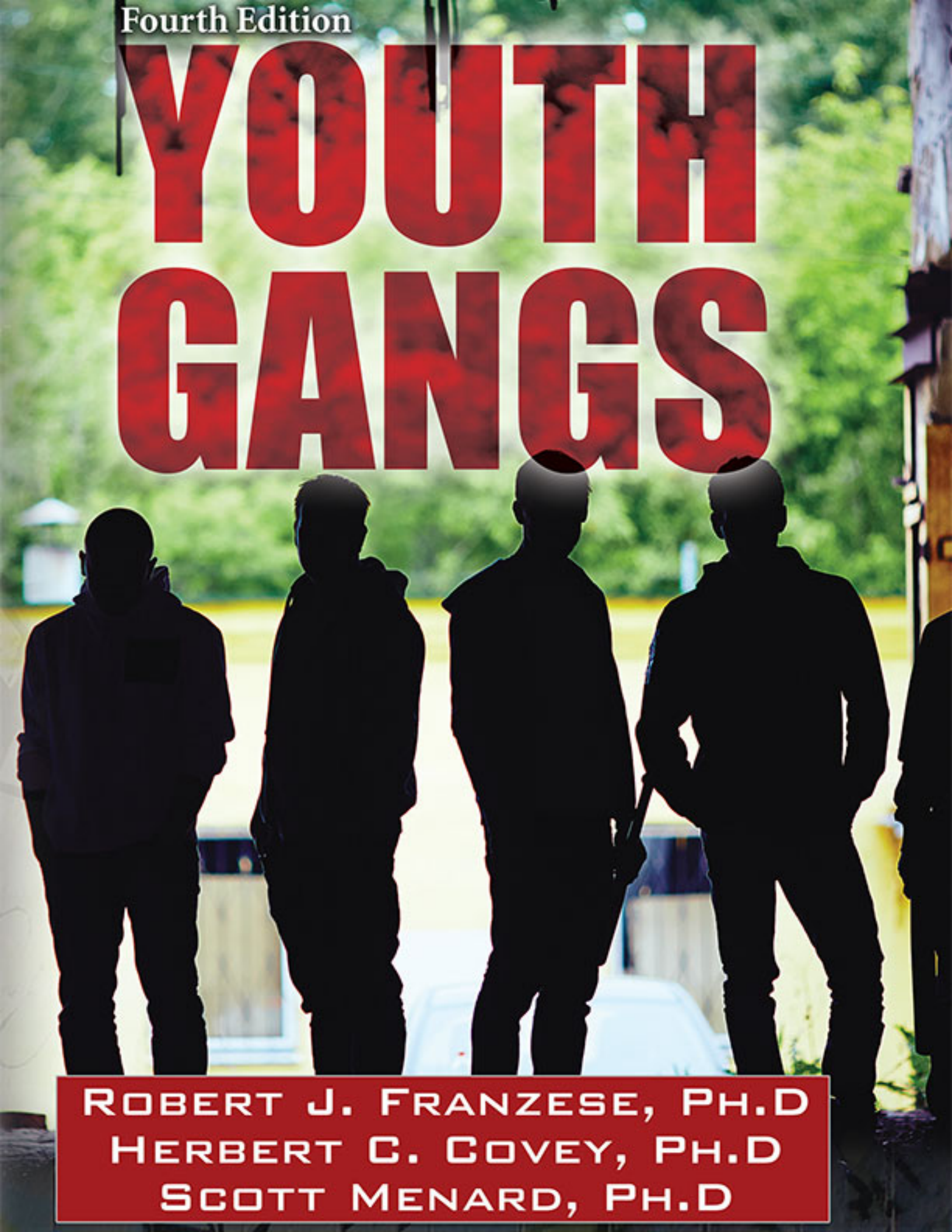
Fourth Edition

YOUTH GANGS



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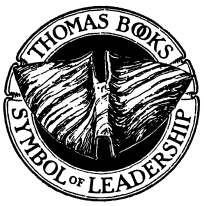

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To Patty, Bob, Virginia, and John - RJF

To Marty, Kelly, and Chris - HC

To Laura, Jessica, and Valery - SM

PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

This is a book about youth gangs. A quarter of a century ago, in the introduction to the first edition of this book, titled *Juvenile Gangs*, we described it as a book about (of course) juvenile gangs, but by the third edition of the book, the recognition that what had formerly been reasonably termed juvenile gangs now included increasingly older members, well past adolescence, convinced us that a change in terminology and title was in order. In this fourth edition, we continue to focus on youth, and to clarify this term, let us specify that it includes two somewhat distinct age groups. *Adolescents* here encompassing ages 11–17 (ages 11–12 are arguably preadolescents), were (and remain) the focus of work on strictly juvenile gangs, gang membership, and gang behavior. These are individuals who have few of the legal rights of adults, and who in principle are not subject to the same legal penalties as adults. *Transitionals* (Menard 2012; Menard and Covey 2015) or emerging adults (Arnett 2000) include individuals from age 18 to roughly the mid-twenties, about age 25 or 26. From their life course perspective, age 18 marks the beginning, not the end, of the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Age 18–26 is the span of the life course that includes the acquisition of rights to drink alcohol, vote in national elections, and serve in national elective political office (the House of Representatives at age 25). It is the usual age range of graduation from high school and college; for those who continue their education, of commitment to a trajectory of post-baccalaureate education, usually for the development of higher-level professional skills and credentials; and for others, the initiation and establishment of occupational trajectories that may last for much of their adult life. It is an age span at which marriage and family formation, and the trajectory of family life, is likely to be established. In contrast to this transitional stage, later stages of the life cycle for most people tend to represent continuity, rather than establishment, of life patterns, at least until the onset of elderly status (Menard and Covey 2015). Finally, youth, encompassing both adolescent and transitional stages, is the age span during which individuals are most likely to experience entry into, participation in, and exit from gang membership and gang-related illegal behavior.

In the quarter century since the first edition of this book, scholarship on gangs in general, and especially youth gangs, has grown exponentially. As detailed in

Pyrooz and Mitchell (2015), the rate of publication of English language books, book chapters, journal articles, program evaluations, white papers, essays, theses, and dissertations that have advanced our knowledge about gangs has increased from about 20-30 per year to a rough average of over 150 per year, and the cumulative total number of available publications on gangs over the same period has increased a hundredfold, from fewer than 50 to nearly 5,000. Much of this expansion has involved empirical research on interventions to reduce gang membership and gang-related behavior, and much of this has been oriented to youth gangs as opposed to gangs consisting primarily or exclusively of adults, largely in response to the rising concern over youth gang problems in the late 1990s. Some has been devoted to testing theories of crime and delinquency for gang membership and behavior, and less (but still some) to new developments in the application of specifically criminological or other theories to gangs. A small but important number of these publications have been methodological in nature, dealing with the measurement of gang membership and behavior, including studies affirming the utility of self-nomination (answering "yes" when asked whether you ever have been or currently are a member of a gang) as a valid indicator of gang membership (e.g., Decker et al. 2014; Thornberry et al. 1993). There has been an increase of survey research, especially longitudinal survey research, on gang membership and gang-related illegal behavior, but less expansion in the area of ethnographic studies of gangs, with the result that the gang literature as a whole has more of a quantitative component than was the case 25 years ago. This massive expansion of the literature on youth gangs, especially in the past decade, convinced us that a new edition of this book was warranted as we move deeper into the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Organization of the Book and Changes

The first chapter introduces the topic of youth gangs, including different terminology and definitions, youth gang structure, demographic characteristics of gang members, and the extent of gang behavior. This chapter has been revised with an updated and expanded discussion of definitional issues, plus recent data from the National Youth Gang Survey, material on the evolving economic nature of gangs, and gang use of internet and social media. The second chapter continues by examining gang violence and drug involvement, and the extent to which they are intercorrelated, with new material on victimization of gang members and gang involvement in drug use and sales.

The third chapter focuses on racial and ethnic differences in gangs and the important role of race and ethnicity on gang membership and gang behavior in the United States. The fourth chapter examines female gangs and gang membership and the changes that have taken place in the nature and extent

of female gang membership over time. The fifth and sixth chapters place contemporary American gangs in historical and international perspective. All have been updated with new material; Chapter 5 includes a new section on youth gangs in the new millennium; and Chapter 6 has been reorganized, particularly to reflect the burgeoning research on European and other international gangs since the turn of the millennium.

The seventh chapter discusses typological and theoretical approaches that have been applied to the study of gangs and gang behavior, and has been expanded to include recent developments in the actual and potential application of biosocial, psychological, and life course developmental theories to gangs. The eighth chapter builds on Chapter 7 and advances a set of theoretical propositions about gang formation, persistence, membership, and illegal behavior, which taken together attempt to provide a comprehensive, multilevel theory of gangs. Chapter 8 has been updated to include new propositions, and new evidence for both new and old propositions, based on more recent work in theory development and theory testing for gangs.

The ninth and tenth chapters have been revised to incorporate more recent material on gang interventions, reflecting the expansion of gang intervention research, especially over the past decade, as noted above. Chapter 9, which focuses on legislative and justice system efforts to deter gang crime and gang membership, includes a discussion of the evaluations of the Boston Gun Project/Operation Ceasefire and related programs as a promising approach to deterring gang membership and gang crime. Chapter 10, which focuses on intervention and assistance programs outside the justice system, provides a more detailed discussion of Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) and the multimodal intervention programs that have become more prominent in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The eleventh and final chapter once again concludes by considering the future of youth gangs in the United States (and now also elsewhere) in light of historical and cross-national evidence, theory, and experience with gang interventions and programs, considering more recent developments in those areas, and whether they justify any change in what we would expect for the future of youth gangs.

Finally, we want to give special thanks to Professor David C. Pyrooz for his comments and insightful suggestions and Laura Menard for her editorial assistance. Both provided valuable input to this text.

R.J.F.
H.C.C.
S.M.

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YOUTH GANGS

Chapter 1

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN YOUTH GANGS

According to data from the National Youth Gang Survey or NYGS (Egley et al. 2014), the numbers of gangs, gang members, and gang-related homicides increased in 2012 compared to the previous five years, but the number of jurisdictions reporting gang problems decreased. According to the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) from the National Center for Educational Statistics, the prevalence of gang activity in schools increased 1.2% between 1999–2000 and 2007–2008, and for approximately the same period, according to the School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey from the U.S. Department of Justice, the percentage of students aged 12–18 who reported that gangs were present in the school during the school year increased 3.1%, but then declined from 2007 to 2013 (Robers et al. 2015). There are two points to make about these findings regarding six different indicators of the youth gang problem in the United States in the early twenty-first century. First, there appear to be countervailing trends, with some aspects of the youth gang problem getting worse, but others getting better. The second point is that embodied in the findings for these six indicators are at least six different definitions of what constitutes a gang, although all of the definitions either explicitly or implicitly refer to youth.

What constitutes a youth gang? How are youth gangs different from other types of gangs, or from other types of groups that are not really gangs, but may resemble youth gangs in some respect? Who is a member – really a member – of a youth gang? In what ways, if any besides mere gang membership, are youth gang members different from nonmembers, or from members of other groups that do not really constitute gangs? What constitutes gang activity, as opposed to nongang activity? If a gang member does it, does that make it gang-related, or does there need to be more of a connection to the gang as a whole, not just to the individual gang member? The literature on youth gangs has long been replete with competing definitions (Cartwright et al. 1975; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Hagedorn 1988; Horowitz 1990; Johnstone 1981; Klein 1971; Klein and Maxson 1989; Miller 1981; Petersen

2000; Thrasher 1927). The difficulty in arriving at consensus on what constitutes a gang has frequently centered around issues such as leadership (Bjerregard 2002; Cohen 1969; Johnstone 1981; Miller 1975, 1980; Spergel 1984); territory or turf (Cohen 1969; Hagedorn 1988; Johnstone 1981; Miller 1975, 1980; Moore 1991; Spergel 1984; Thrasher 1927); organization (Battin et al. 1998; Miller 1975, 1980; Spergel 1984; Short 1990); and the number of gang members and gang names (Cohen 1969; Hagedorn 1988; Klein 1971; Spergel 1984; Thrasher 1927). In addition, a major focus of study in defining gangs has been the degree of participation in criminal and violent activities of gang members (Bjerregaard 2002; Cartwright et al. 1975; Curry et al. 2014; Esbensen et al. 2001; Klein 1971; Miller 1975, 1980; Thornberry et al. 2004; Thrasher 1927).

Here we begin by examining the different definitions that have been proposed for youth gangs and related types of gangs, and of related groups that do not really constitute gangs, but have been studied in connection with gangs. As described in the preface, the term "youth" in this book is used to encompass both adolescents, up to age 17, and what we have elsewhere (Menard 2012; Menard and Covey 2015) described as "transitionals," individuals from age 18 to roughly age 25 or 26 (their mid-twenties), an age span in which a number of transitions from adolescence to full adulthood are taking place. We then turn to a consideration of gang structure, the demographic characteristics of youth gangs, and the extent of gang behavior. This latter topic is continued in the next chapter, with a focus on gangs, violence, and drug involvement.

DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF GANGS

It is helpful to make a distinction among three different types of definitions of what constitutes a gang, or a gang member, or a gang-related crime: conceptual, operational, and legal. Conceptual definitions of gangs, the focus of this section, attempt to define the focus of study, what it is that we are really interested in describing and analyzing, when we talk about gangs, and to distinguish youth gangs from other phenomena such as adult gangs, law-violating youth groups, and subcultures. Operational definitions refer to how we try to measure the abstract concept "gang" in a concrete way when we do research on gangs. Legal definitions of gangs may be informed by conceptual definitions, but instead of being optimized for use in research, they are constructed to better allow clear implementation of law enforcement policy.

Conceptual Definitions of Gangs

One of the earliest and most frequently cited conceptual definitions of a gang is that of Thrasher (1927). Thrasher defined a gang as a group that forms

spontaneously and without any special attachment to existing parts of society. Gangs, according to Thrasher, are interstitial because they form in the "cracks" in the social fabric, the boundaries of society. Thrasher believed that conflict integrates gangs because it provides common labels and common enemies. Thrasher's definition is important because of its influence on decades of research and thinking on gangs and gang activities.

Box 1.1. Thrasher's Definition of a Gang

A gang is an interstitial group, originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face-to-face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The result of this collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory. (Thrasher 1927: 57).

According to Thrasher's definition, a wide range of groups could be considered gangs, including football teams, protest marchers, and Mardi Gras revelers. Klein (1971) and Miller (1975; 1981) offered definitions of gangs that explicitly incorporated illegal activity as an element of the definition of gangs. Klein (1971: 13) defined an adolescent gang as, ". . . any denotable adolescent group of youngsters who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood; (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name); and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or enforcement agencies." Miller (1975) defined a gang as a group of recurrently associating individuals with identifiable leadership and internal organization, identifying with or claiming control over territory in the community and engaging either individually or collectively in violent or other forms of illegal behavior. His subsequent (1981) definition of youth gangs, presented in Box 1.2, is a bit less definite about crime and territory as defining gangs, indicating that gangs "generally" are involved in illegal activity and control of territory. Miller's definitions distinguish gangs from friendship groups, athletic teams, and other noncriminal groups, and were based on criteria used by criminal justice personnel with working contact with gangs (Campbell and Munce 1989).

Box 1.2. Miller's (1981) Definition of Youth Gangs

A youth gang is a self-formed association of peers, bound together by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership, well-developed lines of authority, and other organizational features, who act in concert to achieve a specific purpose which generally includes the conduct of illegal activity and control over a particular territory, facility, or type of enterprise. (Miller 1981: 315–316)