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# God's Gangs: Barrio Ministry, Masculinity, And Gang Recovery



## Synopsis

Winner, 2014 Distinguished Contribution to Research Award presented by the Latina/o Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association

Los Angeles is the epicenter of the American gang problem. Rituals and customs from Los Angeles's eastside gangs, including hand signals, graffiti, and clothing styles, have spread to small towns and big cities alike. Many see the problem with gangs as related to urban marginality for a Latino immigrant population struggling with poverty and social integration, gangs offer a close-knit community. Yet, as Edward Orozco Flores argues in *God's Gangs*, gang members can be successfully redirected out of gangs through efforts that change the context in which they find themselves, as well as their notions of what it means to be a man. Flores here illuminates how Latino men recover from gang life through involvement in urban, faith-based organizations. Drawing on participant observation and interviews with Homeboy Industries, a Jesuit-founded non-profit that is one of the largest gang intervention programs in the country, and with Victory Outreach, a Pentecostal ministry with over 600 chapters, Flores demonstrates that organizations such as these facilitate recovery from gang life by enabling gang members to reinvent themselves as family men and as members of their community. The book offers a window into the process of redefining masculinity. As Flores convincingly shows, gang members are not trapped in a cycle of poverty and marginality. With the help of urban ministries, such men construct a reformed barrio masculinity to distance themselves from gang life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Essential for scholars of religion studying urban ministries. Additionally, Flores's wide theoretical scope and focus on the Latino/a population positions this text to make a significant contribution in other scholarly areas as well, such as immigration, gender, race/ethnicity, and Latino/a studies." - Aida Isela Ramos-Wada, University of Texas at San Antonio

"Flores has entered a growing new focus in sociology of religion: the complex intersections among gender, embodiment, identity, and religion." - Lynn Davidman, University of Kansas

"What differentiates God's Gangs from the extant literature is how Flores weaves together themes of masculinity, religion, immigration, and marginalization to guide readers through the transformation from 'shaved' (i.e., active gang member) to 'saved' (i.e., former gang member)." - David C. Pyrooz, Sam Houston State University

"Flores quite accurately identifies and discusses the critical variable of the historic treatment, interpretation, and labeling of Hispanics... The author explains that within the barrio communities... one of the most resilient defining characterizations is the result of male resistance and struggle for respect and status. The redirecting of that masculinity... in concert with a spirituality based effort to escape gang life, is the essence of this well-developed work. Strongly encouraged for sociology and social work collections. Summing up: Highly recommended." -R.M. Seklecki, Choice

A welcome addition to the gang literature, making the case that gender and religion have more to do with leaving the gang than all the forces of state coercion purportedly aimed at achieving the same result. Through his careful ethnography of two well known non-profit gang intervention programs Flores shows how his subjects develop a recovery trajectory that encompasses a complex reconstruction of their identities. . . . His complex, interdisciplinary analysis based on both empirical and secondary data powerfully rejects the simplistic zero tolerance and other repressive social control strategies that are the typical response to the proverbial urban gang banger. A timely and very much needed contribution to the growing field of critical gang studies. •David C. Brotherton, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

A compelling and important book documenting the remarkable journey from gang life to one that is crime-free. This insightful volume advances our understanding of the ways in which comprehensive faith-based approaches can be transformative for individuals as well as for communities. •Byron R. Johnson, author of *More God, Less Crime: Why Faith Matters and How it Could Matter*

MoreComplicating and extending Elijah Anderson's foundational work on street violence... Flores demonstrates that the gendered performativity at the heart of the code of the street can be remolded and redirected toward more positive and nonviolent ways of life. -Forrest Stuart, University of Chicago

Fleet of foot and with analytic precision, Flores explores the men's ritualized testimonies, which belong alternatively to the vernacular of Pentecostal oratory and the

therapeutic vocabulary of Alcoholics Anonymous. -Joshua Dubler, University of Rochester

"Sociologists of religion will find the work useful for its contribution to the field of immigrant religion in urban America, and race and gender scholars will discover insights into the social and political consequences of performing Latino masculinities in California's carceral society." - Robert Brenneman, St. Michael's College

Edward Orozco Flores is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Merced.

This book provides a clear theoretical background on the successful gang intervention programs in Los Angeles. Dr. Flores presents the nuanced differences in the programs Victory Outreach and Homeboy Industries. Each program has an approach that addresses and provides new perspective for masculinity in their populations. I suggest a therapist who works with gang youth pair this with CBT and Schema Therapy.

Don't buy it unless you have to. And if you do save some trees and get the ebook version. I do not recommend this book.

Interesting read. Great way to help understand how to try to break gang activity.

Awesome research done. Edward Flores, thanks for all your hard work!

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