

**STATEMENT OF
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COMMANDING OFFICER, GANG DIVISION
NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**BEFORE THE
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
PUBLIC SAFETY AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMITTEES
DECEMBER 13, 2007**

Good morning Chairman Vallone, Chairman Comrie, and members of the Council. I am Deputy Chief Robert Boyce, the Commanding Officer of the New York City Police Department's Gang Division. On behalf of Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly, I am pleased to be here today to update you on the activities of the Gang Division, and to discuss the issues presented by the availability of gang paraphernalia.

The mission of the Gang Division is to reduce violence attributable to street gangs, and to develop lines of communication both within the Police Department, and with our partners in government, that allow for the free flow of vital gang related information.

The NYPD has many programs to accurately gather information on gang members and the crimes they commit. The Gang Division works closely with many other operational units within the NYPD – the Community Affairs, Detective, Patrol, Housing and Transit Bureaus and the School Safety Division, Intelligence Division, and Narcotics Division. We have developed the relationships and resources we need, to aggressively and accurately identify current gang members, and we routinely share this information with NYPD personnel assigned to units outside of the Gang Division.

Beyond interagency contacts, the NYPD also interacts with members of the community and to educate them in the identification of gangs and their culture. The Gang Division, Community Affairs Bureau, and School Safety Division all contribute to this effort, making presentations to a variety of government and community representatives, including: the DOE, Parent-Teacher Associations, clergy, Precinct Community Councils, and public officials. These efforts are aimed at educating the community and enlisting their help in the early identification and prevention of new gang membership. By informing our communities about the early warning signs of gang membership such as hand signals, clothing and language, it has allowed for more accurate reporting of gang motivated crimes, enabling us to better and more quickly respond and arrest the perpetrators. So far this year, there have been over 500 such presentations made.

Our gang database is continually updated, and the information we record and analyze guides us in deployment decisions with the goal of preventing criminal gang activity before it occurs. As you know, the NYPD's Real Time Crime Center is an invaluable resource from which we can draw particular benefits, especially with respect to investigating homicides and shootings.

The Gang Division also staffs each borough with a Gang Squad, comprised of uniformed police officers and plainclothes detective investigators. The uniformed officers

respond to incidents and address locations known to be frequented by gang members. The detective investigators conduct vigorous, focused investigations, often developing intelligence on the structure of the gangs with a goal of permanently dismantling their criminal organization. They work in a coordinated fashion on both the short term goal of suppressing street gang violence and on the longer term goal of dismantling the underlying criminal enterprises that support gang activity.

Among our many relationships with other government agencies, our work with the New York City Department of Correction is especially important. This relationship has allowed us to track gang members from arrest, through incarceration, and upon release, yielding a profound effect on gang motivated crime and the recruitment of gang members. We also work very closely with all of the City's District Attorneys, whose Gang Bureaus identify the cases that involve gang crime and gang crime members, allowing for aggressive prosecution.

The Gang Division has taken the lead in developing strategies to combat gang violence, serving as a model for many other law enforcement agencies nationwide, with an emphasis on continual review and improvement. We have also created partnerships with outside agencies such as the Nassau County and Suffolk County Police Departments, federal prosecutors, and the Departments of Probation and Parole, allowing the NYPD to gain critical information that has assisted in the apprehension of many gang members. As an example, our work with the Department of Parole has recently led to the arrest of two gang members in possession of two handguns and over \$23,000, who were trafficking narcotics to and from Pennsylvania.

We would now like to discuss the particular issue of gang paraphernalia, which presents tremendous challenges as we attempt to protect young people from harm.

Like graffiti and hand signals, gang insignia, colors, and paraphernalia are the external signs of an underground culture in which loyalties are demonstrated and threats are made. Unless someone understands the coded message contained in what looks like an unremarkable piece of clothing, they may put themselves at risk by wearing, for example, a blue hat. Conversely, parents may be unaware that their children are demonstrating gang affinity by choosing a red pair of shoelaces, and may simply think that they like the color.

A core problem with controlling the use and proliferation of gang paraphernalia is that any item of clothing or accessory can conceivably be turned into a message. There is no question that a Yankee hat manufactured with a five-pointed crown is a blatant demonstration of Latin King loyalty. However, a sports team shirt with the number 32 embroidered on it may also convey support of the Latin Kings under some circumstances, since the numerals can be read to refer to the five-pointed crown as well. Gang members also ascribe meanings to already-existing items, for example brand names, so that to a gang member, "Mecca" may communicate the message "Murder Every Crip Child Alive" rather than only signifying the manufacturer's name.

Gang messages and paraphernalia are also commonly intertwined with hip hop

culture, and fans of particular hip hop artists may wear or display items which convey a gang-oriented message, whether or not they mean to do so. For those who do wish to communicate gang-oriented messages, there are websites devoted to selling them merchandise, magazines which glorify gang culture, and stores which cater to gang affiliations, even separating their merchandise by the colors associated with gangs.

It is therefore very difficult to insulate young people from all possible sources of gang paraphernalia. However, we encourage parents to learn about gang culture, and to pay close attention to what their children are buying, wearing, and displaying. As we noted before, we are committed to public education, and will gladly make presentations to community groups or parent associations to help them recognize the signs of gang involvement. With the School Safety Division, we work to educate school personnel about the trends and messages that may be silently communicated by students, so that they can recognize potential problems within the student population. We also strongly support your efforts, Chairman Vallone and Chairman Comrie, to address the blatant use of gang insignia to sell merchandise, and we hope that additional focus on the problem will help to shed more light on the danger it poses.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue, and we will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Peace on the Street
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Its testimony to the Gang Paraphernalia & Its Role in the Proliferation of Gang Culture in New York City:

Dear members of the Committee on Consumer Affairs and members of the Committee on Public Safety:

I Richard Garcia co founder of Peace on the Street hereby testify to taking a stand towards companies and vendors profiting on the sale of gang related merchandise. As you may be aware gang's are a considerable threat to young people throughout the country but particularly in New York cities culturally vast poorer neighborhoods.

A large portion of gang related apparel are from small start up fashion companies and sold in smaller hip hop shops as well as on street vendors around poorer neighborhoods in the city. These items openly glorify gang culture and do a part to steer young people in the direction of joining gangs. This summer we helped uncover the fact that New Era, a company that makes millions of dollars selling baseball caps was marketing caps geared towards the Bloods, Crips, and Latin kings. After the New Era bust we began to conduct ongoing research in the field of gang paraphernalia and us making several finds that were startling.

We discovered during our research that:

1. Many of the top Hip Hop retail stores such as Dr. Jays sell a large portion of its merchandise with gang or violent images. One shirt called Stash House (a term for a drug warehouse) was shown giving explicit "street" rules on how to be a better drug dealer.
2. Many of the small street vendors housed in the poorer neighborhoods sell gang and drug related paraphernalia. Shirts such as "stop snitchin or die" terms to describe a person who corporate with police were sold in these street vendors.

Fancy belt buckles have become a popular item for neighborhood children in the last few years. Many street vendors cater to this fad by selling these buckles. Marijuana leafs were depicted in many belt buckles as well as belt buckles displaying automatic pistols and bullets.

3. Most shop owners, street vendors, parents and school teachers were completely unaware as to what many of these symbols represented. We concluded this after on the street surveys, of the big three gangs. This led us to conduct a series of gang awareness and street safety seminars at our facility to help educate the

general public on how potentially dangerous a certain color can be, especially when worn in the wrong neighborhood.

Solution to the problem:

We concluded that in order to effectively solve this issue, we need to first start with educating:

1. The general public (parents, children, school officials)
2. Shop vendors and store owners
3. The actual clothing manufactures.

We believe that in order to get a foot hold on the issue we need gang experts that are in touch with what happening and to provide ongoing reports that are sent to the above sources.

We need to get tough and stop street vendors from selling items that are potentially harmful to our children. Perhaps periodic merchandise inspection is necessary.

We also need to take action against large stores such as Dr. Jays and make them take responsibility to what items they are selling, considering the fact that Dr. Jays makes millions of dollars in the inner.

The issue of gang violence is a tough one; NYPD is doing its best to suppress gangs on the streets. It is our jobs, but particularly with the help of young people who have an eye for gang activity to step up and offer our expertise and to make a difference so that our children can live a safe life in this city we all call home.

Richard Garcia

Co founder: Peace on the Street

Gang expert: Coalition to protect our children



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The following testimony has been presented by Lewis Zuchman, the Executive Director of SCAN-New York and Chairman of the Human Services Consortium of East Harlem.

The proliferation of the mass marketing of blatant nihilistic violence, the denigration of African-American women, the romanticization of prison, "gangsta" culture, the glorification of criminal and violence focused street gang life, insidiously influences and causes grave damage to the lives of inner-city youth, while enriching the bottom lines of a morally corrupt segment of corporate America.

The mass marketing of violent, criminal focused street gang paraphernalia has persisted for two decades. SCAN-New York applauds the New York City Council, Committee Chairmen Leroy Comrie, Jr., and Peter Vallone, Jr. for assisting in bringing this insidious corrupting of our largely African-American and Latino young people to the attention of our city.

I can remember entering Nike on East 57th Street, seven or eight years ago, and finding only the uniforms and paraphernalia of St. John's (a rapidly declining hoops power), Michigan and North Carolina. Were there so many Michigan, North Carolina and St. John's alumni in the Big Apple? Or did these universities represent a dramatic disproportionate percentage of tourists to New York? Or were the colors of St. John's (red) and those of North Carolina and Michigan (blue), colors that were emblematic of the Bloods and Crips street organizations?

Only a few years ago Snoop Dog was on trial for homicide, vilified in the media as a lifetime Crip. Snoop emerged in the nineties as a major spokesperson for street gang violence and crime. Snoop's persona and rap rhymes were emblematic of a nihilistic, "gangsta," violence-filled lifestyle. Yet, two years ago Snoop Dog was a spokesperson for Chrysler, accompanied on national media by none other than retired Chrysler Corporation CEO, Lee Iacocca!

Fifty Cent, a more contemporary proponent of a nihilist street gang lifestyle ("Get Rich or Die Tryin'") has been utilized as a spokesperson for major corporate and national sports organizations.

SCAN-New York has been privileged to participate over the past year with the New York City Council sponsored Ant-Gang Violence Youth Initiative. SCAN (Supportive Children's Advocacy Network), an East Harlem and South Bronx based CBO, has served as the coordinating agency for this City council funded citywide effort. The Ant-Gang Violence Youth Initiative, through the leadership of Council Member Maria Baez

and Council Speaker Quinn, has brought together fifty New York City CBO's to collectively address the scourge of nihilistic, criminal focused violence confronting our inner-city communities. We are pleased to report that our efforts at community education... positive youth development... counseling... education...recreation... has reached 14,000 New York City teens... African American, Dominican, Puerto Rican, Asian American, West Indian, Italian, Albanian... teenagers living in such diverse communities as...Corona...Kingsbridge Heights...Bushwick... South Jamaica...Bedford Stuyvesant...East Harlem... Hunts Point... and, Forest Hills/Rego Park.

These young people are bright, challenging, curious and striving! As we educate, inform and open opportunity, they respond with enthusiasm and promise!

Often our City Council Anti-Gang Violence Youth Initiative has focused on community building efforts to address the myriad of social forces negatively impinging upon the lives of inner-city youth. City Councilmember Diana Reyna has creatively utilized her office to spearhead one such effort in Bushwick as has Councilmember Helen Diane Foster in the South Bronx. In East Harlem, a community coalition supported Johnny Rivera's singular successful effort to expose the insidious influences of corporate mass marketing of gang paraphernalia to los ninos del Barrio! Mr. Rivera worked closely with the Human Service Consortium of East Harlem in our struggle to positively address the needs of el Barrio's "highest risk" young people. Mr. Rivera's success in educating nuestro comunidad regarding the insidious sale of gang paraphernalia to our youth, should also be understood in light of his valued support of the positive youth development activities of various East Harlem CBO's... whether this be through his vital contributions in the area of youth employment...or...in his consistent advocacy for the educational needs of our young people.

In closing, the crisis confronting inner-city youth needs to be collectively addressed on many levels. The New York City Council has proven to be a vital and progressive leader in this struggle. The Council's support of its Anti-Gang Violence Youth Initiative and the positive youth development activities sponsored by its diversely funded community based organizations is but one example of positive Council leadership. Community education efforts, such as this hearing on gang paraphernalia speak strongly to the Council recognition of its vital role in the struggle to positively address the myriad of negative social forces impacting upon the lives of inner-city African American and Latino youth in New York City.



Council for Unity

Good Morning ladies and gentleman. My name is Joe Figueroa. I am a former member of the Bloods. I am currently the Leadership Coordinator for Council for Unity.

The purpose of this testimony is to provide a better understanding of the proliferation of gang culture in New York City in the past decade. We must understand that a major catalyst for this proliferation is gang paraphernalia. Gang paraphernalia are items and/or materials that identify gangs and distinguish them from neighborhoods. They can vary from hats, bandanas, sneakers, jerseys to certain brand name clothing lines etc. For example, Blood members are known to wear Calvin Klein because the emblem CK, to them, stands for 'crip killer'. Members of the CRIPS are known to wear the Ralph Lauren line CHAPS because the acronym stands for CRIPS HATE ALL PIRU SLOBS...

Presentation, particularly clothing, is important in our society. It is of the utmost importance of adolescents who adhere to a style standard based on what is 'in'. Gang paraphernalia is promoted through popular culture, music, 'rap', movies and media. Right now, it's cool to be 'gangsta'.

Youth in areas where gangs dominate tend not to wear gang paraphernalia because they are well aware of the consequences of gang association (either violence/police arrest/ school suspension). In communities where gangs are not well known, youth adopt the clothing and style of gangs to be considered 'cool'. The use of the paraphernalia to emulate gang appearance often leads to behavior emulation as well. It allows an opening for gang proliferation in communities where they did not previously exist. Gang paraphernalia renders individuals to appear more dangerous than they actually are.

It is interesting to note that many of the corporations are well aware of the economic benefits in producing paraphernalia associated with gangs. As a matter of fact, there is a booming business in the production of these items. For example, Jordan's line manufactures products in various colors in order to represent the gangs. Purchasing these products not only allows for corporations to capitalize off the gang culture but it simultaneously promotes gangs. In benefiting from increased sales, they are becoming part of the problem as opposed to providing a solution.

Yankee Caps were pulled off the market after protesters saw gang affiliated insignias of the three major gangs- the Bloods, the Crips and the Latin Kings. They blatantly feature colors and symbols for some of America's deadliest street gangs. The New York Yankees claim that they had no idea that these designs were gang affiliated. However, it is important to consider that these caps were only sold in Harlem- a place where one would assume houses the perfect market niche.

This is only one example of a corporation trying to capitalize off of gang culture.

Stopping the production of gang paraphernalia will not end the gang problem in New York City. But, educating ourselves and increasing our awareness of the elements that enable and promote gangs can serve as a stepping stone for finding solutions to the perennial problem.

Johnny C. Rivera president of The Coalition to Protect our Children (917) 650-2050

Members: Peace on the Street, SCAN –NY, Sisters of Charity, Youth Action Program and Homes; and YouthBuild USA.

New York 1 news report by - Lily Jamali

For those who are in the market for a Yankees cap, it might be best to stick to the white, blue and pinstripes varieties, as a hat manufacturer asked retailers around the city Friday to pull some colorful Yankees hats from the shelves because of a link to gang colors. NY1's Lily Jamali filed the following report.

While colorful baseball caps might seem innocuous to some children, to other kids, the caps, manufactured by New Era, carry a meaning they would rather not be associated with.

"The crown represents [the gang the] Latin Kings," explained Brandon Vargas, 9, of what he believed the colors and symbols signify. "The blue bandanna with the grey means Crips [gang]. And the red and black means the Bloods [gang]."

A back-to-school shopping trip on Monday caught East Harlem resident Johnny Rivera off guard.

Rivera wanted to buy one of the colorful caps for his son, and had thought nothing of them, at first.

"It was [my son] who said this crown might be construed as something possibly associated with a gang," said Rivera. "I said 'what kind of a gang?' He said maybe the Latin Kings. I said 'why? It's just a New York Yankee hat.' It's quite nice. I liked it and the crown to me said 'you're the king!' That's great."

Rivera and his son brought the caps to Ultimate Karate in East Harlem. Karate instructor Richard Garcia said two ex-gang members he trains confirmed that the color combination was no coincidence.

"They brought it to my attention that it was blatant," said Garcia. "That blue and grey in combination was definitely Crips."

Thursday, some community members gathered together at Ultimate Karate to protest at stores along Third Avenue in East Harlem. That helped convince New Era, which has a licensing agreement with Major League Baseball, to ask merchants to pull the caps from the shelves.

In a statement, New Era said it would cooperate with the wishes of those who wanted the Yankees caps yanked.

Even so, there are those who remain unconvinced that there is a connection between these colors and gangs.

"Those are just basically styles," said one local resident. "All the other hats have colors. Those are styles, with no gang affiliation."

As for the Yankees, they say they had no role in approving the caps and that the club was completely unaware of them. Team officials say Major League Baseball has assured them that no such product will be manufactured in the future.

Parents Outraged Over Official Yankee Caps with Gang Colors Hats Look Like Gang Bandannas

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Activists say this official MLB-licensed Yankee cap features the red-and-black bandanna design associated with the Bloods gang.

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By Arun Kristian Das
MyFox New York

NEW YORK (MYFOXNY.COM) -- Yankees gear is always a big seller. But some residents in Harlem were shocked to see that official Major League Baseball caps blatantly feature gang colors and symbols: A red and black bandanna design for the Bloods, blue and gray for the Crips and a gold crown for the Latin Kings.

Activists are outraged and said New Era, the Yankees and the MLB are deliberately marketing gang paraphernalia to gang members and wannabes.

"Companies involved should not profit from the promotion of gang affiliation, which leads only to gang violence," the activists, who call themselves the Coalition to Protect Our Children, said in a statement. The coalition is concerned that unsuspecting kids could buy one of the hats, wear it in the wrong turf and then be targeted for attack.

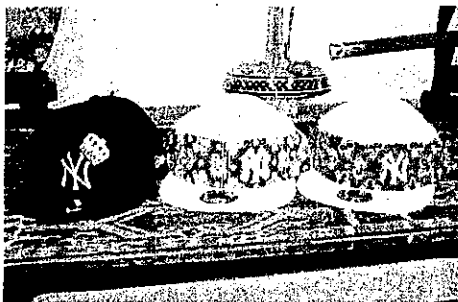
The group marched in East Harlem Thursday and pressured local shops to pull the caps from their shelves. One store operator agreed to do so.

Fox 5 called New Era for comment, but did not hear back as of late Thursday.

Meantime an MLB official claimed the league was not aware that the designs were gang-related.

"Major League Baseball... is very concerned about the issue," said Silvia Alvarez, the league's director of multicultural and charitable communications, in a statement. She indicated that the MLB would encourage and support the pulling of these caps from stores.

The Coalition to Protect our Children said the group would continue its efforts to stop the sale of caps with gang colors and symbols and plans to hold gang-awareness workshops for families in the community.



The feud between Yankees and Red Sox fans may go back generations, but this is taking it a little far. A group of East Harlem parents is calling on the New York Yankees to stop selling official team hats that blatantly feature gang colors and symbols. Yes, you read that right. Gang symbols. The hats are available in three versions (pictured). One includes a gold crown above the "NY," one a red and black bandana stitched in, and another a blue and gray bandana—the signs of the Latin Kings, Bloods, and Crips respectively.

"These corporations are capitalizing on known friction within communities of color," accused Johnny Rivera, president of the Coalition to Protect Our Children, which held a protest yesterday to raise awareness and pressure retailers to pull the New Era caps from their shelves. "Any 11-year-old could buy one of these and get jumped if they walk in the wrong neighborhood because they don't know the signs."

Rivera said he discovered the hats last week on a back-to-school shopping trip with his son. With no knowledge of the symbolism behind the designs, he offered to purchase one of the hats for his 11-year old, who told his dad that the hat was "a gang thing" and could put him in danger.

One retailer, Tom Dick and Harry's, has already agreed to stop selling the caps. The store's manager, Isaiah Hill, told *amNew York* that a friend of his was jumped after wearing one of them in "the wrong neighborhood" in East New York. A spokesperson for the MLB said that the league was unaware of the symbolism.

Handout photo from Johnny C. Rivera on amNewYork.com