When the prison doors fly open, the real dragon will emerge.

—Ho Chi Minh

While conflict between Sureño-affiliated and Crip- and Blood-affiliated gangs in Los Angeles has remained intractable for decades in some cases, the dynamics that drive these racialized conflicts are infinitely more complex than the simplistic race thinking that has framed them. The essentialist discourses that inform these sectarian conflicts have been fueled for generations by professional ethnopolitical entrepreneurs, sensationalist media tropes, and overly zealous law enforcement who are either oblivious to the historical foundations that made the conflicts possible in the first place or are intentionally fanning the flames of sectarian conflict. If there is any hope for a cessation of hostilities between gang members in Los Angeles, perhaps the most promising source of relief is not intervention by state actors or well-meaning reformists but, rather, by gang members themselves. They alone have the inherent potential to reach the epiphany that, by opposing one another, they have become the instruments of their own oppression. The idea that criminalized communities themselves can intervene to mitigate intergang violence is far from a novel insight. The mitigating influence of so-called organized crime has been theorized since Marxist criminologists addressed the issue in the mid-1970s. Likewise, the efforts of gang members and gang leaders in mitigating conflict and violence

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1. The section of this chapter titled “United We Stand” is coauthored with Alex A. Alonso.
2. Quinney 1977; Spitzer 1975.
has been well documented since the late-1970s. This chapter presents a series of narratives that reinforce these perspectives.

For decades, racialized conflict between Sureño-affiliated and Crip- and Blood-affiliated gangs was taken for granted by gang members and their communities, without any avenue to negotiate the cessation of hostilities between opposing racialized factions. This was due in part to the primary strategy used by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to control inmate populations: long-term isolation of anyone suspected of having a leadership role in gang politics. For decades these men were held incommunicado, in extreme isolation, in the infamous Security Housing Units (SHUs) built specifically to house those accused of gang leadership at Corcoran State Prison and the paragon of prisoner isolation, Pelican Bay State Prison. Isolated from other prisoners and the outside world, they lacked the ability to communicate effectively with the general prison population or anyone else, which, of course, precluded any opportunity for negotiation.

Solidarity Forever

The situation started to change in 2011 when leaders of the four principal racialized inmate organizations in California—the Mexican Mafia, the Black Guerrilla Family (BGF), the Nuestra Familia, and the Aryan Brotherhood—had an epiphany. Entirely organically without external agitation, they arrived at the collective realization that the divisions and conflicts between them served only to advance the divide and conquer regime that had defined their lives up to that point. Ironically for the CDCR, their common condition in extreme isolation compelled them to this epiphany, growing to know and respect one another over decades of their shared isolation. For the first time in their lives, they realized the revolutionary potential of their solidarity and endeavored to put an end to generations of racialized conflict in California’s prisons.

To advocate for their common interests, representatives of each of the four principal inmate organizations formed a collective, which they christened the Pelican Bay State Prison-SHU (PBSP-SHU) Short Corridor Collective. Their first act was to openly challenge the mundane circumstances of their extreme isolation. On July 1, 2011, approximately four hundred prisoners in the Pelican Bay State Prison-SHU program, representing each of the principal inmate organizations, declared a sustained hunger strike to

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protest the conditions of their confinement. Eventually, more than six thousand prisoners throughout the CDCR general population (GP) joined in the strike. They demanded (1) an end to indefinite solitary confinement; (2) an end to the debriefing process, by which inmates were transferred out of GP in exchange for information on inmate organizations; (3) an end to collective punishment, by which all inmates in a given unit would be punished if an incident occurred there, whether or not they were personally involved; (4) the restoration of educational programs that had been abolished decades earlier; (5) an end to food restrictions for SHU inmates; and (6) CDCR compliance with recommendations proposed by the Vera Institute’s Commission on Safety and Abuse in America’s Prisons.

Analogous to the Prisoners’ Rights Movement of the 1960s, the impetus for the 2011 protest was a book provided by sociologist Denis O’Hearn detailing a hunger strike against harsh prison conditions carried out by members of the Irish Republican Army in the United Kingdom. With knowledge of another recent successful hunger strike in Ohio, the Short Corridor Collective decided to execute the same tactic. The strike ended three weeks later, on July 20, 2011, after representatives of the collective met with Undersecretary of Corrections Scott Kernan. Rather than address the inmates’ primary demands, Kernan instead offered to allow inmates to send a photograph of themselves to their families once per year and the ability to purchase beanies for the cold winter months, colored pencils, simple wall calendars to keep track of time, and pickles from the canteen. However, in doing even this, Kernan broke a cardinal rule of prison administration in California: never negotiate with gang members.

Kernan abruptly retired mere weeks after meeting with the Short Corridor Collective. Needless to say, the CDCR violated the agreement Kernan had made in good faith and followed through on none of the paltry concessions to which Kernan had agreed to end the hunger strike. After two months of waiting, the Short Corridor Collective concluded that the CDCR administration had no intention of addressing their concerns. On September 26, 2011, they declared a second hunger strike, this time with more than twelve thousand inmates participating. Again, they were told that their principal concerns would be addressed, but the CDCR granted only concessions

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8. Reiter 2014. Professor O’Hearn is now at Texas A&M University.
10. In December 2015, Kernan was appointed secretary of corrections of the CDCR by Governor Jerry Brown. He retired from the position in 2018.
that did not address the inmates’ primary grievances—for instance, giving them access to handball courts and the opportunity to send a photograph of themselves to their families once a year. The strike was called off after three weeks, but the collective was under no illusion that the CDCR had any intention of addressing their principal demands. While SHU inmates were unable to secure any substantive concessions, they did garner the attention of the national media and public awareness of their plight. For men who had spent most of their lives in extreme isolation, public awareness of the conditions they endured was a victory in and of itself.

The following year, on August 12, 2012, the Short Corridor Collective released a document for public dissemination calling for an unconditional cessation of racialized hostilities among all GP inmates in CDCR and county jail facilities throughout the State of California. The “Agreement to End Hostilities,” as the document was titled, stated:11

To whom it may concern and all California Prisoners:

Greetings from the entire PBSP-SHU Short Corridor Hunger Strike Representatives. We are hereby presenting this mutual agreement on behalf of all racial groups here in the PBSP-SHU Corridor. Wherein, we have arrived at a mutual agreement concerning the following points:

1. If we really want to bring about substantive meaningful changes to the CDCR system in a manner beneficial to all solid individuals, who have never been broken by CDCR’s torture tactics intended to coerce one to become a state informant via debriefing, that now is the time to for us to collectively seize this moment in time, and put an end to more than 20–30 years of hostilities between our racial groups.

2. Therefore, beginning on October 10, 2012, all hostilities between our racial groups . . . in SHU, Ad-Seg, General Population, and County Jails, will officially cease. This means that from this date on, all racial group hostilities need to be at an end . . . and if personal issues arise between individuals, people need to do all they can to exhaust all diplomatic means to settle such disputes; do not allow personal, individual issues to escalate into racial group issues!!

3. We also want to warn those in the General Population that IGI will continue to plant undercover Sensitive Needs Yard (SNY) debriefer “inmates” amongst the solid GP prisoners.

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with orders from IGI to be informers, snitches, rats, and obstructionists, in order to attempt to disrupt and undermine our collective groups' mutual understanding on issues intended for our mutual causes [i.e., forcing CDCR to open up all GP main lines, and return to a rehabilitative-type system of meaningful programs/privileges, including lifer conjugal visits, etc. via peaceful protest activity/noncooperation e.g., hunger strike, no labor, etc. etc.]. People need to be aware and vigilant to such tactics, and refuse to allow such IGI inmate snitches to create chaos and reignite hostilities amongst our racial groups. We can no longer play into IGI, ISU, OCS, and SSU’s old manipulative divide and conquer tactics!!!

In conclusion, we must all hold strong to our mutual agreement from this point on and focus our time, attention, and energy on mutual causes beneficial to all of us [i.e., prisoners], and our best interests. We can no longer allow CDCR to use us against each other for their benefit!! Because the reality is that collectively, we are an empowered, mighty force, that can positively change this entire corrupt system into a system that actually benefits prisoners, and thereby, the public as a whole . . . and we simply cannot allow CDCR/CCPOA—Prison Guard’s Union, IGI, ISU, OCS, and SSU, to continue to get away with their constant form of progressive oppression and warehousing of tens of thousands of prisoners, including the 14,000 (+) plus prisoners held in solitary confinement torture chambers [i.e. SHU/Ad-Seg Units], for decades!!!

We send our love and respects to all those of like mind and heart . . . onward in struggle and solidarity . . .

Presented by the PBSP-SHU Short Corridor Collective:
Todd Ashker, C58191, D4 121
Arturo Castellanos, C17275, D1-121
Sitawa Nantambu Jamaa (Dewberry), C35671, D1-117
Antonio Guillen, P81948, D2-106

And the Representatives Body:
Danny Troxell, B76578, D1-120
George Franco, D46556, D4-217
Ronnie Yandell, V27927, D4-215
Paul Redd, B72683, D2-117
James Baridi Williamson, D-34288, D4-107
Alfred Sandoval, D61000, D4-214
Louis Powell, B59864, D2-117
This document is an unmistakably unequivocal statement of solidarity endorsed by all four of the principal inmate organizations within the CDCR GP facilities that explicitly recognizes and categorically rejects racial divisions between racialized inmate factions in carceral environments as a deliberate divide and conquer strategy perpetrated by the State of California.

The following year, on July 8, 2013, more than thirty thousand inmates throughout the CDCR system declared a prolonged hunger strike that lasted two months, resulting in the martyrdom of one of the strikers.\(^\text{12}\) This third, but much larger act of collective resistance again garnered public sympathy and the attention of the national media and was eventually called off with the promise of legislative hearings on the conditions endured by SHU inmates serving indeterminate sentences in the SHU program.\(^\text{13}\) On February 11, 2014, those hearings took place in the California State Legislature, where hundreds of prisoners’ rights supporters packed the State Assembly to offer their support for the abolition of the SHU program in CDCR facilities. During the hearings, Assemblyman Tom Ammiano, numerous academics, and others lambasted CDCR officials for their intransigence.\(^\text{14}\) Impatient with the lack of progress in legal efforts to ameliorate their conditions, representatives of the four principal inmate factions again took the initiative to increase pressure on CDCR to abolish the SHU program.

In 2000, SHU inmates Todd Ashker and Danny Troxell filed a lawsuit pro se challenging long-term isolation and solitary confinement. As a result of the public attention garnered by the first hunger strike in 2011, the Center for Constitutional Rights, a prestigious New York civil rights litigation firm, joined the case as counsel, along with the Bay Area nonprofit Legal Services for Prisoners with Children. The United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on torture also weighed in, denouncing long-term solitary confinement as torture under the organization’s definition. Criminologist Keramet Reiter, who testified in hearings held by Representative Ammiano and Senator Hancock in 2014, provides a deft description of the CDCR’s attempt to neutralize the

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lawsuit to abolish the SHU program through a series of legal maneuvers intended to undermine the standing of the plaintiffs in the case in 23/7 (2016), her invaluable book on solitary confinement.15

On August 16, 2012, Kernan’s replacement as undersecretary of corrections, Terri McDonald, directed CDCR staff to modify the procedure for validating prison gang affiliation, the primary rationale for extended isolation and solitary confinement. Ostensibly, the new policy was a reform that would make the process for validation and indefinite isolation more objective. The CDCR immediately conducted a case-by-case review of inmates who had been in the SHU at Pelican Bay for ten years or more, who consequently made up a significant proportion of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit. By releasing these inmates from the Pelican Bay SHU and transferring them to other prisons, only to place them in isolation again, the CDCR attempted to remove their standing as plaintiffs in the lawsuit while maintaining the SHU program for the rest of the inmates held at Pelican Bay. The judge in the case didn’t fall for the ruse and granted a motion by the plaintiffs to recognize the standing of the plaintiffs who had been surreptitiously relocated. Nonetheless, the CDCR continued to transfer inmates from the Pelican Bay SHU to SHU units at other prisons and, increasingly, to GP yards to separate and divide the strike organizers.

Facing certain defeat in federal court, the CDCR finally settled with the plaintiffs on September 1, 2015. The terms of the settlement effectively abolished the indefinite solitary confinement regime as it had existed for decades. SHU terms were capped at five years, even for the most serious offenses, and the release of all SHU prisoners who had been given those terms on the basis of gang validation—which was the vast majority of SHU inmates, including the representatives of the principal inmate factions—was mandated. For the first time in decades, members of the principal racialized inmate factions were released onto GP yards throughout the CDCR system. The bloodbath the CDCR had predicted would occur upon the release of these so-called “terrorists,” as they had been described by a CDCR spokesperson, simply never happened.16 Hundreds of bona fide members of the four principal inmate organizations have been released onto GP yards at prison facilities throughout the state over the past half-dozen or so years, almost entirely without incident. Only a handful of validated members and associates of inmate organizations have been victims of or accused of perpetrating homicides in CDCR facilities since being released from the SHU program onto GP yards.17

17. Ormseth 2020; Reiter 2016, 201; St. John 2015a, 2015b.
As one gang member who was recently released from prison recounted, the agreement has been a tremendous success. It has led to better conditions of confinement for all prisoners, especially those who helped organize and negotiate the pact:

Q: There’s less tension than there used to be?
A: Yeah. That’s why they be doing the fifty-fifty yards now, because a lotta lifers that been in the SHU for years been isolated—people from the Mexican Mafia, Aryan Brotherhood, BGF, and they tired of being in the SHU or in the hole, so they the ones making calls, like, “Everybody just calm the fuck down and chill out. We trying to get out the hole.” So, you know, they getting out the hole; they could make phone calls. ‘Cause, you know, back in the day, lifers couldn’t get conjugal visits, so now lifers can get conjugal visits because of stuff like that. So lifers get out; they tell their people, their homies, “Just chill out,” you know? They trying to reform this shit from the inside so they could get their visits, get they phone calls, get they conjugals, and it really has helped out the prison system.

Q: So you think it’s coming from the top down?
A: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

Q: So if someone starts something for no reason, they end up getting dealt with?
A: Yup. That’s exactly how it going down right now.

As it turns out, the men whom law enforcement and prison authorities have told us for years were incorrigibly violent “terrorists” are, in fact, the peace-makers whose initiative is mitigating rather than exacerbating violence in carceral environments throughout California.

United We Stand
Coauthored with Alex A. Alonso

Following the third hunger strike in 2013, gentlemen from the Florence community in South Los Angeles were transferred out of the SHU program after decades of draconian isolation. As soon as they were transferred onto general population yards in 2016, they set about trying to contact a member of the East Coast Crips who could negotiate a cessation of hostilities between the rival gangs on the streets. Unfortunately, these efforts initially came to naught. Everywhere they turned, the gentlemen found themselves at a dead end, unable to establish contact with like-minded East Coast leaders.
Then, in 2019, by happenstance, an opportunity presented itself. The Youth Justice Coalition (YJC), a local nonprofit organization that provides meeting space for community groups and runs a continuation school for high school students, was evicted from its location in Inglewood as a result of plans to expand the Metro system into that city. As an alternative, Los Angeles County offered YJC the old Juvenile Justice building on Central Avenue and 76th Street, which had been vacant for years after being used as a juvenile court and jail for minors incarcerated in South Los Angeles. The Juvenile Justice building is located right on the border—the invisible wall—that divides Florencia from East Coast Crip territory. From the outset, there was concern from both the Florencia and East Coast communities that outsiders had been given use of a building in their community that they themselves had not been given an opportunity to use. When the YJC moved into the building, none of the primary staff members were native to the communities surrounding the new location. The closest indigenous connection YJC had to South Los Angeles at the time was through another nonprofit organization—2nd Call, a grassroots prisoner reentry and job placement service—to which YJC provides office space.

Within a week of the new location’s opening, members of the Florencia community paid a visit inquiring as to why they had not been offered space in the building to run their own community programs. In an attempt to find a compromise, Skipp Townsend, the executive director and cofounder of 2nd Call, reached out to a Florencia member who had recently been released from prison and was in 2nd Call’s job placement program to earn a union job with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 11. Over the years, 2nd Call has successfully placed hundreds of formerly incarcerated and gang-involved people in union jobs through IBEW and other local trade unions.

Through this contact, Skipp and his staff at 2nd Call were able to make contact with another member of the Florencia community who had recently been released from prison. He in turn connected staff from 2nd Call with the gentlemen in prison who graciously agreed to negotiate a resolution of the issue. However, the gentlemen asked for an important favor in return: “Find me someone from East Coast I can work with to end this war once and for all.” Skipp and his staff happened to know the perfect person: Paul Gary “Lil Doc” Wallace, a widely respected member of the East Coast Crips who joined the gang in the late 1970s. A committed family man and born-again Christian who had a sincere conversion after his most recent incarceration, Doc, as almost everyone calls him, was genuinely committed to doing right by his community. They asked Doc to facilitate the peace process.

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18. Weide received permission to use Paul Gary Wallace’s name in this section.
and he agreed at least to hear out what the gentlemen had to say. They told Doc that he would be receiving a call from the gentlemen in the near-future and left it at that.

However, when the gentlemen called a couple weeks later, Doc didn’t make the connection and thought someone had given his cell phone number to a rival. He was cordial in their first conversation but couldn’t agree to negotiate a cease-fire because a beloved member of the East Coast Crips, thirty-year-old Raylorce Ysef “X-Ray” Gordon Jr., had been murdered on August 14, 2019, and it was automatically assumed that a Florencia gang member was responsible. In the ensuing days, three people were killed in two separate shootings in the Florencia community: Alfredo Carrera and Jose Antonio Flores Velasquez, both twenty-four, were killed on the 1100 block of East 68th Street, and Felix Valverde, thirty-two, was killed on the 9000 block of Compton Avenue. All three had been shot multiple times. None were affiliated with Florencia 13.

As it turned out, X-Ray’s killers weren’t affiliated with Florencia at all. He was killed in a personal dispute with members of another, unrelated Sureño-affiliated gang in South Los Angeles. Despite the wanton bloodshed for a murder in which Florencia was not in fact involved, the gentlemen maintained their position and, to demonstrate good faith, informed Doc that Florencia would stand down and not retaliate for the unprovoked murders that had just occurred in their community. This unambiguous demonstration of good faith broke the impasse and convinced Doc that Florencia was serious about negotiating an end to the decades-long war. Doc described the chronology of the events:

Q: Let’s talk a lil’ bit about how the beef got squashed. You know there’s been this historic truce that y’all have agreed to. Can you break it down for me? Like, how did that start? How did the communication start? What was the backstory to it?
A: The thing was that right here at Chuco’s, where I work—I got an office right here at Chuco’s Youth Center—YJC—my coworkers from 2nd Call, they deals with a lot of the work here, gangs too. They was talking to the gentlemen from prison, and they wanted to talk to a East Coast Crip about a cease-fire and everything to stop the beef, and they told him about me. And they end up calling me from prison. And at the time, I forgot my coworkers even told me about him calling and getting at me. So I was mad thinking my homies gave them my number, you know?
Q: [Laugh] You like, “How they get my number?”
A: Yeah! They call me and talk to me and then we hung up. I start calling everybody from prison, like, “What y’all doing in there?
What the fuck y’all telling these dudes to call me for?” You know, like you putting me on the spot, you know? Shit. Like, I’m trying to be low-key, and they like, “I didn’t do it. I didn’t do it. I don’t know.” Then, finally, you know, my coworker hollered at me, like, “Did they call you?” And I’m like, “Who?” And they like, “The gentlemen from prison. My friends from Florencia. They wanna have a truce. They said they talked with you.” I was like, “Oh, yeah.” And then it all connected for me. [Laughs] So when they called, I told him not right now because we had just lost our homeboy X-Ray from 1st Street.

Q: Was it Florence that hit him?

A: Yeah, but it wasn’t even Florencios, from what we found out. It wasn’t even Florencia. Basically, he had done something to some eses. . . . It wasn’t no Florencios. It was a personal thing. They came back for him and called him to the car, so he go to the car when he shouldn’t have, and by the time he saw they had a gun, he tried to get on, and they had opened fire on him. And being that it was Mexicans in the car, first thing we think is: “Oh, it was the Florencios!” So at that time, the gentlemen told me, “Hey, man, they told me you the man we need to talk to, ’cause we trying to squash this beef with us and raise some peace in the community. And we pretty much the ones that’s pushing it. That’s it. It’s over. You got my word.” And I was like, “Well, I’m all for peace, but not right now. I’m not trying to facilitate peace to my homies when y’all just killed one of the homies.” That’s where we left it at the time. They was like, “OK. I understand. Maybe somewhere down the line. But I’m a tell my homies to stand down until we get this right.” So I was like, “Yeah?” And he was like, “Yeah.” I was like, “Yeah, right.” You know?

Q: You were skeptical?

A: Yeah, and so they kept they word, like they had said. They homies was like standing down a little. I noticed it. I was like, “OK, this guy for real.” You know? So I start presenting it to my homies that they really for real.

Doc took it upon himself to go throughout the East Coast Crip community, talking to the most respected and influential members of each set and, with faith and tenacity, convinced and cajoled each of them to back the peace process. This is a community that stretches for miles and contains thousands of active members from a dozen different sets.

That isn’t to say that there wasn’t some pushback. Many of the principals in the negotiations called these malcontents “protestors”—as in, they’re pro-
testing the peace process. However, it’s understandable why some couldn’t just let it go. Over the two decades the war had lasted, family and friends had been lost; innocent residents, including children, had been killed on both sides. Grief is an emotion that runs deep in the collective memory of a community whether it results from accident or intent. Others were personally responsible for the bloodshed and carnage and are serving life in prison as a result. Everyone on all sides had suffered tremendously because of the war; yet that is why it had to stop. Following the example set by the Short Corridor Collective, the epiphany spread, from prison yards to the streets, as gang members themselves realized that the divide and conquer regime had to come to an end and they were the only ones who could make that happen.

The two sides agreed to a face-to-face meeting at the YJC building on Central Avenue, which fortuitously had inadvertently presented the opportunity for negotiation between the two sides in the first place. On September 15, 2019, representatives of the Florencia and East Coast Crip communities met at YJC, with the Nation of Islam facilitating the meeting. The Honorable Minister Tony Muhammad of the Nation of Islam, a captivating man of incredible oratory, had been holding peace conferences at YJC between rival Crip- and Blood-affiliated gangs for six weeks before this meeting, so it was a natural progression to have a peace summit across racial lines.

Representatives on both sides exchanged pleasantries and sequestered themselves in a room to negotiate. The East Coast representatives expressed concern that their members were not able to travel freely and safely in certain areas of the community; they particularly wanted guaranteed safe passage through and use of the local Bethune Park, which they had not been able to enjoy for twenty years. Florencia representatives simply wanted an end to the bloodshed. Terms were agreed without dissent, and for the first time in twenty years they broke bread together and shared a meal. As Doc recounted:

We met right here at Chuco’s–YJC. I had the Nation of Islam here just for security purposes. Make your homies feel comfortable coming in, and make mine, too. Nobody gonna get searched, but just the fact that them standing there makes it look like— We can feel safe coming in here, not just coming as Florencia and East Coast Crips, and go up in here and pull heat on each other, you know? Have a massacre right here in the building. So, you know, it all turned out good. They all stood outside, you know, in the parking lot by the front door. Nation of Islam did their part making everyone feel comfortable. And then we all got together and had a dialogue about what we need to do and what not need to be done, far as coming in each other hoods, hanging out; stay away from us, we stay away from y’all. If it’s peace, it’s peace. We don’t have to mingle. And then we had to
come back the second time because people was walking up in each other’s hoods, mingling and doing everything like that. They brought that to our attention, so we was like, they all up at the gas station right now. So, yeah, I was in their hood walking around or whatever. So it was just got to the point where I was telling everybody, “If you gonna peace, you gotta peace all the way. You can’t peace and then put a boundary on it. If we peacin’, then you should be able to go up in each other’s hoods, do whatever you wanna do, ’cause we at peace.” So we left outta there that time like, “There it is, right there, man. We ain’t even tripping, man. If we see you in the hood, we ain’t tripping.” So we shook hands and left outta that meeting.

They decided to meet again at the end of the month, this time with more attendees. “Let’s bring the youngsters this time” was the call to give the younger active gang members a chance to express their perspectives and concerns. On September 29, another meeting occurred with as many as fifty members from each side in attendance. The Nation of Islam facilitated again, and while no one on either side had intended to back down an inch, no one had to. Members of both communities were there in good faith, with the best of intentions, and participants unanimously report that the atmosphere was jovial. Photographs and testimonials of the event we have been privy to demonstrate as much.

While no major incidents had occurred in the two-week intermittence, there were some issues over “wall banging” (graffiti being crossed out). As Doc recounted:

Then we came back about wall banging. So we came back to talk about everybody writing on the walls, dissing still. I ended up saying, “When we come back to it, we need to really sit down and let the lil’ homies talk, ’cause they the gang members. We older. . . . Shit, we married with kids. We ain’t got no time to be catching a murder at our age. So let these youngsters speak.” So when we came back for that third meeting, we let the youngsters speak, and, you know, Florencia they had their youngsters, too. They spoke and then ours spoke. I stepped in to facilitate the rest, and the Florencios stepped in to facilitate their side.

As we’ve experienced in our gang intervention work, wall banging can be a constant impediment to the peace process between rival gangs trying to settle their differences. The “protestors” on each side can sabotage the peace

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process by writing on walls; rival gangs that have not come to the negotiations table can instigate by faking cross outs; and many gang members we’ve talked to since the peace process started are convinced that the police have even faked cross outs to deliberately undermine the peace process.

The most harrowing incident to threaten the peace process reportedly occurred on October 4, 2019, when a Florencia member who had recently been released from prison, and may not have known about the truce, encountered some East Coast Crips at Bethune Park, where, according to the terms of the truce, East Coast was supposed to be guaranteed safe usage. There has been some suggestion that the Florencia member may have had prior bad blood with one of the East Coast members; in any case, an altercation broke out, punches were thrown, and someone produced a gun and fired, hitting the Florencia member who instigated the confrontation in the arm. After the incident occurred, the lines of communication that had been established were employed and the protocol that had been agreed to at the peace summit was followed: both sides deliberated and mutually agreed that the Florencia member who had provoked the confrontation had violated the truce and thus was responsible for the incident. Therefore, no retaliation occurred. Doc recounted the incident and its aftermath:

Q: I also heard there was a minor incident where some dude from Florence had got out recently and either didn’t know the truce was on or whatever the situation was.

A: Yeah. He was young. He came home, and him and my homie—they couldn’t see eye to eye never anyways—So he went to jail, got out, and saw the homie. So he push up on the homie with two other lil’ homies from Florencia. He kinda pressed up on ’em gangbanging, tripping, and, you know, they got in an altercation. And one of them got shot in the arm from Florencia, and that was it. So we ended up meeting on that, and that lil’ youngster that did that, he came to the meeting here. And the homies, you know, the shooter was here. So everything was like, they were all here, so we squashed that, too, because we was like, “Y’all was wrong. He shouldn’t have pressed up on him.”

The truce has been very well received not only by the community, but also by those who opposed it early in the peace process. Even the “protestors” had been converted, as an East Coast member who was an early skeptic conceded:

Q: So you think it’s gone over well? Most people are grateful that it’s over?
A: Hell, yeah. A lot! Alotta people grateful. I could say, even the motherfuckers who played like they didn't want the peace treaty—they still wanna be at war—Shit, they grateful, too. They get to walk up and down the street and go to the store and ain't gotta watch over they shoulder, trying to see inside every car, so see what I'm saying? It's a give and take. Feel what I'm saying?

Q: They been converted! [Laugh]
A: They been converted! [Laughs] Slowly but surely, everybody coming on board.

Since the first face-to-face meeting was held more than two years ago, as of this writing, no further shootings have occurred between East Coast Crips and Florencia. None. We implore the reader to appreciate that these are two of the biggest gangs in Los Angeles County, each with thousands of active members. Yet the discipline to maintain the truce has been so absolute that not a single shooting has occurred between these two gangs since the unfortunate incident at Bethune Park in October 2019. Doc enthusiastically recounted the success of the truce in an interview conducted in the spring of 2020:

Q: So y'all been bumping into each other since then and the truce has held?
A: Oh, yeah. It’s held up good. Nobody shooting and killing. It’s held up good. And it’s mainly been because we let go of trying to do it over here. OK, we peacin’, but what you doing over there? It’s like, “We peacin’, man. Just let it go.”

Q: How about the wall banging?
A: That’s coming down, too, and the Facebook stuff. All of it—kinda everything; it’s really over now. We at a point now to where, like I said, the protestors—

Q: The peanut gallery has spoke? [Laughs]
A: Yeah, and ain’t nobody listening. [Laughs] We ain’t tripping, though. We ain’t shooting them, and they ain’t shooting us. That’s all that matters. We really peacin’ and, you know, the community really loves it.

This is especially noteworthy considering the circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Communities are stressed and struggling as they never have been before, and violent crime is on the rise both in Los Angeles and nationwide.

Not only has the truce held, but Florencia and East Coast Crips members who grew up together, and were estranged for twenty years, have suddenly
found opportunities to reach out to old friends on the other side of the invisible wall and they’re loving it, as one East Coast respondent noted:

Q: Have y’all interacted with the Florences? See ’em at the store, at the park, that kinda thing?
A: Yeah. I mean, we done grown up with each other, see what I’m saying? So with that, there ain’t no war no more, so if I were to see a motherfucker that I grew up with, it’s like, “What up, nigga?” Like, “What up? I ain’t seen you in forever!” You know like, wooty-woop! Just kick back and go down memory lane with that motherfucker, know what I’m saying? Just be cool. So it’s, like, kinda like a good thing.

Once a cessation of hostilities across racial lines is established, solidarity has the chance to face the light and grow organically on its own, no matter how long it lingered in the darkness. For the first time in a generation, childhood friends can reach out to one another across racial and gang lines, sharing their lives as they did before the war started. These relationships will no doubt be important in maintaining the truce in the coming years.

That would make a happy ending for the book. But unfortunately, the future is fraught with peril. On July 16, 2020, Paul Gary “Lil Doc” Wallace was indicted on federal RICO charges alleging that he was involved in two murders—one of which occurred more than seventeen years prior and for which state charges had been dropped—along with numerous other criminal acts. We’ve spoken with his attorneys and a colleague who specializes in defending RICO cases. We all agree that the indictment is incredibly peculiar.

The timing of the indictment is certainly suspect, ten months after the truce was established between Florencia and the East Coast Crips. Further, Doc was charged as the sole defendant in a RICO indictment, which is unheard-of in Los Angeles RICO cases involving gang allegations. If there were convincing evidence of his involvement in either of the murders alleged in the indictment, he would have been tried in California Superior Court years ago with gang enhancements and, perhaps, special circumstances, which carry the penalty of execution, at worst, and life in prison without parole, at best. This leaves the obvious impression that the U.S. Department of Justice brought the indictment against him surreptitiously to intentionally undermine the peace process between Florencia and East Coast Crips. That is certainly what the gang members and communities involved think and what many of the gang intervention professionals we work with think.
Having read the indictment and followed the case ourselves, we find that narrative disturbingly plausible.\textsuperscript{20}

The indictment of Mr. Wallace has had a chilling effect on the peace process since he was taken into custody. Many of those involved in the cease-fire negotiations believe that the indictment was brought to remove him from the peace process and so, understandably, they are concerned about exposing themselves to being indicted, as well. Worse yet, Doc was a key peacemaker in the resolution of hostilities between the East Coast Crips and other African American gangs with which they had engaged in decades-long blood feuds. Leaders of gangs throughout South Los Angeles have the same impression, so the indictment has had a generally chilling effect on the potential for peace among rival gangs far beyond the Florencia and East Coast Crip communities.

The gentlemen in prison who facilitated the cease-fire agreement between Florencia and the East Coast Crips, along with the signatories to the “Agreement to End Hostilities,” are serving life sentences in prison, having been denied parole consistently for decades simply because they refuse to renounce their associations. These men, on all sides of the color line, are deserving of a Nobel Peace Prize. Instead, their peacemaking efforts are rewarded with RICO indictments and perpetual parole denials.

\textsuperscript{20} Paul Gary “Lil Doc” Wallace was convicted of RICO conspiracy involving murder on April 18, 2022.