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Exceptions to the Gang Rules

Know the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of the gangs in your jurisdiction.

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The real test of any law enforcement gang expert is how he transmits his gang knowledge to the jury and judge while on the stand in court. Most cops who have attended gang seminars and training can answer generic gang questions and give general gang facts. Crips wear blue rags and Blood or Piru gang members wear red ones.

However, it is the knowledge of gang exceptions that distinguishes the gang expert. For example, such an expert would know that Compton Lime Street Piru gang members wear lime green bandanas and the gang was started in the 1980s by Ramon Velasquez, a Puerto Rican.

Every good gang cop knows that California gangs are divided into two camps. North of Bakersfield are the gangs that associate with the Nuestra Familia prison gang, call themselves Norteños (Northerners), use the number 14, and identify with the color red. South of Bakersfield are the gangs that associate with the Mexican Mafia, call themselves Sureños (Southerners), use the number 13, and identify with the color blue.

So, who are the Fresno Bulldogs? And who are they affiliated with? Where do the members of the Clanton 14 gang live? Are they Norteños or Sureños?

Fresno Bulldogs

The city of Fresno California is located north of Bakersfield near the center of California. Both the local high school and college have the bulldog as school mascots. When the Mexican Mafia (eMe) and the Nuestra Familia (NF) split California Hispanic gangs in two during the "shoe wars," the gang members from Fresno identified themselves as F14. The Fresno gang members were tough and aggressive in prison, but they experienced a love-hate relationship with the Nuestra Familia.

In 1984 the NF hierarchy approached Anthony "Big Gee" Zataray, Ricky "Animal" Garza, Leonard "Rocco" Ruiz, and Michael "Chicago" Reyes, who would form the first Bulldogs council in San Quentin. The NF attempted to put the "Fresno Car," as they were called, under the 14 Bonds that governed Norteño gangs. However, F14 resisted control by the NF and its sub group the Northern Structure (NS) and went to war against them. Many Bulldogs were related by blood, marriage, or other alliances to members of both the Nuestra Familia and the Mexican Mafia prison gangs. Later the eMe attempted to exploit the Fresno rift with the NF, but again F14 refused to knuckle under.

So who are the Bulldogs? They are the exception, a fiercely independent California gang from Fresno, a gang that claims neither Norteño nor Sureño affiliation. The 14 in F14 now means only that they claim Fresno Bulldogs (BDS) and are not under the thumb of any prison gang. This creates major problems when a Bulldog member is incarcerated anywhere near either Norteño or Sureño gang members. Look for their characteristic Bulldog tattoos or puppy dog prints in their graffiti.

Clanton 14

Early in Los Angeles gang history, before the Norteño-Sureño split, even before the birth of the Mexican Mafia in 1956, a Hispanic street gang called Clanton 14 flourished near downtown Los Angeles. Named after two small streets in its turf, C14 or CX14 became its identifying symbol in graffiti and tattoos. (Many years later a new gang would spring up a few blocks away calling itself 18th Street.) Clanton 14 was a very traditional Chicano gang and the Catholic Archdiocese actually assigned a kindly Irish nun as their chaplain. She survived the years as C14 Chaplin and I was able to interview her in the 1980s when I worked as the LASD OSS Gang Sergeant in East Los Angeles.

Members of Clanton 14 were among the first early supporters and founders of the Mexican Mafia prison gang. As loyal Sureño soldiers they were granted an exception and allowed to continue to use the number 14 as their sign. This is because the 14 represents 14th street in Los Angeles and not the 14th letter of the alphabet (N).

So are the C14 gang members Norteños or Sureños? Don't let that 14 fool you; Clanton 14 is an old school Los Angeles Sureño street gang loyal to the Mexican Mafia.

More Exceptions

At the extreme Southern end of California at the border with Tijuana, Mexico, is the City of San Diego. It is about as far south of Bakersfield as one can get and remain in the U.S. It was also an exception, and for many years it was a city stronghold of the Nuestra Familia.

Even Maravilla, in the heart of East Los Angeles, had several notable exceptions. When California was split by the eMe and NF wars, some Sureño gangs that had helped start the Mexican Mafia felt that they had been used and abused by the eMe. They felt that many of their homeboys, who had been killed during Mexican Mafia purges, had been killed for political reasons. They rebelled against this perceived abuse and sided with the enemy.

In your own jurisdiction, the ability to describe how one gang differs from the rest gives you an advantage over others. Look for those differences and exceptions. When you talk to gang members ask them, "What makes their gang better or different?" They are not all the same and gang members will usually be proud of that fact, and willing to give you the information you need.