9

Keeping Up the Front

How Disadvantaged Black Youths Avoid Street Violence in the Inner City

JOSEPH C. KRUPNICK *and* CHRISTOPHER WINSHIP,
Harvard University

1. Introduction

Much of the literature on inner-city black youth culture has focused on the high levels of street violence, particularly involving gangs. Generally ignored is the fact that the overwhelming majority of interactions among young black gang members are neither conflictive nor violent.[1] Among the many encounters in which gang members participate, very few involve fights—much less shootings or homicides. Given the seemingly pervasive potential for violence in these relations, we ask: How is it possible that "peace" and "order" are preserved in the large majority of encounters on the inner-city street? Rather than thinking about why there is so *much* violence in this young African American world, we examine here why (and how) there is not more.[2]

We base our analysis on eighteen months of ethnographic and social observation and in-depth interviews with members of the Woodlawn community of Chicago. We study peacekeeping and violence in the inner city with a microlevel focus on understandings, performances, and action-oriented rituals of twenty Woodlawn young men who call themselves "Hustlas"—each is either a current or former member of a gang. Based on our ethnographic analysis, we adduce three main arguments. First, we find that social understandings on the street are fundamentally rooted in fear of physical conflict. Owing to socioeconomic marginality, a structural shift in the social relations of Woodlawn gangs, and the constant threat of a predatory social type Hustlas call "Crazy Killers," even the most innocuous face-to-face encounters are fateful events where social

standing is on the line and where there is always potential for violence. However, in a street culture where status is so crucially tied to displays of masculine invulnerability and to being seen as a "badass" or "hardman," this creates a double-bind: Hustlas must find ways of warding off physical threat while simultaneously asserting themselves as street elites worthy of fear and respect.

Our second—and central—argument is that Hustlas negotiate these demands and limit violence through a series of interactional techniques we call "symbolic substitutions." Symbolic substitutions involve the use of aggressive front-staged posture, display, and verbal brinkmanship as strategic substitutes for face-to-face physical violence. While Hustlas talk a great deal about violent crime and organize their street styles around its danger, they stop short of actual physical conflict with threatening bluffs and blusters that substitute for situational closure. What makes these ritualized performances so effective, we find, is the cunning double-sidedness of a repeated street phrase like "Don't fuck with me" or "I'll get you . . . next time"—that both asserts situational dominance and obviates the risk of actual hand-to-hand conflict. Low-pitched phrases like these and menacing gestures like a cold stare or a closed fist earn Hustlas respect and status while limiting violence to artful display and mere front-staged sound and fury.

We organize Hustlas' performances around five types of ritual interaction—each carrying a risk of violence that Hustlas attempt to avoid. Following ~~the legacy of~~ sociologist Erving Goffman, we decompose these violence-limiting interactions into five corresponding categories of symbolic substitution: postponement, accomplishment, keying, fabrication, and reframing. As interactions become more threatening, Hustlas deploy increasingly elaborate substitutes for violence. Less threatening situations like ordinary passages on the street require spontaneous signals that keep up the front by *postponing* violence to a vague and unspecified "next time." More threatening confrontations involve for-an-audience storytelling and cutthroat contests of "shit talking," which symbolically *accomplish* and *key* violence by replacing it with the aggressive suggestibility of dramatic language. Most dangerous are situations that call for acts of retaliation and others, including stickups and armed robberies, which are already framed by criminal intent. Hustlas operate in these fateful worlds by *fabricating* and *reframing* violence via psychological mind games that preserve the face of dominance and leave their victims "beaten"—psychologically, far more than they are physically.

Our third claim is that when violence occurs, it may well be neither necessary nor intended. Notwithstanding strategically planned and premeditated events like drive-by shootings and execution-style gang murders—which are publicized but account for only a small fraction of overall rates of inner-city violence—many instances of street violence are unintended and avoidable. Much of the time, violence is a consequence of misunderstandings, fear-driven breaks of frame, and impulsive accidents that are notable primarily as inconsistencies in a generally successful cultural project of peacekeeping. To put it in the Hustlas' own language, violence ~~usually~~ erupts when people are caught "slipping"—a term that at once suggests the precariousness and the avoidability of most physical acts of violence. And, as we will discuss, even when Hustlas do "slip," there are often social designs in place that keep violence from escalating to all-out urban warfare, which, in this case, we will tentatively discuss via the role of handguns.

This chapter operates in the phenomenal foreground of social interactions, drawing on the interactionist and phenomenological methods made famous by Erving Goffman and with roots in Durkheim ([1912] 1964) and Simmel. In theory and method, this means we depart from the dominant positivist tradition that seeks explanations in the structural background of fixed causal categories (like poverty or residential segregation) (Skogan 1990; Sampson and Wilson 1995; Thornberry et al. 2003). One problem with the standard positivist approach is that most people who engage in acts of violence do not fit these causal categories. Second, most people who do fit into these categories are not violent. And, third, even those who are violent are not violent most of the time (Katz 1988; Collins 2004; 2008). We study violent *experiences,* then, not violent individuals, which means ethnographically investigating the sensual tug and pull of (often conflicting) emotional impulses and how they are tethered to particular situations that may end in bloodshed but must also start somewhere concrete.

Even the more descriptive ethnographic tradition, ~~however,~~ tends to treat violence as an epiphenomenal symptom rather than on its own terms. For one thing, ethnographic sociology—like most quantitative work—generally remains wedded to structuralist assumptions that violence is straightforwardly shaped by "ghetto-specific" behavior and macrolevel antecedents like racism, residential segregation, and socioeconomic disadvantage (Wilson 1996; Venkatesh 2000; Venkatesh 2006). Second, urban ethnographers usually find it necessary to package violence together with culturally similar dynamics like gang membership, guns, drug dealing,

and other phenomena that are presumed to lead to violence—often only by implication or untested association (Sanchez-Jankowski 1991; Majors and Billson 1993; Bourgois 1995; Jackall 2005; Harcourt 2006; Wacquant 2003, 2008; Klein and Maxson 2010). While this may in part reflect the technical challenge of gaining access to a criminal "underworld" (Becker [1963] 1997, 168–71), the upshot is that urban ethnographers rarely get close enough to violence to see how threatening situations actually unfold in everyday social interactions on the street.

The most notable exception is Elijah Anderson's *Code of the Street* (1999). In Anderson's analysis, persistent, racialized urban poverty combines with distrust of police and mainstream political institutions to create a cultural "code" that governs the use of violence as street justice. While residents divide themselves into fluid, folk ethnographic social categories of "street" and "decent," the code of the street takes a particular toll on "decent" residents who are often forced to switch codes and demonstrate "street credibility." Violence, however, is path dependent and situational, because one's degree of street credibility will in some circumstances invite and in others preclude physical challenges. For Anderson, this means violence is primarily a defensive move and that interactions are negotiated by methods of linguistic and paralinguistic signaling that either catalyze physical conflict or keep it at the level of posture and display.

Empirically, we build on Anderson's conception of violence in *Code of the Street*. We are particularly attuned to the role of defensive moves and front-staged postures involving what Anderson calls "showing heart." As we will discuss, the street requires an inversion of the Goffmanian code of presentation—in which we are generally presumed to be putting our best selves forward. Here, we find an antinomian world where respect is staked on front-staged threats, aggressive one-ups, and fierce displays of personal antagonism. In this connection, the inner-city "campaign for respect" creates a catch–22 for its participants: young black men must at once find ways to protect themselves physically (which means avoiding violence) and they must assert themselves socially (which means projecting the potential for violence). In Anderson's *Code of the Street,* there is no reliably safe way out. When it comes down to it, according to Anderson, "street credibility becomes a highly valuable commodity in the community, something for which some people will fight and die; ironically, often in response to a challenge or threat" (Anderson, pers. comm.).

Our argument is less pessimistic than Anderson's. In Woodlawn, we argue, the rituals of interaction make it seldom necessary to "fight and

die." Also, while Anderson does not problematize the link between what he calls the "capacity" and the "use" of violence, we argue that front staging a capacity for violence not only forestalls but also causally leads to its reduction. It is by affecting violent postures and displays that Hustlas in Woodlawn find ways to successfully protect themselves physically while still convincing their peers they are badass street elites not to be "fucked with."

In exploring how violence is strategically avoided, this chapter also has affinities with recent scholarship outside the context of inner-city life. Outside sociology, researchers in military history and warfare have become interested in the implication that, contrary to dominant depictions in mainstream political discussions, violence on the battlefield is fundamentally difficult, inefficient, and even incompetent (Marshall 1947; Keegan 1976, 1993; Holmes 1985; Grossman 1995). In sociology, Randall Collins (2008) in his path-breaking book *Violence: A Microsociological Theory* frames a vision of interactional life that is also quite similar to what we propose for the inner-city context. Collins cuts across a much broader swath of social life than we do, but he makes the critical distinction between performative ~~sound and fury~~ and actual violent expression. Still, Collins stops short of arguing that bluster and bluff are pragmatically motivated to limit violent behavior. Violent presentation and practice do have the character of separateness in Collins, but we systematize the distinction by introducing the concept of symbolic substitution for the types of threatening interactions on which these performances work.

In the next section, we discuss our research methods. In the subsequent section, we describe the Woodlawn neighborhood, discuss the structural bases for our microlevel results, and explore the signs and significance of membership in the Hustla community. We then examine in detail five increasingly threatening street interactions and how Hustlas organize their involvement around displays of symbolic substitution that ~~obviate the need for~~ violence. Following this, we analyze circumstances under which peacekeeping fails and violence does occur. Finally, we offer a tentative note, incorporating into the discussion the complex and perhaps paradoxical role of Hustlas' handguns.

2. Research and Methods

This chapter is based on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted by Krupnick in the Woodlawn community in Chicago's historic

Black Belt. We chose Woodlawn for three reasons: First, like many South Side neighborhoods in Chicago, Woodlawn has over the past twenty-five years suffered severe job losses, significant working- and middle-class depopulation, and escalating rates of concentrated disadvantage. Second, Woodlawn has been targeted for large-scale urban revival and gentrification, making it an opportunity to study a community in transition. Third, Woodlawn figures saliently in many ethnographic old and new classics like Park and Burgess's *The City* (1925), Thrasher's *The Gang* (1927), Drake and Cayton's *Black Metropolis* ([1945] 1993), Venkatesh's *American Project* (2000), and Wacquant's *Body and Soul* (2003).

We participated in detailed social observation and over 100 formal and informal interviews with twenty African American young men aged sixteen to thirty (all names used are pseudonyms). Our ethnographic work was conducted in the summer of 2008, the summer of 2009, and September 2010–September 2011. Each of our informants is a member (or former member, when noted) of a Chicago gang, including the Blackstone Rangers, the Black Disciples, the Gangster Disciples, and the Woodlawn branch of the Vice-Lords. We used a "snowball" sampling method to reach our informants, starting with extensive conversations with former Vice-Lord officer, Leroy, who lives in Woodlawn and has maintained close ties to young members of the community who [illegible] with the Vice-Lords and other prominent gangs in the neighborhood. We first met Leroy in June 2008 on Chicago's north side, where he works as a doorman, and spent that summer becoming acquainted with Woodlawn in one-hour-per-day conversations on the corner of 63rd and Dorchester in Woodlawn. In the summer of 2009, Leroy introduced us to other Woodlawn Hustlas—Percy (twenty-four), Mike (twenty-one), Michael (twenty-five), and L. L. (twenty-five)—who, in turn, helped link us with the other informants in this study. Each of our interviews lasted between thirty minutes and two hours, some were conducted in groups, and many of our informants we followed up several times for purposes of clarification and elaboration. While most of our interviews were conducted onsite in Woodlawn (usually in a car, local restaurant, or on the street), a few were in a neighboring community or (in a handful of follow-up interviews) over the phone. In addition to our conversations with the young men, we also draw on conversations with Woodlawn community leaders, business owners, and local police officers who must go unnamed but were nevertheless essential for purposes of orientation.

In the course of our fieldwork, we made use of observational experiments in the microinteraction tradition of sociologists like Erving Goffman and ethnomethodologists like Harold Garfinkel (1967). We learned, for example, about the concepts of "slipping" and "staying on point" largely in the course of experiments in which we walked down the street with Hustlas and compared notes. We studied "everyday passages" by comparing different kinds of momentary interactions—including encounters with individuals versus those with larger groups, and encounters that we ourselves participated in versus those among Hustlas that we observed at a distance. In querying Hustlas in different social, chronological, and spatial contexts, we wanted to get a sense of the role of situational influences on their attitudes and styles of impression management. We sometimes asked Hustlas a series of questions one on one and then followed up with the same questions in a larger group discussion, and we also took note of how their interactions with us changed over time and in the different geographic settings where we conducted interviews. A final strategy involved cross-checking narratives and testimonies with as many Hustlas as possible. When one Hustla described an event whose consequences implicated others, we found it necessary to query as many Hustlas about it as possible. For corroborative evidence, we also asked Hustlas about other Hustla stories that did not involve them personally but which they might be in a position to discuss or elaborate on. In doing these things, our goal was to understand as precisely as possible how interactions actually unfold among Hustlas and to minimize the potential for narrative bias and fabrication.

Still, like all ethnographically driven research, this one is vulnerable to certain methodological limitations. In the course of our eighteen months in Woodlawn, we did not observe a single physical confrontation that might be called "overtly violent." We witnessed a number of verbal arguments and threats, some bluster-driven scuffles, and a few instances of clandestine crime, but not one fistfight, stick-up, or targeted weapon display or discharge. This means we must depend largely on accounts and stories—rather than direct observation—of encounters with violence and physical conflict. This is a notable limitation, especially if there is a wish among Hustlas to underplay violent deeds for reasons of concealment or, alternatively, to overstate involvement due to the cultural premium placed on ornate imagery and "badass" expressions of honor.

A second source of potential bias owes to the particular brand of intimacy that developed between Krupnick, a Euro-American male, and his

all-black, male respondents. Interactions with Hustlas were often organized around male-bonding tropes (e.g., fist-bumping, joking, running commentary on women as they passed on the street, etc). Krupnick also created trust based on his own physical stature (six feet two, 190 pounds, and "swoll as hell, not like a dorky professor," according to Leroy)—the latter being an important marker of social status among Hustlas in Woodlawn. These things are, of course, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, such intimacy may guard against a common ethnographic pitfall that Howard Becker calls informant "dummying-up"—in which respondents either refuse to participate in the study or simply feign ignorance or interest in what is being discussed (Becker [1963] 1997). On the other hand, there is also the risk of *too much* intimacy, that we have become too sympathetic to the plight of our respondents and have unwittingly elicited exaggerated or embellished testimonies. While we have tried our best to shield ourselves from naive moralism, we can only guard against respondent fabrication—as we have already suggested—by cross-checking reports with as many Hustlas as possible for tone and veracity.

A third methodological caveat involves ethnographic generalizability. The claims we make about Hustlas in Woodlawn are, we must remember, a product of time, place, and circumstance. It is unclear if one would observe similar social interactions in other inner-city centers like New York, Los Angeles, or Philadelphia. Nor is it clear that a study of Woodlawn in the 1970s (or even 1990s) would have yielded the same observations. There is also the matter of sample selection. While we are primarily interested in making claims about Hustlas who are actively engaged in gang life, it is worth noting that some of our respondents are not presently members of a Woodlawn gang. Two of our lead informants, Leroy and Percy, dropped out of the Vice-Lords, and although they retain close connections with their former "running buddies," their testimonies may reflect the idiosyncratic perspectives of former gang members who have (self) selected out of the process. Leroy's "former" status is particularly salient here given that Leroy provided us with an entrée to four of our other respondents—his good friends, who might be expected to share some of his idiosyncratic perspectives despite being still active in the gang system. While we cannot make the claim that our respondents constitute a perfectly representative cross-section of gang members in Woodlawn, we do argue that they belong to a self-defined and delimited community of young black men who strongly identify with the gang world and the members-only world they have self-consciously organized around the

culture of what Leroy calls "street hustling." (See our section entitled "Street Membership.")

3. The Streets of Woodlawn

A. The Neighborhood and Its Social Structure

Before exploring the ethnographic results and implications of our study, the distinctive ecology and economics of the Woodlawn neighborhood merit a brief discussion. Woodlawn is located at the heart of Chicago's historically black South Side and covers a two-square-mile strip of land bordered by Lake Michigan on the east and Hyde Park and the University of Chicago on the north. Like so many U.S. urban communities, Woodlawn is rooted in a history of mid-century white flight and the twin evils of economic disinvestment and state abandonment. In the 1960s, it was a bustling 90,000-person African American neighborhood lined with specialty shops, grocery stores, and famous jazz clubs. It was an era where vital and progressive politics held sway, Saul Alinsky worked with one of the nation's first community organizations (the Woodlawn Organization), and a gang known as the Blackstone Rangers exerted national leadership as a forerunner of African American self-empowerment (Brazier 1960).

If one were to walk down the streets of present-day Woodlawn, however, one would not see much of its progressive, mid-twentieth-century history. Despite recent commitments to [illegible], community, and university-partnered urban revival, the area continues (as of 2011) to show signs of benign neglect. Sixty-third Street and Cottage Grove, once the hub of South Side commerce and culture, looks bombed out—abandoned—a "community of last resort." It is the usual scene with construction and cigarette butts and shards of glass littering the streets. Young men pass each other with a glance, hustling past gang lines, and keeping their heads up en route to somewhere else. Older men loiter on street corners, drinking out of bags and forty-ounce bottles, sometimes retreating into a local store or community organization to chat or to bum a smoke. There is the occasional gunshot, a little bit of running, drug dealers who are on the sly, and fields with dug-up grass and no children playing. There are closed storefronts, torn-down basketball rims, boarded up churches, and not many thriving centers of commerce. What remains are historic haunts, like Daley's Restaurant on 63rd—where they still serve chicken gumbo and breakfast all day; the once-influential community organizations like

TWO and WECAN; and a 20,000-member megachurch, the Apostolic Church of God, that nobody in the community seems to attend (McRoberts 2003). Political and community leaders promise that this will all change in a few years—that Woodlawn will once again become a mixed-income "community of choice" (Quality of Life Plan 2005). But for now, Woodlawn's street life is largely defined by its young men who hang out in the daytime; mix it up on contested street corners; drive by with blares of threats and loud hip-hop; and spend their time looking for business or girls to holler at or just a physically safe way to get through the day.

Against the broad backdrop of post–1960s socioeconomic continuity, the Woodlawn neighborhood has witnessed a massive change in the social relations of the gang. In the 1980s and 1990s—as Venkatesh describes in his ethnographic research on the Robert Taylor Homes—Chicago gangs were large, solidary, and highly structured organizations governed by pyramid-shaped corporate hierarchies and divisions of labor (2000, 2006). Since 2007, large-scale, city-sponsored demolition of many of the city's largest public housing projects (most notably the Taylor Homes) has contributed to a splintering in the gang's traditional structure. Driven out of public housing where they previously consolidated territory, South Side gangs have attempted to establish new areas already occupied by other Chicago gangs. The immediate result, according to the Chicago Crime Commission's 2012 *Gang Book,* was an explosion of turf-related violence—2008 corresponding to a marked spike in Chicago gang homicides. In the longer term, it has meant that the traditionally hierarchical gang has been dislodged into warring factions, many being led by young men under twenty and controlling only a single city block. In Woodlawn, this has produced a fracturing of gang-level loyalty. There is now just as much risk of conflict with members of your own gang as there is with your historic rivals. Social relations, divested of much of their group status, must be settled among individuals who often don't know, in Hustla Leroy's terms, "who's a friend [and] who's an enemy."

B. Street Membership

In this changing gang group context, each of our twenty informants belongs to a class of Woodlawn citizenry whose members call themselves "Hustlas." Hustlas are young, black, males, ages sixteen to thirty, and residents who are active (or formerly active) in a subgroup of a local

gang—the Rangers, the Black Disciples, the Gangster Disciples, or the Vice-Lords. They also share a common "street" orientation, which means that they organize self-presentations around displays of masculine toughness and a capacity to use violence. All twenty claim to own guns, thirteen say they carry guns with them "all the time," fourteen have spent time in jail or prison, eight grew up in Chicago's infamous Robert Taylor Homes, a slight majority are high school dropouts, and only two are employed in the mainstream labor market.

Perhaps most important is that our twenty informants share a strong sense of cultural membership. They explicitly define themselves as a group, often using expressions like "us players" or "g's like me" to locate themselves in a community of Hustlas who self-identify with the culture of honor on the Woodlawn streets. This means that they know each other by name, they know about each other, and some of them are siblings, cousins, or gang "running buddies." But, as our informants told us, the clearest dividing line between Hustlas and non-Hustlas involves gun ownership. It is worth exploring this on the logic of one of our informants—Xman:

> *Xman:* I gotta gun. A glock. We all got 'em and the only difference is what kind of gun you have. But, yeah, part of what it means to live here is to be strapped, 'cause you never know what's gonna happen 'round here, man. So you gotta know who's carrying, who's not, and who's not even in the game. We hustlas, but I mean some of these shorties are just in another world. They never seen a gun. Like they live somewhere else, that's how they act, all uppity, trying to get smart you know. But, we respect them smarties, man, I mean we're all trying to figure out our way outta here, so they didn't bother us, we didn't bother them. Well, sometimes a joke or two if you a real scrawny little chump and you get caught slippin' or whatever. Or if you're a little rat and you talking to the police, then it's different. But, mostly they did their own shit, and we did ours. Different worlds, bro.

In saying "they didn't bother us, so we didn't bother them," Xman suggests that part of what distinguishes a Woodlawn "Hustla" from a Woodlawn "Smartie" is that the latter are not beholden to the same rules of honor and masculine toughness. As other Hustlas emphasized, Smarties are given a pass and tend to go unpunished even if they act like "pussies." They do, however, play a crucial role on the street, typically filling in the

background as onlookers or observers to the rhythms of the streets. Smarties are also treated with some measure of social respect—something Xman frames in the racialized language of collective struggle. This means that in a larger sense Hustlas share a common culture—or, in the terms of sociologist Orlando Patterson, a shared understanding about "what one must know to act effectively in one's environment" (Patterson 2000). They identify and understand themselves as part of a larger American inner-city street culture with idioms and dialects that are rooted in the black community of Woodlawn.

In spite of their strong association with street life, Hustlas also take pains to distance themselves from another social type they call "Crazy Killers." Crazy Killers represent the ultraviolent few in Woodlawn—young men on the fringes with reputations for heinous acts of murder, manslaughter, and even torture. Crazy Killers represent the ten to twenty hardest "hardmen" in all of Woodlawn and, according to our respondents, commit more than half of all the neighborhood's homicides in a given year. Some are hired by gangs for their capacity to instill fear, others are independent contractors, and a few are essentially contract killers who might be hired by a non-Crazy Killer to do somebody in. Crazy Killers are considered crazy because their behavior is so unpredictable; sometimes they'll let a grievance go, other times they will walk into a restaurant and, for no apparent reason (as Xman puts it) "spray bullets all over the fuckin' place and kill six innocent people." Although many of Woodlawn's craziest Killers are behind bars serving long sentences, in any given moment, at least a handful are at large on the streets of Woodlawn—either because they are awaiting criminal trials or because they have somehow, despite their histories of murder, managed to evade the justice system. Complicating matters further, many Crazy Killers have achieved almost mythological or urban-legend status: many Hustlas know them by name and by stories, but could not identify them if they passed on the street, and some Crazy Killers come into Woodlawn from other South Side neighborhoods like Englewood and Washington Park. The result is these violent few arouse in our respondents a distinct blend of awe and awfulness that colors everyday life on the streets in Woodlawn. Percy summarizes the Hustla experience of life among Crazy Killers:

> You know, us guys, we're just trying to get through the day. Yeah, we sometimes do some stupid shit, but something has to happen—I mean, usually there's some reason or whatever. But, there a few guys,

> like fucking crazy killers, who just go around and kill people for no reason at all. They just wake up and are like "I feel like killing somebody," and they fucking do it! We all know about these guys, like this one Anthony James who's got like ten bodies under him minimum. James once walked into a Church's Chicken, he was chasing some mothafucka Johnny or whatever and shootin' down the street, so the guy Johnny runs into the chicken shack, and Anthony follows him and just starts blowing people away. Killed a woman, a kid, an old man, and I don't even know he even hit Johnny. Don't even take the money from the register or anything. Just walks out like it's no big deal and shit. Them guys out there. You get caught slippin', and you get your head blown off by one of these crazy mothafuckas. Can't be too careful.

If "can't be too careful" turns out to be a refrain for our Hustlas, it is in part due to the constant threat of Crazy Killers like Anthony James. That they comprise such a small fraction of Woodlawn's young black male population is not enough to quell the dread of a chance run-in. No matter how unlikely, a single bullet is enough to end things *in medias* and for all time.

4. Street Interactions

In a world where gang affiliations are increasingly tenuous and where Crazy Killers may always be lurking around the corner, Hustlas are faced with a double bind—how to create a reputation as a badass, while preserving a modicum of safety and social order. To resolve the double bind, Hustlas have adopted "street presentations" that display masculine toughness, strength, and conspicuous invulnerability to potential danger. To be seen as weak or "soft" is to make yourself a mark, an easy target for violence. Hence the importance of cultivating and keeping up the self-image that you are a badass. Particular emphasis is paid to physical semiotics, such as the building up of one's muscles (or, "getting swoll"); wearing garments that look like they belong on the battlefield (camouflage pants, fatigues, and boots); ostentatiously displaying tattoos (as a symbolic boundary from the world); growing, and carefully maintaining, facial hair (especially for "shorties" to look older); and brandishing a concealed weapon (sometimes with a conspicuous pants bulge). Use is also made of a distinctive language invoking familiar inversions (to be "sick" is a virtue),

Table 9.1 Interactional Profiles

Interaction Type	Threat of Violence	Symbolic Substitution	Respect Accrued
Ritual Passings	Low	Postponement	Minimal to Moderate
Boasting and Storytelling	Low	Accomplishment	Very High
Shit-Talking	Moderate	Keying	High
Revenge and Retaliation	Moderate to High	Fabrication	High
Armed Robbery	High	Reframing	Minimal

a paralinguistic style that is often highly gestured, and performative styles that favor bluffs, blusters, and an ornate choreography of verbal brinkmanship.

In the present section, we show how Hustlas limit physical danger in five increasingly dangerous types of street interactions: (1) simple passages on the street; (2) ritualized sessions of elaborate storytelling; (3) shit-talking and other language games; (4) interactional occasions for vengeance and revenge; and (5) the commissioning of armed robberies and criminal stickups. What emerges is a corresponding set of symbolic substitutions that we categorize as *postponement, accomplishment, keying, fabrication,* and *reframing.*[3] With each, there are cunning feints, sleights-of-hand, and rhetorical magic tricks that protect street hustlers from the real dread of physical violence. Table 9.1 renders a schematization of the findings in consolidated form. Here for each type of interaction we have indicated the potential threat of violence, the symbolic substitution used for limiting violence, and the degree of respect at stake. We then discuss each form of interaction in detail.

A. Ritual Passages as Violent Postponements

The most common interactions on the street occur in seemingly prosaic encounters where Hustlas simply walk (or drive) past each other on the street. Unlike most U.S. neighborhoods where these momentary exchanges tend to be quite casual and unmemorable, on the Woodlawn streets they often become rituals of fateful significance. We find that the most threatening street passages—usually involving members of rival gangs—undergo

a series of contingent stages in which interactants limit violence by agreeing to postpone it. Here, we rely on our own observations of rival-gang Hustlas as they pass each other on the street in Woodlawn. When two Hustlas pass each other and are "staying on point," they become entrained in a nonverbal confrontation that generally unfolds roughly in the following sequence of embodied cues.

1. Fifty to twenty-five feet away, you do not make eye contact with your interactant and instead seem to be absorbed in something else—typically iPod/walkman, often beat boxing to the sounds of the music. Look around you—right and left—rather than directly in front or behind, but the appearance should be nonchalant or casual.
2. Keep your hands out of your pockets and in plain and visible view. When we questioned K. J. about this, he replied, "It's to show each other they're not planning on using a gun. No harm here, gotta have your hands out."
3. Make less than one second of eye contact when passing your interactant. Nod at each other affirmatively, fist-pound, high-five, and/or say something casual like, "What's up cuz" or "You straight," engage in light banter if situation compels it.
4. After passing, go back to the beat boxing or casual display of attentiveness. Don't look back. Looking back, after an encounter, would be a form of "slipping," unless you are looking for conflict, and might lead to an unwanted altercation—inadvertently or not.

In these simple passages, staying on point involves the ordered signaling of three kinds of cues. (1) Recognition—you have to demonstrate that you are cognitively aware that you are co-present with another person. This is straightforwardly achieved through Goffmanian civil inattention and, subsequently, by momentary eye contact and a head nod or verbal greeting. (2) Invulnerability—you are expected to affect casualness (listening to music, beat boxing, etc.) and "badness" (the effect of the guttural "wassup, cuz"). (3) Nonthreateningness—you are not holding a gun, you deploy the affirmative "nod," and you do not look back after the passage (Anderson 1990).

We might expect some slippage in the requirement to affect both invulnerability and nonthreateningness, but this would miss the crucially situational dimension of the latter. Just as the exchange itself is momentary, so is the display of nonthreateningness, which strategically says, "I'll let

you go, *for now*." To keep your hands in full view is not intended to show that you are unarmed or incapable of discharging your weapon; rather, that you are carrying a weapon but choosing in this instance not to point it at your interactant. Robert helps clarify this point:

> *Robert:* Dude, it's not like we out there looking to get fucked up. I don't want to die, you know, just like you. So if I'm running up on a guy, I gotta show him he's straight and no point in fronting like I'm going to smoke him or you know. . . . So, the other day, I'm on 65th just minding my own self, drinking, you know, and that shorty Zo *[from the Rangers, a historically rival gang]* steps up on me like he wants to hit a lick. So I gotta think fast and shit. I take my hands out, put 'em up totally innocent *[changes his voice],* "Zo, I'll let you pass here. You can go this time." Cause I don't need this shit now, you know. But, Zo's got points to prove you know, like he's just a kid and needs some action like all kids do. He needs to prove himself. So, the only thing I can do is squash it and like be cool and shit. So I'm like, "What's up, Zo, you straight?" Said it like we friends, and I'm like watching his back and want to make sure he doesn't think I'm switching up on him.

In saying "I'll let you pass here," Robert suggests that although he's a threatening person in general, on this particular occasion his intent is to "squash it." Robert achieves the double purpose of preserving the content of his badass image while crucially postponing anything potentially bad until a vague and unspecified next time (see also Suttles 1968, 125). Robert's nonviolent passage is also a striking example of associative reasoning in action. There is no time for Robert to ponder which cultural toolkit to use, just the fast-thinking heuristic much like what Kahneman (2003, 2011) calls the cognitive "System 1."

B. Boasting and Storytelling as Violent Accomplishments

On the street, where public knowledge depends on word-of-mouth circulation, encounters entrain Hustlas in boasts, brags, and "awe"-ful stories that are necessary for the staging of reputation and respect. Hence, the texture and detail with which Hustlas describe—and embellish—stories of themselves as outlaw sovereigns of dread (Katz 1988). In our observations in Woodlawn, we frequently overheard Jalen relating these kinds of anecdotes to fellow Black Disciple, Xman—anecdotes that invariably cast

Jalen playing comic book-type roles of vigilante superhero. In one story, Jalen describes himself as a kind of street soldier and superman. Jalen's story features his running buddy K. J.:

> *Jalen:* It went down in that building right there. Second floor. Cops like banging down the door, and I mean . . . we're up there, smoking, getting high, and I'm doing my thing *[i.e., selling drugs].* Two floors up, and we jump out the window, me and K. J. and A-bomb, and I start runnin. So like a block later, I look around, can't see K. J., look back and he's being like jacked by the Po-lice. I'm like fuck this shit. Then, I say, no, can't let 5–0 think they run this place. So I just come up on the officer, creep up, and knock him down with my fist. Then, I put my fist into the other cop's head. Just pounded the fuck out of both. They're both down. And when we get back, wouldn't you know, K's talking shit, saying I shoulda kept running, that he was straight you know, didn't need help. So I reach for my Nine *[millimeter gun]* and that just shut him right the fuck up. Squashed that shit right away an' then some. So, you know, I'm the motherfucking man, nobody fucks with me down here.

The story contains the performative elements that keep up Jalen's badass reputation. First, there is the imputation of heroic courage in running back to confront the cops. Second, there is the matter of righteous honor in establishing himself, Jalen, as avenger against an unjust criminal system. Third, there is the demonstration of physical strength in punching out both cops. Finally, there is Jalen's display of invulnerability and capacity to use violence ~~expressed~~ both in brandishing a weapon and in his story's coda: "I'm the motherfucking man, nobody fucks with me down here."

More subtle, however, are things that Jalen's story does not say. Jalen makes a point of conveying his capacity for violence (by brandishing the weapon), but it is just as important that he decides not to use it. Despite the fact that he says he has already fought with the cops, and despite K. J.'s apparent decision to goad Jalen into a second fight, Jalen responds by showing (but not firing) his gun. On the one hand, the gun is essential to Jalen's story because it demonstrates his invulnerability and status as someone "nobody fucks with." On the other hand, the gun also functions to deescalate tension, establish situational closure, and defuse the threat of violent repercussions. "Shutting him right the fuck up" both establishes situational dominance and restores peaceful equilibrium by deterring the expression of actual violence.

But, in being so taken by Jalen's story, we must be careful not to be taken in by it. Jalen's story, in other words, is both a description of a staged performance and an example of a staged presentation, which means that the telling of the story itself must be similarly scrutinized. We told it to other Hustlas—Michael, Xman, Leroy, Mike, and K. J. himself. We found that Michael had heard the story from Jalen, framed in almost identical terms (and believed it); Leory, Xman, and Mike had heard it in various guises from other people in Woodlawn (and believed it); and K. J.—who of course was part of the story—remembered the event unfolding very differently. Leroy called the story "awesome"; Mike said it was "straight badass"; and Michael expressed respect/fear for Jalen both because of the terrifying deed Jalen described and because of Jalen's story's capacity to narratively slander the image of fellow Hustla K. J.

> *Michael:* You gotta remember man these things *[stories]* get around and they can just fuck you up. K. J.'s a straight chump in that story, and you know what, I mean yeah it prolly fucking went down like that, but Jalen went around tellin' everybody just to show he's the man. That's what fucking bugs me, bro. It's not just that it happened; I mean what's the big deal that it happened—who's going to know, you know? But, Jalen has this mouth on him and that's the fucking important thing. That's the thing that ruins a man, because how else is it gonna get around, you know? It's like an advertisement or a commercial on television *[Jalen's story]* and that's what gets me about that punk J. I mean what if it didn't even happen like J says? What's the fucking difference, right, because all that matters is that J got in his story before anyone could even talk to K. J. So it doesn't even matter. All that matters now is the rep K. J.'s got because of Jalen's gossip. If enough people find out, it's not just gossip; it's fucking true, man.

In this sense, Jalen's story—even if purely fabricated—accomplishes violence purely by dint of the narrative power to make people believe it. That seems to be what Michael means when he says, "That's what fucking bugs me." What scares Michael is not Jalen's violent actions against K. J., but Jalen's even more threatening capacity to circulate a story that, because everyone hears and is contained by it, can ruin K. J.'s image (Suttles 1968, 201–02).

Quite significantly, K. J. himself remembered the event quite differently. According to K. J., Jalen did not land—or even attempt—a punch

on the officer, but instead both of them defused the situation with the cops by talking their way out of it. Furthermore, K. J. had no memory of Jalen drawing a gun on him and found it surprising that Jalen would present it that way since, according to K. J., the whole situation involved them working together. In K. J.'s words:

> *K. J.:* Naw, man, that motherfucker's making up shit. You tripping if you believe that shit; he's just trying to front like he's a G. Just wanted to impress you, man, that's all. Dude's like my best friend, and that fucker wouldn't pop a cop if he *[the cop]* had a pussy. Dude fights like a bitch. You seen 'em? *[laughing]*

Whose version of the story, Jalen's or K. J.'s, is closer to reality is not the point here. As we infer from Michael, Xman, Leroy, and Mike, fateful stories circulate in the Hustlas' close-knit network, and the better they are constructed, the more likely others will be taken in by them. Mike's response helps to generalize the point that reputations can be earned on the rising shoulders of the street-styled raconteur:

> *Mike:* Yo, Jalen's my boy, he's a straight Hustla. I heard 'bout that from Chris back in the day. Heard it a bunch of dudes man. I 'member I'm locked up and my boy Rob was talking about that shit. Busting on 5–0 like that man, my boy J's fucking Robocop. Crazy, yo, with nunchucks. Heard that cop he bombed on was sent to the ER and after that like was too 'fraid to even bust on *[arrest]* Jalen cause of what happened to him and shit. Nobody fucks with J 'cause of that shit. Not even the police *[laughing].*

Legends make men in Woodlawn, and since people are often not around to see the events as they unfold, awe-inducing stories produce respect, even if they come straight out of the creative imagination and do not involve violence or even as much as a closed fist.

C. "Shit-Talking" as Violent Keying

As street games, stories have a peculiar power of consensual imposition. The storyteller, if charismatic or clever enough, wills his image of himself into the hearts and minds of an enchanted listener/audience. His symbolic power to shape their impression is expressed in a voice so magnetic that it not only transfixes but compels them to remember and repeat it to

others—ideally, with a similar sense of awe. But, there are other language games that Hustlas play to limit the bloodshed of hand-to-hand conflict. In particular, the phenomenon of "shit-talking." Unlike storytelling, shit-talking involves interactionally bilateral exchanges, and the threat of conflict is more direct because of their turn-taking escalation and capacity to explode into violent catharsis. That they do not ordinarily lead to anything physical is what we must explore here.

To "talk shit" (or trash) is now a familiar mainstream expression that connotes aggressive verbal brinkmanship bordering on—though not quite ever reaching—overt hostility. Talking shit points to a theatrical, for-an-audience exchange, particularly during athletic events where the word "shit" seems short for "bullshit" and suggests a kind of talk so situationally narrow that after the game it will be thrown away (like shit or trash) and forgotten. On the street, there is considerably more at stake. Shit-talking rituals invoke a different set of metaphors for our Hustlas, the object being to reduce opponents to existential "shit" (Katz 1988, 85–86). Nineteen-year-old Robert gives us a vivid sense of what makes shit-talking so distinctive in a story about a game with twenty-three-year-old Marcus:

> *Robert:* Okay, you didn't hear this shit from me, yo. But, it goes like this. When you're talking shit, it's like playing basketball. One-on-one, or whatever, cause sometimes there are more guys. And there's almost always someone around payin' attention. So okay: You and I are hanging out chilling, just whatever, bunch of other guys around, and you get into it with me over some bullshit. So if you say something cold, I have to respond. I mean, I can't just walk away or, you know, like act like a pussy and ask you to say sorry. I can't even hit a lick *[get into a fistfight],* see, cause that'd be unfair, and you'd have me then. So I gotta say something to you, and it's got to be even colder. And then it's your turn, and you gotta say something even motherfucking badder than what I said. And on and on . . .
>
> But, see, here's the fucking thing, bro. During this whole time, we are, you know, fronting like it don't mean nothing, but your game is on the line, bro. I mean, people are watching, and you know they remember if you got game or you don't . . .
>
> So, I got into it with my boy Marcus the other day, and we were straight working each other down, I was talking about what a pussy

> he is, how I macked on his sister, and he didn't do anything, you know, and then he came back and said something to me. I won't even tell you what it is, but it was bad . . .
>
> I just bombed on him, started punching him like crazy. I mean I wasn't even thinking, yo, but it was the end right there. His homies stepped in, held me back, and they all left laughing and chuckling, with me just standing there holding my dick. Next time, I gotta stay on point, not let that happen, not acting like a chump, throwing up in the air, you know?

Shit-talking exhibits what Goffman calls *keying,* the real threat of violence being transformed into something mutually understood as merely playful (Goffman 1974, 41; Radcliffe-Brown [1952] 1965, 90–116; Bateson 1971). Because it is all just fun and games, the give-and-take of shit-talking demands that you play by the rules and act like there's nothing particularly important at stake.[4] Shit-talking therefore requires a double evasion: You must feign casualness about both the content of an emotionally threatening exchange and the serious social price if you do not remain casual.

In the shit-talking game with Marcus, Robert broke frame by impulsively punching Marcus—an act both against the rules and grounds for declaring Marcus the conversational victor. Like many staged battles, this one ends with onlookers rallying around the exultant winner and the loser standing there alone "holding his dick." Not only does Robert lose the game, he has played so unfairly that the onlookers come on stage to rescue him from "looking like a chump." He has been caught fighting *and* fighting badly—the audience here being both judge/jury of foul play and limit-setting agent of informal social control. But it is also the awkwardness of "throwing up in the air" that is a source of Robert's regretful, "Next time I gotta stay on point, not let that happen." A repeat performance risks further loss of respect, illustrating further the contrast between the smooth élan of verbal sparring and the flailing gracelessness of hands-on conflict. Leroy helps us generalize the point, by way of personal confession:

> *Leroy:* I used to run with Vice [Lords], but now I got a job working as a doorman. And you know what? I made as much money in a day back then as I do in a week here. But I wouldn't trade this job for anything. Why? Because it's fucking easy compared to being

> out there on the street slinging drugs and shit. But, so, what happened? I got fat and old *[laughing],* and I can't compete out there anymore, bro. Bottom line is it just don't look pretty when I hit a lick. I used to be like Ali, yo, I could smoke 'em all and look like fucking Rambo or Predator. But, dude, that was then. This is now, and look at me, man! You think I can fight like this? *[Leroy points to the paunch in his belly].* So I don't front like that any more, bro. When you grown, you realize you gotta learn to use your brain, not animal brawn . . . most of us guys look foolish, get laughed at, out there fighting. That's why boyz got my back on the street, because I know everything that's happening here . . . and I can talk 'em down with this *[pointing to his head]* not with this *[putting his palm on his fist].*

Here, not fighting turns out to be a face-saving technique to prevent Leroy from looking incompetent via actual violence. In an environment that so highly values "looking pretty" in Leroy's somewhat ironic linguistic inversion, it is not easy to be like Muhammad Ali—especially when you are bare knuckled, standing on the street, and ~~when~~ there is so much at stake. It is the grace and restraint of ritualized shit-talking that heightens the primitiveness of physical fighting, gradually transforming the latter into a childish act of desperation that, in comparison, looks something like a temper tantrum (Collins 2008).

D. Shame as Vengeance and Violent Fabrication

It may not always be enough just to talk the talk. If backed by nothing more than shit-talking or memorably violent stories, there is no guarantee that you will earn lasting respect. This is why street respect requires Hustlas to "always stay on point." In practice, this means that each Hustla is trying to live up to the reputation that he is fundamentally the kind of person nobody should ever mess with. Reputation assumes particularly important transsituational implications in the social logic of revenge. Unlike the spontaneous and in-the-moment dominance Jalen established in his storied altercation with K. J., revenge takes us outside the immediacy of the interaction and into a new situation that depends on strategic calculation and the right timing. It is especially this unpredictability that makes revenge the "coldest" and most effective way to show one's capacity for violence. According to Xman,

Xman: It's about being the guy you can't fuck with. Jalen said it. But, being that guy, you need to be on that shit all the time. And, sometimes you gotta wait a little while, like show him who's boss. Say he fucked with your bro. He knows you're coming for him, because he hasn't seen you, so he knows. It's like horror movies—you just sit there waiting for the bad guy. You can't rest until you see him. The longer you wait, the worse that shit is.

With so much significance ascribed to the "when" of revenge, what is omitted is Xman's take on whether taking such violent action is in fact always necessary. Many of our Hustlas talk in florid language about the abstract importance of revenge, and many describe ornately embroidered plans for future acts of promised payback; however, very few Hustlas gave depictions involving actual experiences of it. A discussion with Leroy helps us think this through:

Leroy: No it ain't that simple. It's not like you get caught slippin' and you always come back at the guy. Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. With gangs it's the same way. Mostly it's about what happens, and it's about respect, man. I mean, let's say someone runs up on you, maybe catches you slippin,' takes your wallet. Are you going to come back on him? Well, maybe not. I mean, it depends if it's worth it and what difference it makes to you. If lotsa people watching, then yo, you wanna make it look like you comin' back for him, 'cause that's how the game works.

But, whether you do come back like down the road, that's on you. Maybe it's a shorty who got you, like took your wallet. I mean, is it really worth it? I mean, what do you get out of hitting a lick on some kid like that . . . but, if shorty's like flaunting it, you know, running his mouth on the street how he took you, then it's another story. Same thing with gang shit. Sometimes it's enough, you just gotta make it look like you can't fuck with me. . . . But, whether you do or you don't, you gotta rep like you not gonna be fucked with.

When pressed for clarification about what it means to "rep like you not gonna be fucked with," Leroy pointed out that even when other people are watching it's often enough just to use certain kinds of suggestive language and tactics of humiliation to keep everyone scared of you.[5] He used an example involving his eighteen-year-old brother (Mike) who was pressured to avenge their younger sister's (Jasmine) honor after being slapped

in the face by a sexually jilted seventeen-year-old male acquaintance (Nelson) from the neighborhood. What follows is an excerpt of our conversation:

> *Leroy:* Yeah, so we all expected Mike to come back at him like stone cold. He [Mike] was up in the house and didn't see the shit go down there. Comes in, sees Jas screaming, and goes like fucking crazy. So, a few days later he comes back down at Nelson up on 60th, down on Stony, bunch a people around in the daytime, you know how it is. He creeps up real slow, Nelson's fronting like he isn't scared. So Mike walks up and stands like this *[very, very close]* and just stares him down. I mean stares him all the way down to like his toenails! Then he takes his fist and points it at N's skull *[pulls JK toward him and simulates this by making a pistol out of his finger]*. Then, N's starting to like piss in his pants, Mike makes him put his hands up, gesturing like he's going to kill him. And, you're gonna love this, he waves his hands away like it's not worth it, and then out of nowhere suddenly pulls N's pants down! Everyone's like cracking up. He got 'em, and you think anyone's gonna fuck with Mike now?
>
> *JK:* But, why didn't Mike beat him up? It was enough just to pull his pants down?
>
> *Leroy:* Yeah, it was fucking perfect man. It was even better than that. You think N didn't learn his lesson—everybody laughing and shit like that? Damn straight he did. Just walked away. You ever seen a black person blush? *[laughing]* It got the job done, and Mike's on probation. That little pussy's not worth going to prison over. Not by a mile, man.
>
> *JK:* What did people think of the "pantsing"? I mean did people talk about it later?
>
> *Leroy:* Yeah, everyone's on that shit man. It got him respect and, shit man, probably fear. Mike's a crazy motherfucker, doing shit like that. I mean uncontrollable. If a guy's capable of "pantsing" you in front of like all his fucking boyz, I mean that's one unpredictable mofo, you know?

An important feature of Leroy's story about Mike is, "That little pussy's not worth going to prison over," which conveys symbolic dominance without recourse to physical violence. "You're not worth it" is a clever

inversion of the traditional way to construct honor; in Mike's case, it turns out to be *dishonorable* to fight, because it would bring him down to the level of someone who's simply "not worth it."

But, more striking is the particular way Mike established situational closure without resorting to physical violence. He got right up in Nelson's face, made him think he was going to beat him up, and then—as if to make fun of Nelson for flinching—simply pulled his pants down. Whatever sense of relief Nelson might have felt is immediately transformed into humiliation—both from what Mike chose to do instead and from his own embarrassment at having felt a sense of relief. The embarrassment, in this case, is somewhat similar to Robert's shit-talking misadventure, but the situation unfolds in reverse. In the shit-talking ritual, the frame was broken when a game was taken seriously; here, what first appears to be quite serious turns out to be a deviously fabricated practical joke. "Pantsing" someone is a classic prank, a practical joke right out of the elementary school playbook, and one that seems ironically suited for someone who has already been sexually jilted and turns out to be literally the butt of the joke. Therefore, as familiar as pantsing may be in the social realm of play, it is most emphatically *not* playful—the disjunction being precisely what makes the prank such a threatening display of situational dominance. Nelson cannot retaliate with violence because that would treat the joke seriously and make him look pitiful (or boorish). Nor can he act like he is in on the joke by playing along, because this would make him look foolish (or dense)—as though he fails to understand the joke's on him. The only thing to do is to acknowledge his own shame by pulling his pants up, walking away, and recognizing Mike as the situational victor.

Mike has also severely limited Nelson's range of options for future retaliation. Because the present interaction has already been socially framed as a joke, Nelson will only lose further respect if he comes back later and attempts to exact serious revenge. This testifies to the onlookers' third-party importance; everyone knows that Nelson has been "chumped"—just as everyone knows the joke was not entirely a joke—but they are likely not quite aware of the retaliatory seriousness of Mike's gesture. The laughter fabricates the event in a way that splits the onlookers off from Nelson and defines the encounter as too unserious for Nelson to be justified in a violent response. When we finally flagged Nelson down to discuss the episode (now six months after the fact), Nelson could only say, "Fuck

that, man. Don't ask me about that shit." In his terseness, Nelson implicitly acknowledges his final defeat.

As a retributive act, the humiliation tactic is perhaps more effective than violence because of its sly opportunism and constructive capacity to pass itself off as nonserious. It uses the practical joke as a strategic manipulation that proxies for raw, uncontrolled physicality and with onlookers present, it is perhaps more emotionally damaging for its victim.[6] Given the choice, Nelson would have likely preferred it if Mike had thrown a punch, because at least that would give him the chance to respond with masculine dignity. In shame, Nelson is left with nothing, not even the opportunity to acknowledge the seriousness of what was done to him. In victory, Mike has now certified himself as something more than a badass. He is not only the triumphant and feared avenger, but also the comic genius who—in a single creative act—has now established magnetic leadership and legitimate authority over onlookers. He earns even more respect because his savvy is as impressive as his vengeance.

E. Stickups, Routinized Crime, and the Reframing of Violence

In arguing that violence is strategically avoided, we have suggested that street hustlers are much more defensive and strategic than is usually recognized in the social science literature. In interactions where it appears violence may be necessary for respect on the street, it is usually enough to present yourself as threatening—give a mean glance, tell a violent story, talk some shit, and pull off a good practical joke. These symbolic substitutions depend on third-party onlookers and double as badass status enhancers and as protection against actual physical conflict. In certain interactions, however, violence might appear to be almost impossible to avoid. Such is the case with armed robberies and stickups that are already framed as criminal altercations. Of the five types of potentially violent interactions we are examining, the stickup is the most threatening—the risk of serious physical harm being heightened by three well-known features. Namely, (1) the fact that it is itself a type of criminal interaction that (2) involves the pointing of a gun or other lethal weapon and (3) happens in an instant, with almost no time for the victim to think, much less deliberate. With a pistol pointed close range at the victim's heart, the stickup is indeed the quintessence of what we might call the violent performance.

Empirically, however, stickups and armed robberies rarely lead to serious physical harm. In the eleven years between 1985 and 1995, according to

data from the National Incident Based Reporting System, only three out of every one thousand Chicago robberies resulted in a murder or homicide (University of Michigan n.d.). While this still leaves unclear whether less serious physical damage was done, other studies suggest that escalation from robbery to violence is far less than typical. A study by Morrison and O'Donnell (1994) of more than ten thousand armed robberies in London shows that only 7 percent of victims are hurt (usually by something other than a bullet), that a gun was discharged in only 4 percent of the robberies, and that in some cases predators use guns that aren't loaded or even real (Morrison and O'Donnell 1994; Collins 2008). Providing you do not resist but surrender to the predator's demands, you are unlikely to be a target for serious violence (Block 1977).

Stickups involve Hustlas robbing both non-Hustlas and other Hustlas, and in both cases, escalation to physical violence is not common. Our discussions with Hustlas in Woodlawn suggest that—contrary to their exotic presentations—stickups and armed robberies turn out to be relatively banal and prosaic affairs in which it is the predator's weapon that, paradoxically, keeps violence from escalating. According to Hustlas Marcus, Michael, Mike, Leroy, and Jalen, the standard on-the-street stickup entrains predators and victim in well-established interaction chains that are (at least implicitly) governed by the following ritual progression:

1. *Stop what you're doing; this is a stick up.* You are expected to put your hands in the air and to be absolutely silent without looking around, nodding, or even making eye contact. You must keep your eyes focused high and on something abstract in the distance. Eye contact is dangerous, because it suggests recognition, and looking around suggests that you are looking for, as Marcus put it, "a way out of this fucking mess."
2. *Lie down on your stomach, face down.* This tactic, with the gun still pointing at the head, both establishes symbolic dominance and prevents the victim from, as Mike put it, "doing something fucked up, like kicking or something." The victim's face is against the ground to muzzle any potential sound or attempt to call for help.
3. *Gimme respect and you won't get hurt.* Very often this demand is accompanied by a temporary removal of the gun from the victim's field of vision. Much like what we saw in nonviolent "postponements" where Hustlas pass each other on the street, the objective here is for the predator to assert himself as a threatening person—the kind of

person who has and is willing to hurt you but who is, in this instance, willing to show you clemency if you give him respect. In Leroy's terms: "If you get your ass busted or jumped on or someone sticks you up, you gotta just give in, man. If he got the jump on you and is carrying [a gun], you just be like 'Here you go. I'm not looking to get into anything, so here's my money and please let me pass. It's all about showing respect, man. You have to show 'em respect. If you could sum up the street in one word, it's respect. You'll be okay if you have it and if you offer it, end of story."

4. *Let's see what you got motherfucker.* Here, the victim must surrender everything on his person—usually his wallet, money, cell phone, sometimes shoes, and occasionally a symbolic accoutrement (like a hat or article of clothing) to suggest a personal or emotional dimension to the crime.
5. *Keep yo head down, you straight.* The predator establishes situational closure before running off. "You straight" is deployed (or a fist pound or a slight slap on the back) in order to restore unity to the interaction, remind both parties that the robbery was just business, and to reassure the victim that he (the victim) did a good job as victim because it's all over now. Subtly different is the fist pump which implicitly suggests that they *both* did a good job playing their respective roles and that, now that it is over, they can once again greet each other as friends/allies/acquaintances.

Most critical to the nonviolence of stickups and armed robberies is how the predator's weapon frames the situation. While Hustlas point out that the prenominate demands are not always expressed orally, their content is intended to redefine a potentially dangerous situation into one that is, interestingly, both personal and "just business." The personal and emotional weight resides in the predator's "gimme respect"—a demand that is more of a request and which seeks to momentarily drop the logic of the gun, physically remove it from view, and act as if the victim's respect is a freely willed gift. When the gun returns, however, the interaction is restored to a straightforward business transaction in which the robber exchanges mercy for money and consummates it with "you straight." Successfully defined as nonviolent, the interactants can return to life as it was before the stickup. They can now act as if it never happened.

In our discussions, Hustlas help us think about these familiar processes in the context of their own experiences on the Woodlawn streets. For example, consider Jalen's testimony on stickups:

> *Jalen:* They go down like ALL the fucking time. Naw, actually, they used to happen more. But, I been down here and seen armed robberies and holdups and you name it, bro. So here it go: you get caught slippin' and what happens? Some fuckin' punk's all up in you, making jokes and fronting like he's not serious. But, you know you're gonna get ganked, so what you gonna do? So he *[the predator]* waits to make sure no one's around, you know, he's been casing this shit and planning and preparing to get your ass, and you just bought it. So it all goes down, simple as that. It's a fuckin' everyday thing, bro. Most guys don't even use guns—maybe knives—but some do and some just say they got loaded guns, and you know they playing off the fact they ain't got shit. But, either way, you just gotta let it happen. Can't take it personal. I mean you prolly know the punk. All you can do is blame yourself for gettin' caught slipping. Never happened to me bro. My shit's tight. . . . But, that's what I'm saying: watch your back and you straight."
>
> *JK:* Are you less likely to get taken if you show the punk you've got a gun, too?
>
> *Jalen:* Naw, man, just let it happen. Get it over with and then come back at his ass if you have to. It's not about using your gun. You gotta use your eyes, bro.

Although it is likely Jalen would have a different perspective on the armed robbery if it happened to him, it is striking how he rationalizes the crime in the context of the performative rules of the street. In saying "all you can do is blame yourself," Jalen also inverts the traditional moral logic of street crime and suggests the fault lies primarily with the victim—not the predator. While physical violence is preventable if you lower your guard and give in, the armed robbery itself can be avoided if you keep constant vigilance to the maneuvers of the street hustlers who watch your every move. This adds perhaps another layer of definition to the experience of being robbed—its essential avoidability. If you "watch your back" and keep "your shit tight," you are not only likely to escape violence but also to protect yourself from being robbed in the first place.

5. When Violence Does Happen

Momentary postponements, storied accomplishments, shit-talking transformations, transcendent humiliations, nonviolent stickups—all of these are strategic street presentations that preserve the symbolism of violence while obviating its physical expression. Each of these reconfigures threatening interactions into those wherein Hustlas draw on cultural strategies to redefine dangerous situations as peaceable. With that in mind, however, violence does happen in Woodlawn, and it is our task in this section to examine the microinteractional dimensions of how violence breaks out and occasionally escalates to gun fighting and even murder. With that said, violence is generally not intended. When it does happens, it appears to be based on momentary breaks in frame, acts of simple misunderstanding, or—in extreme cases—when strategic logic gets "flooded out" by anger or rage. However, in the language Jalen already used, violence most frequently occurs when you "get caught slipping."

The term "slipping" is itself, perhaps not incidentally, somewhat ambiguous and unclear. *Slipping from what?* or *Slipping into what?* are things we might ask, but to ask the question is of course to miss the point. Slipping is most critically a category of performance that refers to something like letting your guard down and correspondingly applies to a variety of interactional oversights. Jalen already introduced a slip in which he got caught in an armed robbery. More serious examples of slipping can fateful and sometimes lead to actual violence. Here, we pay attention to three in particular: (1) basic failures to physically recognize an acquaintance passing on the street; (2) a breaking out of frame in already tense situations—like the stickups we have already discussed—that become redefined as violent provocation; and (3) misunderstandings, especially in ambiguous situations like drug deals that arise from missed signals and misinterpretation of cues. In all three of these, the act of slipping itself is essentially accidental, which makes it dangerous precisely because the other Hustla/Hustlas are liable to treat it as an invitation to violence.

A. The Cost of Non-Recognition

The first type, slipping through unawareness of physical co-presence, suggests a kind of diss that is made more provocative by its passivity. Earlier, in our discussion of nonviolent passages, we discussed the importance of showing recognition with brief eye contact, a nod of the head, and a

casual "What's up, cuz?" To fail to notice you is to suggest that you are not even worth noticing, that I am not here for you because I reside in a world so far above that you're not even visible to me. And, because one cannot know if it was meant as a snub, one can be expected to avoid committing oneself. We rely on Percy for a personal example:

> *Percy:* So this one day I'm walking down the street just minding my business. I walk past these four guys, didn't even think about it, just going to my girl's crib. I'm thinking about her, you know, what I'm gonna do to her. And these four guys like hold me up on the street. Got guns and shanks and shit. These B.D.s roll on me and hit a lick. I mean, it came out of nowhere. Like bam! Like I forgot to bow and shit. Didn't even fuckin' see 'em.

The B.D.s of course interpreted the event quite differently. From Percy's point of view, he was caught slipping, but Black Disciple member Robert (who was present) framed the event quite differently.

> *Robert:* So, yeah, remember that punk Percy? He stepped out, and we was rolling on our own turf, you know—the bitch should know better anyway. And we prepare for, you know, shit to go down, as always, so we just sort of test the waters like we're not even going to actually hit a lick. But when we walk past, Percy just straight rolls past us like we wasn't even there, like this was his fucking block and shit. So who the fuck he think he is, you know, and so we all look at each other like "who's it gonna be," and Samuel just busts on his shit, bro. Shorty got what's coming for him. What a fucking punk, dissing us and shit.
>
> *JK:* But how do you know Percy even saw you? He told us it was an accident.
>
> *R:* Whatever, man. That's what he gets. You gotta stay on point on our block man, and sometimes there isn't time to be like *[in an affectedly "white" tone of voice]* "Excuse me, sir, did you realize that you just walked past us without saying hello?" *[laughing]*

First, note Robert's reliance on the classic "he got what he deserved" trope, which inverts the interaction's moral logic by casting Percy as predator and the Disciples as avengers of wounded pride. Second, there is Robert's critical point about there not being enough time to reconcile things in any way other than violently. On its face, this sounds like a convenient rationalization or way to justify what seems like an impulsive act

of aggression toward Percy. But from Robert's point of view, it is the act—not the intention—which compels immediate response. He says, "You gotta stay on point on our block man," suggesting that Percy is at fault even if his failure to recognize was inadvertent because he ought to be more attentive to the fact that he's trespassing on rival gang turf. More subtly, Robert is also alluding to the situational nature of the interaction, which was crucially a four-on-one affair. It is not just that it is easier for a group to assert physical dominance over just one man, but also that the group members are compelled to prove themselves to each other (Collins 2008).

B. Violence in Breaking Frame

The second type of slipping involves frame breaks in situations that are suffused with confrontational tension but are themselves not designed to be violent. Stickups, for example, occasionally become violent when victims don't follow the playbook or act out in ways that are unpredictable. Jalen gives us an example of an episode involving his running buddy Lamar who was shot in the arm and face during a stickup gone wrong.

> *Jalen:* Okay, I can't get into all the details with this, but you know, Lamar was up in his crib, and I was over there with just him fucking around, so we go out to play ball, you know, 63rd over there late-night. So we're playing, and I'm just fucking his shit up with crossovers and whatnot, so at some point L just gives up and throws the ball like a fucking mile down the street. So he's fucking out of his mind angry, and as he's gettin' it, he runs into some big dude, I forget his name, Jimmy's older brother, who just got out. Guy just pulls chrome on L and goes through the motions and shit, like you know, "Gimme that shit" *[wallet, watch, cell phone]* and whatnot. So what does homie do? L reaches for his back pocket and switches up, grabs for his own gun. Crazy motherfucker saw that shit straight up and got no choice but to shoot my boy. Shattered L's cheek or something, all for acting crazy.

In Jalen's story, Lamar walked into the stickup already feeling vengeful and beaten down after the embarrassing loss in basketball, but most crucial here is that both men forward-panicked ("acted crazy"), and Lamar was caught in what might be called a class-two slip. As Jalen points out,

Lamar was partially at fault for breaking the contract implicit in armed robbery, impulsively reaching for his gun and causing Jimmy's brother to do the same.

C. Fateful Misunderstandings

If forward panic is a risk factor associated with relatively well-defined situations like armed robbery, it is also the product of more ambiguous interactions where there is some chance of misunderstanding. We already saw a close-call example of this in Jalen's story about his altercation with K. J., in which Jalen accused K. J. of misinterpreting his offer of protection after the incident with the police. Although the latter abjured the implication, the sheer speed and chaos of get-away situations create an inevitable danger of misunderstandings.

We here rely on Hustlas' discussions of drug deals. Most drug exchanges in Woodlawn are relatively straightforward, involving well-defined rules of territoriality and customs among buyers and sellers that both parties recognize. More dangerous are occasions when Hustlas receive large bids from unknown customers or when they are requested to do the deal in out-of-the-way or unfamiliar settings. These types of encounters are suffused with ambiguity, and there is always a possibility of being caught slipping. Percy reaches into his own experience to provide a (possibly embellished) sense of context:

> *Percy:* A while, while back, I'm doing my shit, slinging, clocking, you know how the game works. Or maybe you don't *[laughing].* So me and B. B. get this call on the cell. I mean we don't handle business on cell phone, cops be fucking our shit up otherwise. So it's a call from this guy who wants serious weight, and I won't go into details at risk of incriminating myself in a court of law *[laughing again].* So he wants to meet us on 79th and Stony, way, way out of the 'hood. I never even been there. But, I'm a shorty, you know, young and dumb, so me and my boy roll out there. . . . We get there, it's already fucking dark as shit, and B. B.'s getting crazy nervous, like "Where are these guys?" and "Are you sure it's not police?" and all that. So sooner or later, this grey Lexus rolls up, tinted windows and shit. So I'm gettin' ready rough for the score. The car stops, and suddenly the guy like rolls his window a little, sticks his eyes

> out, glaring at us. Then rolls it up like immediately. I don't know what he's thinking, but B. B.'s suddenly going crazy. He says he knows the motherfucker, that it's a gang thing. Gangster lean and maybe a drive-by, who knows? So B. B. reaches for his gun and fires three shots into the window. We book it, the car's going crazy, guys roll down the window again and are like "Motherfuckers! I thought we were straight!" Nobody was hurt, but window shattered and like. They just wanted to buy some shit man. B. B. straight fucked up. I think there was just something wrong with the window!

Despite our skepticism about some of the details of this story, it is fairly clear that there was a misunderstanding here. Violence was neither intended nor (really) even suggested, but the surrounding events (e.g., the call on the cell, heavy weight, long wait time, and so on) heightened the forward panic that B. B. experienced when he saw the "eyes glaring at us." In such episodes with unusually high levels of situational ambiguity, the precise moment of contact can be a fateful one with brisance realized in the impulsive act of violence.

6. Keeping Violence in Check: A Tentative Note on Guns

Despite "fucking up," B. B. got lucky, and according to Percy, nobody was hurt after the episode in the Lexus. But ambiguity makes violence more threatening, and when violence occurs, there is always a fear is that it will become uncontrollable. But as we have argued, the Hustlas organize their interactional world precisely to avoid this kind of violent chaos. This means that when violence does occur, Hustlas often have to take swift action to stem the tide and prevent it from escalating further. Here, we enter into a tentative discussion of how violence, even when it has begun, rarely explodes into forward panic or all-out combat. In particular, we explore how Hustlas—somewhat paradoxically—occasionally use handguns to defuse violent expression and restore the always-precarious sense of cultural order.

To carry a gun—or to be "strapped"—is to signal to others that you are a badass, a player in the high-stakes game of "urban warfare," that you are somebody to be taken quite seriously. Guns evoke "sacred objects," or Durkheimian metaphors, loaded with force imposed on a weaker world that does not ask questions. But among our twenty Hustlas, only two report ever actually firing their gun at another person, and on both

accounts, they missed their targets. More surprising is what others told us: that the large majority of gunshots heard in Woodlawn are not signs of violence; they are either errant bullets fired into the air to blow off steam or attempts to alert police to ward off an anticipated threat. The former are the sound and fury of vented anger and the latter a constructive expression of fear for purposes of protection. The Hustla who vents spleen by firing bullets into the air is forcing the world to hear his anger, but it is really more like a desperate wail than a roar. To fire in the air is to literally fire at nobody, but it is also to shoot your gun indiscriminately at the entire world that has wronged you and cannot be pinned down for individual blame. Or, in a different sense, a kind of prayer to the invisible heavens above; words have proved insufficient and must be replaced with a sound that even God cannot fail to hear.

It is the other rationale, firing the gun to elicit police protection, that is suffused with practical significance. In the absence of a reliable law enforcement presence, it is sometimes necessary to alert the police when interactions escalate to the point where violence seems imminent. Hustlas will occasionally fire their guns as a kind of bat signal for the dual protection of summoning the cops and of creating fear of the possibility of summoned cops. The effect is to neutralize a personal threat and to restore a sense of communitywide order. Leroy helps us provide a context for this:

> *Leroy:* But you know, sometimes, I'll tell you what I do: this place is so fucked up that I have to fire my Glock just to get the police's attention. You know when something's about to go down. I see shorties scrapping a couple months ago, man, so I saw this Lexus roll by my block a few times. It stopped and kept going, but kept coming back. So I'm thinking it's about to be some gangster shit—shooting and whatnot. So I like book it to 64th, and first thing I do, I fire my Glock a couple rounds. The police, man, they know that sound; they know it's one of us trying to get 'em out here. I'm Batman; they know that shit. So 5–0 shows up and, guess what—that Lexus just flew up out of here! Those niggas know that sound, too.

Leroy's account is interesting, particularly given that it all happened in what sounds like ambiguous or uncertain circumstances. He didn't know for sure what the guys in the Lexus were planning, whether they were casing the street for a drug deal, a drive-by shooting, or perhaps just to assert symbolic dominance and instill fear. He also did not know whether he himself was in danger, but the fact he had to "book it" suggests he was

not ruling out the possibility. What Leroy does, in other words, appears to be the reverse of what his badass image might predict. Rather than evincing invulnerability, the gunshot suggests risk-averse cautiousness in the face of putative danger. Leroy (1) imputes the worst-case scenario involving the Lexus when its behavior may well have been innocuous; (2) flees to an out-of-the-way area to fire his gun; and (3) alerts the police to a scene that might turn out to be a false alarm.

But in comparing himself to Batman, Leroy actually assumes the role of a new kind of badass—in this case a superhero crime fighter who fills a structural hole between the street and the conventional institutions of law and order. And, as other Hustlas suggest, this forging of crime-fighting alliances may not rest exclusively with Leroy:

> *Percy:* Yeah, bro, it's like that. You see some shit about to go down, and you let one go. We all do that shit. I mean how the fuck else do you get 5–0's attention? And they know what's up. We fire one, and they either think a 187's goin' down or it's one of us roundin' their asses out of bed. But, yeah, that's what's up, yo. You gotta take the law into your own hands down here. I got a mother and girl to look out for, yo; I gotta protect. And my bros, you know, we got all that shit worked out. You don't know this shit, but it's like Martin said, in the ghetto we cooperate. Ain't no shame in that. I got you, man. And nobody's fucking with me; I'm a bad motherfucker. Like Shaft.

If Percy's language establishes the conventional young black male distrust with the law enforcement community, it does so in qualified terms. The police may need to have their "asses rounded out of bed," but at least the gunshot gets their attention and successfully elicits their assistance in helping to fight crime. More broadly, what this suggests is that the "bad motherfucker" perhaps cannot afford to be "bad" all the time. Or as Percy intimates, perhaps doing some social good is part of what makes you "bad" in the first place.

7. Conclusion

In the foregoing analysis, we have attempted to challenge much of the received wisdom about how violence works in the inner city. *Pace* the conventional description of urban street life as a Hobbesian world of all-out brutality, we have argued that in many ways in Woodlawn it is just the opposite. Much of what looks like violent inner-city encounters is in fact

intended to reduce the threat of violence via what we have called "symbolic substitutions." More broadly, this suggests that the black urban poor are neither passive victims of unfortunate structural circumstances nor impulsive "super predators" caught in a cultural contagion of low self-control (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1990; Zimring and Hawkins 1997; Wacquant 2008). We have argued for a model in which inner-city residents find themselves interacting in an effort to limit violence and forge a sense of self and social order amidst socioeconomic marginality, the dislodging of the contemporary gang, and the ongoing threat of "Crazy Killers." We say that they "find" themselves, because it is unclear that these strategies are always entirely conscious or premeditated. If as Jack Katz puts it, "only rarely do we actually experience ourselves as subjects directing our conduct," it is in this case because, over time, Hustlas wind up deploying these violence-reduction maneuvers as a matter of course—that is, they become entrained in its rhythms (Katz 1988, 5; see also Katz 1999). For Katz, this nonstrategic strategicness is "magical"; for our Hustlas, it is simply the internalized product of a need to find a modicum of stability and peace amidst the precariousness of inner-city life. That they arise out of need makes our Hustlas rational, but it also makes them less exotic (or more human) than the presentations one usually finds in the mainstream media—or perhaps even in the sociology literature.

But, it is certainly not enough to simply call them "rational," because what also emerges is the extraordinary savvy and sophistication with which Hustlas seem to be able to reflect on their worlds and what it is they are doing. The proverbial "cultural dope" would be unable to articulate Leroy's point that "you gotta learn to use your brain, not animal brawn . . . and I can talk 'em down with this [his head] not with this [his fist]." Nor would he be able to describe the "shit-talking game" with Robert's artfulness—"we are fronting like it don't mean nothing, but your game is on the line, bro." If there is analytical danger in overindulging in folk concepts or in taking these testimonies so seriously, it is a danger that we could not resist, given their explanatory power (Wacquant 2002; Wilson and Chaddha 2009). Such is the potential drawback of stumbling onto such sophisticated informants. But, as it is, we stand firmly behind our arguments—first because we heard such similar testimonies from so many of our Hustlas and, second, because, quite simply, they make sense. Our story is in keeping with Randall Collins's (2008) argument in *Violence: A Microsociological Theory*. It is also in keeping with evidence from the real battlefield—World War II, Korea, and so on—that even frontline soldiers

rarely fire their weapons at the enemy and spend most of their time trying to figure out ways to avoid it (Marshall 1947; Grossman 1995; Collins 2008). Finally, it is consistent with the larger arc of western culture—which we must not forget young black men are a part of—documented by scholars from Norbert Elias to Steven Pinker, that the grand march of history has been associated with progressively lower levels of physical conflict (Elias [1939] 2000; Pinker 2011).

But perhaps we ought to be less upbeat—both about history and about the men we studied. As we have already mentioned, perhaps some of the Hustlas' techniques of avoiding physical violence are actually worse than violence. It is not out of the question that being publicly "pantsed" is more wounding than a fist—or even a knife. Nor, as we saw in Robert's "shit-talking game" with Marcus, is it clear that the no-hands rule was particularly beneficial for him. What physical violence has going for it—maybe the only thing—is at least it's honest. That is, at least it comes clean and reveals its seriousness and the passion of its rage—which suggests it may not be enough to call humiliation and shit-talking mere sound and fury, because on the inner-city streets they may signify a good deal more than nothing. Indeed, they may cause internal bleeding.

With that in mind, we make no claims that our findings about peacekeeping in Woodlawn generalize to other inner-city neighborhoods or other periods in history. What may be true in one Chicago community at one moment in time may be quite different in others, and future research might think about some of these questions in other areas—New York, Los Angeles, Boston, and even other neighborhoods in Chicago. There is also, of course, the matter of time. African American homicide rates have declined more than 50 percent in the last two decades, making it possible that some of the peacekeeping strategies explored here are connected to that nationwide reduction in violent behavior. Points of divergence between this essay and earlier qualitative research—like Anderson (1990, 1999), Bourgois (1995), Venkatesh (2006), and Wacquant (2008)—may reflect different historical frames of reference as much as analytic or substantive disagreement. As such, we intend this essay not just as a challenge but as an invitation to ethnographers to explore spatial differences in inner-city strategies of violence and peace, to historically minded scholars to think about changes in the cultural practices of urban black youth, and finally, to quantitative sociologists to gather data to test the arguments. We hope that this essay will encourage these kinds of future directions, because as much as urban sociology has already said about the

proliferation of violence, it has only just begun to think about processes of peace.

Appendix: Profile of Highly Quoted Respondents

Leroy: In his mid-twenties, former mid-/high-level officer in Vice-Lords. Currently works part time as a salaried service professional in an upscale Chicago neighborhood and attends a local two-year college, also part time, pursuing an associate's degree in criminal justice. Leroy has three arrests, including one for drug possession, but he has never been convicted nor has he spent any time in prison. Leroy lives with his daughter and her mother in a one-bedroom apartment.

Mike: Younger brother of Leroy and current drug-dealing member of the Vice-Lords. He is currently on parole for armed robbery. Mike dropped out of high school during his senior year and is presently not employed in the mainstream labor market. He depends on drug-sale commissions to make ends meet and lives with his (and Leroy's) mother—who receives disability payments and is recovering from a crack-cocaine addiction—in a small Woodlawn apartment where he attempts to support his mom and sisters.

Percy: In his early twenties, former "runner," Vice-Lords. He dropped out of high school to pursue "the thug life" then left the Vice-Lords to pursue the GED and prepare for a career in criminal justice. Percy and Leroy are close friends—he calls Leroy his role model—and says that Leroy inspired him to quit the Vice-Lords and "focus on my education," as he put it.

Xman: Mid-twenties, "street soldier," Black Disciples. He dropped out of high school after his junior year to make money working with the Black Disciples and "help my sisters get out of the projects." Xman was incarcerated briefly on a weapons charge in 2009.

Jalen: Early twenties, "street soldier," Black Disciples. Dropped out of high school after his brother was shot and killed during a gang retaliation.

Michael: Mid-twenties, member of Black Stone Rangers. He is a high school graduate and part-time auto mechanic. He is presently applying for technical training and credentialing at a technical institute.

L. L.: Mid-twenties, member of Black Stone Rangers. He is currently charged with manslaughter. He dropped out of high school and has been incarcerated for marijuana distribution and gun possession and was on probation at the time of his most recent arrest.

Robert: Late teens, member of Black Disciples. Recent graduate from high school—the first in his family's history. His older brother and his father are presently incarcerated, and Robert lives with his girlfriend. He has aspirations to be a criminal lawyer and, according to friends, was a very good student who "should be in college like at Harvard."

K. J.: Early twenties, "street soldier," Black Disciples. K. J. dropped out of high school during his senior year. He is currently on probation for involvement in a burglary-turned-robbery.

Nelson: Teenager, member of the Black Disciples. He dropped out of high school at age sixteen.

Marcus: Early twenties, member of the Gangster Disciples. Dropped out of high school during his senior year. He is working on his GED and has ambitions to ultimately become a high school basketball coach.

Lamar: Early twenties, "street soldier," Black Disciples. Dropped out of high school. He has been incarcerated for drug possession and assault.

B. B.: Mid-twenties, member of the Vice-Lords. B. B. dropped out of high school. Has been supporting his mother and three sisters since he was twenty-one with the money he made from the drug trade. B. B. has a number of children and currently lives with his girlfriend and her children in a two-bedroom apartment in Woodlawn.