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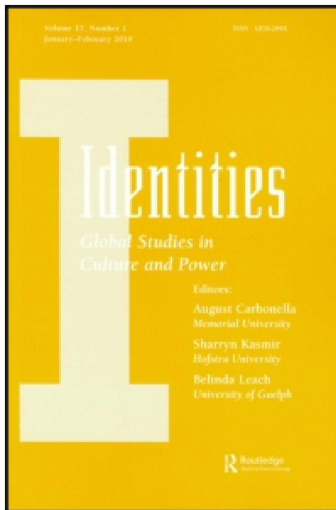

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"As Soon as I Get Out Ima Cop Dem Jordans": The Afterlife of the Corporate Gang

Laurence Ralph[a]
[a] Departments of African and African American Studies and Anthropology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

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"As Soon as I Get Out Ima Cop Dem Jordans": The Afterlife of the Corporate Gang

Laurence Ralph
Departments of African and African American Studies and Anthropology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

Sudhir Venkatesh and Steven Levitt's influential 2000 article transformed the way social scientists study gangs by showing the context in which Chicago gang members built an organization modeled on a corporation. But if this research helped to demonstrate that the underground economy is a logical response to the inner city's isolation from the rest of the country, it also makes it difficult to see that the very same factors that have led to urban decay and "social isolation" (i.e., escalating unemployment, the loss of manufacturing jobs, and the emergence of gangs to fill bureaucratic voids) serve to connect gangs to wider social worlds. This study expands upon recent gang research by detailing the improvisational economic and social practices, as well as the intricate narratives, and the social practices that allow Chicago gangs and their members to access a variety of people, institutions, and resources, while marking the diverse modes of historical consciousness that gang affiliates develop. A gang that I will here be calling the "Divine Aces" forms a powerful case in point. [1]

Key Words: historical consciousness, gangs, urban youth, war on drugs, style, civil rights

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The interview unfolds after hours in a Westside Chicago barbershop, while Red Walker, the tattoo-blanketed leader of the Roving Aces, a sect of the transnational gang the Divine Aces, reminisces about what it has been like to grow up in the organization.[1] Red has been "affiliated" since he was nine years old. Now, as a gang captain, Red feels that his organization's biggest problem is a lack of leadership:

> "When I was growing up, we had chiefs. We had honor. There were rules that Aces had to follow: a code that gang members were expected to respect."
>
> "Like what?" I prod.
>
> "Like. . .if we were shooting dice, and somebody's mom was walking down the street—just got off of work—we would move, out of respect. These kids don't have that kind of discipline. They govern themselves. That's why we call them *renegades*."
>
> "You'll meet a lot of renegades around here," Red continues, "they'll even tell you—'Yeah, I'm just out for self. I'm tryna get *my* paper. Fuck the gang. . .the gang is dead.' They'll tell you, straight up. But, you know

what? *They* the ones that's killing it—them *renegades*. I even had one in my crew," he says, plopping into the vacant barber's chair next to me.

"I'ma tell you this story, cause I like you. You a studious, motherfucka," he jokes. "You know how niggas be in here selling everything, right?—Selling bootleg cable, DVDs, CDs, candy. . .whatever. Well, back in the day, a long, long, long time ago . . . a *long* time ago," he looks at my recorder, then at me, then at the recorder again, "niggas used to sell something the police didn't like us selling, ya-know-what-I'm-sayin' . . .we used to sell. . .*[pause]*. . .muffins. Yeah, we had a bakery in this motherfucka. And cops, they hate muffins, you know that, right?" He winks.

". . .So they would come up in here, they'd snoop around, get they lil' free hair cut, and try to catch someone *eating* muffins or *selling* muffins. But they could never catch nobody with muffin-breath around here. Never."

"Well, one day they hemmed up one of the lil' shorties that worked for me, down the street, with a muffin in his pocket. Now this wasn't even an entire muffin. It was like a piece of a muffin—a crumb. Shorty wouldn't have got in a whole lotta trouble for a crumb, you know? But this nigga sung—didn't even make it to the station. The nigga was singin' so much the cops didn't have to turn on the radio. He told about the *whole* bakery: the cooks, the clients. . .he told on everybody. And I had to do a lil' time behind that. That's why in my new shop," he continues, glaring again at the recorder, "WE-DO-NOT-SELL-MUFFINS-ANY-MORE. But, real talk," he adds, ". . .That's how you know a renegade. . .they quick to snitch. No loyalty. They'll sell you down the river for a bag of weed and some Jordans."

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It would be easy to read Red's story—one, riddled with anxieties about the contemporary moment—as a clichéd complaint about an organization that is unable to reproduce itself according to an idealized conception of the good ol' days. His concern about a generation that lacks the work ethic of members past could be dismissed as rueful nostalgia if it did not mesh so well with prevailing attitudes about gangs that view affiliates as members of an urban underclass with a radically different moral sensibility. The most recent literature on urban life and gang violence has rightly shifted away from the racist presumptions that inner city blacks are predisposed to violent crime. Rather than an index of innate dysfunction, groundbreaking sociological work has argued that deviance is produced through and by social exclusion (Wilson 1987: 60–62; Venkatesh 2006: 18). Indeed, sociologists like William Julius Wilson and Sudhir Venkatesh have been persuasive in accounting for the historical and sociological parameters of black impoverishment in cities like Chicago. Still, emergent new factors exist. The reinvestment in urban spaces through processes of gentrification and the transnational networks of narcotics distribution—not to

mention global consumer products like rap music and shoe advertising, which traffic markers of the inner city (Rose 1994: 40–41; Pattillo-McCoy 1999: 206)—bring questions to bear about the extent to which the "ghetto" is still isolated.

This article complicates strict structural and network analyses of inner-city gang formations by examining how gang members make sense of their own lives and histories. I focus on the young affiliates gang leaders call "renegades" because they supposedly disregard the aspirations of the collective for individual pursuits. Because it is widely held that "renegades only care about gym shoes"—and because the easiest way to tell if someone is, in fact, a renegade is by the sneakers he or she wears—it follows that sneakers provide a useful way to track social aspirations. Despite the prevailing idea that renegades have no sense of history, three years of ethnographic research on the Divine Aces in a community that I call "Eastwood" has instead demonstrated that renegades actively engage possibilities for social advancement in a world defined by failed social movements of the past few decades and the contradictions around crisis and capital that stem from illicit economies from a more recent epoch. Residents of Eastwood—members of local gangs, former gang affiliates, and residents of the neighborhoods they inhabit—all seem convinced that civil rights' promise and crack era loss shape the ideological contours of who and what people in the community think they can and should be.

In the midst of unprecedented rates of death and injury, the anxieties that gang members harbor about the social reproduction of their organization are projected onto the youngest generation of gang members and the globally circulated objects that they consume and produce. When younger members refashion the gym shoes older affiliates like Red used to wear, they are called "renegades" and struggle to understand why the forms of expression that have long been associated with the gang are now objects of charged complaint. The problem—as I explain below—is that many gang symbols have a duplex quality: they articulate notions of social mobility for one generation and simultaneously recall a sense of nostalgia and social cohesion for another.

Gang historicity and the "isolated ghetto"

Sociologists and anthropologists alike have long been concerned to examine the factors that have prevented inner-city residents from developing sustainable institutions. In the decades after the second great migration—which took place between 1940 and 1970—when poverty, unemployment, business failure, and crime swept through many of Chicago's black neighborhoods (Lemann 1992: 81; Wilson

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1996: 29–30), the urban "ghetto" became the quintessential "disorganized society." Based on the assumption that social relations within a neighborhood are supposed to be orderly and recurrent, social scientists regarded urban enclaves as deprived whenever they apparently lacked the networks and norms presumably required for a given community to flourish (Wolf 1982: 11).

More recently, scholars of black Chicago have been concerned to examine the factors that render black urban residents isolated from resources that might otherwise improve their condition. In *The Truly Disadvantaged,* William Julius Wilson (1987: 60–62) discussed the sociohistorical circumstances of black Americans who live in relative remoteness from the surrounding city.[2] Because residents of urban Chicago were unable to find work and suffered from inadequate integration into neighborhood institutions, Wilson characterized them as "socially isolated." He argued that though the middle-class urban residents of the mid-twentieth century provided social controls over unruly and delinquent behavior, they left behind an insulated "underclass" when they fled to neighboring suburbs during the 1970s and 1980s.

Wilson's work was pathbreaking in that it sought to dismantle the racist presuppositions embedded in mainstream sociological scholarship at the time, which suggested that African Americans were predisposed to delinquency and violence (Hagedorn 2007: 17). His work helped to develop a compelling critique of sociological arguments that relied too heavily on notions of pathology as determinants for urban decay. The causes of skyrocketing unemployment rates amongst young black men in the 1980s had less to do with their cultural proclivities, he successfully demonstrated, and more to do with a local shift from manufacturing to service industries.

Despite Wilson's strong critique of cultural explanations for black poverty, a subsequent generation of scholars frequently looked to family and community to explain urban economic crisis. In *The Code of the Street,* for instance, Elijah Anderson contended that two distinct groups inhabit today's inner cities (1990: 37–45). The first accepts the laws and ethical codes of mainstream society, whereas a second group considers education and hard work to be futile. Rejecting social norms, this latter group readily uses violence to resolve interpersonal conflicts.

In response to what has been dubbed a "culture-of-poverty" explanation, Sudhir Venkatesh and Steven Levitt offered a different way to think about gang and community. In a seminal article, "Are We a Family or a Business?: History and Disjuncture in the Urban American Gang," Venkatesh and Levitt showed that, as opportunities for illicit revenue generation opened up in the 1980s, many gang families stood as a variegated "composition of individuals with different biographies,

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relationships to social institutions, and personal interests, the sum of which manifested in cleavages amongst the membership" (2000: 428–429). At the same time, the United States shifted to a postindustrial climate such that gangs struggled to ensure their collective integrity. Gang members now engaged in heated debates about the future outlook of their gang—debates that were influenced by the rise of a "greed is good" corporatist ideology in American society. By addressing the historical dynamics that structure gang activity, Venkatesh and Levitt illuminated the context in which gang members built an organization modeled on a corporation. The underground economy, they demonstrated, is a logical response to the inner city's isolation from the rest of the country.

Following Wilson and Venkatesh, my approach pays close attention to the relationship between sociohistorical change and the way urban residents interpret and internalize these transformations. Yet, in addition to charting the objective conditions that produce urban decay and "social isolation" (i.e., high unemployment, the loss of manufacturing jobs in the inner city, and the emergence of gangs to fill governmental voids in neglected communities), I am also concerned with those dynamics that serve to connect Chicago gangs to wider social worlds. In this way, I seek to trouble the sociological studies of the black "ghetto" (which too often inadvertently overstate how much these enclaves are disconnected).[3] I am instead concerned to trace the improvisational economic practices, the intricate narratives, and the signifying practices that offer Chicago gangs and their members the mobility to access a variety of people, institutions, and resources. Examining these forms of social life helps me mark the diverse modes of historical consciousness that obtain within a street gang.[4]

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Gym shoes and historical consciousness

In Eastwood, gym shoes embody diverse forms of historical consciousness, in part by capturing aspirations for economic control and ownership that resonate with two distinct aspects of the Divine Ace legacy: the first is the civil rights era of the 1960s; the second is related to the heyday of heroin trafficking in the 1980s. For gang members who are forty-something to sixty-something years old, gym shoes signal the end of an era when affiliates pursued grass roots initiatives and involved themselves in protest movements. Meanwhile, for another cohort of gang members who are roughly twenty-five to forty years old, gym shoes connote an era of rampant heroin trafficking, where battalions of young soldiers secured territories within a centralized leadership structure. Throughout the course of the article, I point out

that the distinctions gang members make about their organization's mission are commonly overstated—that is, even when the gang engineered a significant amount of community service initiatives in the 1960s, it was still considered a public menace by politicians and police officers. Likewise, even when the gang formally organized around the drug trade in the 1980s, it never completely abandoned its role as a constructive community institution. Still, many gang members view the "political gang" as disparate from the "criminal gang," and, in this formulation, individual greed and a lack of community mindedness make a convenient alibi for rogue behavior. The fact that the two oldest generations of the Divine Aces hanker for a gang structure in which authority was more centralized places an enormous amount of pressure on the youngest generational cohort, gang members aged approximately between fifteen and twenty-five years old. Gang veterans insist that this group is overrun with disloyal "renegades" who care more about conspicuous consumption than their allegiance to the gang. The renegade and his sneakers thus index the historical transformation of the Divine Aces' organizational form over a fifty-year period.

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Gym shoes as cultural objects

When I first heard older gang members speak about the consumption patterns of the youngest generation, I ignored these complaints, thinking they were no different from the general tendency to dismiss youth as wayward and consumerist (Chin 2001: 4). After conversing with gang elders, however, I realized that the rat's nest of assumptions about poverty, money, and consumption of the inner-city poor was reproduced within the gang itself. To be sure, renegades in Eastwood hold similar opinions of footwear as young people in suburban settings who are not gang affiliated. The kind of shoes they acquire gains a reputation through market capitalism and the promotion of hip hop culture in broader society. Hence, studying gym shoes in this context becomes a way to examine social inequalities that specifically affect youth in low-income areas. In a community like Eastwood, where 75 percent of males between the ages of fifteen and forty-five have a criminal record—and 57 percent of all men and women have been incarcerated—one cannot reduce the suburban student and the urban gang member's predilection toward gym shoes to the same rudimentary obsession. The stakes are higher when one considers, for example, that when juveniles are arrested in Chicago they will be stripped of all material possessions when they arrive in jail *except* for their shoes.

For all these reasons, gym shoes are important cultural objects in present-day Eastwood (see also Pattillo-McCoy 1999: 156–159; Chin

2001: 126–127).[5] Within the Divine Aces' organization, wearing the latest pair of sneakers is the first status marker in the life career of a gang member. From the time a person joins the gang, having a fashionable pair of shoes signals one's rank or station as an affiliate. After members reach their late teens and twenties, success is measured by whether a person can, for instance, afford a nice car, or his or her own apartment. But because most "renegades" have yet to reach that stage, possessing the latest pair of gym shoes is the highest honor other affiliates can expect them to achieve.

Even though their gang leaders claim that the fashion choices of young affiliates derive from mainstream trends—that their style is no longer definitively the Divine Aces' own—gym shoes are the badge of prestige that young gang members covet most. As privileged attributes, renegades speculate about how exclusive a person's shoes are (whether they can be easily purchased in ubiquitous commercial outlets like Foot Locker or only in signature boutiques) or if they are "retro" (models from another era). Often, the more colors and textures that are woven onto the canvas of one shoe, the higher the prestige.

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The "renegade's" top 5

From listening to gang members in informal settings and facilitating focus groups with Divine Ace affiliates, I discovered there were five especially popular forms of footwear among young gang members.

1. "Tims," or Timberland Boots, are the construction boot of choice to tackle Chicago's harsh winters. The tan, "butter-soft" suede with the rubber bottoms and dark brown leather ankle support are staples of any shoe collection (and are typically the first pair of boots someone purchases). If, in addition to the tan, suede Tims, someone has a variety of Tims in other colors, he or she is thought to be an adept hustler in any climate.

2. "Recs," or Creative Recreations, are a relatively new brand of sneakers and are thought to be a favorite amongst young renegades because they come in a variety of bright colors. Usually, multiple textures (e.g., metallics, suedes, rubbers, and plastics) are combined on the synthetic leather canvas of each shoe. "Recs" also have a distinctive Velcro strap that runs across the toe. Considered the "gym shoe-of-the-moment," they are, nevertheless, held in high esteem by young Aces because the most innovative styles only appear in a select few of Chicago's signature boutiques.
3. As the Timberland boot is to the winter, the Air Force One is to the rest of the year—a staple of the "renegade's" collection. If a young gang member has only one pair of gym shoes, it will likely be a pair of "Ones." Although they come in a variety of color combinations, most people begin with either white or black, with the expectation that their collection will grow. Moderately priced, these might be the most popular gym shoes in Eastwood because people try to acquire a vast number of different styles.

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4. Young renegades are also likely to purchase the signature shoe of their favorite basketball player: for some it's Lebron James; for others it will be Kobe Bryant. It is true that one's personal affinity for a particular player can override the aesthetic judgment of his or her friends. Yet, to maximize the accrual of prestige, purchasing a signature shoe entails several calculations, including when they were released, which company manufactures them, and how popular a given player is at the moment. Hence, purchasing a signature shoe is a high risk/high reward proposition. Given the danger that one's signature shoe may prove unworthy of the effort invested in purchasing it, no current player's footwear can surpass the model by which the success of his shoe will no doubt be measured: brand Jordan.
5. "Jordans" or *the* signature shoe: a pair of Jordans are valuable to the young renegade for a number of reasons. First, it is significant that Michael Jordan, considered the greatest basketball player of all time, was a Chicago Bull. Thus, there is often a geographic connection to his apparel. In addition, the risks involved with

> purchasing this particular signature shoe are greatly reduced because Jordan's legacy is cemented in history. Third, since the first pair of shoes one buys are not usually Jordans (because they are so expensive), there is a sense of gratification associated with finally being able to afford a pair (see also Pattillo-McCoy 1999: 156–159).
>
> Moreover, although when the annual Air Jordans are released, youngsters wait for hours in line at the local shoe store, any one of the twenty-three different shoes Nike has released can be purchased online. And they are always in style. Upon sight, a Jordan connoisseur can name the order in which a particular style of Jordans was released. It is for this reason that Jordans are quintessential icons of nostalgia. Older gang members can recall, down to the year (sometimes even the day), when they purchased the exact same model of shoes they currently see young renegades wearing.

In flagging the popularity of gym shoes, I do not mean to overstate the uncritical accusation that young blacks are willing to acquire expensive commodities at the cost of their own (or someone else's) well-being (Chin 2001: 55-56). Despite how much the incessant talk of gym shoes resonates with the perennial anxieties advanced by people of greater status about the group(s) below them, shoe talk has a special salience amongst members of one of America's oldest black street gangs. In what follows, I examine the civil rights-inflected vantage point of a seventy-two-year-old gang member, Mr. Otis, before discussing the investments of the aforementioned, twenty-nine-year-old gang leader, Red Walker. We will see that, whether they are haunted by the Divine Aces' unrealized successes or the height of heroin trafficking in the neighborhood, seasoned gang members seek comfort in the dubious stability that a unified gang structure invokes.

The historicity of the civil rights era

Profile # 1

Name: Otis Ball
Age: 72
Occupation: Gang Prevention Counselor

Otis Ball is in his seventies, but you can scarcely tell: he has very few wrinkles and a full head of hair. He moves in a deliberate fashion, like each step he takes is carefully considered. But this day he spends

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most of his time sitting. His slight hunchback angles him forward so he watches the street intently as if he's being paid for the task. And, in a sense, he is. Mr. Otis works as a counselor at a gang prevention agency, but he has street credentials that date back to the time he spent as a leader of the Divine Aces. He was one of the first members to join the roster in the 1950s, during the second great migration when African Americans moved from the South to Chicago and settled in neighborhoods where European immigrants already lived. Back then, black youths traveled in packs for camaraderie and to navigate an environment full of residents who resented their presence. Because they were known to fight their white peers over access to recreational spaces, the popular image of black gangs emerged as a group of delinquents. Nowadays, Mr. Otis speaks about his youth with a mix of fondness and disdain. The narrative he tells is one of community decline through gang devolution:

> "I'm scared and *I* helped start the gang. *You* should definitely be scared . . . they'll walk up and *take* those shoes off your feet." From Mr. Otis' viewpoint, getting the shoes is just part of the battle—you have to keep them. And, according to gang elders, today's young people are especially eager to take shoes from foes. Tormented by his political past, Mr. Otis relays his frustration about the younger generation by nodding in the direction of the group across the street.
>
> "See, things were different when we were on the block," he continues. "We did things for the community. We picked up trash. . .even had a motto: 'Where there was glass, there will be grass'," he sings whimsically, ". . .and white folks couldn't believe it. The media, they were shocked. Channel five *and* seven put us on the T.V. screen for pickin' up bottles."

In these narratives, Mr. Otis connects the Divine Aces' community service initiatives to the struggles of the civil rights movement. When he was a youngster, Otis was a part of the faction that claimed it wanted to end criminal activity. They hoped their gang could be known for activism instead. This was a moment when criminologists associated with the prison reform movement gained momentum. Researchers would argue that people turned to crime because social institutions had largely failed them (Dawley [1973] 1992: 103; Klein 1995: 83). Given more decision-making power through the use of War-on-Poverty funds, major street gangs became recipients of public and private grants to develop social welfare programs (ibid). Taking advantage of these initiatives, the Divine Aces of the 1960s opened community centers, reform schools, and a number of small businesses and management programs. These initiatives were gaining momentum

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when Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. moved his family to Eastwood (Ralph 1993: 55).

As King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), geared up to take its battle to the streets in May 1966, the focus turned to Chicago's gangs. Some civil rights leaders feared that recent outbreaks of riots in the area might jeopardize their nonviolent campaign. But, after meeting with the Divine Aces, top representatives from the SCLC felt confident that gangs could not only be persuaded to refrain from rioting but that they could be convinced to help calm down matters if there was an issue on their respective turfs (Diamond 2009: 265-267). Soon after the SCLC's arrival in Chicago, gang members were persuaded to participate in the two marches Dr. King led into all-white neighborhoods during the Chicago Freedom Movement's open-housing campaign.

Inspired by the movement, the Divine Aces organized their own platform for political action. They were set to hold a press conference with local media outlets to unveil their agenda on 4 April 1968, the same day King was assassinated. Hours later, Eastwood burst into riots, resulting in devastation from which the neighborhood has yet to recover. Gang elders insist that after the massive fires and looting, the Divine Aces lost most of their power because they could do little to stop the other factions from rioting. Residents in the neighborhood not affiliated with gang life were likewise dismayed, believing that King's murder proved that the injustices the Divine Aces alleged to be fighting were, in fact, intractable. From Mr. Otis' perspective, the disillusionment rendered during the civil rights era serves to explain why gangs wholeheartedly embraced the drug economy.[7]

In actuality, the gang's shift toward illicit entrepreneurialism in the 1980s resonated with systemic transformations in the American social order. The encompassing context was changing in the wake of disinvestment in urban neighborhoods and the transformation in the United States economy from manufacturing to service sector jobs. Opportunities for illicit revenue generation opened up at the same time that opportunities on the legal labor market were eliminated. Furthermore, as members of the Divine Aces debated about the gang's mission, other Chicago gang families began to pull members of the Divine Aces to the Southside with the prospect of earning a lucrative income. Unwilling to be taken over by rival gangs, the Divine Aces ran non-affiliated drug dealers out of their neighborhood and claimed the Westside drug market for their own. When more and more urban youth joined a thriving drug distribution network, the influx of new recruits transformed the public face of the gang into a business-like organization (Venkatesh and Levitt 2000: 430).

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Still, for Mr. Otis, the Divine Aces are as much about their forgotten history of activism as anything else. So, on days when he sits on his porch watching the latest generation of gang members, he feels it his duty to share his take on the local history of civil rights with a novice researcher:

> "Take notes on *that*. Write *that* down. We, the Divine Aces, got money to build a community center for the kids. We was just tryna show 'em all: Gangs don't have to be bad, you know. Now these guys don't have no history. They're 'Anonymous,'" he says sarcastically, making a pun with the name of the faction that stands before us, "the Anonymous Aces."

Otis gazes at the crowd. In front of him, a group of ten or so face each other like an offense about to break huddle. And then they do just that. The quarterback (or gang leader), Kemo, walks toward us, retrieves a cell phone from his car, and then rejoins the loiterers.

> "What about Kemo and 'em?" I ask, referring to the thirty-year-old gang captain and his peers, "Those older guys aren't as bad as the young ones. Are they?"
>
> "Look at 'em," he exclaims, "they all outside, ain't they? Drinking. . . smoking. . .wasting their lives away. They *all* outside," he repeats.

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As I reflect on Mr. Otis' words, I fight the temptation to regard his commentary as some kind of nostalgic yearning for the past, rather than the desire for a different present. In his lamentations about the contemporary state of the gang, structural changes are reduced to bad decision making. Mr. Otis fails to acknowledge that the gang's latter day embrace of the drug economy was not a simple matter of choice. The riots of 1968 also marked the end of financial assistance for street organizations that wanted to engage in community programming (Farmer and Connors 1996: 118 on "structural violence"). These kinds of governmental initiatives were drastically cut in the late-1960s with Richard Nixon's infamous call for "law and order" (Parenti 1999: 6–7). As Nixon spread marvelous portrayals of inner-city danger and helped to fuel a popular American fantasy that out of control urban blacks were hell-bent on destroying the United States, the chimera of black crime signaled a recurring nightmare that the civil rights movement could trigger widespread violence (ibid).

The reality that the gang was, in fact, feared for its revolutionary potential is erased in the history that Mr. Otis resurrects. No one can tell from listening to him that, even during the civil rights heyday, there were gang members who were not at all civic minded and that

a substantial number of gang members were occupied by their own parochial and selfish concerns (Sullivan 1989: 245). Still, whether this conception of a political gang persists, or even if it never existed in the way Mr. Otis imagines, it is deployed nevertheless.

In Eastwood, however, these forms of nostalgia are not unique to politically oriented gang elders. A younger generation is beset by devotion to the era when the Divine Aces organized around the drug economy.

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The historicity of the drug years

Profile # 2

Name: Red Walker
Age: 29
Occupation: Gang Leader/Business Owner/Barber.

> "*Obama? Really?*" Red says as he watches the boy he employs, and pays in free haircuts, sweep loose clouds of hair. "I mean, I ain't got nothin' against the brother: He's black. He's from the Chi. But I ain't finna be walkin' 'round here wit Obama shoes on like the campaign is payin' me." Red is referring to the then-potential presidential nominee's face as it has appeared, in hologram form, on the most fashionable sneakers the young Aces wear—Nike Air Force Ones. "I don't know what Obama's gonna do if he does get elected, but I know this—he can't do *much*," Red asserts.
>
> "See, when I was his age," he continues, again referring to the boy, who has just left, "the *gang* was my *nation*. We were a nation of Aces. I ain't wear no red, white, and blue Nikes with no politicians face on 'em. Nah. We kept it plain and simple. Our flag was orange and blue. Keon Russell Beamer was our President—he put food on our tables, clothes on our back. That's the difference between us and them renegades."
>
> Taking advantage of his longing for a leader, I find this an ideal time to ask him about the differences between his generation and the newest cohort of Divine Aces:
>
> "Mr. Otis, that's my neighbor," I say to Red. "I talk to him all the time. You call these young boys 'renegades'; you say they only care about gym shoes. But he told me that you guys were 'good-n-crazy' when you were younger."
>
> When he hears this, Red switches off his clippers. He has a tendency to stop whatever he's doing during a debate. People joke that he can turn a twenty-minute haircut into a two-hour ordeal: "We were crazy, alright," he admits, "but we were some close-knit crazyees." Red puts down his clippers. Meanwhile, the man in his chair rolls his eyes and slumps in his seat.

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> "We used to wear colors. Remember that? What happened to colors?" he says.
>
> "All of my clothes were orange and white, from head to foot. We used to represent!" he shouts. "We used to cock our hat to the side. What happened to that? Huh? . . .When we rocked those expensive jewels, when we had on name brand clothes and new shoes, it meant that we earned it. *Hustling*. We all looked fly cause we all got money. *Together*. We got it together. . .See man," he says, picking back up his clippers, then waving them at me, "that's the difference. And you can tell ol'-ass Otis I said it."
>
> While the abrupt buzz of the clippers precludes any rebuttal that I might have had, the man in the chair sighs, relieved his barber has resumed his work.

Reflecting on Red's words, I realize that the tension between his generation and the youngest stems from the fact that, just like Mr. Otis' cohort, Red's peers also use gang mythology as a stable frame of reference for contemporary times. They conjure memories of great leaders like K. Beamer as a means to reestablish social cohesion, a sense of security, and an obedient relationship to authority. The notion that one of his workers would prefer Obama Nikes to orange and white ones bothers Red because the historical consciousness that gym shoes conjure peaked at a time when gang leaders secured an autonomous sphere of authority in Eastwood.

Just as Mr. Otis fails to acknowledge that the political sentiment in the United States has shifted, such that the modern gang cannot solicit funds for community development, Red fails to acknowledge that the Divine Aces' former leadership structure has shifted as a consequence of social transformations that have taken place over the past three decades. During the 1980s, as populations of urban poor (i.e., mentally ill, alcoholics, drug addicts, and impoverished low-wage working class) became increasingly visible, their very presence (and not necessarily an increase in crime) motivated Ronald Reagan's anticrime crackdown (Kelley 1997: 99).[8] To add insult to injury, only two years after Reagan's 1984 crime bill (the most severe anticrime measure since the Nixon era), criminal legislation reached new heights in response to the arrival of a new drug: crack cocaine. Congress swiftly implemented The Federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, which imposed a five-year mandatory minimum for offenses involving "500 grams of cocaine or 5 grams of cocaine freebase known as 'crack'" (Parenti 1999: 57; Mauer 2006: 93). Because sentencing for crack cocaine was 100 times more severe than powder cocaine and because African Americans were more frequently arrested for crack than powder cocaine, Christain Parenti has referred to these drug laws as a form of apartheid sentencing (1999: 57).

Given that the moral hysteria that characterized the "war on drugs" was accompanied by lengthier prison sentences, which were disproportionately applied to drug offenders from urban neighborhoods, it should not be surprising that the wholesale removal of nearly an entire generation of young people from neighborhoods like Eastwood has led to the erosion of the ways in which behavior was regulated in the past. To be sure, the fact that many of the architects, managers, and foot soldiers that formed the "corporate gang" ended up in prison has much more to do with the remaining members' abilities to organize efficiently than a disintegration of individual work ethic—even if gang veterans don't see it this way.

Red, for one, takes the Divine Aces' presence in Eastwood for granted and believes the organization ought to have clear-cut roles to serve a functional purpose for youth socialization. In the face of this logic, he grows perplexed because, even when confronted with paternalisms that yearn for the past, young renegades fashion their own "style" through footwear—a style that he finds difficult to make sense of, let alone manage.[9]

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"Renegade style"

I have argued that the discourse on "renegade style" gains salience in Eastwood because it signals nostalgia for a familiar form of Divine Aceness during volatile times. Going forward, I describe my encounters with a gang member named Danny to discuss the relationship between gang historicity and the ways in which the youngsters deemed "renegades" fashion their identities in relation to the discourses of longing invoked by Mr. Otis and Red. In what follows, I discuss my experiences in a classroom full of gang members and in the Juvenile Detention Center where a teenager discusses the circumstances involved with his arrest. Taken together, these events illustrate that the historical narratives that renegades are inundated with signal a paradoxical existence for young affiliates who are both mavericks and malleable, who welcome middle-class inculcation at times and oppose it at others. In local churches, schools, and jails, young gang members are laden with a pristine vision of the civil rights era as a socializing mechanism. Thus, to fully understand the social reality that renegades develop, we must first examine how their actions articulate a struggle against middle-class morality.

Career Day at Brown High

I consider it an ethnographic coup when I realize that several key leaders in Eastwood's schools, churches, and gang prevention agencies have

become familiar with my research. Even if the practitioners of these organizations do not know the full extent of my thesis, many are aware that my work involves gangs. Monique, a youth worker at Eastwood Community Church, asks me one day if I would be interested in talking to students at Brown High School for Career Day. Once I agree, she informs me that I will be in a classroom with sophomores who the administration has tagged as gang members.

Career Day festivities begin on a crisp winter morning. After a continental breakfast of bagels and hot coffee, I enter room 208, where two white, male teachers greet me. One, Mr. Flynn, looks to be in his mid-twenties; the other, Mr. Drake, is in his forties. The older teacher is directing a class, which consists of fifteen black, teenage males sitting on plastic chairs. Thirty unimpressed eyes stare at three "professional" black men: one graduate student, a corporate attorney, and a probation officer.

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> After Mr. Drake gets the attention of the class, Mr. Randall, the probation officer, begins: "I work for Cook County Courts. Everyday, I deal with kids that look like you. . ."
>
> One boy is drawing on his desk in loopy cursive with his pencil eraser. As soon as his ears catch the word "you" he bristles:
>
> "*What* did you say?" he responds abrasively.
>
> "No, I'm not talking about *you* specifically," Randall apologizes, "I'm talking about 'you,' in the sense that they live in neighborhoods like this and they are black. . ."
>
> Finding this a sufficient answer, the scribbler, whose real name is Jemell, responds with a dismissive (but affirmative) head nod and continues his table traces.
>
> "One thing I do," Randell says, "is monitor home incarceration. Do any of you know what that is?"
>
> "House Arrest!" Two kids from opposite ends of the class chime in.
>
> "Yeah, that's right...and I'ma let you in on a lil' secret." He leans forward, "Probation officers who monitor people on house arrest are off every other weekend and on holidays. Do what you want with that information."
>
> The class erupts. Students begin bouncing on the edge of their seats.
>
> "Aww, man! So which weekend will they come?" a boy asks.
>
> "It don't matter," says another, "if they come one weekend, you know they're off the next, right?" he replies, begging for confirmation.
>
> "That's right. Man, what's your name?"
>
> "Danny," the boy replies.
>
> "That's right, Danny."
>
> Just then, Mr. Flynn informs the class that the "activity period" is upon us. The first game we play is called the "Stand Up and Declare Activity." There are four papers posted on each wall: "STRONGLY AGREE," to the north; "AGREE," to the south; 'DISAGREE,' to the east;

and “STRONGLY DISAGREE,” to the west. The younger teacher opens an envelope, takes out a sheet of paper, and reads a statement from it. The game requires students to occupy a wall if their response is posted on it.

“Jay-Z is more powerful than Barack Obama,” is the claim.

When the room reaches equilibrium, the ‘STRONGLY AGREE’ side has six people, as does the ‘STRONGLY DISAGREE’ side. Everyone else is sprinkled around in proportion.

The thirty-something teacher, Mr. Drake, argues in favor of the rapper, Jay-Z:

“You guys know all his songs. You know everything about him. You don’t know hardly anything about Barack or what he stands for. Last night was the nineteenth presidential debate. Who has seen a debate so far?”

All of the adults raise their hands. None of the students do.

“See what I mean?” Mr. Drake says, smiling.

“But I think Barack is more powerful,” Danny says, interrupting his teacher’s happy experiment, “. . .because he’s tryna be *president*. Jay-Z’s just tryna be rich. And plus, Barack, he got plans and stuff for how to improve our lives. He tell us about change, how to change the world, ya know? All Jay-Z tell us about is how to hustle, how to sell drugs, how to live in the hood—which we already know,” he says, gesturing towards the window.

“But Jay-Z got clothing lines,” Jemell intervenes. “He got a record label, he produces movies, he got a restaurant, he got his own shoes.” In making the case, he points to another student’s feet, which are adorned with pearl white ‘S. Carter’s’—Jay-Z’s signature shoe. “People in the hood. . .we want that. People want to dress like Jay-Z, eat what he eats, be on his label. A lot of people don’t know Obama’s story like they know Jay-Z’s.”

“But Jay-Z is a *rapper*,” Danny roars, “A rapper can never be as powerful as the president. The president can raise taxes, lower taxes. A president can send us to war, make us go in the draft. . .,” Danny says, gaining steam, “. . .a president can send *Jay-Z* to war if he wants to. . . If we get evicted, what is Jay-Z gonna do? When you livin’ in your car that don’t have no gas, and don’t work—can’t even turn on the radio. How you gonna listen to Jay-Z? What then, *huh*?”

The room goes silent.

“Danny for President!” Mr. Randall yells out.

After a few more activities, complete with a school assembly and keynote speaker, Monique and I leave Career Day, exiting Brown High through the parking lot. As school is still in session, some students are looking out of the window from the building’s top floor and begin yelling: “Good bye, now. Have a nice day!” They say, speaking in the nasal voice black comedians use in exaggerated imitations of white people.

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Then, one of them howls, “Now get in your car and drive home!”

“Aye, man. . . Is that your girl?” one continues to heckle while we walk, stoic and unconvincingly deaf.

“You hear me talking to you, man! Why don’t you get the *fuck* outta here!”

“Bye-bye, now,” another says, returning to his uptight, white-person voice.

The window hecklers effectively deflate the pride Monique and I experience as Career Day draws to a close. And yet, I am more surprised by the recalcitrance of the hecklers than I should have been. Brown High is a school where students who have been flagged as gang members attempt to discern exactly what is possible by referencing disparate prototypes of power—embodied on this day by a successful rapper and a potential presidential nominee. Although many people hope that Obama will serve as an icon for boundless possibilities, gang affiliates, like Jemell, fit him into the conceptual frame reserved for successful athletes and rappers who “just want to be famous.” Even though others, like Danny, achieve the distinction the administration hopes for, successful rappers and “professional” blacks nevertheless index a paradoxical existence for Eastwood youth. The students who taunt us, for instance, articulate a struggle against the middle-class morality that conceives of “Career Day” as a feasible response to permanent unemployment and escalating school dropout rates through a combination of deviant protest and comic relief.[10] As scholars interested in the social aspirations of urban youth have pointed out, this is one of the few ways disgruntled students can respond to such events without legitimating and reproducing the normative structure that is the subject of their critique (Willis 1977; MacLeod 1987).

In what follows, we will see that, in addition to this kind of mocking, refashioning the gym shoes that older members used to wear helps young renegades establish their own brand of belonging in a moment of political and economic transition. In Eastwood, gym shoes represent the decline of authority and community mindedness among gang members; as such, they are an index for renegades. That these commodities invoke a different connotation than in times past points to the structural imbalances in the street, which weigh heavily on the formation of identities in the current period.

Renegades and their shoes

Profile # 3

Name: Danny Sharpe
Age: 15

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Occupation: High School Student/ Gang Member

When I told Danny, after Career Day, that I wanted to interview him for my research project, I never dreamed that the majority of our conversations would take place in the Juvenile Detention Center. I have been waiting here for over an hour, observing the irony of the place. It has the stale smell of so many government buildings: cold, hard floors that reek of Pine-Sol, walls shaded the hue of a mildewed sock, and generic, rectangular light panels that turn everything a dull yellow. But sprinkled all around this "audition box for adult jail" (as one police officer calls it) are terry cloth cutouts of bubble letters that reference poems and history projects, that quote Mandela and TuPac, that remind people like me that children live here—though some are considered adults by the law. The guard fits me into their age-grade and views me suspiciously. This is ironic, I think, since nobody notices your face at the Juvenile Detention Center; it's almost like you don't have one.

When you walk into a cell block at recreation time, when youths are playing spades or sitting in the TV room watching a movie, the attention moves quickly to your shoes. They watch you walk to figure out why you came there.

I quickly learn this game of shoe charades:

"*Navy blue leather boots. . .reinforced steel toe. . .at least a size 12. . .must be a guard*."

That's an easy one.

The glass door swings open again.

"*. . .Expensive, formal shoes. . .somewhat trendy. . .creased khakis cover the tongue. . .a Northwestern law student come to talk about legal rights*."

Yup.

Mr. Gregory wears dress shoes. The black leather makes a squeaking sound against the linoleum as we walk: "I've been coming here for five years now," he explains, detailing his experience as a Bible study instructor. "It's a shame, but you can just tell which ones have their mothers and fathers at home. Most these kids don't. Their pants gotta sag below their waist, even in prison garbs. You sit around and listen to these kids. . .all they talk about is selling drugs and gym shoes."

Though I generally don't agree with what Mr. Gregory has to say about today's young people, his comments warrant a nod of acknowledgement. His observations are, if not quite accurate, at least astute: there is certainly a relationship between jail clothes and gym shoes.

Upon entering the facility, everyone is issued the same uniform: dark gray khakis, a green T-shirt, and/or a sweatshirt (depending on

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the time of year). The clothes come in different sizes, but they all mark a person's status as inmate. As they travel with peers in a single-file line, as the confines of Plexiglas encasements become home, these kids have only to look around to be reminded that they are incarcerated. That is, unless they look down.

As previously mentioned, when teenagers are arrested and sent to the Detention Center, they are stripped of everything except the shoes they are wearing when they arrive. Because the county can't afford to equip each arrival with new shoes, inmates keep the ones they are arrested in until their trial date, when they are transferred to a prison or released. As a result, icebreaker conversations center on what kind of shoes people wear in each neighborhood, the number of pairs each person has at home, and the kind of shoes people plan to buy when they get out.

Shortly after I reconnect with Danny, he and a friend, Scooter, begin arguing over gym shoes during recreation time:

> "Dem Air Force Ones?" Scooter says, inspecting my black Nikes, which feature green and yellow highlights.
>
> I hesitate because I know the make, but not the model, of my shoes. I could check the tongue, but I don't want to seem insecure.
>
> "Nah man, those some Dunks," Danny says, saving me. "Everybody on my block rocks them. Those are cool," he continues, eyes still glued to my feet, "but as soon as I get out, Ima cop dem new Jordans."
>
> Scooter smiles and nods, "Yeah, me too."
>
> A week after Scooter and Danny talk about buying the latest pair of Jordans in their jail cell, I sit adjacent from them, surrounded by grade school artwork in a musty, yellow-tinged room that is chilly to begin with, but made colder by an underpaid guard's stare. I spark a conversation with Danny by mentioning the brand of footwear that he has on:
>
> "At least you came in here with new Tims, they've gotta be giving you some kind of respect, right?"
>
> "Coulda been worse," he says playfully. "Scooter got arrested in flip-flops."
>
> "So how you doin'?" I ask.
>
> "Not so good. . .not good at all. My lawyer says they tryna move my charges up to attempted murder," Danny replies.
>
> "Yeah, but Mr. Randall is gonna testify for me. . .be a character witness. So I'm keeping my head up."

Irving Randall is the probation officer who attended Career Day with Danny and I, months prior. After the event, he developed a relationship with the youngster. Randall, a respected employee of the court, wanted to inform the judge that Danny was trying to turn his life around and break from his gang. But this task was difficult. As

far as gang activity goes, Danny's street is more organized than most. He lives on the same block where the Divine Aces maintain their headquarters, a street where many lifetime gang members still dwell. Danny's father is a member of the Aces, as is his older brother. Danny was, in his words, "born into the gang."[11]

During the second semester of his sophomore year, Danny stopped selling drugs and was attending school on a regular basis. But, because he was not dealing, he was expected to contribute to the gang in other ways, especially since his crew was currently bickering with a rival faction, the Bandits. Kemo, the leader of Danny's gang, tasked Danny with carrying his gun in case the opposing camp attempted to infiltrate.

One day, Danny was walking his girlfriend, Tasha, home while holding Kemo's piece. He noticed that a squad car was tailing him, so he asked that she pretend to drop her cell phone to see if the gun was visible from behind. She agreed and confirmed that the handle was protruding from the small of his back. Danny kept walking, hoping the cops would fail to notice. But when the couple stopped at Tasha's doorstep, he could hear the car door slam shut and realized the officers were approaching. He took off running.

Danny rounded a corner and threw Kemo's gun over the fence of an abandoned lot. The gun, which had a broken safety, discharged as soon as it landed on a sea of empty liquor bottles. It is this event that threatens to ratchet up his charges. The prosecution claims that Danny was shooting at the police. Ironically enough, the sound of the gun blast made Danny think the police were shooting at him, so he kicked into high gear and ducked through an alleyway. Moments later, he had successfully escaped to the apartment of his older brother, Devin. Devin is locked up, but his girlfriend and son (Danny's nephew) now live there.

The next day, Danny got word that Kemo was looking for him. He and other gang leaders wanted to meet, so Danny reluctantly went to Kemo's garage. During the conference, Kemo explained that the incident the day before had brought unwanted attention to his drug operation. He told Danny that he must face sanctions.

The burly Kemo landed a swift right hook to the side of Danny's face that sent the youngster tumbling across a weight bench. Pleased with this exercise of brawn, Kemo looked toward his team and began to snicker. But Danny, seeing his back turned, quickly grabbed a pipe and told Kemo and company to back up, swinging it in front of him to create a buffer. He walked backward until he reached a shelf and then exchanged the pipe for another of Kemo's guns, pointing it at the owner.

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"You young motherfuckers are crazy—can't even take an ass whuppin'!" Kemo ranted. "You run now, and it'll be ten times worse when we catch you. Take it like a man!" he advised.

"Fuck you!" Danny shouted defiantly. He backpedaled hurriedly and disappeared through the gangway, running feverishly as he had the day before. Only this time he dashed to the house of his best friend, Cook, where his confidante explained the day's events:

". . .The police been at yo' mom's house *and* school wit a warrant," Cook said. "Mr. Randall just called my cell sayin' you need to turn yo' self in—and you might need to listen."

With the police *and* the gang after him, and after a brief deliberation, Danny returned Irving Randall's call: "Can you come take me to the station? I'm ready."

But, before Randall arrived to escort him to jail, Danny borrowed Cook's brand new boots. He knew what to expect inside the "audition box."

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My conversation with Danny at the Juvenile Detention Center exemplifies the social constraints under which young gang members struggle in the contemporary moment. In this context, shoes come to index the precarious balancing act of renegades. On the one hand, young gang members are viewed as disloyal to the gang, but, on the other, it is not as if this dissidence improves their life conditions or permits them to reach middle-class standing. Instead, renegades are stuck: running from law enforcement to their gang leader's garage, only to flee back into police custody and return to the Juvenile Detention Center, where mass incarceration gives mass production a more particular meaning.

As jail guards and Bible study instructors watch young gang members, the apparent shoe obsession they observe occludes the ways in which social inequalities are being formed and reproduced through linear narratives of black youth who once respectfully picked up trash and marched in picket lines but now sell drugs due to personal choice alone. Gang elders act as if their organization's shift toward illicit entrepreneurialism did not resonate with the large-scale disinvestment in urban neighborhoods and the widespread transformation in the American economy from manufacturing to service sector employment. Similarly, the history of the gang that long-standing members acknowledge often erases key sociohistorical processes that have transformed the ways traditional membership is experienced. When the gang is perceived to be *less political* or *less profitable* than it once was, the focus of attention (and especially the blame) falls on the attitudes, orientations, and behaviors of those who are not yet locked up for long periods of time. Often the youngest members are viewed as key to the gang's social reproduction.

Conclusion

My president's black, my Lambo's blue
And I'll be goddamned if my rims ain't too
My money's light green and my Jordans [are] light grey
And they love to see the white [crack], now how much you tryna pay?
—Young Jeezy, "My President Is Black"

In the rap verse above, Young Jeezy speaks of the pride he has for his president's skin tone in the same breath that he voices his esteem for his Lamborghini ("Lambo"), its wheels ("rims"), his money, his Jordans, and his ability to sell crack ("white"). From a certain perspective, such a sentiment might seem to be a quintessential example of urban black youth who celebrate commercialism as a fantasy that marks their seclusion from "mainstream" American success. The range of ideas about society, economy, and politics—commodities and leaders—that Eastwood affiliates develop, however, urges us to rethink our static and pristine conceptions of history. The legacy of the civil rights movement, in other words, is not a relic of the past, all to be forgotten by young urban residents. To the contrary, it becomes a salient part of the way urban youth are socialized in the contemporary moment—from the high school dropout who is reminded that Martin Luther King Jr. relied on gang members' organizational capacity when he occupied a humble quarters on the Westside of Chicago, to the student who is asked to compare Barack Obama's clout and cultural capital with that of Jay-Z, a rapper who cooks up delicious tales of drug lore. Though people like Mr. Otis and Mr. Gregory pit governmental officials and disreputable rappers against each other in a politics of respectability that views the hip hop generation as ungrateful and woefully failing to take advantage of the opportunities created for them, the fact that Jay-Z boasts about trading text messages with Obama[12] and that Jeezy's verse gets sold and circulated as part of a campaign to help young people "rap the vote," points to the material consequences of historical narratives. These narratives, I might add, are no less enlightening when packaged in conspicuous consumables.

I have argued in this article that gym shoes, and the "renegades" who wear them, mark a shift in the Divine Aces' organizational form—a marker for before and after hordes of urban residents were extracted from Eastwood during the "war on drugs." For the oldest two generations of Divine Aces, the longing for a coherent organizational structure recalls different notions of social belonging and produces competing ideas about their organization. In other words, notions of the gang as a criminal enterprise *and* the notion of the gang as a constructive institution live together and cultivate deep ambivalences in

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the hearts and minds of Eastwood residents. It follows that the reality of these ambivalences has a tremendous impact on the ways in which young gang members construct their identities.

The shoes that young gang members wear, then, are not simply commodities that distill unrealistic expectations but are instead mobile technologies that help affiliates get from "here" to "there"—whether or not they know exactly where they are headed. Indeed, I say *mobile* technologies, because, by following a young person's designer footprints, Eastwood is illuminated as a neighborhood in which gang members are constantly on the move: hustling, trading, taking up corners, and fighting until violence—sometimes physical, sometimes structural—strikes. Furthermore, it is mobility here that organizes space and its control, whether we are referring to the geographies of commerce in which gang members circulate, the stagnation associated with Danny's incarceration, or the dissenting voices of disgruntled students—those hurled from classroom windows and aimed at privileged strangers who travel to an underfunded school for the day and, unlike gang-affiliated teenagers, have the resources to exit swiftly and return to a comfortable life.

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Notes

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Address correspondence to Laurence Ralph, LSA-CAAS, 4700 Haven Hall, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1045. E-mail: lralph@uchicago.edu

1. In accordance with the Internal Review Board protocol for the University of Chicago, I have changed the names of people, gangs, and specific neighborhoods throughout this study.
2. Wilson's approach can be placed within a larger genealogy of research associated with the "Chicago School" of Sociology. Instead of defining the gang problem as primarily a criminal one, many early sociologists tried to analyze what had "gone amiss" and fostered slums. This notion was embraced most notably by Frederic Thrasher, author of the classic *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago* ([1927] 1963).
3. Similarly, Carl Nightingale has argued that the values of the American Dream permeate all levels of United States society. He contends that the greatest dilemma for urban youth is not oppositional culture, but their strong commitment to the tenets of the American Dream (1993: 56).
4. This approach is similar to Renato Rosaldo's conception in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (1989). While problematizing the emphasis on structure in classical ethnography, Rosaldo notes that many ethnographies are unable to account for the open-ended human processes in the informal settings of everyday life that occur outside a circumscribed sphere of social life. Because culture is an open and "porous array of intersections where distinct processes crisscross from within and beyond its borders," Rosaldo argues for a focus on the intersections of "cultural borderlands" (1989: 20).
5. Following Hebdige's analysis of youth culture through sartorial style (1979), I build on the work of scholars who have examined contemporary African American "style," in particular. For example, Mary Pattillo-McCoy has argued that in the 1980s, when advertisers began targeting black youths through an "increased use of black models, celebrities, and cultural themes," material goods were used as status markers and symbols of black identity (1999: 147–148). Moreover, Pattillo-McCoy discusses how Nikes—and the aesthetic enjoyment derived from purchasing them—played a role in how young, black Chicagoans thought about courtship, self-esteem, and gang affiliation (1999: 146–150).
6. I mention ghosts here to reference the historicized reality that Walter Benjamin convincingly captured when he argued that "haunting" occurs when "an occluded dimension of the past becomes visible through a form of recognition that seizes on its fleeting image before it sinks into irretrievable oblivion" (1978: 257, quoted in Palmié 2002: 11).
7. Speaking of the perspectives of gang members like Mr. Otis, Tom Hayden similarly argues that the "failure of radicalism bred nihilism" for some of America's most notorious street gangs (2004: 167).
8. Marc Mauer (2006: 93) has pointed out that no one knows the extent to which crime rates actually increased. One of the ironies of the period is that the growing politicization of crime itself contributed to higher reporting rates.
9. See Campbell's discussion of patches for another detailed ethnographic example of the way in which "style" signals affiliation and solidifies social bonds (1984: 52–54 and 89).
10. In Eastwood, 70 percent of the population never finished high school. Tom Hayden has noted that the dropout rate in inner-city schools is both a measurement and a major cause of gang involvement. "Abandoning or being driven out of school," he argues, "is a definitive moment after which a gang identity becomes more important" (2004: 311).
11. See also Scott H. Decker et al. for the role of parental and sibling gang affiliation in motivating membership (1996: 232).

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12. In the song "On to the Next One," from his 2009 album, *The Blueprint 3*, Jay-Z raps, ". . .Obama on the text, y'all should be afraid of what I'm gonna do next."

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