deluy (www.LIONELDELUY.com) moved to Los Angeles 10 years ago to pursue his dream of being a fashion and celebrity photographer. Now well established and successful, Lionel shot the cover with one of his favorite artists, *The Game*, in Grand Station, downtown Los Angeles.



Alex Alonso

Writer, "Blood Pressure Rising"

Alex Alonso was born in the Bronx, NY, and grew up between New York and Los Angeles. He earned a bachelor's and master's degree from the University of Southern California in '95 and '99, respectively. He has published articles in the *Journal of Urban Geography*, *Criminal Justice News*, and on his website, www.threepeeps.com.



P. Frank Williams

Writer, "All Eyes on Me"

Enjoying a TV Producer and writer life, Hip Hop purveyor P. Frank Williams has got it work since the early 1990s. As the former Executive Editor of *The Source*, Williams wrote the cover stories on Suge Knight, Tupac and Dr. Dre. Currently, he writes and produces for TV shows such as *Hip Hop Flavor* on VH1, *NAACP Image Awards* on Fox, and is also a producer for BET News in LA.

BLOOD PRESSURE



WORDS ALEX ALONSO

RISING

WHAT STARTED IN LOS ANGELES AS A LOCAL GANG HAS SPREAD ACROSS THE COUNTRY AT AN ALARMING RATE. BUT WHAT ROLE HAS HIP-HOP HAD IN THIS SPREAD, AND WHY HAVE THE BLOODS BECOME THE CULTURE'S LATEST FASCINATION?

TOUTED AS "THE BIGGEST RAP REMIX EVER," THE GAME'S MONSTROUS "IT'S OKAY (ONE BLOOD)" FEATURES NEARLY 25 OF RAP'S MOST RECOGNIZED NAMES. THE TRACK, WHICH BOASTED MCS FROM EVERY REGION, ALSO CARRIES A MESSAGE ABOUT THE PROLIFERATION OF GANG CULTURE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. WHILE IT IS NO SURPRISE TO HEAR WEST COAST MCS LIKE DAZ, KURUPT, WC AND, OF COURSE, SNOOP DOGG TOUT THEIR AFFILIATIONS WITH THE CRIPS, IN MANY WAYS THE SONG IS A MICROCOSM OF THE BLOOD CULTURE'S SPREAD THROUGHOUT BOTH HIP-HOP AND THE NATION. ARTISTS LIKE HARLEM'S JIM JONES AND NEW ORLEANS' LIL WAYNE DROP SOME NOT-SO-SUBTLE HINTS ABOUT THEIR OWN GANG AFFILIATIONS.

During the relatively drama-free BET Hip-Hop Awards held in November at Atlanta's Fox Theater, it wasn't hard to miss Cash Money CEO Baby rocking a Cincinnati Reds hat with a matching bandana around his neck and Lil Wayne waving a red bandana in the air during The Game's live rendition of the song. What the mainstream may miss—but what hip-hop fully understands—is that these red bandanas have become the street identifier of the Bloods, one of the nation's fastest-growing and most dangerous street gangs. So what is the reason behind the fascination with the Bloods and the culture that surrounds them?

PROTECT YOURS

The first major wave of Black street gang activity in L.A. occurred in the 1940s, when thousands of Blacks migrated from the South to fill the labor void created by soldiers leaving for World War II. As Black residents moved into South-Central Los Angeles, they encountered resistance from the majority White population. Racial tension between Blacks and Whites led to the formation of the early Black street gangs, or "clubs."

Under the threat of violence from Whites whenever they ventured outside of traditionally Black areas, Black youths found it necessary to band together for protection from groups like the infamous Spook Hunters, a White club active in the 1950s, who were thirsty for confrontations with Blacks.

The '50s and early '60s saw the phenomenon of "White flight," as Whites left many primarily African-American areas. Around this time, Black clubs like the Slausons, Businessmen and the Gladiators began to engage in rivalries with each other. But by 1965, shortly after the Watts Riots, many of these groups came to a truce through the efforts of community leaders like Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter, who would later go on to head the L.A. chapter of the Black Panther Party. But the tumultuous '60s led to the weakening of the area's Black leadership, as the power structure that had maintained calm within the community disintegrated. Surveillance operations like the federal government-sponsored COINTELPRO disrupted the activities of groups like the Black Panthers and the US Organization. It was during this time that Black gangs made a major resurgence.

BLACK AND BLUE

It was a teenager named Raymond Washington who started the small gang on the Eastside of Los Angeles near 76th Street that would become known as the Crips. Early on, he attempted to consolidate other existing neighborhoods into his gang. Although many neighborhoods jumped on the Crips bandwagon in the early 1970s, several declined to give up their individual identities. Some of those early dissenters included the L.A. Brims, Black P Stones, Bishops, the Athens Boys. The Pirus from Compton initially did join.

By 1972, there were about eight active Crip gangs in Los Angeles and they were gaining media attention because of the violence associated with them. That same year saw their first murder, when 16-year-old Robert Ballou was accosted for his leather coat outside of Hollywood's Palladium nightclub following a concert. This was a turning point in L.A.'s gang history, because for the first time it was clear that the Crips were capable of murder. Three months later, Crips shot and killed L.A. Brim member, 17-year-old Freddy Garrett, a.k.a. Lil' Country, the Crips' first gang-on-gang murder.

The murder of a Brim changed the relationship between the Crips and all non-

Crip gangs in L.A. As the tension escalated, it created a gang rivalry of the likes that the city had never seen. "The Brims don't get enough acknowledgement in the entire Blood process," says retired L.A. County DA/gang investigator Ken Bell. "You hear more about the Pirus, but the Brims were very formidable back in the day. They were always smaller, but they were a bit more organized than some of the other neighborhoods."

FIRST BLOOD

In 1972, the Compton Pirus, started by Sylvester "Puddin'" Scott and Vincent "Tam" Owens, also came into conflict with the Compton Crips. "The Pirus and the Crips were at odds with each other but quite often socialized together," says Twilight Bey, a social intervention specialist who grew up in the gang-affected Circle City Piru neighborhood. "There was a girl that had been dating a member of the Crips and a member of the Pirus, and a fight broke out over that." The incident led the Piru leadership to reconsider their alliance with the Crips; soon after, they became known as the Piru Street Boys. Other neighborhoods were also joining forces against the Crips in an alliance that included Bobby Lavender's the Bishops on Bandera Street, the Bounty Hunters in the Nickerson Gardens housing projects, Eddie Watt's the Brims, and Jan Brewer's the Inglewood Families.

"We were outnumbered by the Crips, and we formed an alliance with the Brims," recalls T. Rodgers, founder of the Black P Stones and author of new book, *Lies My Homeboys Told Me*. "Eventually [we had] an alliance with other neighborhoods who felt threatened by the Crips." It was this group of allies that would come to be known as the Bloods.

The rivalry between the Crips and Bloods exploded, resulting in over 400 murders in the 1970s. By 1978, there were about 15 Blood gangs and 45 Crip gangs throughout Los Angeles. By 1982, Bloods had grown to 46 neighborhoods, and Crips to 109. "Bloods treated each other like brothers, whereas Crips had rivalries amongst each other," says Bey. "Bloods looked after each other like family. They were united."

The war intensified during the 1980s, so much so that the L.A. County jail system created a separate housing section for the Bloods called 4300, better known as the Blood module. The module was designed to isolate Bloods from the Crip-laden general population, or "the mainline." Coincidentally, another term for Bloods, "Darnus" (based on the Swahili word for blood), arose during this time. The term likely became popular as inmates tried to expand their African conscious and study the language while incarcerated. "The Blood module came about because of the constant rat-packing by Crips on fellow Bloods housed in the general population," says Rollin' 20s Blood member Ronald Chatman. "The Bloods

were pulled together and housed in one module for the next decade."

Today there are roughly 70 Blood gangs and 210 Crip gangs in L.A. County. And although the feud between the Bloods and Crips is strong, the number of internal Crip rivalries has grown dramatically. Neighboring municipalities like Pasadena, Inglewood and Compton have large numbers of Bloods, but the gang remains a minority in South Los Angeles, the Eastside and Westside, and there are no Blood gangs in the City of Long Beach.

RED CARPET TREATMENT

With gangsta rap evolving out of L.A., it was inevitable that Bloods would become major players in the world of Hip-Hop. DJ Quik, Mack 10, Marion "Suge" Knight and, most recently, Cedar Block Piru member The Game, have become Hip-Hop notables. Their allegiance to the red side is far from a secret and their popularity has helped the spread of gang culture beyond California. According to the US Department of Justice, Bloods have been reported in over 200 US cities and are proliferating faster than the Crips in certain regions. Partially through the celebrity of gangsta rap artists, L.A. gang culture has become extremely fashionable. Mixed with the ghastly conditions of postindustrial inner-city reality, it can be deadly.

The Bloods first caught America's imagination with DJ Quik's 1991 debut album, *Quik Is the Name*. Quik represented for Tree Top Pirus, a Blood set located in Compton. (According to US Department of Justice figures, TTP is a gang now being reported in 25 different cities across America.) Quik makes a direct reference to his neighborhood, in his 1995 song, "Dollars and Sense," when he says, "Westside trees spraying all of the fleas," a dis to rapper MC Eiht, a rival from the Tragniew Park Compton Crips neighborhood.

DJ Quik later began to distance himself from his gangsta image with the release of the song, "You'z a Gangsta." Many contend that the song also distanced Quik from the murder of a Rollin' 60s Crip member, Kelly Jamerson, which occurred at a Death Row party at Los Angeles' El Rey Theater in 1995. In the song, Quik mentions that he did get into an altercation with MC Eiht, but not with Jamerson. No one has ever been arrested in the stomping death.

Compton-born Marion "Suge" Knight used his MOB Piru Blood affiliation to gain respect as the hard-nosed CEO of Death Row Records. Recent court documents contend Knight used seed money from jailed drug dealer, Michael "Harry O" Harris, a reputed bounty hunter Blood, to co-found Death Row in 1991. Shortly thereafter, Knight used his industry knowledge and his street connections to expand his clout. He pried Dr. Dre away from Ruthless Records, signed superstar Snoop Doggy Dogg and eventually bailed out Tupac Shakur from prison for \$1.4 million to join the label.



LIL WAYNE



MITCHY SLICK



CRIPS BLOODS
MEXICANS
TOGETHER TONI

"SOME PEOPLE WANT TO KEEP IT ORIGINAL. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, YOU CAN'T KILL THE MOVEMENT. EVERYONE KNOWS THAT BLOODS AND CRIPS STARTED IN L.A., BUT IF THEY DO IT IN NEW YORK, COLORADO, VEGAS, I LOOK AT IT AS MORE POWER, I DON'T LOOK AT IT AS A BAD THING."
—GAWTTI OF BOO YA T.R.I.B.E.

Reports claim that Knight openly recruited members from MOB Piru and the neighboring Lueders Park Piru to be employees of Death Row. As one of Hip-Hop's most successful entrepreneurs, Knight's celebrity rose and he didn't shy away from representing his gang affiliation.

But Crips and Bloods commonly work together in the music industry, such as Snoop Doggy Dogg, a Crip from Long Beach, who was safe at Knight's Death Row when he was signed to the label. According to Mitchy Slick, a San Diego-based rapper from the Lincoln Park Bloods, "It's a crazy code we have on the West Coast. It's really unwritten. Muthafuckas really put that gang shit aside, because a lot of Bloods and Crips got to fuck with each other." Slick, who is signed to Angeles Records and is a member of the collective Strong Arm Steady, contends that bangin' can take a back seat to business. "I know Snoop, Kurupt, Bad Azz, Roccett and C-BO and all them dudes are my niggas. It's not just about this red and blue shit."

As Westside Connection, Ice Cube, WC (who has ties to 111 Neighborhood Crips) and Mack 10 (a Blood aligned with Inglewood's Queen Street set) have released two successful and critically acclaimed albums. Mack 10's solo career began with a self-titled album in 1995. A string of marginally successful albums followed before he left Priority records in 2001 and signed with New Orleans-based Cash Money Records.

There it appears Mack's Blood leanings may have rubbed off on a few of the Cash Money staples who appeared draped in red bandanas in the video for *Bang or Ball's* first single, the Dr. Dre-produced "Hate in Your Eyes." These days red hats, red cars and, of course, red flags have become the norm for Cash Money's Baby and Lil Wayne, as witnessed in the video for "Stuntin' Like My Daddy." This begs the question, Are they Bloods? While Wayne has yet to give a straight answer, on "It's Okay (One Blood) Remix," Weezy notes, "I'm bickin' back bein' boof on the Eastside of New Orleans where them Bloods..." In L.A., this is a common phrase where Bloods replace the "C" or "C sound" in words with letter "B."

RISE OF THE BLOODS

While the spread of Crips and Bloods across the country is not a new phenomenon, a new generation taking on L.A. gang identities has given rise to rappers from new locales claiming allegiance. However, there are plenty of other issues that have

contributed to this spread. Crack cocaine trafficking of the '80s was certainly influential in the early migration of L.A. gang members to Las Vegas, Portland, Seattle, Kansas City and St. Louis (recall "My Summer Vacation," from Ice Cube's 1991 classic, *Death Certificate*).

Additionally, the prison system has impacted the spread of gang culture. "When the homies from San Diego went to Youth Authority and to the pen, it just so happened that they hooked up with Bloods from L.A. and they brought that back with them," Slick says of the early San Diego gangs. Now, L.A. gangs are reported in all 50 states.

But there is no greater enclave of Bloods outside California than in New York City, where the Nine Trey Gangsta Bloods have become the dominant street gang. Started in 1993 by Leonard "Deadeye" MacKenzie, aged 26, and fellow inmate O.G. Mack while in New York's Rikers Island Correctional Facility, the Bloods in these areas are arguably more influential than the Latin Kings of the '80s. "I would say in late '94, definitely '95 is when it was spilling over into the streets," says 24-year-old Nine Trey Gangster Blood and rapper El dorado Red, whose mixtape *Paint the Town Red* is currently in stores. "That's when you started seeing niggas coming through with red flags in different neighborhoods and recruiting different niggas."

Some have been very critical of Bloods in other cities. New York rapper Tru-Life, from Manhattan's Lower East Side has been a vocal critic of the gang's growth. At The Roxy nightclub, during a Puerto Rican Day Parade after-party earlier this year, he addressed the crowd, "You heard Game. Blood gangs are L.A.'s shit/You from Harlem, why you on L.A.'s dick?" The taunt was directed towards Harlem's Diplomats, questioning why Cam'ron, Juelz Santana and Jim Jones have embraced the gang.

"Jim Jones is a Nine Trey gangster," says El dorado Red in response to Tru-Life. "That's not a West Coast gang. The only thing that is West Coast is the Blood aspect. If he has a problem with a movement that is not New York based, then he should speak on the Latin Kings. They are originally from Chicago, but I don't hear him saying anything about them."

Others have seen the spread as somehow empowering. "Some people want to keep it original. But at the same time, you can't kill the movement," explains Gawtti, a member of both the rap group

Boo Yaa T.R.I.B.E. and Carson, California's West Side Pirus. "Everyone knows that Bloods and Crips started in L.A., but if they want to do New York, Colorado, Vegas, I look at it as more power. I don't look at it as a bad thing."

But location is not the only criticism. "Bloods in L.A. don't consider [New York Bloods] real," says Jason Brooks, producer of the documentary *Gang Bangin' Fo Life*. "They also call the gangsta rappers from L.A. 'studio gangsters.' Some of them even dissed Game." There has been a long debate on the authenticity of L.A. gangsta rappers because, for some, it is a contradiction to be both a gangsta and a rapper. "For everybody who is getting their money and living a facade, I don't really care. I am cool with that, too," adds Mitchy Slick, who offers up a line from one of his songs to illustrate. "But I'm gonna tell you all my homeboys can vouch for me/I been bangin' on the front line since elementary. Niggas can't say that in their raps."

DEATH SENTENCE

As the growth of L.A. Blood culture continues to expand, it's important to remember the detrimental effects it's had on its birthplace, Los Angeles County. Even today, gang violence continues to tear apart the fabric of the city. A recent resurgence in gang violence is often attributed to those too young to remember the rampant violence of the '80s and early '90s. Estimates report that over 10,000 gang-related homicides have taken place in the Los Angeles area since the early '70s. This number doesn't include countless gang members and innocent bystanders that have been permanently maimed or paralyzed by this type of senseless violence. Still, thousands more are incarcerated from their involvement with illegal gang activities.

Around the country, law enforcement, educators and citizens are concerned with the growth of gangs in their communities. What started out as an urban problem in Los Angeles has penetrated suburban and rural communities around the country. Major cities have seen an increase in juvenile crime. Murder arrests for juveniles in the US increased by 20 percent from 2004 to 2005, and much of that increase has been blamed on gangs. Whether one faults drug trafficking, the prison system or gangsta rap for the spread of L.A. gang culture, there is no question that the logical result of joining a gang is jail or death, not a record deal. **O**