

# **Juvenile delinquency and violent gangs in the USA**

## **and**

### **The treatment of this subject in literature**

Statistics reveal that the American's youths are committing an increasing number of violent crimes.

But are juvenile offenders fully responsible for their actions?

They are children in the progress of developing, with proper guidance and treatment they can be rehabilitated into productive members of society. In contrast to this some people believe that today's violent juveniles should be transferred to the adult criminal justice system, in which they would be adequately punished.

Others are against transferring juveniles into adult courts.

Where can you draw the line: Are violent juvenile offenders misguided children or dangerous criminals?

#### 1.) The Juvenile Justice System Should Punish Violent Youths:

Paul Mc Nulty, who was director of policy and communications in the U.S. Department of Justice during the Bush administration, predicts a surge in violent juvenile crime in the first decade of the twenty - first century.

He has the opinion that youths who commit criminal acts should be punished. More violent crime is committed by older teenagers than by any other age group. Teenagers from fatherless home commit more crimes than teenagers from intact families.

Offenders under the age of 21 commit more than one-fourth of all violent crime.

Older teenagers (from 17 to 19) are the most violent of all age groups. While the teenage population in America declined between 1985 to 1995, violent crimes committed by juveniles rose sharply.

A large majority of teenage criminals are from broken and single - parent households, many teenage boys are growing up without fathers as moral guides. And it is not unusual that a family member served some time in prison.

#### 2.) The Juvenile Justice System Should Rehabilitate Violent Youths:

In contrast to Paul Mc Nulty George M. Anderson advocates the community --based programs being developed in a few states, which provide youths with education and therapy designed to prepare them for reentry into their communities. Big institutions make kids worse because they tend to be hostile, abusive and understaffed.

Sure, some teenagers are psychopaths who can't be rehabilitated. But most are still growing and capable of change under the right circumstances.

#### 3.) Violent Juveniles Should Be Tried As Adults:

Joseph Perkins contends that because of the severe nature of the violent crime committed by youths today, the juvenile justice system should be reformed. The court proceedings of violent juveniles should be open to the public.

Criminal behaviour has consequences. Many young men haven't learned that, either.

We know how dangerous a young man with a gun can be, but many young men today use their bodies as weapons, too. If a boy is old enough to go to war, he is old enough to drink.

If a boy is old enough to rape, he is old enough to serve some time in prison.

More and more kids are wearing firearms and more are involved with drugs.

As it is now, many young offenders are well aware they will receive lenient treatment in juvenile court no matter how loath – some their crime was. They will be far more circumspect if they know that they will be tried and sentenced as an adult if they commit adult crimes.

#### 4.) Violent Juveniles Should Not Be Tried As Adults:

Placing juveniles in the adult criminal justice system puts youths at risk for abuse and fails to reduce crime.

It is estimated that every day 2700 babies are born into poverty, more than 2000 students drop out of school, 250 kids are arrested for violent crimes, and 1700 are abused by their parents.

While schools, jobs and the social safety net continue to erode, more kids are finding themselves caught up in an ever – expanding criminal justice system.

- Unemployment among teens was 19% in 1993, up from 15.3% five years earlier – and for black youths, the figure was twice that high. For those who do find jobs, the average hourly wage has fallen nearly 10% since the mid-1980s.
- In 1992, there were 14.6 million children living below the poverty line, about 5 million more than 1973.
- In 1993, there were 3 million victims of child abuse, a rate 50 percent higher than in 1985. Studies also indicate that the majority of prisoners were abused as children.
- Teen suicide rates increased nearly 20 percent during the 1980s.

In recent years, most states have made it easier to try juvenile killers as adults. Ignoring the immaturity of a 15- or 16-year old, lawmakers have accepted the idea that murder is an adult crime and thus deserves an adult punishment.

Especially in America, gangs are the foundations of violence and crime.

#### **OVERVIEW OF GANGS:**

Today a gang can be defined in four basic ways:

- \* an organized group with a leader
- \* a unified group that usually remains together during peaceful times as well as times of conflict
- \* a group whose members show unity through clothing, language, hair...
- \* a group whose activities are criminal or threatening to the larger society.

Gangs are one of the results of poverty, discrimination and urban deterioration.

Some experts believe that young people, undereducated and without access to good jobs, become frustrated with their lives and join gangs as an alternative to boredom, hopelessness and devastating poverty.

#### THE 19TH CENTURY GANGS:

It was not until the 19th century that "criminal" gangs were first formed. As the result of a worsening economy and growing population that increased competition for jobs, gangs began to specialize in crime and became a part of America's cities.

#### POST CIVIL WAR:

After the Civil War in 1865 New York indicates a large presence of Jewish, Italian, African-American and Irish gangs. With the increase of immigrant populations the gang membership grew.

Chinese gangs appeared in California in 1850, Philadelphia became home to over 100 street gangs in 1870, for example.

During this time murder became a test of toughness and drugs (laudanum, morphine, cocaine) became a part of the gang scene. The level of violence escalated.

It's unbelievable that a gang of Five Points used murder as a membership requirement. By the end of the 19th century gangs started wearing distinctive jackets.

#### THE 20TH CENTURY GANGS:

In the early 19th the U.S. economy got worse, the population grew rapidly and the gap between the rich and poor widened. All across the nation gangs appeared where poor, hopeless people lived.

The beginning of the 20th century also brought a widespread use of firearms with it.

#### THE 1920s:

In 1920 there were about 1300 gangs in Chicago and more than 25000 members. Gang warfare in Chicago was widespread and fighting took place along ethnic, cultural and racial lines.

#### POST WORLD WAR II:

After World War II gang membership:

- 1.) became younger
- 2.) fire-arms were used more often
- 3.) the structure of organization became more rigid
- 4.) drug dependence grew
- 5.) and society became concerned with gangs as a social problem and worked toward rehabilitation

#### THE 1950s:

During the 1950s gang fighting rose highly in cities like New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles and Cleveland. Gang members were usually in their teens. Codes of dress (black leather jackets were popular) and mannerisms were important means of identification. Body language said a lot about the nature of the gang. When a gang decided to become a fighting gang, its members immediately took on a different way of walking. Gang members used guns, knives and homemade weapons. Most common drugs were (alcohol), marijuana and heroin.

Usually they fought over girls. Gang members believed it was essential to protect the honour of their girlfriends. And in the late 1950, girl gangs, a bit similar to boy gangs, were formed. In order to combat the rise of violence, organizations like the New York City Youth Board sent social workers into the slums to form relationships with the gangs. In some cases it worked; in many it did not.

#### THE 1960s:

In the 60s gang violence declined, but drug use escalated. Where there was more drug use there was less gang violence. A new racial consciousness had its effect on local street gangs.

#### GANGS TODAY:

Since the 1980s, as the ghettos become more and more overcrowded, a gang's territory has become no more than a single corner or a block. Guns decide arguments quickly and gang wars today are usually fought like guerilla warfare with shooting from roofs and quick shots from speeding cars. Gangs are found in all 50 states and come from many backgrounds. Members are still usually male, between the ages 13 and 24.

#### REASONS FOR GANG MEMBERSHIP:

Gangs are still largely populated by young people from disenfranchised neighbourhoods. Characteristic features are overcrowding, high unemployment, high drop out rates, lack of social services and a general feeling of hopelessness.

Some experts estimate that more than 80% of gang members are illiterate and find it nearly impossible to get a job.

Young people turn to gangs to earn a living through drug trafficking, illegal weapons sales, robbery and theft. Some young people join gangs to gain the protection and the respect they do not get at home. Or they may join gangs because all their friends are doing it as well, it seems like a natural thing to do. Some experts say that young people from troubled homes attempt to find substitute families in gangs.

#### GANG STRUCTURE:

Gang structure varies. The largest gangs, some with 2000 members break up into smaller groups called clubs and cliques. Clubs bring more territory to a gang, cliques assemble new gang members and unite them along similar interests (street fighting, burglary).

#### GANG LEADERSHIP:

Some gangs operate informally, the leadership is falling to whoever takes control. Other gangs have distinct leaders and highly structured gangs have officers. The president might direct the gang's business dealings and the vice president might keep members in line, overseeing the gang's communication network (including car phones, walkie-talkies, pagers and beepers). Gang members use these devices to coordinate drug deals and to protect themselves from arrest. The "warlord" keeps order at gang meetings, plans fights against rival gangs and controls the gang's arsenal.

### SOLUTIONS:

Although there are no easy solutions to the gang problem, sociologists and social workers have some ideas:

- 1.) Create jobs for young people.
- 2.) Develop community programs in the arts, sports.....
- 3.) Make sure young people receive a good education.
- 4.) Create alternate living situations for children who cannot stay at home.
- 5.) Society as a whole must look at problems of poverty and discrimination.
- 6.) Young people can do their part by being open to alternative activities.
- 7.) Against all prejudices young people should appreciate cultural differences.
- 8.) Provide counseling services for families and young people.

## S.E.HINTON: THE OUTSIDERS

### CONTENT:

Ponyboy, who is on the way home from the movie house, is attacked by the rival gang, the "Socs". The members threaten him with a knife and he is really scared to death. But suddenly his brothers, Darry and Soda, arrive and rescue him. Darry accuses Ponyboy of being so silly to walk home alone.

The next time when Ponyboy watches a movie film with his "gang - brothers" Jonny and Dally, he meets Marcia and Cherry, two girls, whose boyfriends belong to the "Socs". Ponyboy is aware of the fact that Cherry is a member of the rival gang, but he develops a trusting relationship to her, such as he only knows from his brother.

Two -Bit, also a "Greaser", drives Cherry and Marcia home, and all of a sudden some "Socs" arrive who want to start a rumble. Jonny recognizes some of the "Socs" who beat him up some months ago. He was really badly hurt then and he hasn't been able to forget that day.

When Ponyboy comes home late in the evening, Darry is about to call the police because he is worried about his little brother. Ponyboy runs away and finds Jonny; both want to run away from home at this moment. They decide to go to the park when suddenly some drunk "Socs" approach them and start a fight. Bob, a "Soc", is nearly drowning Ponyboy in a fountain and Jonny, who has been wearing a knife since some "Socs" jumped him a few months ago, stabs Bob to defend himself against these quarrelsome and brutal "Socs".

A panic is rising in Ponyboy and Jonny and that's why they flee to Dally.

Dally gives the two boys money and a gun and orders them to hide in a small secluded church in the country. Knowing that the police will come soon they hurry to the train station and hop on the train. Jonny and Ponyboy realize the first time what happened that night and the awareness that Jonny is a murderer is like a nightmare for them.

One week they have to live in this church until Dally will come to check if both are allright.

Jonny and Ponyboy feel alone; they think about the future and home and are scared: How long do they have to hide? This time in the church, which seems to have no end, strengthens their

friendship. After some days Darry arrives. He can't believe his eyes when he looks at Ponyboy and Jonny with short hair.

The police is searching for them at home and with short hair people would perhaps not recognize them from the paper.

They drive away to get something to eat. Jonny can't bear this emotional burden of being a killer, that's why he wants to go to the police and he tells Dally and Pony about his decision.

After a short time they come back while something frightening has happened in the meantime: the church is blazing in flames and 8 children are inside. Jonny and Ponyboy, who believe that they are responsible for the fire, crawl into it to rescue the children.

Ponyboy's back is burnt a bit and some hours later when he wakes up in hospital Darry tells him that Jonny is badly hurt (his back is broken and in addition he is burnt pretty severely.)

The police is already waiting to have a conversation with Ponyboy. He and Jonny do not have to hide any longer so he tells the police the course of events. The policeman gets to know that Jonny had to defend himself and had to help Ponyboy, otherwise Bob, a "Soc", would have drowned Pony. Additional to that Cherry, Bob's girlfriend, told the police that the "Socs" were drunk that evening and wanted to start a fight with the "Greasers".

Darry and Soda, who haven't been able to sleep a wink all nights since Ponyboy disappeared, are giving their brother with the other members of the gang a warm welcome. But this mood is spoiled because Jonny is in critical condition.

On the one hand Ponyboy is weak because of the strains of the last days, but on the other hand he can't be prevented from taking part in the following fight between the "Socs" and the "Greasers".

With the support of other gangs the "Greasers" win this fight.

Dally is quite upset about Jonny, who will die soon, so they drive to the hospital very fast to tell Jonny that they won the fight. Immediately afterwards Jonny closes his eyes and dies.

Dally is so sad about Jonny's death that he wants to die as well. He lost a person he really loved.

Full of anger he robs a grocery store and when the police is chasing him he raises his gun, which is not loaded, he is bluffing. As the policemen don't know that they shoot him.

"Dally Winston wants to be dead and he always gets what he wants."

Ponyboy gets very ill, but his brothers stay on his side and take care of him. A few days later the court's hearing is over but Pony can't draw a deep breath, because it could happen that he has to stay some time at a boys' home. After his recovery Ponyboy has some quarrels with Darry about his bad marks at school, because he has always been a good schoolboy until now. But suddenly Soda, who has the role of a mediator between his two brothers, can't stand their fights any more. It's the first time Soda tells them about his feelings, which reminds Pony and Darry that they should stick together: They are a family!

### THE MAIN CHARACTERS:

#### PONYBOY:

He is 14 years old and the youngest member of the gang called "Greasers".

Ponyboy's parents died in a car accident some months ago and now his brothers, Soda and Darry, take care of him. Ponyboy is very proud of his light - brown long hair, because it is typical of all "Greasers" to wear long hair. He is a clever guy who gets good marks at school until the course of events overcharges him. He is too young to be able to estimate danger, risk and what violent behaviour can cause. Most of the time Pony does not consider that his oldest brother sacrifices

his own hopeful future, additionally he thinks that Darry does not love him, because he nags at him and orders him around, but his brother only means well.

In the church when he changes his appearance he wants to break out of this situation. Life has changed too fast since he was pulled out of his daily routine.

**SODA (Ponyboy's brother):**

He is about 17 years old and works at a gas station.

He is always grinning and tries to be helpful and understanding, that's why Ponyboy loves him more than anyone else. He knows that his brothers have many quarrels and it takes him a lot of time and patience to stop them. But he hides his feelings, which is the worst thing he does. He believes that there is no place for his problems.

**DARRY (Ponyboy's oldest brother):**

He is 20 years old. Darry is tall, broad - shouldered and muscular, hard and firm.

His eyes can be gentle and sympathetic one moment and blazing with anger the next. Sometimes his eyes are really cold.

Ponyboy believes that Darry doesn't like him, because he is always moaning about him.

In contrast to this believe Darry loves Ponyboy, although he is sometimes unable to show his love.

Since his parents died he has always been trying to protect Ponyboy from all dangerous situations. He is also the one who wants Ponyboy to go to collage and who wants him to work and study hard so that Ponyboy will be able to realize his dreams some day. Darry didn't have the chance to finish school because he has to go to work to earn a living.

Darry feels responsible for his two younger brothers and he would do everything to protect and help them, although Ponyboy is not of this opinion. Darry has to carry the responsibility for his brothers and so it is understandable for him to be strict to them, because if something happens to the boys it will be his fault and then Sodapop and Ponyboy will have to go to a boys' home and that's not very pleasant.

**TWO -BIT MATHEWS:**

He is the oldest of the gang. Ponyboy likes him because he has a wide grin like Soda.

A characteristic feature of Two -Bit is that you are not able to shut up that guy.

**DALLAS WINSTON (DALLY):**

Dally spent three years on the wild side of New York and was arrested at the age of ten.

His eyes are cold with a hatred against the whole world.

He is tougher, colder, meaner than the rest of them. But deep inside he has a good core, although he was arrested, got drunk, lied, cheated, stole, and so on.

First Ponyboy didn't like him because he had to respect him.

Darry succeeds in doing what he wants. But there is one event he feels guilty of: The fact that Jonny is dangerously hurt because of saving the children. He, the most experienced gang brother, stayed outside the church, and now Jonny is in bad condition, so he thinks he is involved in Jonny's burning.

#### JONNY CADE:

He is the gang's pet and about 16 years old. He is a very good listener and Ponyboy's best friend. Jonny is against violence but since he was beaten up by the "Socs" he has always been carrying a knife with him. And at home life isn't bearable: His father often beats him up and his mother ignores him.

One of the most embarrassing sentences in the book is when Jonny says that he would be happy if his father or his mother beat him, because then they would realize that he was there. He dreams about an intact family, but this only stays a dream.

When Jonny kills a member of the rival gang a nightmare starts for him because before he couldn't even "hurt" a fly.

Jonny is a quiet boy who sometimes thinks of suicide, because he cannot stand his terrible life, especially he can't cope with his murdering Bob. But in hospital Jonny changes his mind and he starts to fight for his life. He is aware of dying soon, it's too late for changes! Even when his mum wants to visit him in hospital he refuses because she has been neglecting him all his life.

#### RANDY (from the "Socs"):

Randy has no prejudices against the "Greasers", he says what he thinks and in my opinion it is worth mentioning that he is a honest boy. Once he starts a conversation with Ponyboy in his car, the next time he visits him after his accident at home, which is an indication that he is sick of the fights between these two gangs. If there were different circumstances I could imagine that Randy and Ponyboy would become friends someday.

#### CHERRY VALANCE (Bob's girlfriend):

She understands the "Greasers" and tries to help Jonny and Pony although they killed her boyfriend. Cherry is a nice girl who stands between two gangs. On the one hand she is familiar with the lifestyle of the "Socs" and belongs to them as well, but on the other hand she feels for the "Greasers" and builds up a relationship to some members.

#### THE GANGS:

##### 1.) The GREASERS: boys from the "East Side" of the city

poorer than the "Socs" and middle class

The "Greasers" are not well organized, they are rather a small bunch of friends who stick together.

The members are guys with greasy long hair.

The kids or youngsters spend their days outside in the streets, sometimes they sleep outside because they are tired of hearing their parents quarrelling and shouting.

##### 2.) The SOCS: rich kids from the "West Side" of the city

contrasting and rival gang of the "Greasers"

almost everyone has a car and a weapon too

Some guys of the Socs pretend to be very cool because of the fact that

they have money, but in reality they are not.

#### STEPHEN SONDHEIM: WEST SIDE STORY

## CONTENT:

This play is about two gangs of the West Side of New York City. RIFF is the leader of the JETS. The opposition - a Puerto Rican gang called the SHARKS, is lead by BERNARDO.

Inevitably it is bound to happen that they want to fight against each other. The two gangs want to set the date of the fight at a dance. The Jets, who believe that they are the greatest, were founded by Riff and his best friend TONY. Later, Tony has been drifting away from the Jets. He even has a job at Doc's candy store. Riff goes to the candy store to persuade Tony to come to the dance too.

For MARIA the dance is also very important. It has been one month since her brother, Bernardo, brought her to America.

The dance begins fairly well, but when Bernardo arrives with Anita and Maria with Chino (the boy, Maria has to marry), the dance becomes a competition between Jets and Sharks. Suddenly Tony arrives. From opposite sides of the gym he and Maria see each other for the first time.

Later, Tony walks through the streets, lost in a dream and only thinking of the girl he has just met and he has just fallen in love with. At the dance, as planned, Bernardo is challenging to a rumble.

After a while Maria hears a voice from outside of her window. It's Tony. She goes out onto the fire escape and he climbs up to join her. For a moment they forget their problems. Tomorrow evening they will meet at the Bridal Shop, where Maria works.

At Doc's candy store, where a "war council" is taking place, Riff and his Jets are visited by OFFICER KRUPKE, a cop, who warns the boys not to cause trouble.

When Tony comes to meet Maria the next day, she wants him to stop the fight between the Jets and the Sharks. The rumble is about to begin when Tony arrives. He attempts to reconcile the two gangs, but Bernardo insults him. In the fight that follows the forbidden knives appear, and Riff is killed by Bernardo. Tony gets so angry that he stabs Bernardo. The rumble ends with the scream of the police siren. Tony flees to Maria, who has already heard that he killed her brother, but she can't hate him.

The Jets, now commanded by ICE, determine to protect Tony - particularly from Chino, who is searching for him with a gun. Anita agrees to find Tony at Doc's Candy store, where he's hiding, to tell him that Maria will join him. In a rage, because she is pestered by the Jets, she delivers another message. They should inform Tony that Chino found out about him and Maria and that Chino shot her.

Tony, who believes that Maria is dead, is running lost in thought through the streets. Suddenly he stops, as he sees a figure in the darkness of the playground. It's Maria! He starts running to her, ignorantly that another figure steps out of the shadows; it's Chino who pulls out his gun and fires.

Tony stumbles and Maria, who is running to him, catches him. Tony dies in her arms.

THE MAIN CHARACTERS:

MARIA:

- \* She is lacking in self - confidence.
- \* With New York, her new home town, she is not really familiar.
- \* She can't hate Tony, although he killed her brother.
- \* She wants to stay at Tony's side all her life knowing that there are dangerous situations they have to cope with.

TONY:

- \* He is in love with Maria.
- \* He stabbed Bernardo, Maria's brother, in rage, because Bernardo killed his best friend.
- \* He is sick of the fights between the "Jets" and the "Sharks".
- \* He is a sensitive and helpful person who wishes: "There's a place for us, a time and place for us!"

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