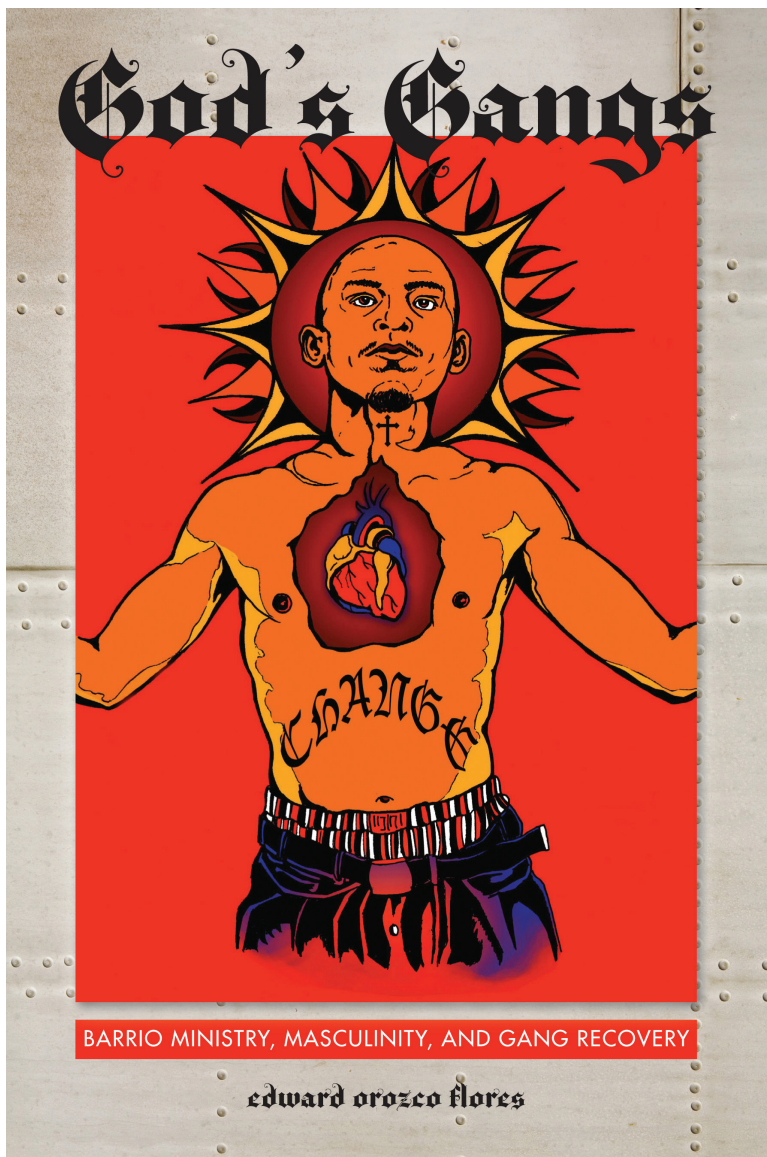


# God's Gangs

Barrio Ministry, Masculinity, and Gang Recovery

## INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



Los Angeles is the epicenter of the American gang problem. Rituals and customs from Los Angeles' 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.

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## Introduction

Pages 1–30

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### SUMMARY

The introduction begins with Sergio, a former gang member, who is involved with Homeboy Industries, a faith-based organization that provides therapy and job training. Sergio’s experience with Homeboy Industries illustrates the process of faith-based “gang recovery,” a phenomenon understudied by sociologists. The introduction examines how social contexts, such as immigration and crime policy, drive gang membership—but also how faith-based groups interact with such social contexts. The introduction also describes how literatures on religion, immigration and gender have treated the topic of gangs and gang exit, and outlines the chapters in this book.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How do social policies, such as immigration or crime policies, foster the formation of gangs?
- What does scholarly literature, such as segmented assimilation theory, predict for the outcomes of second generation immigrants involved with gangs?
- How do social programs, such as Homeboy Industries, promote an alternative to hostile crime policies?

## Chapter 1: The Latino Crime Threat: A Century of Race, Marginality, and Public Policy in Los Angeles

Pages 31–62

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### SUMMARY

This chapter opens by using a vignette of Matthew, a Homeboy Industries member who was arrested during a gang sweep and indicted under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) act. This chapter traces the racialized nature of social policies in Los Angeles, across the 20th century. Early 20th century European immigrants experienced immigration and exclusion, but also social integration. In contrast, Latino immigrants have experienced persisting marginality. Structural racism, such as housing discrimination, have reproduced racist ideas of Latino families and communities as pathological. These ideas later formed the foundation for backlash against the civil rights movement, and the conservative political ideologies that shaped late 20th century urban American social policies. Conservative ideologies rolled back the welfare state, targeted Black and Latino men through the war on crime, and targeted Latino men through the war on terror.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Compare and contrast Latinos and Europeans' early 20th century experience with immigration. How did social institutions shape such experiences?
- How is the context of the post-civil rights era different for contemporary immigrants than for previous waves of immigrants? How is such a context shaped by concerns with crime? The war on terror?

## Chapter 2: Into the Underclass or Out of the Barrio? Immigrant Integration in Latino Los Angeles

Pages 63–87

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### SUMMARY

This chapter draws from US Census data on Latinos and immigrants in inner-city Los Angeles to suggest that—contrary to segmented assimilation theory—upward mobility exists among Latino immigrants. Segmented assimilation theory and an analysis of inner-city Los Angeles suggest that recent immigrants are more likely to be Black or Latino and to settle in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. However, at the same time, a demographic analysis of Los Angeles challenges segmented assimilation theory. An analysis of Los Angeles, between 2000 and 2010, suggests that immigrants are very likely to move up and out of disadvantaged neighborhoods rather than remain in geographic isolation and cyclical poverty.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What evidence is there for segmented assimilation theory's predictions of downward mobility among second-generation immigrants?
- What evidence contradicts segmented assimilation theory? How do poverty rates change across the life course for cohorts of inner-city LA residents? Do changes in the population size of different immigration cohorts suggest geographic isolation or social mobility?

## Chapter 3: Recovery from Gang Life: Two Models of Faith and Reintegration

Pages 88–108

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### SUMMARY

This chapter presents two cases of faith-based social programs facilitating exit from gangs: the Jesuit-Catholic founded non-profit Homeboy Industries, and the Pentecostal-Evangelical church Victory Outreach. These two organizations facilitate different forms of recovery from gang life. Where Homeboy Industries sought to reintegrate recovering gang members into their local communities, through “integrative redemption” (page 93), Victory Outreach sought to facilitate gang exit by separating members from their surrounding communities, through “segregated redemption” (page 92).

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How did the theological underpinnings of Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach shape their models of gang recovery?
- What types of spiritual practices characterized religion in Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach?
- What does the contrasting nature of Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach’s relationships with their local communities suggest about the process of gang exit?

## Chapter 4: Reformed Barrio Masculinity: Eight Cases of Recovery from Gang Life

Pages 109–144

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### SUMMARY

This chapter presents eight cases of recovery from gang life, and suggests that gendered negotiations facilitate the process of exit from gang life. The case studies of four leaders in gang recovery (Antonio, Mario, Rick and Ramon) suggest that successful recovery hinges upon adoption of conventional expressions of manhood, such as landing stable employment, having close relationships with family members, and giving back to one's community. The case studies of two members who had spent considerable time in recovery, Sergio and Ivan, suggest that structural obstacles can inhibit adoption of conventional expressions of manhood, and that failure to progress through recovery is associated with emasculation. Lastly, the case studies of two newer members (Gerardo and Santiago) suggest that recovering gang members risk emasculation by not remaining committed to recovery, but that they also draw from masculine tropes to deepen participation in recovery and to justify gradually distancing themselves from gang life.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What roles do stable employment, child-rearing, and church responsibilities play in facilitating gang exit?
- What is reformed barrio masculinity? How is masculinity highly contested among recovering gang members?
- How does recovery from gang life challenge racist stereotypes of Latino men, and specifically Latino men with gang pasts?

## Chapter 5: Masculinity and the Podium: Discourse in Gang Recovery

Pages 145–167

**SUMMARY**

This chapter examines how social interactions in recovery facilitate gang exit. Recovery provides settings for public talk, in which members learn how to use verbal communication to distance themselves from gang masculinity and to align themselves with conventional notions of manhood. This chapter draws from Dwight Conquergood's research, which conceptualizes gangs as a communicative phenomena, and Shadd Maruna's concept of "redemption scripts," which suggests that ex-offenders' desistance from crime is facilitated through a particular type of pro-social discourse. Both Victory Outreach and Homeboy Industries sought to facilitate exit from gangs by using discursive platforms to shape members' gendered expressions into nurturing masculine displays.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- On page 147, the author states that reform is not an individual effort, but rather occurs through social interaction. What evidence does Alfredo's interactions in the Anger Management class present?
- What is reintegrative shaming? Disintegrative shaming?
- What is a "podium" (page 151), and how does its use achieve reintegrative shaming in the settings of recovery?
- Contrast Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach's models of gang recovery. How do they each achieve reintegrative shaming through the podium?

## Chapter 6: From Shaved to Saved: Embodied Gang Recovery

Pages 168–190

**SUMMARY**

This chapter examines the place of bodily practices in the masculine negotiations facilitating gang exit. The beginning of the chapter presents two concepts to be drawn upon later in the chapter: masculine gang embodiment and reformed gang embodiment (page 169). In addition, the author also presents the concepts of “hard embodiment” and “soft embodiment”; while hard embodiment refers to rigid facets of embodiment that are difficult to shape, soft embodiment refers to the more malleable facets of embodiment. Conventional notions of masculinity reshape men’s embodiment, such as by using advancement within the organization to reward adoption of conventional dress codes. Masculine gang embodiment is also blended with the nurturing characteristics of reformed barrio masculinity, such as by using elaborate handshakes to greet each other in recovery.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- On page 169, the author states that “reformulation of embodied masculine meanings is pivotal to the process of gang recovery.” Explain.
- Ruben, a member of Homeboy Industries, is frustrated with the fact that he is paralyzed. How does his paralysis make participation in Homeboy’s model of gang recovery difficult? How does it make Ruben’s recovery from gang life difficult beyond Homeboy Industries? How is this gendered?
- How does the project of recovery shape dietary habits, and how does the consumption of food shape the process of recovery?
- How does the project of recovery redirect masculine expressions by blending gang embodiment with reformed barrio masculinity?
- How is faith a part of the embodied nature of gang recovery? How is this gendered?



## Conclusion

Pages 191–204

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### SUMMARY

The conclusion opens by placing this study on gang recovery within the broader context of literature on neoliberalism and punishment, resistance and social movements. It notes that while other scholarly work has examined macro-level features of the carceral state, this study examines the meaning of the post-incarceration experience from the ground up. The conclusion provides summaries of each chapter, along the themes of the book: religion, gender and immigration.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is the Chicano patriarchal bargain, and why is it important? How is it important to consider it in light of the experiences of recovering gang members?
- How does the author describe the experience of Latino immigrants in relation to the experience of Black and European immigrants? What evidence in the book supports this?