

**Prison Gang Tattoo Recognition:  
A Correctional Officer's Survival Guide**

by

**Thomas R. Zackasee**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements**

**for the Degree of**

**Master of Science**

**in the**

**Criminal Justice Program.**

**YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY**

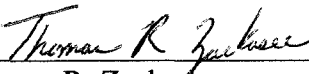
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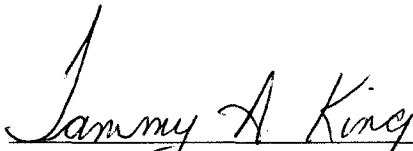
  
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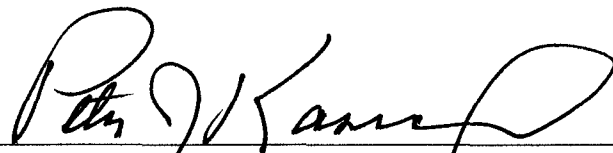
12-02-04  
Date

  
Tammy A. King, Ph.D., Committee Member

12/02/04  
Date

  
Christian Onwudiwe, Ph.D., Committee Member

12/02/04  
Date

  
Peter J. Kasvinsky, Ph.D., Dean of Graduate Studies

12/7/04  
Date

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for supporting me during this project. Their encouragement and support will never be forgotten.

God, with whom all things are possible. God is Good.

All of the Y.S.U. faculty from whom I have had the pleasure to learn, especially Dr. Tammy King and Dr. Christian Onwudiwe.

Dr. Eric See, the teacher “period.” Thank you for always having time for me, and thank you for making learning fun again. Youngstown State University is very lucky to have such a great mind and wonderful person.

My parents, who have always given me their support, understanding, and love. Thank you for always being there.

Nicole Wallis, MD, my beautiful wife. Thank you for being you. Without your motivation, understanding, and love I would not be where I am today. Thank you and I love you.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this project is to explain the need for creating a handbook of inmate tattoos and their meanings for correctional officers. In order to accomplish this goal, the history of the art form of tattooing, the history of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the history of prison gangs within the Federal Bureau of Prisons have been discussed. However, an important goal of this thesis is to provide correctional officers with information so that they have the ability to recognize inmate tattoos and interpret their meanings. This study was then narrowed to focus on the five Disruptive Groups that currently exist within the Federal Bureau of Prisons. A collection of federal, state, and private sources were used to complete this project.

A handbook for correctional officers of prison gang tattoos and their meanings was created during this project. The handbook focuses on the five Disruptive Groups previously mentioned. The study also proposes the creation of a centralized database that would track all inmate tattoos. The main idea behind this creation is to help monitor the criminal activity of prison gangs and to better track their movement.

Four categories of inmates will exist within the database. The first category of inmates that will exist within the database are members of Disruptive Groups. The second category of inmates within the database will be those inmates who have gang affiliated tattoos. The third category of inmates within the database will be inmates who have tattoos but the tattoos are not gang affiliated. The fourth category of inmates within the database will be inmates who do not have tattoos.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

A destructive force has existed within the United States correctional system since the mid 1950s - that destructive force is prison gangs. Prison gangs have evolved a great deal throughout their existence. They originally emerged out of a desire for protection. However, prison gangs as they exist today are responsible for much more than just protection, as their activities now include murder, drug trafficking, and extortion. Understanding prison gang members requires an understanding of prison tattoos.

This thesis will explain the need to create a handbook for correctional officers of inmate tattoos and their meanings. An inmate data-card will also be created to record all inmate tattoos. Finally, although it will not be created, the need to create a centralized data- base to keep track of all inmate tattoos will be made clear. The main ideas behind these creations are to help monitor the criminal activity of prison gangs, to better track their movement, and to educate correctional officers.

In order to fully appreciate how prison gangs have evolved, and how they have influenced the evolution of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, it is important to understand: the historical beginnings and the significance of tattoos, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and prison gangs within the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The first topic to be addressed will focus on tattoos. The following section will not only explain the history of tattooing, but will also introduce why this art form is used by gang members today.

## **The History of Tattooing**

The art form of tattooing has evolved over the centuries. Tattoos have been found in all four corners of the earth including: Egypt, Great Britain, Polynesia, Samoa, New Zealand, Japan, North America, and South America . Unfortunately, no one can positively identify who or from where this art form originated. The major reason why this mystery exists is the fact that written records were either not kept or were destroyed over time. Despite this, a large amount of data exists about the evolution of tattoos. Tattoos have been used for numerous reasons, including: therapeutic relief, to show affiliation with a particular group, and to show national pride (Gilbert, 2000).

The oldest known tattoo in existence belongs to a 5,000 year old tattooed corpse that was found on a mountain between Austria and Italy. According to Gilbert, Professor Konrad Spindler of Innsbruck University stated that this man's body is the only one of it's kind from the Bronze Age. Professor Spindler went on to say that this tattooed corpse is the best-preserved tattooed corpse ever found. The corpse contained, "several tattoos: a cross on the inside of the left knee, six straight lines 15 centimeters long above the kidney and numerous parallel lines on the ankles" (Gilbert, 2000, p.11). Spindler claims that the tattoos' placement suggests that they were probably applied for therapeutic reasons (Gilbert, 2000).

All Egyptian mummies that have been discovered with tattoos to date are female. The most famous tattooed mummy is that of the Egyptian priestess Amunt, who lived sometime between 2160-1994 BC (Gilbert, 2000). Her body was tattooed with, " parallel

lines on her arms and thighs, and there is an elliptical pattern below her navel,” all of which Egyptian scholar Robert S. Bianchi believes has “an undeniably carnal overtone” (Gilbert, 2000, p.11).

The evolution of tattooing took a huge step forward around 400 B.C. Female Nubian mummies dating from this time period have been found with the first picture tattoos. These mummies contain tattoos that represent the god Bes, who “is portrayed in many Egyptian works of art as an ugly ape-like dwarf wearing an animal skin.” (Gilbert, 2000, p.13). Until this time, all known tattoos were abstract patterns (Gilbert, 2000).

Tattooing is mentioned by a large number of Greek and Roman writers, including Plato and Herodotus. The Greeks learned the art of tattooing from the Persians. Evidence exists which suggests that tattooing was used to identify slaves and deserters, and thus respectable members of Greek and Roman societies did not take part in the art form (Gilbert, 2000).

This time period left behind the oldest known description of a tattoo technique, and with it, a formula for tattoo ink. This technique for tattooing and the formula for tattoo ink are found in *Medicae artis principes* by the sixth century Roman physician, Aetius, who writes:

Stigmata are the marks that are made on the face and other parts of the body. We see such marks on the hand of soldiers. To perform the operation they use ink made according to this formula: Egyptian pinewood and especially the bark, one pound; corroded bronze, two with vinegar and mix it with other ingredients to make powder. Soak the powder in two parts of water and one part of leek juice and mix thoroughly. First wash

the place to be tattooed with leek juice and then prick in the design with pointed needles until blood is drawn. Then rub in the ink (*Translated by Steve Gilbert*) (Gilbert, 2000, p.15).

Polynesia can proudly take credit for having the most intricate and skillful tattooing in the ancient world. The art form evolved over thousands of years throughout the islands of the Pacific. However, western anthropologists did inquire into the significance of tattooing within the context of traditional Polynesian culture. The most sophisticated of all Polynesian cultures was in the Marquesas. The world had never seen such an intricately tattooed people, as the inhabitants of Marquesas were extensively tattooed from head to toe, including their faces (Gilbert, 2000).

In Japan, the earliest written record of tattooing was compiled in 297A.D. The Japanese original use of tattooing was similar to the Greeks and Romans. Tattooing was used to punish criminals and outcasts. Tattooing was considered such an insult that, when crimes were punishable by death, the convicted individual could elect to be tattooed instead. By the end of the seventeenth century the practice of tattooing criminals had all but ended. This practice ended due to the mounting popularity of decorative tattooing. Criminals began to cover up their penal tattoos with one of these more decorative tattoos, in an attempt to conceal the crime for which they had been imprisoned (Gilbert, 2000).

In 1936, the use of tattoos saw another first. Fighting broke out in China and individuals in Japan that wanted to avoid military duty were tattooed. Since individuals who were tattooed were seen as potential problems, they were not drafted into the military (Gilbert, 2000).

### **Street Gangs use Tattoos the way Prison Gangs do Today**

During the eighteenth century the art form of tattooing was used by Japanese gangs. "These gang members were tattooed to demonstrate their ability to endure pain, show their affiliation, and to permanently separate themselves from normal society" (Gilbert, 2000, p.78). This use of tattoos is of particular importance to this paper, since many of the aforementioned reasons for being tattooed are the same reasons gang members are tattooed today.

The following section of this paper will detail the growth and development of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. This section will also explain how the Federal Bureau of Prisons has been able to recognize the need to implement changes in their existing policies in order to meet the demands placed on the agency by their ever-changing inmate population.

### **The History of the Federal Bureau of Prisons**

The history of the federal prison system can be broken down into three phases. During the first phase, the government did not have any federal prisons. Instead, the government paid state and local facilities to house individuals who were convicted of committing a federal offense. This phase of the federal prison system began approximately 1776 and lasted until sometime late in the nineteenth century. However, the practice of housing federal inmates in state or local facilities did not end and, in fact, continues today. The 'Three Prisons Act,' which was passed in 1891, started the second phase of the

federal prison system. With this act began the construction of United States Penitentiary Leavenworth, Kansas and United States Penitentiary Atlanta, Georgia. Under this act, McNeill Island in the state of Washington also became a federal correctional facility. The third phase of the federal prison system started in 1930 with the official creation of the Bureau of Prisons. Many events over the past two centuries are responsible for the evolution of the federal prison system, and the subsequent creation of the Bureau of Prisons (Keve, 1991).

### **Phase 1**

The federal court system was established in 1789. The court created, “the country’s first federal criminal statute in 1790, which defined explicitly those crimes that were to be subject to federal prosecution” (Keve, 1991, p.3). Many of the first federal prisoners were incarcerated for crimes against the government. These individuals were held in state and local facilities such as the New Gate Prison. New Gate Prison was an abandoned copper mine in Simsbury, Connecticut. The conditions at this prison were deplorable. At night, the inmates were kept in an underground cavern. Inmates had almost no light, and had to deal with dripping water and narrow living quarters. This was not the only state or local facility with poor living conditions at the time, and inmates were subject to whippings at many other facilities that housed federal inmates (Keve, 1991).

The problem of poor living conditions for inmates who broke federal crimes can be attributed to a 1776 ruling made by Congress, which stated that prisoners found guilty of committing federal crimes could be housed in state or local facilities. These facilities

had substandard living conditions at this time (Keve, 1991). In fairness to Congress, they had little choice since the Department of Justice was not created until 1870.

Many state and local facilities were more than happy to house federal inmates for the money. Two famous facilities in which federal inmates served their sentences were in Pennsylvania and New York. In 1829 Pennsylvania opened a popular prison named Eastern Penitentiary. Maintaining the silence and solitary confinement of inmates was never an issue at this facility, as they were achieved by the architecture of the institution. This building was so massive that no inmate ever came in contact with another inmate. Inmates at this institution had living quarters that measured 8 by 12 feet. The inmates' living quarters were attached to an outdoor recreation yard to allow solitary exercise (Mays, 2005).

During the same time period, the New York State Prison at Auburn was also a popular institution. The main philosophy of this institution was also silence (Allen, 2001). However, unlike the Pennsylvania System, silence was accomplished by whipping inmates and not by the architecture (Keve, 1991). Auburn prison administrators also used solitary confinement as punishment, whereas those in Pennsylvania viewed it as a way of prison life (Allen, 2001). This institution, and the less popular facility at Dannemora which opened in 1845, housed federal inmates for nearly 100 years (Keve, 1991).

Near the end of the era of these facilities:

an act to create a Department of Justice was signed by President Ulysses S Grant in June 1870, and the department came into being on July 1, headed by a new attorney general, Amos T. Akerman. As its duties gradually were defined, the Justice Department assumed responsibility for the control and

disposition of all federal prisoners, although there was still no move toward having federal prisons. Boarding of prisoners in state and local institutions was still the unquestioned practice" (Keve, 1991, p.14).

The government of the United States could clearly see that neither of these popular institutions was a suitable facility to house federal inmates. Unfortunately for the government, they were the best available facilities at the time. The Eastern Penitentiary was not viewed as an appropriate facility due to the fact the it was mentally draining on it's inmate population. However, it was the institution in New York at Auburn that came under public criticism due to the fact that whippings were regularly administered (Keve, 1991).

The public and the media's first influence on the prison system occurred in the 1840's, when public criticism forced the prison inspectors to modify the disciplinary policies of their respective institutions. The law which first prohibited whippings in prison was passed in 1847 in New York. This law put an end to the use of the whip except in riot situations (Keve, 1991). Public criticism of the prison system continues to affect the way prisons are run even today. This fact is especially true when it comes to the Federal Prison system.

Ending the whipping of inmates was only the first goal of the humanitarians, who were also outraged by the mortality rate of inmates who were in contracted facilities. One individual who must receive credit for improving the life of federal inmates is George Washington Cable. Cable was a newspaper reporter in New Orleans who, in 1881, was put on a grand jury that was investigating local prison conditions. His devotion to the subject was so strong that he wrote several stories about how prisoners were treated



(Keve, 1991). Cable's "main thesis was that the public was responsible and it was itself ultimately the sufferer" (Keve, 1991, p.21). His main objection to the contract facilities in which federal inmates were kept was the fact that inmates were used to provide cheap labor; he asserted that this hard labor was a death sentence. He backed this with the assertion that, at the time, inmates' expected survival rate in prison was only ten years (Keve, 1991).

Enoch Cobb Wines is another individual who influenced the current state of the Federal Prison System. Cobb is credited with starting the first national organization for correction professionals, and was a major player in organizing a collection of U.S. and foreign prison workers in 1870. This meeting, which was held in Cincinnati Ohio, was the beginning of the National Prison Association. The National Prison Association is currently the American Correction Association (Keve, 1991).

Cobb's idea of turning prison guards into correctional officers is an idea that is still pursued by the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Federal correctional officers must pass professional training in Glynnco, Georgia and also at their respective institutions. Officers are also taught a wide variety of subjects that include the Use of Force Model, verbal skills, and the proper use of firearms.

The Use of Force Model is a five-step model that all Bureau of Prison employees must follow. This model takes into account the reasonable correctional worker's response to the reasonable correctional workers' perception of inmates' behavior.

The five steps of inmates' behavior in this model are first-compliant, second-passive resistant, third-active resistant, fourth-assaultive/bodily

harm, and five-lethal threat and escape. The five correctional worker's responses in this model are first-cooperative controls, second-containment, third-compliance techniques, fourth-controlling and defensive tactics, and fifth-the use of deadly force" (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal, 2003).

Federal Bureau of Prisons' staff are taught to use only the amount of force necessary to contain any given situation. This type of training is the evolution of Cobb's original idea.

## **Phase 2**

After years of public outrage about the treatment of federal inmates, humanitarians finally achieved victory. "The fifty-first Congress, in the year 1891, took the first step toward providing the federal government with its own prisons" (Keve, 1991, p.30). Congress did this by passing the Three Prisons Act, which created United States Penitentiaries (USP) Leavenworth and Atlanta, as well as making McNeill Island a United States Penitentiary (Keve, 1991).

The creation and passing of the Three Prisons Act was a significant development for the Federal government. For the first time it was committed to having its' own prisons. Unfortunately for the federal prisoners, the new law provided no immediate relief for them. The Three Prisons Act had no true power at its' onset, due to the fact that it authorized some funds for planning, but no money was appropriated for prison construction (Keve, 1991).

In the spring of 1897, six years after the passing of The Three Prisons Act, federal inmates began to build USP Leavenworth, Kansas. This institution took over two

and a half decades to finish, thereby holding the record for the institution that took the longest to complete (Keve, 1991). “In April 1896, an appropriations bill was introduced in Congress that included the funds for the second of three authorized prisons” (Keve, 1991, p.43). Unlike USP Leavenworth, there was no inmate labor available to construct USP Atlanta. The construction of the penitentiary at Atlanta began in 1900, and the completion of the first phase of the facility was completed in January of 1902 (Keve, 1991).

The construction of McNeill Island started in 1871 and the prison was opened in 1875; however, McNeil Island did not have its’ own budget until 1909. So the official opening date of this institution according to the Bureau of Prisons is 1909. Of the three institutions that officially came on line thanks to the Three Prisons Act, McNeil Island was the most poorly constructed, and subsequently, the only one that closed (Keve, 1991). (See Appendix A for a complete list of Federal Bureau of Prisons (Historical) Closed Institutions.)

Although the Bureau of Prisons has obviously suffered more than a few setbacks, it has also achieved greatness. One individual that must be recognized for his contributions to the Federal Bureau of Prisons is Warden McClaughry. At the time, the Bertillon system of identification was a complex process of taking physical measurements. It was the only system of identification used by the Bureau of Prisons at the time McClaughry was warden of Leavenworth. Thanks to two inmates named Will West and William West, McClaughry attended a demonstration on fingerprinting in 1904. Will West

and William West were confused for each other by staff members at Leavenworth in 1903. Their physical characteristics were so similar that the Bertillon system could not distinguish them apart. McClaughry knew that the Bertillon system of identification must be replaced. McClaughry's son, Matthew, started work on developing a central file of fingerprinting. In 1906 more than three thousand fingerprint records existed at Leavenworth (Keve, 1991).

The mid 1920's brought about a time of turmoil for the Bureau of Prisons. In 1925, the FBI discovered that over 3,000 inmates were in Leavenworth when there should only have been 1,400 maximum. Overcrowding was not the only problem that faced Leavenworth at the time. The institution was so under-staffed, reports show that in 1918, all clerks in the records shop and administration offices were inmates. Inmate clerks had to classify fingerprints and file prisoner records (Keve, 1991). Obviously the safety and security of this institution, as well as the safety and security of the staff and inmates, were jeopardized. During this time period inmates were also used as full time doctors of institutions (Keve, 1991).

At the same time United States Penitentiary Leavenworth was facing problems of overcrowding and a lack of security, United States Penitentiary Atlanta was facing similar problems. Fortunately, for the inmate population in Atlanta their warden was Warden Moyer. Moyer instituted many changes to improve life in the federal penitentiary.

Moyer instituted daily calisthenics, organized an orchestra to play during meals, improved medical care by adding medical positions, improved recreational activities, and

discontinued the wearing of striped clothing. Moyer even allowed inmates to talk during meals. This was considered to be a risky move due to the fact that meals are considered to be potentially volatile situations, as a large number are grouped together (Keve, 1991). Currently, inmates are forbidden to talk during any counts made by staff. However, the talking during meals is still allowed by Bureau policy.

Warden White of USP Leavenworth, can also be credited for making a Bureau policy change. Unfortunately for the Bureau of Prisons, it took an unfortunate event to precipitate this change. In December of 1931, an armed group of inmates took several hostages including Warden White. At the inmates demand, Warden White gave his guards the order to open the front gates of the institution. Some of the inmates were eventually killed. While others committed suicide, or were recaptured. The Bureau made a policy change as a direct result of this incident (Keve, 1991). It is currently the Bureau's position that any staff member taken hostage loses all of their authority.

The Bureau of Prisons is all too often reactive instead of proactive. A classic example of this occurred in October 1983. Three officers were escorting inmate Thomas Silverstein from the shower area to his cell. Silverstein was walking just ahead of the guards when he thrust his hands into another cell and was handed a weapon. Silverstein managed to fatally stab Officer Merle Clutts. This entire situation could have been avoided if the inmate had been hand cuffed with his arms in back of him. However, cuffing inmates behind their backs was not Bureau of Prisons Policy. Later in the same day Inmate Clayton Fountain killed Officer Robert Hoffman in the same manner (Keve, 1991).

This event could have been avoided because the warden should have locked down the institution after his first staff member was killed.

After these two events, and other less violent acts in the preceding days, the warden made many procedural changes. Inmate law libraries were put in the special housing unit, medical staff came to the unit to see the inmates, and only one inmate at a time was allowed in the recreation area (Keve, 1991). These policy changes were put in place to help in preventing future attacks on staff. This was achieved by limiting inmate movement.

### **Phase 3**

The third phase of the Federal Bureau of Prisons started in 1930 with the official creation of the Bureau of Prisons and continues today.

### **A Time for Change**

As a result of the two staff murders in 1983, the Bureau of Prisons once again came under the attack of public criticism. In 1984, a study was conducted to see if United States Penitentiary at Marion, Indiana was a more dangerous facility than the famous Alcatraz in San Francisco, California. Researchers point out the fact that when Alcatraz was in its' prime, inmates had no rights. Marion had to address the growing issue of prisoner rights. For example, inmates at Marion complained about rectal searches, claiming it was a form of anal rape. Inmates at Alcatraz underwent very similar searches

and didn't complain (Keve, 1991).

The answer to the question of why Marion prisoners are more assaultive toward staff than the Alcatraz inmates and why they are more likely to kill other inmates lies in a complex set of factors that relate to changes over the past two decades in the character of crime, the emergence of powerful white, black, and hispanic gangs organized within prisons or in outside communities, the dramatic growth of the drug trade and other changes in American society (Keve, 2000, p.201).

Although researchers point out the fact that a complex set of factors contributed to the changes in inmate behavior during this time period, the importance of the emergence of powerful white, black, and hispanic gangs can not be over stated.

The previous discussion is not a complete history of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Many historic events such as the first female prison and the first drug (rehabilitation) program implemented by the organization as well as many other important events were excluded because they are not relevant to the focus of this paper. The investigation on USP Marion is the correct time to leave the historical time line of the Federal Bureau of Prisons since the gang problem within the prison system has been introduced.

### **History of Gangs within the United States Correctional System**

What is a gang? Webster's Dictionary defines a gang as, "A group of persons working to unlawful or antisocial ends; for example a band of antisocial adolescents" ([http://members.aol.com/hta/venicecom/myhomepage/index.html?mtbrand=AOL US](http://members.aol.com/hta/venicecom/myhomepage/index.html?mtbrand=AOL%20US)).

The Madison, Wisconsin, Police Department Gang Task Force defines a gang in the following way. "A group or association of three or more persons who have a common

identifying sign, symbol or name, and who individually or collectively engage in criminal activity, or a juvenile commits an act that if committed by an adult would be a criminal act” (Internal, 1996). A gang can also be defined as, “an organized group with a recognized leader whose activities are either criminal or threatening to the community. Although gang members are part of these organizations, they rarely acknowledge their roles as contributing to the problems in the community” (Chicago, 1998). As witnessed above, many sources define what a gang is and they are all slightly different. However, the one constant within all of the above definitions of what a gang is include the words unlawful or criminal activities.

Prison gangs are involved in criminal activities. According to Fleisher: “prison gangs constitute a persistently disruptive force in correctional facilities because they interfere with correctional programs, threaten the safety of inmates and staff, and erode institutional quality of life” (2001, p.1). The reader should not only know the definition of a gang, but also realize that gangs have spread all over the country, including within the federal correctional system. The next few paragraphs will explain how and why gangs spread in this country, including within the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and also why the public knows relatively little about the spread of gangs in the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

“As the gang phenomenon has grown and spread in America's cities and counties, there has been a parallel growth and spread of gangs in America's prisons” (Carlie, 2002). There's no way to know how many prisons have gang members. The reasons for this lack of information are do to the following: “First, official documentation on prison gangs is



weak and is generally for departmental use only. Second, prison managers (wardens) are reluctant to allow researchers into facilities to conduct prison gang research. Third, prison gangs and their members themselves are secretive and likely would not disclose sensitive information to researchers or prison authorities (Fong, 1991).

According to experts on gangs the federal courts have contributed to the growth and development of gangs including those within prisons. Three cases that contributed to this growth and development of gangs are the 1976 Guajardo case, the 1979 LaMar ruling, and the 1982 court order in the Ruiz prison reform lawsuit. First, the 1976 Guajardo case permitted gang affiliated inmates at different facilities to be allowed to have written correspondence with one another. Second, the 1979 LaMar ruling, resulted in the desegregating of prison cells. This ruling caused an escalation in racial tensions within prisons. The 1982 Ruiz ruling resulted in the abolishing of the building tender system (Walt, 1998). "Building tenders are usually older white inmates who function as guards and spies. They maintained the social order among felons through intimidation and coercion, and snitching on lower-ranking inmates" (Walt, 1998).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

Sociologists have identified several reasons for which individuals join gangs, and also have insight on the mentality of gangs. However, little is known about prison gangs in comparison to other types of organized crime. Several reasons explain this lack of knowledge. Prison gang members reside in prisons and therefore the public has limited access to them. Prison gangs operate in considerable secrecy in order to shield their members from detection by prison authorities. As previously stated, there is also reluctance on the part of prison administration to acknowledge the problems that these groups cause. As a result, the current literature on prison gangs is sparse (Potter, n/d).

Even though current literature on prison gangs is sparse some facts about prison gangs are known. Experts know that prison gangs have a structure and have different levels of membership. The next few paragraphs will explain the organizational similarities that prison gangs share as well as explaining the different levels of membership recognized by experts in the field, as well as the different levels of membership recognized by the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Prison gangs share organizational similarities. They have a structure with one person who is usually designated as the leader and who oversees a council of members that make the gang's final decisions. Like some street counterparts, prison gangs have a creed or motto, unique symbols of membership, and a constitution prescribing group behavior.

It is known that most prison gangs, as well as street gangs, have what is known as

a gang structure. Urban Dynamics Inc. states:

that all gangs have identifiable levels of membership. The highest level in gang structure is leadership. The leader or leaders of a gang determine what criminal activity the gang will participate in. The second highest level in gang structure is the hard-core member. The hard-core gang members are usually the older and most violent gang members. These individuals make up about 10% of a gang's membership. Associates are the next in level of gangs. These individuals usually make a personal commitment to the gang culture and are dedicated to achieving the level of recognition needed to attain hard-core status. The next lowest level of gang structure is the fringe. These individuals have not made a commitment to a life in the criminal gang culture. Wanna-Bes are the lowest level of the gang structure. Wanna-Bes want to be in the gang, even act like and dress like gang members. However, for one reason or another they have not been accepted into the gang. Cliques are also recognized within the gang structure. Gangs are very seldom at full strength, unless they are in conflict. When several lower level gang members gravitate around one or more of the hard core gang members a clique has occurred (Urban, n/d).

The Federal Bureau of Prisons currently recognizes two classifications of prison gangs. The first class is the five Disruptive Groups that currently exist within the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The Federal Bureau of Prisons currently recognizes three levels of gang membership within these Disruptive Groups: members, suspects, and associates. This three tiered system is used to distinguish how embedded a particular prisoner is in the gang (Spergel, 1995). Members can be defined as those individuals that are considered to be or have been identified as fulltime active members. A suspect is a gang member whose credentials have not been fully established. An associate is someone whose actions indicate he is conducting business or looks out for the interests of a gang but has not joined the gang, or cannot join the gang (Klein, 1995). Currently, this three-tiered system only applies to the five current Disruptive Groups that exist within the federal correction

system. These disruptive groups are considered to be the most dangerous gangs within the federal correctional system, due to their level of organization and their violent actions (Spergel, 1995).

The second classification of prison gangs recognized by the Federal Bureau of Prisons are the Security Threat Groups, which include all other gang members and problem inmates. A two-tiered classification exists for all other gang members; they are either suspects or associates (Spergel, 1995).

As previously stated, the most powerful prison gangs in the federal prison system today are known as Disruptive Groups. There are currently five gangs classified as Disruptive Groups: the Mexican Mafia, the Black Guerilla Family, the Mexikanemi, the Aryan Brotherhood, and the Texas Syndicate. The Latin Kings were the most recent gang to lose their status as a Disruptive Group within the Federal Prison System. The major difference between the Security Threat Groups and Disruptive groups is the blood in blood out oath. Once a member joins a Disruptive Group, that individual is in for life.

The Mexican Mafia is the oldest prison gang in the federal system. The creation of the group is credited to Luis "Huero" Flores (<http://www.geocities.com/OrganizedCrimeSyndicates/MexicanMafiaPrisonGang.html>). The Mexican Mafia is also known as La EME. La EME originated in 1957 at the Deuel Vocational Institution in the California Department of Corrections. The group originally formed out of a desire for protection (Valentine, 2000).

La EME is primarily comprised of Mexican-Americans

([http://www.1800stunnaz.com/cholo/nortesur\\_1.html](http://www.1800stunnaz.com/cholo/nortesur_1.html)). In order to achieve membership within the Mexican Mafia an individual must be sponsored by a current member. After an individual is sponsored by a current member he must take a blood-in-blood-out pledge. (Fleisher, 2001). 'Blood in Blood out' means that the prospective member must kill someone as the price of admission to the gang and cannot leave except by dying (Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, 2000). The structure of La EME consists of a chain-of-command whereby instructions from generals are carried out by captains, lieutenants, and soldiers

(<http://www.geocities.com/OrganizedCrimeSyndicates/MexicanMafiaPrisonGang.html>).

The original members of the Mexican Mafia trace their roots to Latino Street gangs predominately from the Maravilla area of East Los Angeles (Potter, n/d). "La EME is also closely associated with several urban Latino street gangs including various 18<sup>th</sup> street gang factions and a number of others collectively known as 'Surenos'" (Valentine, 2000, p.26).

- Movidas, meaning rules of conduct, were drawn up and approved by all of the original members of the Mexican Mafia.
- Membership was open only to Mexican Americans.
- La Eme was to be placed above all else, including family, church, and self.
- The confirmed member had to carry out orders without question. If a hit was ordered, it must be done. If not, the member assigned the mission would himself be put to death.
- Members were never to snitch to the authorities or trust prison staff members. The Mafia would try to get along with the administration but would take care of Mafia business whenever it was required, regardless of prison rules.
- Any insult or disrespect directed against Mafia members by other inmates was to be avenged swiftly. The prison inmate population

would be compelled to respect La Eme.

- Mafia members were to back each other at all times.
- Homosexual activity among members was forbidden.
- Mexican Americans who were imprisoned together but had fought each other during street gang warfare back in East Los Angeles were given time to settle their past differences and then were required to be supportive of all Mafia members and activities (Valentine, 2000, p. 22).

“La EME is associated with the Aryan Brotherhood, Arizona's Old Mexican Mafia, New Mexico Syndicate, and Southern California Hispanic street gang members” (Florida Department of Corrections, n/d).

La EME has developed a relationship with the Aryan Brotherhood largely due to the fact that the Black Guerilla Family made a pact with the Nuestra Familia. The Mexican Mafia and the Aryan Brotherhood in turn made a pact with each other (Valentine, 2000, p16). La EME have been known to take "hit" contracts for one another, to have mutual drug connections, and to work extremely well together in narcotic trafficking. However, “as of 1997 La EME is currently only working with the California branch of the Aryan Brotherhood” (Fleisher, 2001, p.4).

La EME is enemies with La Nuestra Familia, (La EME recruits "urban" Mexican-Americans, while La Nuestra Familia recruits "rural" Mexican-Americans. As a result, there is a continuing struggle and rivalry between these two groups.) Northern Structure, Mexikanemi, Texas Syndicate, Latin Kings, Arizona's New Mexican Mafia, Black Guerilla Family, Black Gangster Disciples, and black street gang members (Florida Department of Corrections, n/d).

“La EME is known for committing extremely brutal killings. La EME commits these brutal acts as a means of gaining respect” (Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, 2000). “The EME’s killings are extremely gruesome and calculated to establish fear

and intimidation” (Walker, Mexican Mafia, 2002). Even though La EME is well known for their brutal killings, “their main activities are centered around drug trafficking, extortion, pressure rackets, and internal discipline” (Walker, Mexican Mafia, 2002).

The Mexican Mafia may use the letters "EME," "MM," "M," "13," and the "black hand of death" in their tattoos. Many people confuse La EME with the Texas Mexican Mafia, known as the Mexikanemi or EMI [discussed later] (<http://www.vip-cali.com/CDCINFO/faq.htm>). Due to this similarity, careful consideration should be taken into account when attempting to associate membership with either EME or EMI through the use of an individual's tattoo.

Through the years, the EME has attempted to establish itself as a legitimate organization. They have been successful on a few occasions in obtaining federal grants and using some of these funds to further their criminal activities (Carlie, 2002).

“The Mexikanemi originally formed in the Texas Department of Corrections in 1984. The Mexikanemi is also known as the EMI. A lesser-known name for the gang is Mary Lou. Translated, Mexikanemi means “Free-Mexican.”” (Walker, Other Prison Gangs, 2002). “Membership in the Mexikanemi or the EMI is based on race, ethnicity, and domicile”

([http://www.gang-busters.com/otherprisongangs/html/untitled\\_2\\_mexikanemi.html](http://www.gang-busters.com/otherprisongangs/html/untitled_2_mexikanemi.html)).

The Mexikanemi, like many other prison gangs has a group structure. The structure of the group consists of, “a president, vice-president, regional generals, lieutenants, sergeants, and soldiers. The ranking positions are elected by the group based

on leadership skills” (Fleisher, 2001, p.5). The gang can be found in San Antonio, Texas, South and West Texas, and the Texas Department of Corrections ([http://www.gang-busters.com/otherprisongangs/html/untitled\\_2\\_mexikanemi.html](http://www.gang-busters.com/otherprisongangs/html/untitled_2_mexikanemi.html)).

“The Mexikanemi is associated with the Latin Kings; and peace agreements have been established with the Mexican Mafia, Barrio Azteca, and Texas Syndicate. EMI’s enemies include the New Mexican Mafia and the Black Guerilla Family” (Walker, Other Prison Gangs, 2002).

The EMI can easily be mistaken for the Mexican Mafia because their tattoos are very similar. There are subtle differences in the designs that must be taken into account before determining gang affiliation. Many of their tattoos and graffiti contain a circle which borders their symbolism. Use of the initials MM and EMI is very common. The term "Aztlán" is a strong indication of Mexikanemi affiliation (Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, Mexikanemi, 2000).

“The Mexikanemi, or EMI, became known for criminal activity including extortion, drug trafficking and murder. The Mexikanemi state that they will conduct any criminal activity that will benefit their advancement, including contract assassinations” (Walker, Other Prison Gangs, 2002).

“The Black Guerilla Family was founded in 1966 by former Black Panther member George Jackson. The Black Guerilla Family is also known as the BGF ([http://www.adl.org/hate\\_symbols/tattoo\\_black\\_guerilla\\_family.asp](http://www.adl.org/hate_symbols/tattoo_black_guerilla_family.asp)). Membership in the BGF is based on race. The Black Guerilla Family is made up of Black inmates (Florida



Department of Corrections, con't, n/d). "The gang is also called by the less known names Dove Life and the Firm. Originally, the BGF was called the Black Family or the Black Vanguard"

([http://www.knowgangs.com/gang\\_resources/black\\_guerilla\\_family/bgf\\_001.htm](http://www.knowgangs.com/gang_resources/black_guerilla_family/bgf_001.htm)). "The BGF is also known by less popular names including Jama which is Swahili for family, Weusi Giadi Jama, which is Swahili for Black Guerilla Family and the numbers 267 which represent the numerical order of the letters B,G, and F in the alphabet" (Valentine, 2001, p.17). "Some BGF members were formerly associated with the Black Liberation Army, Symbionese Liberation Army, and the Weatherman Underground organization" ([http://www.knowgangs.com/gang\\_resources/black\\_guerilla\\_family/bgf\\_001.htm](http://www.knowgangs.com/gang_resources/black_guerilla_family/bgf_001.htm)).

The Black Guerilla Family is the most "politically" oriented of the major prison gangs. It was formed as a Marxist/Maoist/Leninist revolutionary organization with specific goals to eradicate racism, struggle to maintain dignity in prison, and overthrow the U.S. Government. Though small in number, the BGF has a very strict death oath which requires a life pledge of loyalty to the gang (<http://www.vip-california.com/CDCINFO/faq.htm>).

The Leadership and organization of the Black Guerilla Family is organized along paramilitary lines with a Central Committee, a "Supreme Leader," and military ranks. The gang is found nationwide, but primarily found on the East and West coasts. The BGF prospective members must be nominated by an existing member (Walker, Black, 2002; Valentine, 2000).

"The Black Guerilla Family is associated with La Nuestra Familia, Black Liberation Army, Symbionese Liberation Army, Weather Underground, Black Gangster Disciples, 415, Black P-Stones, and DC Crews" (Florida Department of Corrections,

con't, n/d).

“The Black Guerilla Family is an enemy of the Aryan Brotherhood, Texas Syndicate, Aryan Brotherhood of Texas, and the Mexican Mafia” (Florida Department of Corrections, con't, n/d).

Typical identifiers of the Black Guerilla Family include the use of different versions of a dragon surrounding a prison tower and holding a correctional officer in its clutches.

They will also use a crossed rifle, swords crossed, and the letters "BGF"

(<http://www.vip-cali.com/CDCINFO/faq.htm>).

Although the BGF experienced a decline in membership and strength in the 90s, it has recently reorganized and gained substantial power and growth due to its alignment with the 415s, Crips, Bloods, and Black Gangster Disciples. Several members of the Crips and Bloods have recently been found with documentation from "Dove Life" (Crips) and "Blood Line" (Bloods). Both groups are believed to have working alliances with the BGF under these aliases. In addition, members of the 415 gang and BGF have been found with documentation suggesting membership in a group called the "Firm." The Firm is believed to be a working alliance between the 415 and BGF.

The BGF is currently experiencing internal conflict between old and new membership in federal custody. Younger members have created a new version of the gang known as the "New Man/New Woman," or the Northern Structure of the BGF. Members of the newly formed Northern Structure believe old BGF members are no longer concentrating on the correct group mission and are becoming extinct. The Northern Structure membership believes the alliances between the BGF, Crips, Bloods, and 415s will result in the Crips continuing to support the old BGF members or Southern Structure and the Bloods and 415s siding with the Northern Structure. Current intelligence suggests state BGF members continue to support the old BGF membership within federal custody ([http://www.knowgangs.com/gang\\_resources/blackguerillafamily/bgf\\_001.htm](http://www.knowgangs.com/gang_resources/blackguerillafamily/bgf_001.htm))

“The BGF has also created what appears to be a political and paramilitary sub-

group known as the "New Afrikan Revolutionary Nation," or "N.A.R.N." This group's purpose is to gather and analyze data to enhance BGF security practices and education" ([http://www.knowgangs.com/gang\\_resources/black\\_guerilla\\_family/bgf\\_001.htm](http://www.knowgangs.com/gang_resources/black_guerilla_family/bgf_001.htm)).

The Aryan Brotherhood or the AB originated in San Quentin prison in 1967 (<http://www.liesexposed.net/nfp/issue0211/arybro.htm>). Membership of the Aryan Brotherhood is based on race. The Aryan Brotherhood consists of only white members (Florida Department of Corrections, n/d). Originally, this gang was established to provide protection for white individuals from African American and Hispanic groups (<http://www.liesexposed.net/nfp/issue0211/arybro.htm>). "Some of the original members of the AB migrated from a 1950s gang known as the "Bluebirds." Other names used in the past were the "Diamond Tooth Gang" and the "Nazi Gang" (Potter, n/d). "Less know names for the Aryan Brotherhood include the Brand, Alice Baker, and the Tip" (Valentine, 2000, p.6).

"The Aryan Brotherhood, or AB, originated in California, but has spread to numerous locations. Members released from prison are expected to dedicate themselves to supporting members who are still incarcerated" ([http://www.adl.org/special\\_reports/racist\\_groups\\_in\\_prisons/prisons\\_intro.asp](http://www.adl.org/special_reports/racist_groups_in_prisons/prisons_intro.asp)).

Before gaining membership, a recruit must be nominated by an Aryan Brotherhood Counsel member and approved by a member of the Commission. A person is considered for nomination based on how he has lived his life. The term "Stand-up Convict" is used regularly when this consideration is made. The term is defined as an individual who stands up for what he believes and is willing to do what it takes to survive and take care of business, including killing his enemies. Membership is considered to be for life. The only way out of the AB is by death, either natural or by the

hands of another.

The philosophical premise of the AB and its members consists of a mixture of ideologies of white supremacy and German and Irish ancestry. Over the years, the AB has distanced itself from the Neo-Nazi philosophy; group members are identifying more with Irish ancestry and Norse and Viking symbolism and history. The AB is no longer using the "blood in" portion of the "blood in - blood out" philosophy. They have adopted a profiling system of membership: individuals now gain membership based on their abilities. However, this does not eliminate the "blood-out" rule. Currently, most members are apolitical and the group's primary orientation is now drug trafficking.

(Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, Aryan Brotherhood, 1997)

There is conflicting information regarding the use of the "blood in - blood out" philosophy within the Aryan Brotherhood. The majority of sources claim that the AB's use this philosophy, but others claim that at least for a small period of time the group abandoned the Blood in Blood out philosophy. Fleisher and Decker state, "the AB has a blood in, blood out rule (Fleisher, 2001, p.4)."

"The original members of the gang were tattooed with two bluebirds in flight on their neck, which represented freedom" (Valentine, 2000, p.6). "AB members ordinarily wear numerous and varied body tattoos, but the true AB tattoo is a shamrock, the letters AB, and three sixes. Tattoos of the swastika, a picture of a bluebird and of double lighting bolts are also used to identify Aryan Brotherhood"

(<http://www.shutitdown.net/gangtattoos/>). "Most recently, tattoos of a falcon, that may be superimposed on a shamrock or in front of prison bars have been worn by members. Also, the slogan "Sinn Fein" has been tattooed on members" (Valentine, 2000, p.6).

"Three sixes displayed by themselves are not AB-specific because they are used by several other gangs. Only members of the AB are permitted to wear the "brand" of the

gang; individuals found to be wearing the tattoo without consent of the AB are subject to being murdered” (Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, Aryan Brotherhood, 1997).

The AB has realized that prison administrators often identify gang members by their tattoos and have prohibited members from displaying AB specific tattoos. As a result, many members have disguised their AB tattoos (Walker, Aryan Brotherhood, 2002).

“The AB is associated with the Dirty White Boys, Nazi Low Riders, Mexican Mafia, Odinist and the Assatru Kindreds” (Florida Department of Corrections, con’t, n/d). There is conflicting information regarding the Aryan Brotherhood and their relationship with the Hells Angels. The Florida Department of Corrections states that the Hells’ Angels is an associated group of the Aryan Brotherhood. However, Valentine states that despite popular belief, the two groups do not get along well (Valentine, 2000)

The AB’s enemies include the Black Guerilla Family, La Nuestra Familia, inmates from the District of Columbia , and Black Gangster Disciples” (Florida Department of Corrections, con’t, n/d). “Many original AB members have been killed or have become protection cases and are separated from other gang members. Most AB related violence in recent years has been directed at its own membership” (Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, Aryan Brotherhood, 1997).

“The AB is using the Odinist religion to conduct gang meetings and disguise illicit business practices” (Florida Department of Corrections, n/d). The Aryan Brotherhood is

involved in drug trafficking, contract killings, extortion, and pressure rackets (Pelz et al., 1998). The AB is a particularly violent group within state institutions and also the Federal Bureau of Prisons. "From 1975 to 1985, members of the group committed 40 homicides in California Prisons and local jails. From 1978 to 1992, AB members, suspects, and associates in the federal prison system were involved in 26 homicides, 3 of which involved staff victims" (Florida Department of Corrections, con't, n/d).

The last of the disruptive groups is the Texas Syndicate. "The Texas Syndicate originated at Deuel Vocational Institute in California. It appeared at California's Folsom prison in the early 1970s" (Fleisher, 2001, p.4). The Texas Syndicate is also known by the less popular names of Sindicato Tejano, and TS (Pelz, 1998). Hispanic Texans doing time in this prison were being victimized by the Aryan Brotherhood and the Mexican Mafia, as well as other less powerful gangs. Out of a desire for protection these inmates initially formed for self- protection (Florida Department of Corrections, n/d).

Although this group originated in California, its strongest geographic ties are in the state of Texas. They became known as the most ruthless and violent gang in California prisons. A lone member would go into a group of inmates to kill, setting aside his own safety. As some of these members moved back to Texas and were subsequently incarcerated, they spread throughout the Texas prison system with the same ruthlessness and violence (Pelz, 1998).

The TS is comprised of predominately Mexican-American inmates in Texas Department of Corrections institutions (Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, Texas Syndicate, 2000). "Although particular about membership, the once all-Hispanic group has let inmates of other ethnicities join the gang. This group recently has begun to

accept members from Latin American countries such as Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico” (<http://davadni.users.omniglobal.net/ts.html>).

The Texas Syndicate has a hierarchical structure with a president and vice president and an appointed chairman in each local area, either in a prison or in the community (Orlando-Morningstar, 1997) “The chairman watches over that area’s vice chairman, captain, lieutenant, sergeant at arms, and soldiers. Lower-ranking members perform the gang’s criminal activity. The gang’s officials, except for the president and vice president, become soldiers again if they are moved to a different prison, thus avoiding local-level group conflict” (Fleisher, 2001, p.5).

The Texas Syndicate is associated with the Texas Mafia, Dirty White Boys, and the Barrio Aztecas (Florida Department of Corrections, con’t, n/d).

The Texas Syndicate is an enemy of the Aryan Brotherhood, La Nuestra Familia, Mexican Mafia, Mexikanemi, Mandingo Warriors, and the Aryan Circle (Walker, Texas Syndicate, 2002).

Tattoos identifying affiliation with this group have a "TS" located somewhere within the design, and sometimes it can only be visualized after close scrutiny. The primary group symbol is a stylized "T" with an "S" running through it (called a "copia"), and may be disguised within the figure of a snake. Additionally, a cross with a ribbon running through it in the shape of an S is often used. Tattoo locations are generally on the back of the right forearm, the outside of the calf area, neck, and chest. In addition to drug trafficking, this group also has engaged in selling "protection" in prison. According to one source, the Texas Syndicate is centered around drug trafficking, extortion, pressure rackets, and internal discipline (Florida Department of Corrections, con’t, n/d).

The Texas Syndicate is still under the thumb of Francisco “Panchito” Gonzales, a California inmate at Pelican Bay. (Pelz, 1998).

## **Criminal Activity**

The five disruptive groups that exist in the Federal Bureau of Prisons began out of a desire and a need for protection. However, these groups, as well as most other prison STG's (Security Threat Groups), have evolved into criminal entities. Today prison gangs are responsible for murders, staff assaults, drug trafficking, and many other crimes inside and outside of prison walls.

Prison gangs dominate the drug business, and many researchers argue prison gangs are also responsible for most prison violence (Ingraham, 1987). "Adverse effects of gangs on prison life have motivated correctional responses to crime, disorder, and rule violations, and many correctional agencies now have policies to control prison gang-affiliated inmates" (Fleisher, 2001, p.5).

Gang affiliated individuals in the Federal Bureau of Prisons are more likely to commit drug related offenses and property crimes than inmates who are not gang affiliated. Spergel also reported that individuals who were classified as members were more likely to commit violent acts than suspects and associates. Suspects were more likely to commit violent acts than associates. Spergel also concluded that members and suspects are more likely to commit violent acts than non-gang affiliated individuals (Spergel, 1995).

A one-year study of over 82,000 federal inmates in the United States revealed that those who were embedded in gangs were more likely to exhibit violent behavior than those



who were peripherally involved in gangs. And those who were peripherally involved exhibited more violent behavior than those who were unaffiliated (Gaes, 2001).

### **How Many Prison Gang Members are There?**

How many gang members are there in state and federal correctional facilities? As there are different definitions and different criteria to define what a gang is, different sources have different answers. One study suggests the number of gang-affiliated inmates is staggering.

Beck conducted a survey of inmates in State Correctional Facilities in 1991. That survey, together with similar surveys conducted in 1974, 1979, and 1986, represents the largest single database on America's prisoners. A total of 277 correctional facilities in 45 different states participated in the 1991 survey. A total of 13,986 inmates answered questions in face-to-face interviews. The prisoners represented more than 711,000 adults held in State correctional facilities. Simultaneous with the state inmate survey, a federal prison survey interviewed 8,500 inmates (Beck et al., 1991).

Gangs have been previously defined several times in this paper. All of the previously given definitions of a gang included a criminal element in them. Beck's definition of a gang also included committing criminal acts. Beck went on to define a gang as,

having at least five of the six characteristics: formal membership with a required initiation or rules for members, a recognized leader or certain members whom others follow, common clothing such as jackets, caps, group colors, symbols, tattoos, a group name, members from the same street, neighborhood, or school, and turf or territory where the group is known and where group activities usually take place (Beck et al., 1991).

The survey revealed that approximately 6% of inmates belonged to groups engaging in illegal activities which exhibited five or six characteristics of

gangs (above). Another 6% engaged in illegal activities with groups exhibiting only three or four gang characteristics. If a prison gang were defined as a group of inmates characterized as sharing at least three of the six characteristics identified above, in addition to committing crimes in the prison, then approximately twelve percent (12%) of the prison inmates were likely involved in gangs in 1991 (Beck et al., 1991).

In addition, the survey also found that half of the gang members in prison reported their gangs' as having 60 or more members. As concerns the inmates who were gang members: On average, they joined at age 14, half belonged for 36 months or more and belonged at the time they were arrested for their current offense, 32% were still members, 19% reported other members, 19% reported other members' being involved in their current offense, 73% had served time for a violent offense, 49% of the gang members committed robberies, stole cars, shop lifted and sold drugs while in a group (Beck et al., 1991).

Beck estimates that approximately 12% of prison inmates are gang-affiliated is correct, thus perhaps as many as 148,496 gang members (12% of all 1,237,469 inmates) were confined in state and federal prisons on December 31, 2000. If, in order to be a gang, at least five characteristics of a gang were required then as many as 74,245 inmates were gang members (6% of all 1,237,469 inmates) (Beck et.al., 1991).

Beck's findings are supported by the Anti-Defamation League. According to the Anti-Defamation League, prison officials estimate that up to 10 percent of the nation's prison population is affiliated with gangs

([http://www.adl.org/presrele/asus\\_12/3291\\_12.asp](http://www.adl.org/presrele/asus_12/3291_12.asp)).

According to George Knox, Ph.D., gangs are a growing problem within the state and federal correctional system.

In 1992, only one out of ten institutions reported gang members being a problem in terms of assaults on correctional staff. By 1999, the number of institutions who reported gang members being a problem in terms of assaults on correctional staff rose to 33.6%... In 1992, only a fourth of the institutions surveyed reported gang members being a problem in terms of threats against correctional staff. By 1999, the problem of gangs threatening correctional staff escalated to nearly half. (Knox, 1999)

(See appendix B for more results of George Knox's survey.)

These findings are supported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics Federal Justice Statistics. According to the BJS that collects these data as part of its Census of State and Federal Correctional Facilities, the victimization rate of federal correctional officers is the following: In 1995 alone, there were 1,124 assaults on federal prison staff resulting in one death. Over its 67-year history, the Federal Bureau of Prisons has experienced an average of one correctional officer death every three years.

## **Closing**

The three previous sections have discussed the history of tattoos, the history of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the history of the current disruptive groups in the Federal prison system.

In section one, the history of tattoos was discussed. Perhaps the most important idea for the reader to remember is that individuals get, "tattooed to demonstrate their ability to endure pain, show their affiliation, and to permanently separate themselves from normal society" (Gilbert, 2000, p.78). The reader must also remember that tattoos were used to identify criminals and therefore respectable members of society did not take part in the art form (Gilbert, 2000).

Section two discussed the history of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The Federal Bureau of Prisons has always shown an ability to adapt and to change when it has been faced with challenges presented by its ever changing inmate population. The first and

possibly the most important change that the Federal Bureau of Prisons has made is to house its inmates in facilities that were comfortable. The author uses the word comfortable because the Bureau did not allow the whipping of inmates. However, it did take the Bureau of Prisons several years to make all of their facilities the best in correctional history.

Other changes made by the Federal Bureau of Prisons include implementing fingerprinting, doing away with the Bertillon system of identification, and implementing Enoch Cobb Wines' desires to create correction professionals. After Inmates Thomas Silverstein and Clayton Fountain killed Officers Merle Clutts and Robert Hoffman in the same day, policy changes such as hand cuffing inmates arms behind their backs', limiting inmate movement by moving inmate law libraries into special housing units, and by having medical staff care for inmates in special housing units took place (Keve, 1991).

Section three dealt with the five disruptive groups. The major concepts in the gang section include but are not limited to the reasons why individuals join gangs, the reasons why prison gangs spread, and the reasons why in prison gangs and specifically why disruptive groups are such a problem for the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Professionals and those in the academic field agree that the same prison gangs that exist in correctional facilities also exist in the outside world.

Individuals are attracted to gangs and specifically prison gangs for a wide variety of reasons. The most important reason why individuals join gangs is for protection. Gang members also join gangs for social identity, belonging, and personal interests (Fong,

1991).

The five current Disruptive Groups that exist within the Federal Bureau of Prisons began out of a desire and a need for protection, but they have evolved. The disruptive groups, as well as most other prison gangs and STG's (Security Threat Groups), have evolved into criminal entities. Today, prison gangs are responsible for murders, staff assaults, drug trafficking, and many other crimes inside and outside of prison walls. Simply stated, prison gangs and especially the five current disruptive groups, inject fear into the day-to-day operations of the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

#### **WHY THIS PAPER IS IMPORTANT**

The history of tattoos, the history of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the history of prison gangs (especially the current state of the disruptive groups in the Federal Bureau of Prisons), are all related. It is imperative that the connections between these three concepts be recognized and understood.

“Since prison gang members frequently get tattooed, having the ability to recognize and interpret tattoos is a valuable tool when dealing with gang members while they are incarcerated and after they are released” (Whitley, n/d). “Prison gangs’ tattoos have very specific meanings and often are hidden within other elaborate tattoos” (Jackson, 1996).

If one can recognize and interpret tattoos, he or she can determine three things. The tattoo will tell who the convict is, what he's done, and where he's been. Often the inmate will have his name, his street name, or the name of a loved one tattooed on him. Tattoos can tell you what he's done.

For example, if an inmate is tattooed with a weapon that usually means he carries a weapon on him. One particular inmate in federal custody is tattooed with several skulls that bear the name of different federal departments in them. These represent the staff members that have been killed by this individual. Tattoos of landmarks such as walls, gun towers, or cell doors will tell where the inmate has been incarcerated in the past (Whitley, n/d).

The reader must understand that tattoos are very important to gang members.

Some gang members will do anything to get their tattoos, even kill. "Inmate James Burmeister was convicted in 1995 of killing a black couple, an act he committed solely because he wanted to wear the spider web tattoo that was popular among members of the Aryan Brotherhood" (<http://www.shutitdown.net/gangtattoos/>).

Prison gangs take their tattoos very personally. Although the tattoo worn by a gang member may be only skin deep, its significance can run as deep as the soul (Whitley, n/d). If a non-gang member wears the tattoo of a prison gang he is often physically punished by the gang. The gang members may even cut the tattoo off of the inmate as a means of punishment (<http://www.shutitdown.net/gangtattoos/>).

Prison gangs and their tattoos also harm society. Tattooing inside correctional facilities although illegal, occurs frequently. Tattooing inside correctional facilities causes the spread of HIV and also Hepatitis C (Correctional, 1998). It is known that prison gangs frequently use tattooing to show their gang affiliation. Therefore, not only do prison gangs contribute to the spread of disease, they also contribute to the monetary amount that the federal government and individual states spend on inmate health care. It can be said that prison gangs can even effect the amount of taxes that the those in society pay.

Now that the importance of having knowledge about prison gang tattoos has been made clear, the disruptive nature of gangs will be revisited.

Correctional professionals, as well as those in the academic field, agree that prison gangs are a deadly force within federal and state correctional facilities. According to George Knox, Ph.D. the number of correctional facilities who reported gang members assaulting correctional staff in 1992 was only one out of ten. He went on to say that by 1999 the number rose to almost 34% (Knox, 1999).

In order to fully understand the increase of correctional facilities reporting assaults on staff, the reader must know a fact about Federal Correctional Facilities. If an individual is identified as a disruptive group member he is moved to a United States Penitentiary. Therefore, all of the disruptive group members are in a small portion of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Since this is true the problem of prison gangs must be spreading to all the other types of federal correctional facilities. These facilities are spread all over the country, as are the gangs and their members.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As has been demonstrated, gangs and gang members are a major problem in federal correctional institutions. In order to deal with this problem, correctional officers must be able to identify gang members, especially members of the five disruptive groups discussed in this paper. Key to identifying these gang members is understanding the tattoos they use as a means of membership and solidarity. Simply recognizing these

tattoos however is not enough. The Federal Bureau Of Prisons must have a simple yet effective means of coding inmate information, and sharing that information among officers and institutions within the system.

#### PI.

Officers in the BOP do not have adequate tools at their disposal to understand, recognize, and identify tattoos exhibited by the five disruptive groups.

#### PII.

The BOP needs a new mechanism to record and share information concerning inmate tattoos among staff and institutions within the BOP.

The first problem, that of identifying gang affiliated tattoos, is a daunting task. It is difficult because the tattoos change and are modified over time. This issue can be dealt with however, with the creation of an up to date instructional guide made for correctional officers. This guide would contain the history, current information, and pictures of tattoos likely to be exhibited by the five disruptive groups. Officers could use this manual to educate themselves to the current tattoos exhibited by federal prisoners.

The second issue, that of information sharing, can be dealt with as well. The BOP currently codes information related to tattoos. It does so however, in an inefficient and outdated manner. As gangs and tattoos evolve, so too must our methods of tracking them. A new, yet simple and compressive data recording card will be created to address these problems.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

This study has conducted a descriptive data analysis pertaining to the current Disruptive Groups within the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Information has come from state, local, and private sources. Information will be entered into the created manual and analyzed for changes and updates.

A handbook for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, designed to assist correctional officers in tattoo identification, has been created. The focus of the handbook is the five disruptive groups that currently exist within the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The Disruptive Groups have proven to be the worst of the worst when it comes to upsetting the day-to-day operations of the BOP. The handbook focuses on pictures of the tattoos affiliated with each group and also provides a brief biography of each disruptive group. The main objective of this handbook is to help correctional professionals identify Disruptive Group members by their tattoos. Information on these groups, their history, and their distinctive tattoos does not currently exist in such a form, and will provide valuable information to correctional officers on the front lines.

The handbook contains six sections, one dedicated to each Disruptive Group and a section dedicated to other tattoos of importance: Section One - Texas Syndicate; Section Two - Back Guerilla Family; Section Three - Aryan Brotherhood; Section Four - Mexican Mafia; Section Five - Mexikanemi. Each section in the handbook dedicated to the

Disruptive Groups has two parts: the first part of the section contains facts about each group including their historical beginnings and their criminal behavior. The second part of each section contains pictures of the tattoos affiliated with each group; followed by pictures demonstrating how the tattoos can be hidden. Section six of the handbook contains pictures of other tattoos of importance and an explanation of their meanings.

This handbook should become part of the information that correctional professionals receive at Glynco, Georgia where all Federal Bureau of Prisons staff go for training shortly after they are hired.

The next step in the process was to create a new inmate tattoo identification card to be filled out by correctional staff. First, the tattoo identification card contains the inmate's name. Second, the tattoo identification card contains the inmate's Federal Bureau of Prisons identification number. The tattoo identification card also contains two body outlines, front and back. Staff members will place a number on all body parts where tattoos are located. Staff members will start on the inmate's head and work downward. The front of the inmate's head will be done first and the back of his head will be done second. The alternating of front to back will continue until the inmate's entire body is completed.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Results**

**FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS  
INMATE TATTOO IDENTIFICATION HANDBOOK  
for  
CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS**

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Section 1 – Texas Syndicate

Section 2 – Black Guerilla Family

Section 3 – Aryan Brotherhood

Section 4 – Mexican Mafia

Section 5 – Mexikanemi

Section 6 – Other Tattoos of Significance

## SECTION ONE

### TEXAS SYNDICATE

“The Texas Syndicate originated at Deuel Vocational Institute in California. It appeared at California’s Folsom prison in the early 1970s” (Fleisher, 2001, p.4). The Texas Syndicate is also known by the less popular names of Sindicato Tejano, and TS (Pelz, 1998). Hispanic Texans doing time in this prison were being victimized by the Aryan Brotherhood and the Mexican Mafia, as well as other less powerful gangs. Out of a desire for protection these inmates initially formed for self- protection (Florida Department of Corrections, n/d).

Although this group originated in California, its strongest geographic ties are in the state of Texas. They became known as the most ruthless and violent gang in California prisons. A lone member would go into a group of inmates to kill, setting aside his own safety. As some of these members moved back to Texas and were subsequently incarcerated, they spread throughout the Texas prison system with the same ruthlessness and violence (Pelz, 1998).

The TS is comprised of predominately Mexican-American inmates in Texas Department of Corrections institutions (Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, Texas Syndicate, 2000). “Although particular about membership, the once all-Hispanic group has let inmates of other ethnicities join the gang. This group recently has begun to accept members from Latin American countries such as Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico” (<http://davadnai.users.omniglobal.net/ts.html>).

The Texas Syndicate has a hierarchical structure with a president and vice president and an appointed chairman in each local area, either in a prison or in the community (Orlando-Morningstar, 1997) “The chairman watches over that area’s vice chairman, captain, lieutenant, sergeant at arms, and soldiers. Lower-ranking members

perform the gang's criminal activity. The gang's officials, except for the president and vice president, become soldiers again if they are moved to a different prison, thus avoiding local-level group conflict" (Fleisher, 2001, p.5).

The Texas Syndicate is associated with the Texas Mafia, Dirty White Boys, and the Barrio Aztecas (Florida Department of Corrections, con't, n/d).

The Texas Syndicate enemies include the Aryan Brotherhood, La Nuestra Familia, Mexican Mafia, Mexikanemi, Mandingo Warriors, and the Aryan Circle (Walker, Texas Syndicate, 2002).

Tattoos identifying affiliation with this group have a "TS" located somewhere within the design, and sometimes it can only be visualized after close scrutiny. The primary group symbol is a stylized "T" with an "S" running through it (called a "copia"), and may be disguised within the figure of a snake. Additionally, a cross with a ribbon running through it in the shape of an S is often used. Tattoo locations are generally on the back of the right forearm, the outside of the calf area, neck, and chest. In addition to drug trafficking, this group also has engaged in selling "protection" in prison. According to one source, the Texas Syndicate is centered around drug trafficking, extortion, pressure rackets, and internal discipline (Florida Department of Corrections, con't, n/d).

The Texas Syndicate is still under the thumb of Francisco "Panchito" Gonzales, a California inmate at Pelican Bay. (Pelz, 1998).

Figure One  
Texas Syndicate Tattoo # One



Figure Two  
Texas Syndicate Tattoo # Two



1

Figure Three  
Texas Syndicate Tattoo # Three

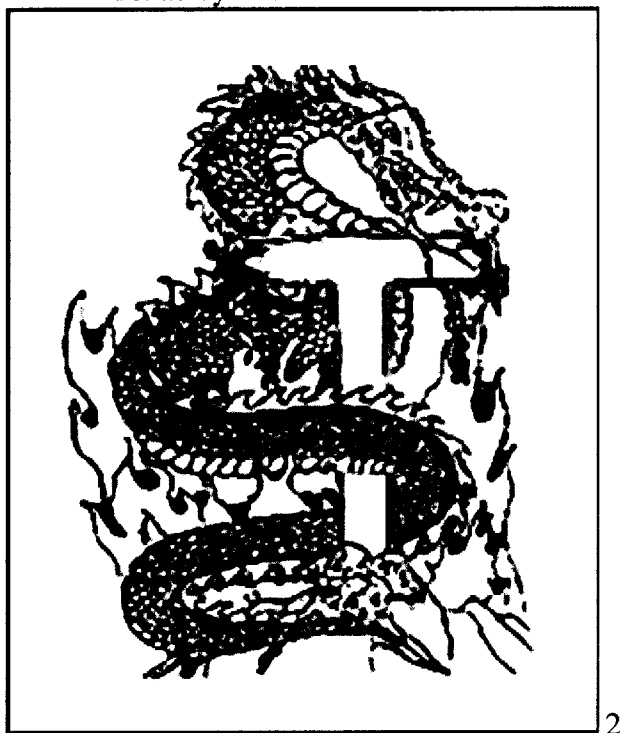


Figure Four  
Texas Syndicate Tattoo # Four



Disguising the letters TS in tattoos is a common occurrence.



Figure Five  
Texas Syndicate Tattoo # Five



4

Figure Six  
Texas Syndicate Tattoo # Six



5

Again, the letters TS are disguised within the brim of the hat.

## SECTION TWO

### BLACK GUERILLA FAMILY

“The Black Guerilla Family was founded in 1966 by former Black Panther member George Jackson. The Black Guerilla Family is also known as the BGF

([http://www.adl.org/hate\\_symbols/tattoo\\_black\\_guerilla\\_family.asp](http://www.adl.org/hate_symbols/tattoo_black_guerilla_family.asp)). Membership in the BGF is based on race. The Black Guerilla Family is made up of Black inmates (Florida Department of Corrections, con’t, n/d). “The gang is also called by the less known names Dove Life and the Firm. Originally, the BGF was called the Black Family or the Black Vanguard”

([http://www.knowgangs.com/gang\\_resources/black\\_guerilla\\_family/bgf\\_001.htm](http://www.knowgangs.com/gang_resources/black_guerilla_family/bgf_001.htm)). “The BGF is also known by less popular names including Jama which is Swahili for family, Weusi Giadi Jama, which is Swahili for Black Guerilla Family and the numbers 267 which represent the numerical order of the letters B,G, and F in the alphabet” (Valentine, 2001, p.17). “Some BGF members were formerly associated with the Black Liberation Army, Symbionese Liberation Army, and the Weatherman Underground organization” ([http://www.knowgangs.com/gang\\_resources/black\\_guerilla\\_family/bgf\\_001.htm](http://www.knowgangs.com/gang_resources/black_guerilla_family/bgf_001.htm)).

The Black Guerilla Family is the most "politically" oriented of the major prison gangs. It was formed as a Marxist/Maoist/Leninist revolutionary organization with specific goals to eradicate racism, struggle to maintain dignity in prison, and overthrow the U.S. Government. Though small in number, the BGF has a very strict death oath which requires a life pledge of loyalty to the gang (<http://www.vip-cali.com/CDCINFO/faq.htm>).

The Leadership and organization of the Black Guerilla Family is organized along paramilitary lines with a Central Committee, a "Supreme Leader," and military ranks. The gang is found nationwide, but primarily found on the East and West coasts. The BGF

prospective members must be nominated by an existing member (Walker, Black Guerilla Family; Valentine, 2000).

“The Black Guerilla Family is associated with La Nuestra Familia, Black Liberation Army, Symbionese Liberation Army, Weather Underground, Black Gangster Disciples, 415, Black P-Stones, and DC Crews” (Florida Department of Corrections con’t, n/d).

“The Black Guerilla Family is enemies with the Aryan Brotherhood, Texas Syndicate, Aryan Brotherhood of Texas, and the Mexican Mafia” (Florida Department of Corrections, con’t, n/d).

Typical identifiers of the Black Guerilla Family include the use of different versions of a dragon surrounding a prison tower and holding a correctional officer in its clutches.

They will also use a crossed rifle, swords crossed, and the letters "BGF"

(<http://www.vip-cali.com/CDCINFO/faq.htm>).

Although the BGF experienced a decline in membership and strength in the 90s, it has recently reorganized and gained substantial power and growth due to its alignment with the 415s, Crips, Bloods, and Black Gangster Disciples. Several members of the Crips and Bloods have recently been found with documentation from "Dove Life" (Crips) and "Blood Line" (Bloods). Both groups are believed to have working alliances with the BGF under these aliases. In addition, members of the 415 gang and BGF have been found with documentation suggesting membership in a group called the "Firm." The Firm is believed to be a working alliance between the 415 and BGF.

The BGF is currently experiencing internal conflict between old and new membership in federal custody. Younger members have created a new version of the gang known as the "New Man/New Woman," or the Northern Structure of the BGF. Members of the newly formed Northern Structure believe old BGF members are no longer concentrating on the correct group mission and are becoming extinct. The Northern Structure membership believes the alliances between the BGF, Crips, Bloods, and 415s will result in the Crips continuing to support the old BGF members or

Southern Structure and the Bloods and 415s siding with the Northern Structure. Current intelligence suggests state BGF members continue to support the old BGF membership within federal custody ([http://www.knowgangs.com/gang\\_resources/black\\_guerilla\\_family/bgf\\_001.htm](http://www.knowgangs.com/gang_resources/black_guerilla_family/bgf_001.htm))

“The BGF has also created what appears to be a political and paramilitary sub-group known as the "New Afrikan Revolutionary Nation," or "N.A.R.N." This group’s purpose is to gather and analyze data to enhance BGF security practices and education” ([http://www.knowgangs.com/gang\\_resources/black\\_guerilla\\_family/bgf\\_001.htm](http://www.knowgangs.com/gang_resources/black_guerilla_family/bgf_001.htm)).

Figure Seven  
Black Guerilla Family Tattoo # One

BGF

Figure Eight  
Black Guerilla Family Tattoo # Two

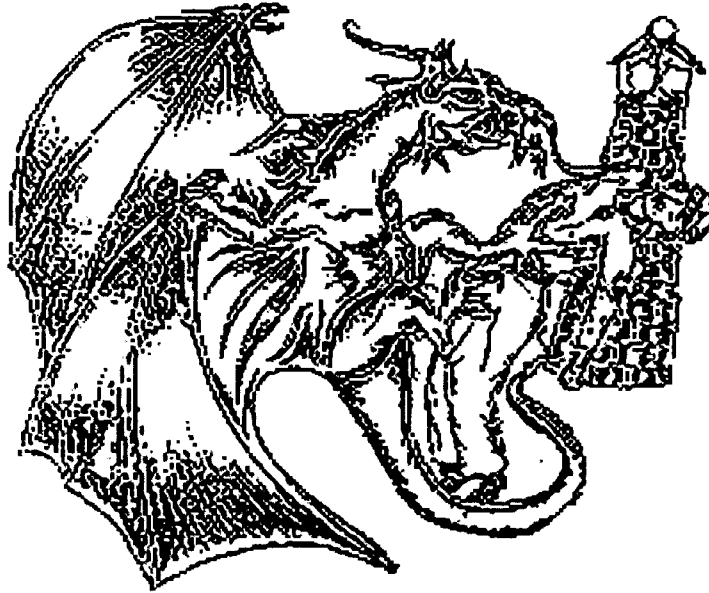
BGF

Figure Nine  
Black Guerilla Family Tattoo # Three



A crossed carbine and machete superimposed over the initials BGF.

Figure Ten  
Black Guerilla Family Tattoo # Four



7  
Variations of a prison gun tower being attacked by a dragon are frequently tattooed on BGF gang members.

#### LESS COMMON BGF TATTOOS

Figure Eleven  
Black Guerilla Family Tattoo # Five

**276**

This represents the numerical order of the letters in the alpha bet.

Figure Twelve  
Black Guerilla Family Tattoo # Six

**Jama**

The Swahili word meaning family.

Figure Thirteen  
Black Guerilla Family Tattoo # Seven

**Weusi Giadi Jama**

Swahili for Black Guerrilla Family.

## SECTION THREE

### ARYAN BROTHERHOOD

The Aryan Brotherhood or the AB originated in San Quentin prison in 1967 (<http://www.liesexposed.net/nfp/issue0211/arybro.htm>). Membership of the Aryan Brotherhood is based on race. The Aryan Brotherhood consists of only white members (Florida Department of Corrections, n/d). Originally, this gang was established to provide protection for white individuals from Black and Hispanic groups (<http://www.liesexposed.net/nfp/issue0211/arybro.htm>). "Some of the original members of the AB migrated from a 1950s gang known as the "Bluebirds." Other names used in the past were the "Diamond Tooth Gang" and the "Nazi Gang" (Potter, n/d). "Less known names for the Aryan Brotherhood include the Brand, Alice Baker, and the Tip" (Valentine, 2000, p.6).

"The Aryan Brotherhood, or AB, originated in California, but has spread to numerous locations. Members released from prison are expected to dedicate themselves to supporting members who are still incarcerated" ([http://www.adl.org/special\\_reports/racist\\_groups\\_in\\_prisons/prisons\\_intro.asp](http://www.adl.org/special_reports/racist_groups_in_prisons/prisons_intro.asp)).

Before gaining membership, a recruit must be nominated by an Aryan Brotherhood Counsel member and approved by a member of the Commission. A person is considered for nomination based on how he has lived his life. The term "Stand-up Convict" is used regularly when this consideration is made. The term is defined as an individual who stands up for what he believes and is willing to do what it takes to survive and take care of business, including killing his enemies. Membership is considered to be for life. The only way out of the AB is by death, either natural or by the hands of another.

The philosophical premise of the AB and its members consists of a mixture of ideologies of white supremacy and German and Irish ancestry. Over the years, the AB has distanced itself from the Neo-Nazi philosophy; group



members are identifying more with Irish ancestry and Norse and Viking symbolism and history. The AB is no longer using the "blood in" portion of the "blood in - blood out" philosophy. They have adopted a profiling system of membership: individuals now gain membership based on their abilities. However, this does not eliminate the "blood-out" rule. Currently, most members are apolitical and the group's primary orientation is now drug trafficking.

(Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, Aryan Brotherhood, 1997)

There is conflicting information regarding the use of the "blood in - blood out" philosophy within the Aryan Brotherhood. The majority of sources claim that the AB's use this philosophy, but others claim that at least for a small period of time the group abandoned the Blood in Blood out philosophy. Fleisher and Decker state, "the AB has a blood in, blood out rule" (Fleisher, 2001, p.4).

"The original members of the gang were tattooed with two bluebirds in flight on their neck, which represented freedom" (Valentine, 2000, p.6). "AB members ordinarily wear numerous and varied body tattoos, but the true AB tattoo is a shamrock, the letters AB, and three sixes. Tattoos of the swastika, a picture of a bluebird and of double lighting bolts are also used to identify Aryan Brotherhood"

(<http://www.shutitdown.net/gangtattoos/>). "Most recently, tattoos of a falcon, that may be superimposed on a shamrock or in front of prison bars have been worn by members.

Also, the slogan "Sinn Fein" has been tattooed on members" (Valentine, 2000, p.6).

"Three sixes displayed by themselves are not AB-specific because they are used by several other gangs. Only members of the AB are permitted to wear the "brand" of the gang; individuals found to be wearing the tattoo without consent of the AB are subject to being murdered" (Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, Aryan Brotherhood, 1997).

The AB realized that prison administrators often identify gang members by their tattoos and have prohibited members from displaying AB specific tattoos. As a result, many members have disguised their AB tattoos (Walker, Aryan Brotherhood, 2002).

“The AB is associated with the Dirty White Boys, Nazi Low Riders, Mexican Mafia, Odinist and the Assatru Kindreds” (Florida Department of Corrections, con’t, n/d). There is conflicting information regarding the Aryan Brotherhood and their relationship with the Hells Angels. The Florida Department of Corrections states that the Hells’ Angels is an associated group of the Aryan Brotherhood. However, Valentine states that despite popular belief, the two groups do not get along well (Valentine, 2000)

The AB’s enemies include the Black Guerilla Family, La Nuestra Familia, inmates from the District of Columbia , and Black Gangster Disciples” (Florida Department of Corrections, con’t, n/d). “Many original AB members have been killed or have become protection cases and are separated from other gang members. Most AB related violence in recent years has been directed at its own membership” (Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, Aryan Brotherhood, 1997).

“The AB is using the Odinist religion to conduct gang meetings and disguise illicit business practices” (Florida Department of Corrections, n/d). The Aryan Brotherhood is involved in drug trafficking, contract killings, extortion, and pressure rackets (Pelz et al., 1998). The AB is a particularly violent group within state institutions and also the Federal Bureau of Prisons. “From 1975 to 1985, members of the group committed 40 homicides in California Prisons and local jails. From 1978 to 1992, AB members, suspects, and associates in the federal prison system were involved in 26 homicides, 3 of which involved staff victims” (Florida Department of Corrections, con’t, n/d).

Figure Fourteen  
Aryan Brotherhood Tattoo # One



Figure Fifteen  
Aryan Brotherhood Tattoo # Two



Figure Sixteen  
Aryan Brotherhood Tattoo # Three



8

Figure Seventeen  
Aryan Brotherhood Tattoo # Four



9

Aryan Brotherhood tattoos often have the letters AB accompanied with a shamrock and/or swastika within their tattoos. However, a swastika is not specific to the Aryan Brotherhood, as many white supremacist groups use this symbol.

Figure Eighteen  
Aryan Brotherhood Tattoo # Five



10

Figure Nineteen  
Aryan Brotherhood Tattoo # Six



**Sinn Fein**

11

AB members are more recently being tattooed with a picture of a falcon and the words  
"Sinn Fein."

## SECTION FOUR

### MEXICAN MAFIA

The Mexican Mafia is the oldest prison gang in the federal system. The creation of the group is credited to Luis “Huero” Flores

(<http://www.geocities.com/OrganizedCrimeSyndicates/MexicanMafiaPrisonGang.html>). The

Mexican Mafia is also known as La EME. La EME originated in 1957 at the Deuel

Vocational Institution in the California Department of Corrections. The group originally formed out of a desire for protection (Valentine, 2000).

La EME is primarily comprised of Mexican-Americans

([http://www.1800stunnaz.com/cholo/nortesur\\_1.html](http://www.1800stunnaz.com/cholo/nortesur_1.html)). In order to achieve membership within the Mexican Mafia an individual must be sponsored by a current member. After an individual is sponsored by a current member he must take a blood-in-blood-out pledge.

(Fleisher, 2001). ‘Blood in Blood out’ means that the prospective member must kill someone as the price of admission to the gang and cannot leave except by dying

(Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, 2000). The structure of La EME consists of a chain-of-command whereby instructions from generals are carried out by captains, lieutenants, and soldiers

(<http://www.geocities.com/OrganizedCrimeSyndicates/MexicanMafiaPrisonGang.html>).

The original members of the Mexican Mafia trace their roots to Latino Street gangs predominately from the Maravilla area of East Los Angeles (Potter, n/d). “La EME is also closely associated with several urban Latino street gangs including various 18<sup>th</sup> street gang factions and a number of others collectively known as ‘Sureños’” (Valentine, 2000, p.26).

- Movidas, meaning rules of conduct, were drawn up and approved by all of the original members of the Mexican Mafia.
- Membership was open only to Mexican Americans.
- La Eme was to be placed above all else, including family, church, and self.
- The confirmed member had to carry out orders without question. If a hit was ordered, it must be done. If not, the member assigned the mission would himself be put to death.
- Members were never to snitch to the authorities or trust prison staff members. The Mafia would try to get along with the administration but would take care of Mafia business whenever it was required, regardless of prison rules.
- Any insult or disrespect directed against Mafia members by other inmates was to be avenged swiftly. The prison inmate population would be compelled to respect La Eme.
- Mafia members were to back each other at all times.
- Homosexual activity among members was forbidden.
- Mexican Americans who were imprisoned together but had fought each other during street gang warfare back in East Los Angeles were given time to settle their past differences and then were required to be supportive of all Mafia members and activities (Valentine, 2000, p. 22).

“La EME is associated with the Aryan Brotherhood, Arizona's Old Mexican Mafia, New Mexico Syndicate, and Southern California Hispanic street gang members” (Florida Department of Corrections, n/d).

La EME has developed a relationship with the Aryan Brotherhood largely due to the fact that the Black Guerilla Family made a pact with the Nuestra Familia. The Mexican Mafia and the Aryan Brotherhood in turn made a pact with each other (Valentine, 2000, p16). La EME have been known to take "hit" contracts for one another, to have mutual drug connections, and to work extremely well together in narcotic trafficking. However, “as of 1997 La EME is currently only working with the California branch of the Aryan Brotherhood” (Fleisher, 2001, p.4).

La EME is enemies with La Nuestra Familia, (La EME recruits "urban" Mexican-Americans, while La Nuestra Familia recruits "rural" Mexican-

Americans. As a result, there is a continuing struggle and rivalry between these two groups.) Northern Structure, Mexicanemi, Texas Syndicate, Latin Kings, Arizona's New Mexican Mafia, Black Guerilla Family, Black Gangster Disciples, and black street gang members (Florida Department of Corrections, n/d).

“La EME is known for committing extremely brutal killings. La EME commits these brutal acts as a means of gaining respect” (Southeast Connecticut Gang Activities Group, 2000). “The EME’s killings are extremely gruesome and calculated to establish fear and intimidation” (Walker, Mexican Mafia, 2002). Even though La EME is well known for their brutal killings, “their main activities are centered around drug trafficking, extortion, pressure rackets, and internal discipline” (Walker, Mexican Mafia, 2002).

The Mexican Mafia may use the letters "EME," "MM," "M," "13," and the "black hand of death" in their tattoos. Many people confuse La EME with the Texas Mexican Mafia, known as the Mexicanemi or EMI [discussed later] (<http://www.vip-cali.com/CDCINFO/faq.htm>). Due to this similarity, careful consideration should be taken into account when attempting to associate membership with either EME or EMI through the use of an individual's tattoo.

Through the years, the EME has attempted to establish itself as a legitimate organization. They have been successful on a few occasions in obtaining federal grants and using some of these funds to further their criminal activities (Carlie, 2002).

Figure Twenty  
Mexican Mafia Tattoo # One



Figure Twenty-one  
Mexican Mafia Tattoo # Two

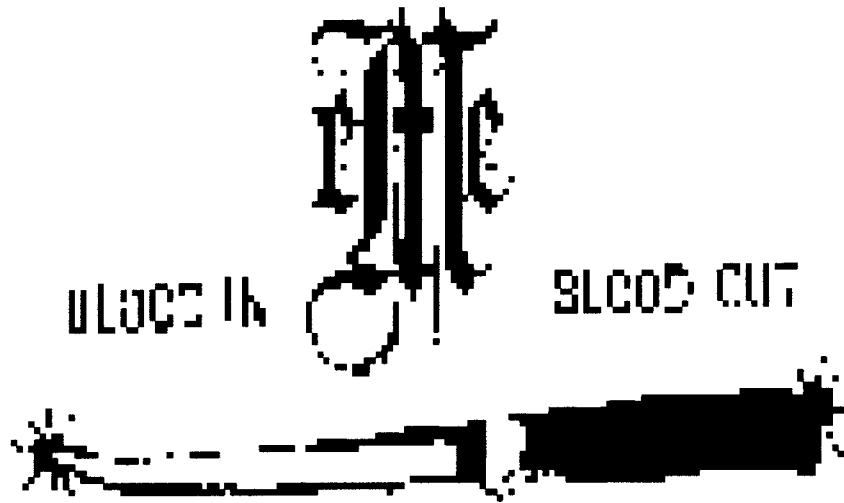


12

This symbol is referred to as the black hand of the Mexican Mafia.



Figure Twenty-two  
Mexican Mafia Tattoo # Three



13

Figure Twenty-three  
Mexican Mafia Tattoo # Four



14

Different representations of EME, Mexicana, and the black hand are used within Mexican Mafia tattoos.

Figure Twenty-four  
Mexican Mafia Tattoo # Five



Any eagle with a snake in its grasp with EME is a traditional Mexican Mafia tattoo.

## SECTION FIVE

### MEXIKANEMI

“The Mexikanemi originally formed in the Texas Department of Corrections in 1984. The Mexikanemi is also known as the EMI. A lesser-known name for the gang is Mary Lou. Translated, Mexikanemi means “Free-Mexican.”” (Walker, Other Prison Gangs, 2002). “Membership in the Mexikanemi or the EMI is based on race, ethnicity, and domicile”

([http://www.gang-busters.com/otherprisongangs/html/untitled\\_2\\_mexikanemi.html](http://www.gang-busters.com/otherprisongangs/html/untitled_2_mexikanemi.html)).

The Mexikanemi, like many other prison gangs has a group structure. The structure of the group consists of, “a president, vice-president, regional generals, lieutenants, sergeants, and soldiers. The ranking positions are elected by the group based on leadership skills” (Fleisher, 2001, p.5). The gang can be found in San Antonio, Texas, South and West Texas, and the Texas Department of Corrections

([http://www.gang-busters.com/otherprisongangs/html/untitled\\_2\\_mexikanemi.html](http://www.gang-busters.com/otherprisongangs/html/untitled_2_mexikanemi.html)).

“The Mexikanemi is associated with the Latin Kings; and peace agreements have been established with the Mexican Mafia, Barrio Azteca, and Texas Syndicate. EMI’s enemies include the New Mexican Mafia and the Black Guerilla Family” (Walker, Other Prison Gangs, 2002).

The EMI can easily be mistaken for the Mexican Mafia because their tattoos are very similar. There are subtle differences in the designs that must be taken into account before determining gang affiliation. Many of their tattoos and graffiti contain a circle which borders their symbolism. Use of the initials MM and EMI is very common. The term "Aztlán" is a strong indication of Mexikanemi affiliation (Southeast Connecticut

Gang Activities Group, Mexicanemi, 2000).

“The Mexicanemi, or EMI, became known for criminal activity including extortion, drug trafficking and murder. The Mexicanemi state that they will conduct any criminal activity that will benefit their advancement, including contract assassinations” (Walker, Other Prison Gangs, 2002).

Figure Twenty-five  
Mexikanemi Tattoo # One

EMI

Figure Twenty-six  
Mexikanemi Tattoo # Two

MM

Use of the initials MM and EMI is very common within Mexikanemi.

Figure Twenty-seven  
Mexikanemi Tattoo # Three



16

A strong indication of Mexikanemi affiliation is the use of a dagger and the term "Aztlán," which refers to the homeland of the Aztecs.

Figure Twenty-eight  
Mexikanemi Tattoo # Four



17

Figure Twenty-nine  
Mexikanemi Tattoo # Five



18

This image is often used within Mexikanemi tattoos. (please note that the name Laura is not part of the symbol, but just present in this photograph)

Figure Thirty  
Mexikanemi Tattoo # Six



19

An actual photo of a Mexikanemi tattoo incorporating the gang name, daggers, and the circle that is often used in EMI tattoos.

## SECTION SIX

### OTHER TATOOS OF SIGNIFICANCE

There are non gang affiliated tattoos that are also worth mentioning in this handbook . The following tattoos are frequently seen on inmates within the federal correctional system. The teardrop tattoo is frequently associated with the belief the wearer of this tattoo has killed someone. Although this is indeed a fact in some instances, there is also another less known reason the teardrop tattoo is worn. That less known meaning of the teardrop tattoo is that the individual has lost a loved one, “especially if the death occurred while the individual was incarcerated” (<http://www.shutitdown.net/gangtattoos/>).

The spider web tattoo that is worn on the elbow is often believed to be associated with white supremacy groups.

In some parts of the country this tattoo means that a individual has served time in a penitentiary and in other parts of the country it is believed that the wearer of the tattoo has killed a member of a minority group. In fact, James Burmeister was convicted in 1995 of killing a black couple, an act he committed solely because he wanted to wear the spider web tattoo that was popular among members of the Aryan Brotherhood (<http://www.shutitdown.net/gangtattoos/>).

Although the spider web tattoo was popular among members of the Aryan Brotherhood it was at no time and is not currently a tattoo that is specifically associated with the group. In fact the spider web tattoo is one of the most popular if not the most popular tattoo assimilated by middle class America simply because they like it. (<http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/gangs/prison.html>)

A tattoo of a tombstone or multiple tombstones are very common among prison gang inmates. There are two common meanings of the tombstone tattoo. Each



tombstone tattoo frequently represents a year an individual was incarcerated.

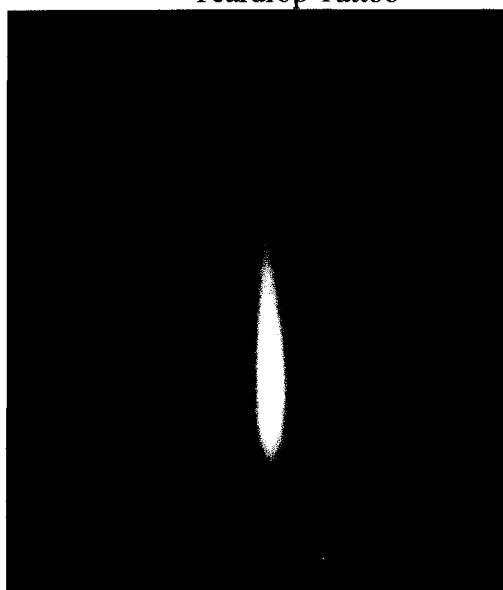
“Tombstones with “R.I.P.” and a date show the loss of a loved one. Often these tattoos are reserved for fellow gang members who were killed in gang related violence”

(<http://www.shutitdown.net/gangtattoos/>).

The pachuco cross is a tattoo that is commonly worn by Hispanic gang members. However, it is important to remember that this tattoo is not specific to a particular Hispanic gang (<http://www.shutitdown.net/gangtattoos/>).

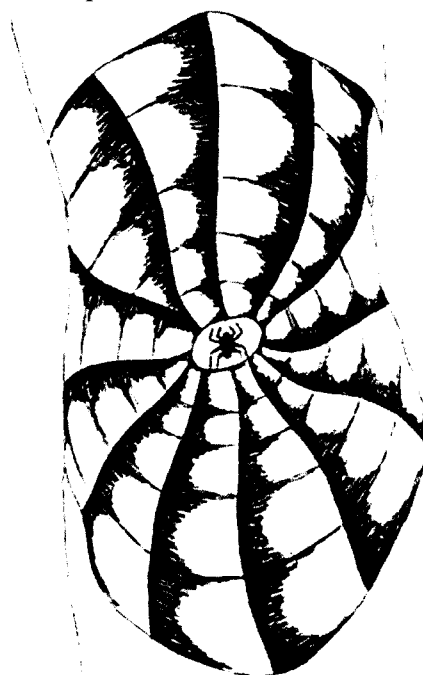
Three dots in the shape of a pyramid is also a common tattoo among gang members. This tattoo as worn by Hispanic gang members can be translated as meaning my crazy life. The tattoo as worn by Southeast Asian gang members can be translated as meaning I care for nothing (<http://www.shutitdown.net/gangtattoos/>).

Figure Thirty-one  
Teardrop Tattoo



20

Figure Thirty-two  
Spiderweb Tattoo



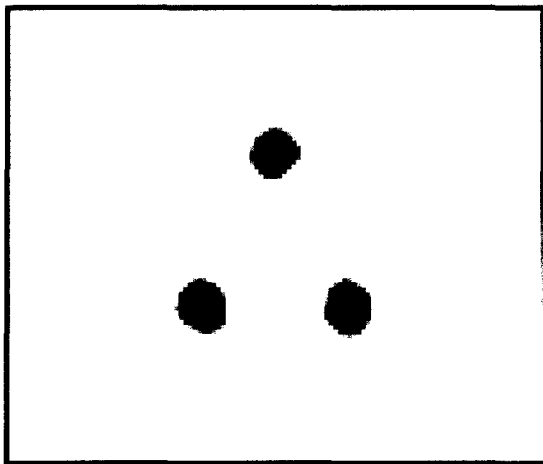
21

Figure Thirty-three  
Tombstone Tattoo



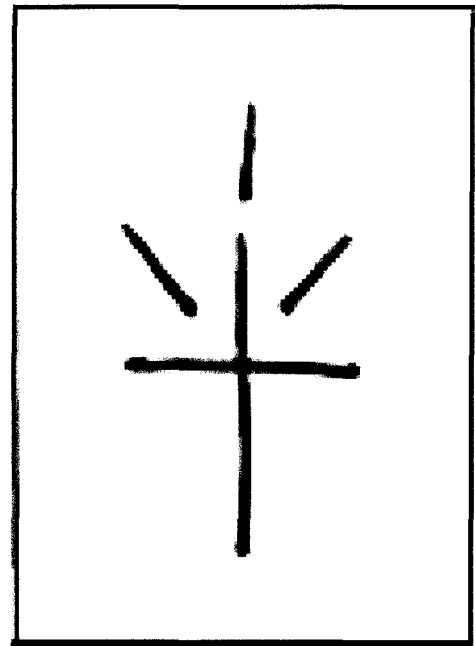
22

Figure Thirty-four  
Three Dots Tattoo



23

Figure Thirty-five  
Pachuco Cross Tattoo



24

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FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS  
INMATE TATTOO IDENTIFICATION CARD

Inmate Registration Number: \_\_\_\_\_

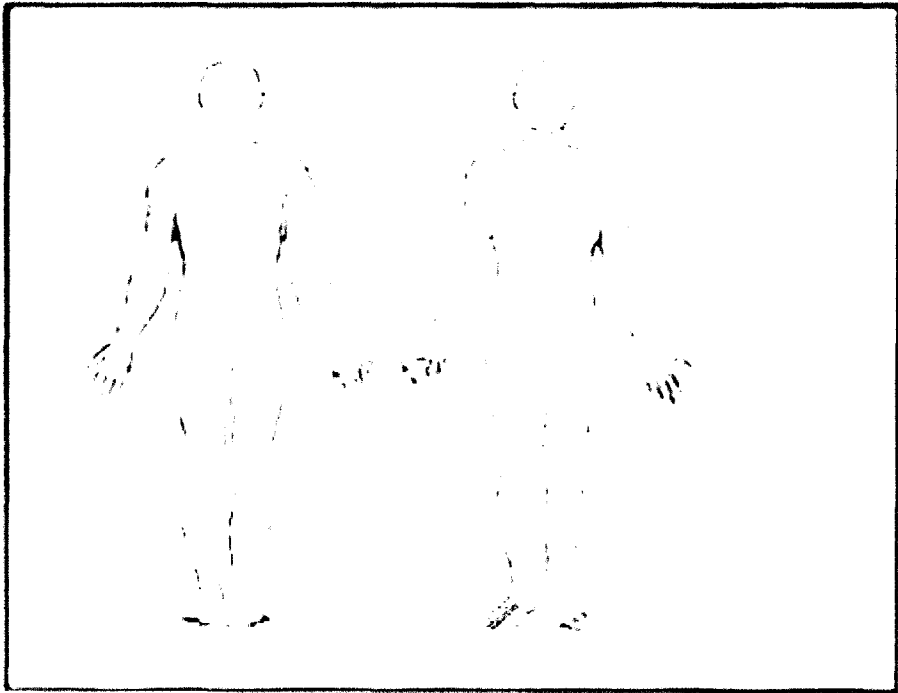
Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Eye Color: Brown

Blue/Green

**TATTOOS:** Please assign a number to each tattoo on the diagram above, and describe it in the numbered space.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_
12. \_\_\_\_\_
13. \_\_\_\_\_
14. \_\_\_\_\_
15. \_\_\_\_\_



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Discussion**

The previous chapters have examined the history of the art form of tattooing, the history of the Federal Correctional System, and the history of gangs, specifically the Disruptive Groups, within the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The need to recognize and interpret prison gang tattoos was made clear. Finally, both a handbook for correctional officers of prison gang tattoos and an inmate tattoo identification card were created. This chapter will discuss the limitations of the study conducted and current policy regarding prison gangs and how they can be improved in the future.

### **Limitations**

Two major problems occurred while attempting to complete this project. First, due to the number of prison gangs that exist, the volume of data is overwhelming and could not possibly be covered in such a project. Therefore, the project focused on the five current Disruptive Groups that exist within the Federal Bureau of Prisons today. These groups represent only a small portion of the total number of gang members that are incarcerated within the Federal Bureau of Prison. Second, the current policy of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, as well as other law enforcement agencies, limits the public's access to the agencies current information on prison gangs. Volumes of information were provided to the author from the Federal Bureau of Prisons. However, the vast majority of

it was stamped law enforcement sensitive and thus, as a result, this project, and all examinations into this issue suffered.

**Recommendation: The creation of a centralized database to track all inmate tattoos.**

Now that a data card has been created, a centralized database is necessary. The main idea behind this creation is to help monitor the criminal activity of prison gangs and to better track their movement. The database will contain at least four nude digital photos of every inmate currently within the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The inmates will be photographed from the front, back, right side, and left side. Every inmate will have their head shaved as well as any other body hair that could conceal a tattoo.

Four categories of inmates will exist within the database. The first category of inmates that will exist within the database are members of Disruptive Groups. The second category of inmates within the database will be those inmates who have gang affiliated tattoos. The third category of inmates within the database will be inmates who have tattoos but the tattoos are not gang affiliated. The fourth category of inmates within the database will be inmates who do not have tattoos.

The inmates will be photographed in the R&D (receiving and discharging) area of every institution as they are processed into the facility and also as they are exiting the facility. This process is a built in safe guard against staff error. The inmate will be photographed prior to leaving a particular facility. If staff detect new tattoos on the inmate, the inmate will be moved into the appropriate category. Also at that time a

incident report will be written on the inmate for receiving a tattoo while incarcerated, which is currently against the rules of the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

This database will be a centralized database that every institution within the Federal Bureau of Prisons will have access to. It will help monitor gang activity such as recruitment. The Federal Bureau of Prisons will share this information with other law enforcement agencies. However, only Federal Bureau of Prisons staff members will have an opportunity to change information within the system.

### **Policy Implications**

The current policy of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, as well as other law enforcement agencies, limits the public's access to the agencies current information on prison gangs. The policy of keeping information from the general public is a mistake. It is not practical to expect those outside of the law enforcement agencies to understand how bad the gang problem in this country is. These law enforcement agencies need to share their information with the outside world and each other. Information should be passed on to local law enforcement, schools, and area business in an effort to provide the knowledge to fight the gang problem that faces America.

It is common knowledge within the correction field that a unwritten policy exists. Prison administrators do not and will not admit to having gang problems. (This fact is not true of U.S.P's in the Federal Prison System or High security state facilities such as Pelican Bay ion California, which is know as a particular violent facility.) This unwritten

policy is dangerous to correctional officers, as well as being detrimental to those in the academic field who are trying to find out exactly how bad the gang problem really is. This problem is multi layered. Not only must law enforcement agencies change their policy, but prison administrators must gain some well needed character. The problem is that some prison administrators are worried about their reputation within their agency instead of being honest about their gang problem.

One solution to this problem is appoint an independent panel to monitor the gang problem that exist within the Federal Bureau of Prisons. This independent panel would consist of three people. An individual from another federal law enforcement agency, one individual from the academic field, and one member of the national press. The combination of these three individuals and their diverse background would make it difficult for any one member of the panel to purposely keep information from the public. The researcher acknowledges that changes in the law may be necessary for all parties involved to be permitted to share data.

### **Future Research Projects**

The Federal Bureau of Prison needs to dedicate staff positions to future research projects. One such project could be to take this newly created handbook for correctional officers and improve upon it. Also, including digital facial photographs of every known Disruptive Group member to this handbook would be an improvement. The Bureau of Prisons could then progress to include other known prison gangs within the Federal

Correctional System, starting with the gangs that have the highest rates of violent offences. Since there are so many prison gangs, limited information would be included on all other gangs. Correctional Officers would be provided photographs of what tattoos to look for, facial photographs, a short summary of their criminal activities, and who their enemies and allies are. The historical beginnings and other background information about the gangs would be left out to avoid confusion.

Now that an inmate identification card has been created, a centralized database to track all inmate tattoos is necessary. The main idea behind this creation is to help monitor the criminal activity of prison gangs and to better track their movement. Only a new database designed with such a project in mind will have the ability to accomplish such a goal.

Information gathered by the proposed independent panel has the potential to shine a bright light on a dark problem in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Simply ignoring the gang problem and pretending that it does not exist is not an adequate solution. Prison tattoos survive because they are kept in secret. The guide book created here allows officers to identify and understand a hidden area of corrections. Until the Federal Bureau of Prisons acknowledges the problem it faces, the safety of the officers, the prisoners, and the institutions will be compromised.

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## Appendix A

Complete list of Federal Bureau of Prisons Historical (Closed) Institutions.

Federal Bureau of Prisons. (n.d.). Federal Bureau of Prisons Historical (Closed)

Institutions. (Online), Retrieved from the Web January 9, 2004.

<http://www.bop.gov/ipapg/ipaclosed.html>

Institution (State)	Year Opened	Year Closed	Notes
USP McNeil Island (WA)	1909	1981	
# FCI Chillicothe (OH)	1926	1966	
# FDH New York (NY)	1929	1975	Also called the West Street Jail
# Leavenworth Annex (KS)	1929	1940	
# Camp Bragg (NC)	1930	1933	
# Camp Riley (KS)	1930	1933	
# Camp Meade (MD)	1930	1933	
# Dupont Camp (WA)	1930	1943	Originally called Fort Lewis
# Camp Dix (NJ)	1930	1931	
# Fort Wadsworth (NY)	1930	1931	
# Fort Eustis (VA)	1931	1934	
# New Orleans Jail (LA)	1932(?)	1943	
# FPC Tucson (AZ)	1933	1967	
# USP Alcatraz (CA)	1934	1963	
# FPC Kooskia (ID)	1935	1943	
# FPC Mill Point (WV)	1938	1959	
# National Training School for Boys (DC)	1939	1968	
# Columbia Camp (WA)	1944	1947	Also known as McNeil Island camp
# FPC Natural Bridge (VA)	1944	1963	
# FPC Avon Park (FL)	1952	1953	
# FPC Wickenburg (AZ)	1952	1953	
# FPC Tule Lake (CA)	1952	1953	
# Fairbanks Jail (AK)	1953	1964	
# Juneau Jail (AK)	1953	1964	

#	Ketchikan Prison Camp (AK)	1953	1964	
#	Elmendorf AFB (AK)	1953	1964	
#	Anchorage Jail (AK)	1954	1964	
#	FPC Greenville (SC)	1958	1963	
#	CTC Chicago (IL)	1961	1981	
#	CTC New York (NY)	1961	1980	
#	CTC Los Angeles (CA)	1961	1978	
#	CTC Detroit (MI)	1963	1981	
#	FPC Florence (AZ)	1963	1983	
#	FPC Sewart (TN)	1963	1965	
#	CTC Washington, DC	1965	1967	
#	CTC Kansas City (KS)	1966	1981	
#	CTC Houston (TX)	1967	1981	
#	CTC Atlanta (GA)	1967	1978	
#	CTC Oakland (CA)	1967	1981	
#	CTC Dallas (TX)	1972	1981	
#	FDC El Paso (TX)	1973	1979	
#	CTC Phoenix (AZ)	1974	1981	
#	CTC Miami (FL)	1975	1977	
#	CTC Long Beach (CA)	1975	1981	
#	FDC Hartford (CT)	1986	1992	
#	FPC Tyndall (FL)	1987	1993	
#	Fort Polk (LA)	1987	1988	Used temporarily following disturbances at USP Atlanta and FDC Oakdale

# Fort Gordon (GA)	1987	1988	Used temporarily following disturbances at USP Atlanta and FDC Oakdale
# FPC Homestead (FL)	1989	1992	Destroyed by Hurricane Andrew
# FPC Millington (TN)	1990	1996	Became FCI Memphis satellite camp
# FMC Carville (LA)	1991	1994	
# Krome Detention Center (FL)	1992	1992	Used temporarily following Hurricane Andrew
# FPC Beaumont (TX)	1997	1998	Became USP Beaumont satellite camp
# FPC Boron (CA)	1979	2000	
# FPC El Paso (TX)	1989	2001	Became FCI La Tuna satellite low-security camp

**Facility Abbreviations:**

CTC - Community Treatment Center FCI - Federal Correctional Institution FDC - Federal Detention Center FDH - Federal Detention Headquarters FMC - Federal Medical Center FPC - Federal Prison Camp USP - United States Penitentiary (Federal).

## Appendix B

More results from George Knox's survey of Prison Gang Disruption of Correctional  
Facilities. (George Knox, Ph.D.)

<b>Question asked in survey</b>	<b>1993</b>	<b>1999</b>
% of correctional facilities that reported disturbances related to gang members	31%	50%
% correctional facilities that believe that gangs are responsible for more and a greater production of weapons within their facilities grew	<b>1992</b> 37.2%	<b>1999</b> 55.65%
The percentage of all institutional management problems caused by gangs or STG's increased	<b>1993</b>  16.4%	<b>1999</b>  25.7%
The percentage of all institutional violence caused by gangs or gang members increased	<b>1993</b>  20.4%	<b>1999</b>  29.2%
the percentage of all inmate on inmate assaults that were gang related	<b>1995</b>  23.8%	<b>1999</b>  32.7%
The percentage of wardens who think that prisons are feared and a deterrent to gang members	<b>1995</b>  4.6%	<b>1999</b>  0.8%
Do you believe that gang members have significantly affected your correctional environment?,	<b>1992</b>  27.75%	<b>1999</b>  63.4%
When asked if telephone monitoring is an effective way in disabling gang leaders from maintaining ties to outside gang members	<b>1995</b>  80.4%	<b>1999</b>  91.4%
When asked if mail monitoring is an effective way in disabling gang leaders from maintaining ties to outside gang members	<b>1995</b>  82.2%	<b>1999</b>  91.5%
The percentage of wardens that responded yes when asked if overcrowding is a problem in your facility	<b>1993</b> 47.7%	<b>1999</b> 53%
Do you believe that gang members could be more effectively controlled if they were transfered to a central national federal unit?	<b>1993</b> 33.3%	<b>1999</b> 41%
Facilities were asked - Do most STG's in your facility exist under the same name outside of your prison?	<b>1995</b>  83.9%	<b>1999</b>  89.6%

<sup>##</sup> %OF GANGS OPERATING THE FOLLOWING ECONOMIC RACKETS WITHIN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES	1994	1999
<sup>##</sup> Drugs	68%	83.2%
<sup>##</sup> Sex	33.6%	30.5%
<sup>##</sup> Food	28.7%	46.6%
<sup>##</sup> Loan Sharking	45.5%	46.6%
<sup>##</sup> Gambling	50.9%	64.9%
<sup>##</sup> Extortion	50.5%	61.1%
<sup>##</sup> Protection	52.2%	56.5%



## Appendix C

### Human Subjects Protocol Review Committee Approval

September 24, 2004

Dr. Eric See, Principal Investigator  
Mr. Thomas Zackasee, Co-investigator  
Department of Criminal Justice  
UNIVERSITY

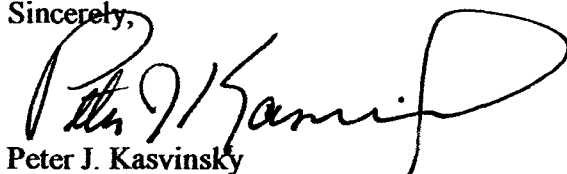
RE: HSRC PROTOCOL NUMBER: 20-2005  
PROTOCOL TITLE: Recognition and Interpretation of Tattoos of Inmates  
within the Federal Bureau of Prisons

Dear Dr. See and Mr. Zackasee:

The Human Subjects Research Committee of Youngstown State University has reviewed the above mentioned protocol and determined that it fully meets YSU Human Subjects Research Guidelines. Therefore, I am pleased to inform you that your project has been fully approved.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Human Subjects Research Committee and may not be initiated without HSRC approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the Human Subjects Research Committee.

Sincerely,



Peter J. Kasvinsky  
Dean, School of Graduate Studies  
Research Compliance Officer

PJK:cc

c: Dr. James Conser, Acting Chair  
Department of Criminal Justice