The Watts Gang Treaty: Hidden History and the Power of Social Movements

William J. Aceves*

On the eve of the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, a small group of gang leaders and community activists drafted an agreement to curtail violence in south Los Angeles. Several gangs in Watts accepted the truce and established a cease-fire agreement. By most accounts, the 1992 Watts Gang Treaty succeeded in reducing gang violence in Los Angeles. Local activists attributed the reduction in shootings to the Treaty. Even law enforcement officials grudgingly recognized the Treaty’s contribution to reducing gang violence and a corresponding decrease in homicides.

The origins of the Watts Gang Treaty can be traced to gang leaders recognizing that the devastating struggle between rival gangs was analogous to a military conflict—complete with “no-man’s land,” assault weapons, targeted killings, and civilian casualties—and, therefore, it required a diplomatic solution. Seeking inspiration from international conflict resolution efforts, gang members looked to the 1949 Armistice Agreement adopted by Egypt and Israel to end the Arab-Israeli War. The drafters of the Watts Gang Treaty mirrored the key provisions of the Armistice Agreement, including a cease-fire agreement and other confidence-building measures. The drafters then built a social movement to support the Treaty.

This Article examines the origins, impact, and legacy of the Watts Gang Treaty. It also pursues a prescriptive agenda. It supports the study of hidden history that runs counter to the common narrative of power and privilege in the United States. Moreover, this Article argues that social movements can achieve meaningful change even in the face of poverty, violence, and structural racism.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE ORIGINS OF THE WATTS GANG TREATY</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Early History and the Rise of Gang Culture</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* William J. Aceves is the Dean Steven R. Smith Professor of Law at California Western School of Law. I am indebted to Aqeela Sherrills, Daude Sherrills, and Twilight Bey for their reflections about the Watts Gang Treaty. Deborah Archer, David Beatty, Emily Behzadi, Justin Brooks, Tabrez Ebrahim, Pooja Dadhania, Paul Gudel, Catherine Hardee, Michael Krikorian, Samuel Paz, Michael Pinard, Alec Rosenberg, Erin Sheley, India Thusi, and Bobbie Thyfault provided valuable comments. The Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles City Council, and the Southern California Library for Social Research in south Los Angeles offered access to their archival materials. Regina Calvario, Maliat Chowdhury, Sara Emerson, Lillian Glenister, Matt Halverson, Varun Sahbarwal, Jose Vega Zamudio, Barbara Zalewski-Zaragoza, and Stacey Zumo provided excellent research assistance. This article was presented at the 2021 AALS Annual Conference (Section on Civil Rights). All errors are my own.
Dedication

This Article is dedicated to the Watts community and those individuals who risked their lives to end the cycle of pain and violence they had endured for decades. Their creativity and bravery is an inspiration to peacemakers around the world.

Preface

A hidden history lies beneath the common narrative of power and privilege in the United States. This history reflects a world where structural racism generates poverty, conflict, and subordination. In the realm of hidden history, there exist compelling, yet overlooked, stories that run counter to assumptions about race, color, and class. In this realm, marginalized communities can achieve meaningful change as they seek to overcome years of neglect, decades of discrimination, and centuries of violence. These stories offer both inspiration and prescription. This is one such story.
The Watts Gang Treaty

INTRODUCTION

On the eve of the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, a small group of gang leaders and local activists drafted an agreement to curtail violence in Watts, a small community in south Los Angeles. Several gangs accepted the truce and established a cease-fire agreement. By most accounts, the 1992 Watts Gang Treaty succeeded in reducing gang violence throughout affected communities, which included the four major housing projects in Watts. Local activists attributed the reduction in shootings between gang members to the Treaty. Even law enforcement officials grudgingly recognized the Treaty’s contribution to reducing gang violence and a corresponding decrease in homicides.

The origins of the Watts Gang Treaty can be traced to gang leaders’ recognition that the devastating struggle between rival gangs was analogous to a military conflict—complete with “no-man’s land,” assault weapons, targeted killings, and civilian casualties—and, therefore, it required a diplomatic solution. Seeking inspiration from international conflict resolution efforts, gang members visited several libraries to search for a historical document that could provide a template for their own agreement. They eventually discovered the 1949 Armistice Agreement adopted by Egypt and Israel to end the Arab-Israeli War. The Agreement established an armistice line, prohibited the use of military force, and brokered an exchange of prisoners. Despite mistrust between the two countries, the Agreement held for several years.

1 This Article uses the word “gang” because it is the standard nomenclature in legal and ethnographic studies.


The drafters of the Watts Gang Treaty mirrored the key provisions of the Armistice Agreement, including a cease-fire arrangement and other confidence-building measures. The Treaty applied to the four main gangs in Watts. On April 26, 1992, the Watts Gang Treaty took form and entered into force. The Treaty influenced gang behavior, saved countless lives, and held for several years despite significant challenges. Its success stemmed from its development within the Watts community as a social movement. Gang members had a personal interest in compliance. They were eventually supported, not by political leaders, but rather by their own community.

The Watts Gang Treaty also had a profound cultural impact. It was referenced in rap music. It generated radio and television programs. It inspired poetry. It was depicted in documentaries and movies. It gained international prominence. Reaching ubiquity if not absurdity, the Treaty even led to a beer called Watts Truce.

This Article provides an ethnographic study of the origins, impact, and legacy of the 1992 Watts Gang Treaty. This qualitative methodology uses an immersive approach to provide rich insight into its subject matter, highlighting social and cultural norms that might otherwise be overlooked in

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12 Straight Outta Compton (Universal Pictures 2015); Crips and Bloods: Made in America (The Gang Documentary 2008).
14 The beer was produced by Blood Brothers Brewery in Toronto, Canada. See Untappd, https://untappd.com/b/blood-brothers-brewing-watts-truce/2525167 (last visited Sept. 26, 2021), archived at https://perma.cc/E9FE-EJVA (“Named in honour of two rival gangs coming together for the purpose of peace, this ale is a blend of two of our favourite beers, Paradise Lost and Torch. Blended together and then heavily dry hopped with classic west coast ‘C’ hops, Paradise Lost gains added bitterness and Brett funk while giving the beer a bright acidity.”).
more traditional legal studies. Such an approach is particularly valuable for assessing the Watts Gang Treaty, a story infused with racial identity, economic inequality, and social conflict.\(^{16}\) However, this study does not rely solely on first-person accounts, which are often used in ethnographic studies.\(^{17}\) It relies on various sources, including public records, news reports, and other published sources to provide an evidence-based account.\(^{18}\)

Part I of this Article places the Watts Gang Treaty in the context of the poverty, violence, and structural racism that permeated Los Angeles throughout the twentieth century. It examines the origins of gang culture, which reflect a sociological response to the conditions affecting many marginalized communities. Within this culture, the Treaty emerged through a social movement led by gang members.\(^{19}\) In the absence of meaningful support by public officials, gang members became agents of their own social change by drafting a self-enforcing peace treaty. Part II assesses both the immediate and long-term impacts of the Treaty.\(^{20}\) Within hours of its adoption, the Treaty’s effectiveness was tested by, and survived, the outbreak of violence following the April 29, 1992 criminal trial verdict that acquitted several police officers in the brutal assault of Rodney King.\(^{21}\) Part III considers the reasons for the Treaty’s success, and its legacy—both in the Watts community and throughout the United States. The gang truce inspired simi-

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\(^{17}\) STEVEN LUBET, INTERROGATING ETHNOGRAPHY: WHY EVIDENCE MATTERS ix–x (2018).

\(^{18}\) Id. at 136–37. Lubet argues that ethnographic studies should pursue accuracy, provide candor, and offer clear documentation. Cf. EDWARD R. MAGUIRE, WOODROW WILSON INT’L CTR. FOR SCHOLARS, RESEARCH, THEORY, AND SPECULATION ON GANG TRUCES (2013) (arguing for evidence-based studies on gang truces).

\(^{19}\) Edward L. Rubin, Passing Through the Door: Social Movement Literature and Legal Scholarship, 150 U. PA. L. REV. 1, 4 (2001) (Social movements can be defined as “coordinated, ideologically based efforts that originate within the social sphere or, in other words, as a self-conscious effort by previously unorganized individuals resulting in collective action.”). The study of social movements is an important part of legal scholarship that examines racism, inequality, and progressive reform. See HOW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS MATTER 4–6 (Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam & Charles Tilly eds., 1999); Scott L. Cummings, The Puzzle of Social Movements in American Legal Theory, 64 UCLA L. REV. 1554, 1556 (2017); Tomiko Brown-Nagin, Elites, Social Movements, and the Law: The Case of Affirmative Action, 105 COLUM. L. REV. 1436, 1436 (2005); Reva B. Siegel, Equality Talk: Antisubordination and Anticlassification Values in Constitutional Struggles Over Brown, 117 HARV. L. REV. 1470, 1543 (2004). See generally Steven W. Bender & Keith Aoki, Seekin’ the Cause: Social Justice Movements and LatCrit Community, 81 OR. L. REV. 595 (2002).

\(^{20}\) Part II uses the language of the law of treaties to frame its organizational structure, including entry into force, implementation, compliance, enforcement, and desuetude. See THE OXFORD GUIDE TO TREATIES 699, 765 (Duncan B. Hollis ed. 2012).

\(^{21}\) On March 3, 1991, Rodney King was brutally assaulted by several police officers in Los Angeles after a high-speed car chase. His beating was recorded, and four police officers were subsequently indicted for excessive use of force. Despite clear evidence, three of the officers were acquitted and the jury failed to reach a verdict against the fourth officer. See generally REBECCA RISSMAN, RODNEY KING AND THE L.A. RIOTS (2014); GEOGRAPHY OF RACE: REMEMBERING THE LOS ANGELES RIOTS OF 1992 (Jervey Tervalon ed. 2002); Seth Mydans, Tape of Beating By Police Revives Charges of Racism, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 7, 1991; at A18.
lar conciliatory efforts to address the violence that continues to plague many urban communities throughout the United States.\textsuperscript{22}

Finally, Part IV explores the value of studying hidden history.\textsuperscript{23} The stories within hidden history run counter to the common narrative of power and privilege in the United States.\textsuperscript{24} They reveal how structural racism crafts the walls that keep generations in subjugation through racialized policing and political neglect. Building on earlier scholarship, this Article identifies the power of social movements and their ability to achieve meaningful change in the face of such profound inequality and violence.\textsuperscript{25} Understanding the morphology of conflict is essential for building peace in urban communities.\textsuperscript{26} Because many of these communities remain in crisis, the Watts Gang Treaty is a story worth telling.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{22} See infra Pt. III(B).


\textsuperscript{24} See infra Pt. IV.


I. THE ORIGINS OF THE WATTS GANG TREATY

While the Watts Gang Treaty was adopted in 1992, the roots that gave rise to its birth can be traced back several decades. Gang violence did not emerge spontaneously in Watts. It was created by racism and segregation, and nurtured by social, economic, and political neglect.

A. Understanding the Morphology of Conflict in Watts

1. Early History and the Rise of Gang Culture

The community of Watts is located in south Los Angeles. It was incorporated in 1907, and eventually joined the city of Los Angeles in 1926. Throughout its early years, the population mirrored the broader demographics of Southern California in that its citizens were mostly white or of Mexican ancestry. As the area began to grow, a small Black community, known as “Mudtown,” emerged in the southern portion of Watts. The Black community in Watts expanded in the 1930s and 1940s, reflecting social and economic developments in the United States. Black families migrated from the East, and particularly the Southeast, to escape both segregation and poverty. They were joined by a small, but growing, Hispanic population. The poet Oshea Luja spoke these words about early Watts:

In the late 1800s, Lotsa Watta was established ten miles east of the coast.
Nestled ‘tween Compton ‘n Los Angeles.
Outta the South we headed West for opportunity—Brownsville,
Central Avenue, Black ‘n Brown unity.
Downtown Union Station—that mess was segregated.
Last stop for my folks, Mudtown, Watts Station.
Nobody locked doors, and we always gave thanks for livin’.\textsuperscript{34}

To accommodate its growing population, Los Angeles built several large housing projects in Watts between 1942 and 1954.\textsuperscript{35} These public housing projects, which included Nickerson Gardens, Jordan Downs, Imperial Courts, and Hacienda Village, would eventually serve a largely Black population. Watts soon had the highest concentration of public housing in the United States west of the Mississippi River.\textsuperscript{36}

Poverty and racism gradually overwhelmed the Watts community.\textsuperscript{37} The civic vacuum left by political neglect offered few opportunities for residents. Economic development was sporadic.\textsuperscript{38} As described in the \textit{New York Times}, inequality and violence were evident to residents on a daily basis.\textsuperscript{39}

At first glance, south-central L.A. does not fit the stereotype of a depressed, predominantly black ghetto. Shaded by tall palms, the bungalow-like homes are fronted by lawns and a profusion of oleander and bougainvillea and hibiscus. But a closer look reveals the grim picture of an occupied zone: heavily barred doors and windows; high chain-link fences; walls covered by graffiti indicating the various gang turfs. Many of the street lamps have been shot out, and when the sun goes down the darkened streets crawl with armed children.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{34} Oshea Luja, \textit{Historic Watts Ley-lines}, https://vimeo.com/214767918, archived at https://perma.cc/9JAY-GC5X.
\textsuperscript{38} GERALD HORNE, \textit{Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s} 361 (1997).
\textsuperscript{39} See also \textit{Wanda Coleman, The Riot Inside Me: More Trials & Tremors} 247 (2005).
The Watts Gang Treaty

The dilapidated conditions in the public housing projects served as an apt metaphor for the treatment of the Black community by civic leaders. As explained by prominent social activist and California State Senator Tom Hayden, “[l]ike identical structures that birthed gangs in every northern city, these projects contained and institutionalized the low-income and welfare classes.” The 1965 Watts uprising—the first rebellion—began with a police stop of a Black man and soon escalated. Anger at pervasive discrimination and economic inequality in the community led to the outbreak of violence, which eventually resulted in thousands of arrests and dozens of deaths throughout Los Angeles. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Watts on August 17, 1965, soon after the violence had subsided. In describing the uprising, Dr. King observed that “economic deprivation, racial isolation, inadequate housing, and general despair” among the Black community formed “the ready seeds which gave birth to tragic expressions of violence.” Official accounts were far less candid in their assessments. While the McCone Commission was established by Governor Edmund Brown to investigate the causes of the Watts uprising, its final report failed to provide a meaningful review of many structural conditions that contributed to the outbreak of violence. The report disregarded racism and dismissed claims of police misconduct. The recommendations that did address social conditions were largely ignored.

In the absence of economic opportunities and in the face of profound structural racism, a gang culture began to emerge in south Los Angeles, including Watts. There is no single explanation for gang formation; multi-
ple factors affect their creation. To the young residents of the housing projects, gangs offered community, protection, and financial opportunities. They also offered hierarchy, structure, and respect. Gangs were thus a reflection of social isolation, economic inequality, and public neglect. As the gang-involved population grew, membership and territory became more valuable. Drugs offered a lucrative incentive to protect both membership and territory.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, gang violence increased in Watts. In general, gang culture coincided with the housing projects. The Grape Street Crips were from Jordan Downs; the PJ Watts Crips were from Imperial Courts; the Bounty Hunter Bloods were from Nickerson Gardens; and the Hacienda Village Bloods were from Hacienda Village. Other gangs, such as the Circle City Pirus, resided in neighboring communities. This typology is not meant to reflect a monolithic structure in gang culture. Membership did not always coincide with residency. Moreover, factions (or sets) often developed within gangs, adding further turmoil and potential for conflict. In addition, retribution became a common feature of gang culture, which perpetuated a cycle of violence. By the 1990s, gang violence was endemic in south Los Angeles, and death was a constant feature in the Watts community.


See Donna Murch, Crack in Los Angeles: Crisis, Militarization, and Black Response to the Late Twentieth-Century War on Drugs, 102 J. AM. HIST. 162 (2015); see also Paul E. Bellair & Thomas L. McNulty, Gang Membership, Drug Selling, and Violence in Neighborhood Context, 26 JUST. Q. 644, 662 (2009).


Chang, supra note 8, at 359–60.

The Watts Gang Treaty

2. Law Enforcement and the Legal System

The story of Watts cannot be told without reference to the role of law enforcement and the criminal justice system. To be clear, many police officers were sincere in their efforts to protect the community.⁶⁰ They worked in a conflict zone where gangs were organized and violent, and where gang violence often led to the injury or death of innocent people. Occasionally, police were the intended targets of violence. In this challenging environment, many officers sought to fulfill their motto, “to protect and to serve.”⁶¹ However, other officers pursued a different agenda. ⁶² Motivated by racism and fueled by unchecked power, they disregarded due process and discarded civil rights.⁶³ Too often, the culmination of police misconduct was murder, and the legal system failed to prosecute most of these cases, signaling to many that Black and Brown lives did not matter.⁶⁴

Police tactics further undermined community trust.⁶⁵ Searches occurred in the absence of probable cause⁶⁶ and arrests were often based on a suspect’s race. The legal system routinely ignored these due process violations.⁶⁷ In the 1980s, military tactics, complete with advanced combat gear, armored vehicles, and aerial support, became a regular part of policing strategy in south Los Angeles.⁶⁸ However, aggressive law enforcement operations only served to exacerbate tensions in the community.⁶⁹ For example, the Los Angeles Police Department initiated Operation Hammer in 1987 to use over-


⁶¹ See generally Joe Domanick, To Protect and to Serve: The LAPD’s Century of War in the City of Dreams (1994).


⁶³ Cf. H Orne, supra note 38, at 358–60.


⁶⁶ See generally Felker-Kantor, supra note 46, at 19–42, 49.


⁶⁸ Hinton, supra note 43, at 238–40; Felker-Kantor, supra note 46, at 50–57.

⁶⁹ See Donna March, Crisis in Los Angeles: Crisis, Militarization, and Black Response to the Late Twentieth-Century War on Drugs, 192 J. AM. HIST. 162, 165 (2015); see also Marc

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whelming force to search for criminal activity in the community. These operations led to massive property damage and large-scale arrests but were really designed “to deliver a strong message to the gangs.” As described by Twilight Bey, a former member of the Circle City Pirus, Operation Hammer “would have police roll through the hood and basically beat brothas up. Brothas were getting slammed every day. Cats were trying to get their lives together, but how can you do that when you’re constantly being abused . . . ?” Community members who were innocent and had done nothing wrong were traumatized by the use of excessive force and humiliated by public arrests.

Some gang members argued the police actually benefited from gang conflict. According to T. Rodgers, who was affiliated with the Black P. Stones in south Los Angeles, “[w]ithout the warring factions of gangs, there would be no CRASH [Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums], there would be no OSS [Operation Safe Streets], which is the county sheriff’s thing, there would be no gang unit, there would be no specialized gang unit, there would be no task force.” Activists also pointed out that gang conflict was also lucrative for individual officers, who benefitted from overtime pay.

The legal system failed the Watts community in other respects. State and federal officials further isolated and targeted the Black community. Government resources were rarely offered to promote economic development or to address social problems. Instead, criminal legislation seemed designed to disproportionately target minority groups. In 1988, for example,

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See Mike Davis, City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles 268 (1992).


73 See Mitchell, supra note 71.


76 Felker-Kantor, supra note 46, at 19.

77 Horne, supra note 38, at 360–64. When resources were provided to the community, it was often in the form of combat gear and riot equipment for law enforcement. Felker-Kantor, supra note 46, at 197–216.
California adopted the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act to impose criminal liability for gang membership. The state also authorized enhanced criminal penalties for acts committed by gang members. In addition, Los Angeles began using injunctions to target alleged gang activity, criminalizing common behavior and imposing guilt by association.

By the 1980s, the use of crack cocaine had become an epidemic in urban regions throughout the United States. While drug possession was already criminalized and subject to significant sanctions, the federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 created profound disparities between crack cocaine and powder cocaine offenses. The racial disparity in drug sentencing was evident, and the Black community suffered disproportionately, both in the number of convictions and the length of incarceration. While these were national developments, south Los Angeles was on the frontline.

In sum, poverty, civic neglect, discrimination, and racialized policing undermined the Watts community’s trust in local government and reinforced the desire of gangs to address the human toll of gang violence themselves.

### B. Negotiating the Treaty

While many gang members had little interest in peace or compromise, others realized that conflict did not benefit them or their community. They were motivated to protect family and close friends from indiscriminate shootings and targeted attacks. They recognized that law enforcement could not end the violence—if anything, the police were part of the problem. Within the Black community, there was also a strong desire to protect itself from destruction. Public events, such as Louis Farrakhan’s 1989 *Stop the Killing Tour*, highlighted these concerns and called on the Black community...
to engage in collective action against gang violence.\textsuperscript{88} Various efforts to craft negotiated agreements appeared in the late 1980s.\textsuperscript{89} In fact, local ministers, including the Reverend Charles Mims, Jr. of the Tabernacle of Faith Church in Watts, organized several gang “summits.”\textsuperscript{90} These meetings involved members of the Bloods and Crips, and they often highlighted the strong animosity between the groups.\textsuperscript{91} Ad hoc agreements were sometimes made but they generally did not result in meaningful long-term change.\textsuperscript{92}

The Watts Gang Treaty was different. It reflected a social movement with deep roots in the community. Building on prior agreements, it worked to end gang violence and provide new opportunities to local residents.\textsuperscript{93} It was an organic process that began through informal meetings in the housing projects, community centers, and houses of worship. Local activists wanted to protect their neighbors. Religious leaders sought peace for their congregants and an end to senseless violence. Above all, gang members brought credibility to the process. They knew each other, and they knew the costs of continued conflict. Their injuries were not only physical; their psychological wounds were also profound.\textsuperscript{94}

Several members of the Watts community played a defining role in this social movement. Daude and Aqeela Sherrills (of the Jordan Downs housing...
The Watts Gang Treaty

Project) were early advocates for negotiation. At one time, both were also members of the Grape Street Crips. Other important members of the Watts community involved in the process included Dewayne Holmes and Tony Bogard (of the Imperial Courts housing project), Don Gordon (of the Jordan Downs housing project), Twilight Bey, and Anthony Perry (now Rasheed L. Muhammad). Significantly, they all had strong connections to local gangs.

While each individual was influenced by his own distinct experiences with gang culture, they all shared a common desire to end the cycle of violence that had engulfed the Watts community. Gang violence had killed family members and wounded close friends. They also recognized that “Black-on-Black” violence was destroying the Black community from within. To Don Gordon, the reason to pursue a truce was self-evident: “In 1987, I was hit three times with [an] AK, ‘cross the head, the arm and the leg . . . If them three reasons ain’t good enough to stop gangbanging, I don’t know what is.” To Daude Sherrills, the cycle of violence, destruction, and death had to end for his family to survive. His reasoning was straightforward: “I did this for my kid. . . . I stopped gangbanging because I had a son being born.”

There was also a desire to develop a unified response against systemic racism and police abuse in the community. Confronted with decades of con-


97 The gendered dynamics of gang culture resulted in men playing the most significant roles in the treaty process. See Raegan Kelly, Watts Love: The Truce is On!, 3 URB MAG. 42, 48 (1993) (noting that women were largely excluded from the truce process). However, several female gang members, such as Sista Soulja, were involved. Buntin, supra note 36.

98 See JAH & SHA’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 241 (interview with “Big Ship”) (“Most of all, and most importantly, is that we must immediately stop this Black-on-Black crime and this gang-banging, because until we start respecting one another as human beings, as well as ourselves, then we won’t be able to build up a damn thing.”). Some gang members even referred to gang violence as “Black on Black genocide.” STANLEY Tookie WILLIAMS, BLUE RAGE, BLACK REDEMPTION: A MEMOIR 129 (2004). There is some controversy, however, about the term “Black-on-Black” violence. See Anthony A. Braga & Rod K. Brunson, The Police and Public Discourse on “Black-on-Black” Violence, NEW PERSp. IN POLICING BULL., (May 2015), https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/248588.pdf, archived at https://perma.cc/CQ4D-9XH3.

99 Kelly, supra note 97, at 44.


flict, the challenge was finding a way to focus on their common interests. According to Twilight Bey, the community was searching for a way to escape the gang culture and its perpetual cycle of violence:

We had a lot of hate in our hearts. The hate was rooted in the dysfunctionalism of our families, our schools, communities and the police. We had all of this hate and nowhere to release it in a positive way. Our hate would manifest itself in the form of violence. You could only go that way but for so long.  

Anthony Perry echoed this belief: “The concern among this town’s gang members with regard to their self-destructive behavior is what compelled them to cease their . . . war among themselves.”  

As noted by Dewayne Holmes, “[t]he natural question became how do we get together but still have these conflicts.”

The leaders of the social movement decided that a peace treaty among the warring gang factions could offer a path to peace. While their agreement would focus on Watts, which they saw as “ground zero,” they hoped it would have an impact throughout Los Angeles. According to Aqeela Sherriels, the Treaty drafters believed if they brought together the four major housing projects in Watts, they “would create a domino effect for peace across the city.”

The Treaty drafters were supported by a broader group of community and religious leaders. Former National Football League (“NFL”) player Jim Brown used his fame and leadership in the Black community to facilitate conversations through his Amer-I-Can Program, which offered life management training and promoted community development.

The photograph, art critic Geoff Dyer offered the following assessment:
The Watts Gang Treaty

mosque was led by Minister Mujahid Abdul-Karim, who had a long history of working with the local community in Watts, and who regularly counseled gang members.\textsuperscript{110} During these negotiations, local politicians were conspicuously absent.\textsuperscript{111}

These were tense meetings, and participants knew the stakes.\textsuperscript{112} To build credibility, key members from each gang had to attend. Twilight Bey noted the importance of broad representation: “I brought my homeboys from three different generations, because that’s the way it is out here now. In each generation you have a man that’s respected and has influence. So in order to make sure that it gets to every level, you need to bring representatives from every level.”\textsuperscript{113}

Daude Sherrills acknowledged the difficulties of bringing gang members together: “A lot of brothers didn’t trust the situation. They wanted to make sure that nobody was going to get ambushed.”\textsuperscript{114} His brother, Aqeela Sherrills, echoed these concerns: “[S]ome of the meetings were really volatile because, you know, you get killers in the same room, you know, who have harmed each other and who have, you know, traded bodies. I mean, you can imagine. You know what I’m saying. It’s intense.”\textsuperscript{115} Don Gordon shared a similar perspective: “We had a lot of problems, because some brothers weren’t with it. We had people that had killed other people’s cousins, homeboys, and brothers. There was a lot of animosity in bringing about this peace, because everybody wasn’t down with it.”\textsuperscript{116} Highlighting the inherent tension and mistrust, Bey noted gang members would often bring
132 Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review [Vol. 57

weapons to these meetings: “Sometimes there was so much metal [weaponry] that if you melted it down it would become a tanker . . . But it worked so that eventually there was no need to bring metal to the house.”117 These in-person meetings proved invaluable. According to Bey:

There [we could see that] this person feels and hurts in the same way I do, and the only way to stop the pain is to stop hurting each other. Young men expressed their anger and pain but also expressed that they would try to communicate. Some of us have found some of our closest friends to be people from the other side.118

C. Drafting the Treaty

As these meetings advanced, Daude Sherrills met with Anthony Perry and asked him to draft a document that could be used as an outline for a gang truce. Sherrills presented a set of notes to Perry that explained their goal was “to create [a] better environment for children, parents, and for economic development, bringing jobs and business back to the community.”119 Sherrills’s interest in history led him to consider using a treaty as a template for their work.120 Perry also believed a document drafted in a “military format” would be effective because “many youth” needed “military structure” for discipline.121 The Treaty would provide an opportunity for gangs to present themselves “in a unified way, signaling peace.”122 It would be drafted specifically for the gangs from the four housing projects in Watts.123

To prepare the document, Perry first visited the University of California, Los Angeles.124 Because he was not a student, he was not allowed access to the library.125 He then went to the University of Southern California, where he was able to conduct his research in the Von KleinSmid Center (“VKC”) Library.126 The VKC Library was an ideal research facility be-

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118 Id. at 149.
119 MUHAMMAD, supra note 103, at 27.
120 D. Sherrills Interview, supra note 4.
121 MUHAMMAD, supra note 103, at 13.
122 Id.
123 MUHAMMAD, supra note 103, at 25; PERRY, supra note 87, at iv.
124 HAYDEN, supra note 23, at 188.
126 Katz & Ford, supra note 5. In 2020, the University of Southern California removed the Von KleinSmid name from the building due to his leadership role in the eugenics movement and his support of forced sterilization. Teresa Watanabe & Tomás Mier, USC Removes Name of Rufus von KleinSmid, a Eugenics Leader, From Prominent Building, L.A. TIMES (June 12,
cause it housed the university’s collection of international legal documents. With the assistance of library staff, Perry eventually discovered the Egypt-Israel armistice documents.127

These documents proved significant to gang members for two reasons. First, the Arab-Israeli conflict was an intractable struggle, with countless casualties on both sides, a description that mirrored the ongoing gang conflict in Watts.128 According to Perry, the Arab-Israeli conflict involved “fights over land rights, turf, and grudges people just won’t let go,” a characterization that also served as an apt description of the gang conflict.129 Second, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the conflict in Watts both involved opponents who were connected by land and shared a common heritage. As Perry noted, “I knew from the Bible and Koran that the Jews and Arabs were Semitic, they were related, both children of Abraham, it was tribal bloodletting, and I knew from gang members the same thing, that they were saying, ‘man, he’s my cousin’ about their enemies in another gang.”130

Anthony Perry holding the draft treaty at the Von KleinSmid Library.131


127 Katz & Ford, supra note 5; Hayden, supra note 23, at 188. Email from Ken Klein, Reference Librarian, University of Southern California, to William Aceves (Apr. 23, 2022) (on file with author).

128 Morris, supra note 6, at 1–12.

129 Hayden, supra note 23, at 188.

130 Id.; see also Perry, supra note 87, at 19 (describing the historical parallels between “the children of Israel” and “black people”).

Perry copied the relevant text of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement by hand.\textsuperscript{132} By using the Armistice Agreement as a template, Perry believed the Treaty would “take on an official appearance to make the entire world know Black youth were serious.”\textsuperscript{133} Perry then shared this draft with Daude Sherrills, who refined the text to make it applicable to the gang conflict in Watts.

The Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement took on even greater meaning when the drafters discovered its principal architect was Dr. Ralph Bunche, an American diplomat who worked for the United Nations.\textsuperscript{134} More significantly, Dr. Bunche was African American, and from Los Angeles. He attended Jefferson High School in Los Angeles, which was only a few miles from Watts, and then pursued his undergraduate studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{135} Dr. Bunche was eventually awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on the Armistice Agreement. To the drafters of the Watts Gang Treaty, Dr. Bunche’s significance came from his status as a Black American from Los Angeles “who had grown up in the neighborhood.”\textsuperscript{136} This was deeply symbolic. His role in the Armistice Agreement affirmed their conviction that they were pursuing the right course of action.\textsuperscript{137}

Daude Sherrills titled the document \textit{Multi-Peace Treaty-General Armistice Agreement}.\textsuperscript{138} The preamble began by identifying the key parties to the agreement.\textsuperscript{139} It indicated that the named representatives of the parties had been granted full authority by their respective neighborhoods. The agreement was then divided into four articles.

Echoing the language of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement, Article I acknowledged the Treaty’s goals were to prevent “the future war-like destruction of the parties” and promote “the return to permanent peace in Watts, California.”\textsuperscript{140} It stated that “[n]o aggressive actions by the leading influential neighborhood community leaders will call for attacking another party.”\textsuperscript{141} It prohibited the planning or threatening of murder. In addition, Article I indicated that each party had a right to security and freedom from

\textsuperscript{132} \textsc{Muhammad}, supra note 103, at 46; Katz & Ford, supra note 5.
\textsuperscript{133} \textsc{Muhammad}, supra note 103, at 46 (emphasis in original).
\textsuperscript{134} Brian Urquhart, Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey 21 (1993).
\textsuperscript{135} Id. at 33, 37.
\textsuperscript{136} A. Sherrills Interview, supra note 4.
\textsuperscript{138} \textsc{Muhammad}, supra note 103, at 17–24. The treaty will be referred to as the Watts Gang Treaty.
\textsuperscript{139} Id. pmbl.
\textsuperscript{140} Id. art. I. This article was based on Article I of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement.
\textsuperscript{141} Id. art. I(1).

fear of attack and that this right would be fully respected.\textsuperscript{142} To achieve these goals, the Treaty acknowledged that a cease-fire between the parties was “a necessary step toward the renewal of peace in Watts, California.”\textsuperscript{143}

Article II formally established a general cease-fire between the four gangs in Watts.\textsuperscript{144} The language again mirrored the terms of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement. “No conflict of the land, that is drive-by shootings and random slaying or any community representative organizations shall commit any warlike or hostile acts against the other parties or against innocent civilians in the neighborhoods under the influence of that community representative.”\textsuperscript{145}

Article III addressed social and economic factors. It recognized the importance of supporting Black businesses, economic development, and the advancement of educational programs.\textsuperscript{146} Accordingly, “no favoritism or back-stabbing” would be tolerated under the truce.\textsuperscript{147} In addition, the Treaty indicated it was not meant to establish, recognize, strengthen, or weaken any parties existing customs or rights.\textsuperscript{148}

Finally, Article IV addressed the rights of non-gang members as well as several administrative matters. It acknowledged that existing “rules and regulations” among the gangs had prevented “non-community representatives and common citizens from crossing the so-called fighting lines or entering the areas between the lines.”\textsuperscript{149} Such rules and regulations “shall not be supported.”\textsuperscript{150}

With respect to the Treaty’s implementation, the document indicated that it would replace any existing agreements between the parties.\textsuperscript{151} The designated representatives of the four gangs would sign the Treaty.\textsuperscript{152} Each party would receive one copy. Additional copies would be provided to local groups. The document included four signature lines and noted that the four representatives would sign in the presence of mediators from the Fruit of Islam.\textsuperscript{153}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{142} Id. art. I(2).
\item \textsuperscript{143} Id. art. I(3).
\item \textsuperscript{144} Id. art. II. This article was based on Article II of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Id. art. II(1).
\item \textsuperscript{146} Id. art. III. Neither the preamble nor Article III(1) have a counterpart in the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement.
\item \textsuperscript{147} Id. art. III(1).
\item \textsuperscript{148} Id. art. III(2). This article was based on Article IV(3) of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Id. art. IV(1). This article was based on Article V(4) of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Id. art. IV(2).
\item \textsuperscript{152} Id. art. IV(3).
\item \textsuperscript{153} Id. art. IV. The participation of mediators from the Fruit of Islam can be attributed to the role of Muslim religious leaders in supporting the Treaty drafters. The Fruit of Islam are members of the Nation of Islam, which had a strong presence in south Los Angeles. Andrea Ford & Russell Chandler, A Growing Force and Presence: The Young Men of the Nation of Islam Are a Common Sight in the Black Neighborhoods of Los Angeles, L.A. TIMES (Jan. 25,
The Watts Gang Treaty included two annexes, which were also influenced by the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement.\textsuperscript{154} Annex I included a “Plan of Re-Opening Territory.”\textsuperscript{155} This provision used language from Annex I of the Armistice Agreement, which established a timetable for troop withdrawals. It also introduced a new concept—a training facility—that would provide instructional opportunities for former gang members. Annex II addressed the termination of “false barriers” in Watts.\textsuperscript{156} Presumably, the term “false barriers” referred to the demarcation of gang territory by the respective gangs.

In addition to the Treaty, Daude Sherrills drafted a separate document, \textit{United Black Community Code}, to serve as a code of conduct for gang members.\textsuperscript{157} The preamble indicated that signatories accepted “the duty to honor, uphold and defend the spirit of the red, blue and purple, to teach the [B]lack family its legacy and protracted struggle for freedom and justice.”\textsuperscript{158} Several standards of behavior were identified, including limiting drug and alcohol consumption and refraining from using derogatory words directed at women and Black men.\textsuperscript{159} The Code also imposed rules of behavior when gang members traveled outside their territory, such as prohibiting “throwing” gang signs or wearing provocative clothing.\textsuperscript{160} In addition, the Code promoted literacy programs, school attendance, voter registration, investment pools, cultural events, and a food bank.\textsuperscript{161} It even proposed the establishment of a financial hardship fund, which would be created by annual dues of $100 per gang member.\textsuperscript{162}

Initially, no official signing ceremony occurred although the Treaty symbolized the goals of the peace process.\textsuperscript{163} Perhaps the defining moment of the truce process occurred on April 26, 1992, when a group of Grape Street Crips from the Jordan Downs housing project entered “enemy territory” in the Imperial Courts housing project, which was the home of the PJ

\textsuperscript{154} Watts Gang Treaty, supra note 138. The Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement contained three annexes.
\textsuperscript{155} Id. This article was based on Annex I (Plan of Withdrawal from Al Faluja) of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement.
\textsuperscript{156} Id. This article was based on Annex II (Demarcation of the Western and Eastern Fronts in Palestine) of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement.
\textsuperscript{157} CHANG, supra note 8, at 366; Katz & Ford, supra note 5; MUHAMMAD, supra note 103, at 47.
\textsuperscript{158} Katz & Ford, supra note 5. The colors red, blue, and purple are associated with the respective gangs in Watts. Id.
\textsuperscript{159} Id.
\textsuperscript{160} Id.
\textsuperscript{161} Id.
\textsuperscript{162} Id.
\textsuperscript{163} A. Sherrills Interview, supra note 4; see also HAYDEN, supra note 23, at 189. A ceremonial signing occurred two years later on April 29, 1994 at the Imperial Courts housing project. D. Sherrills Interview, supra note 4; see also CHANG, supra note 8, at 518.
Crips. Several advocates of the gang truce movement were present, including Daude and Aqeela Sherrills (of the Jordan Downs housing project) and Dewayne Holmes and Tony Bogard (of the Imperial Courts housing project). The senior leaders of the respective gangs entered the local gym to continue negotiations while the younger members waited outside. Suspicion soon gave way to conversation. Don Gordon, a member of the Grape Street Crips, began playing music and other gang members began to socialize. His memories of that moment reveal how significant this moment was to the gang community.

When they opened the gym up, it was the most beautiful thing that you could ever see in your life. It was what we had been working for. When they opened the gym up, and our big homiez and their big homiez came out hugging each other, and kissing each other, all the people started hollering, and everybody just collided. . . . When they came out, everybody just collided. It was on. It was just beautiful. Talk about power. Talk about strength. Man, they made a long chain of all hugs and handshakes.

Aqeela Sherrills has a similar recollection of that night. As word began to spread about the burgeoning peace agreement, he recalled “[t]he young cats from the Imperial Courts, they was like, ‘Man you all wit it? You all wit the peace?’ And we was like, ‘Yeah, we wit it!’” At that point, the truce became reality to Sherrills. “[I]t was like, ‘Fuck it, it’s on?’ People yelling it, house to house, it was unbelievable, you could see people coming outside, ‘It’s on! The peace treaty is on!’” The celebration continued through the night. The next day, gang members from Jordan Downs hosted their counterparts from Nickerson Gardens.

On April 28, 1992, a large group from the Watts community drove by bus to Los Angeles City Hall seeking political support for their peace efforts. Their bus transportation had been arranged by Jim Brown through his Amer-I-Can Program. Several members from the truce delegation spoke during the public comments portion of the Council meeting, including Aqeela Sherrills (Jordan Downs), Dewayne Holmes (Imperial Courts), and Twilight Bey. According to the Council minutes:

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164 AFARY, supra note 7, at 77–78.
165 Id.
166 Id.
167 Id.
168 JAH & SHÀ’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 95 (interview with Don Gordon).
169 Duane, supra note 56, at 62.
170 Id.
171 Id.
172 Id.
173 A. Sherrills Interview, supra note 4.
174 HayDEN, supra note 23, at 189–90; see also AFARY, supra note 7, at 78.
175 Bey Interview, supra, note 4.
176 Los Angeles City Council, Transcript of Council Meeting 27 (Apr. 28, 1992) (on file with author) [hereinafter L.A. City Council Transcript].
The representatives of the American [Amer-I-Can] Program stated that the reason for escalated gang and drug related activities in minority communities was caused by social conditions in the low-income areas of the City, the significant high school dropout rate and unemployment. They requested the City’s financial assistance in achieving peace among the various gang members who have offered to work with the youth in the community to rebuild their neighborhoods, improve the school system and provide more jobs for youth.\textsuperscript{176}

Despite their entreaties, the Council declined to offer meaningful assistance. Councilwoman Joan Milke Flores, whose district included Watts, encouraged the speakers to contact the Community Development Department and seek assistance in applying for grant funding.\textsuperscript{177} Aqeela Sherrills recalls that the Council’s lack of interest in their proposal was evident: they “ushered us out of there as quickly as they possibly could.”\textsuperscript{178}

The experience at City Hall reflects the challenges facing this social movement. Gang leaders recognized the value of political support and the importance of economic development. Lobbying City Hall was a reasonable strategy. However, political leaders were skeptical and, ultimately, unsupportive.

II. ENTRY INTO FORCE

The Watts Gang Treaty was now in force. Even without political support, the Treaty had a significant effect in reducing gang violence in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{179} Indeed, its impact was almost immediate.\textsuperscript{180}

A. Implementation and Impact

1. The Rodney King Assault Trial Verdict

On April 29, 1992, a jury in Simi Valley, California acquitted four white police officers in the beating of Rodney King.\textsuperscript{181} In Watts and throughout Los Angeles, the jury’s decision was surprising and yet expected. It was surprising that the legal system would allow such an outcome in a highly

\textsuperscript{176} Id.
\textsuperscript{177} Id.
\textsuperscript{178} CHANG, supra note 8, at 368.
\textsuperscript{179} Paul Cotton, Violence Decreases with Gang Truce, 268 J. AM. MED. ASSOC. 443, 444 (1992).
\textsuperscript{180} Duane, supra note 56, at 62.
publicized trial with clear video evidence of guilt. And yet, the outcome was expected because it simply reaffirmed the experience of the Black community in the criminal justice system. This perspective was captured by Aqeela Sherrills:

We felt like our cries for help were falling consistently on deaf ears, because of this label “gangs” that was put on us. It dehumanized the people behind it, desensitized the public to our plight, so therefore, regardless of what we said, the system—even though they saw this video, and we had been complaining about this for years—still it was like “oh, that’s not happening to folks.”

A field coordinator for Community Youth Gang Services in Los Angeles offered a similar observation. “[W]hen the verdict came in, it was like a 10.0 earthquake that woke everyone up, especially gang members, to the injustice that is happening to minorities. The verdict helped push the process together. The across-the-board not-guilty verdict was a real slap in the face, whether you’re a gang member or Joe Citizen.”

The acquittal ignited rage in minority communities throughout Los Angeles. Within forty-five minutes of the verdict’s announcement, protest groups began to form. The growing anger reflected long and deep-seated frustration toward the social, economic, legal, and political inequalities that existed in Watts and throughout Los Angeles. To community members, this was not a riot—it was the second uprising, 27 years after the first uprising in Watts.
The first acts of violence appeared in south Los Angeles in the afternoon. They gradually spread throughout the city. Over the course of four days, violence and destruction overwhelmed the community. Federal troops and the National Guard were called to quell the violence. By May 3, 1992, civil unrest had subsided. However, the human toll was significant. Dozens of people were killed and thousands were injured. Property damage exceeded $775 million, and the majority of the destruction occurred in south Los Angeles.

Amid this violence, the nascent gang truce held. During the rebellion, there were no killings or acts of violence between gang members in Watts. While at times tenuous, the truce held during its early months. Drive-by shootings decreased—from 162 in a six-week period in 1991 to 85 during that same period in 1992.

2. The Treaty’s Short-Term Impact

Medical records from local hospitals provide further evidence of the Treaty’s immediate impact. According to an emergency room physician at Martin Luther King, Jr. Hospital in south Los Angeles, Black men were routinely admitted every week with gunshot wounds before the truce. After the truce, this changed. “The first week I worked after the riot there was not a single case of gunshot wound in an African-American male, which is unheard of.” These observations were reinforced by medical studies, which concluded, “[t]here was a statistical decrease in the number of gunshot wound victims treated at King/Drew Medical Center since the Los Angeles riot.” Moreover, the racial distribution of gunshot victims treated at King/Drew Medical Center further affirmed these findings. Before the Watts Treaty, the racial distribution of gunshot victims was 50% African American.

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192 Seth Mydans, After the Riots: ‘Trial and Error’ in Los Angeles as Gangs Maintain Truce, N.Y. TIMES, May 18, 1992, at B8; see also FELKER-KANTOR, supra note 46, at 240.
193 Cotton, supra note 179, at 443.
194 Id.
195 Id.
196 Gary J. Ordog et al., Incidence of Gunshot Wounds at a County Hospital Following the Los Angeles Riot and a Gang Truce, 34 J. TRAUMA 779, 779 (1993), but see also Samuel Castellanos, supra note 46, at 240.
The Watts Gang Treaty

2022] The Watts Gang Treaty 141

and 50% Hispanic.197 After the Treaty was adopted by the predominately Black gangs in Watts, there were far fewer Black gunshot victims. At this point, the racial distribution of gunshot victims was 80% Hispanic and only 20% Black.198 Even the local funeral home in Watts noted the Treaty’s impact in reducing gang violence.199

Anecdotal evidence indicates the gang truce had a noticeable impact throughout the Watts community. Gang members were the first to observe the Treaty’s impact. Twilight Bey noted that “people can go anywhere they want” and “children can walk down the streets and play.”200 The Treaty brought families together, many of whom had been separated because of the gang conflict. One gang member observed, “that’s when we started to realize that some of us were kinfolks, and we never even knew it.”201 The Treaty also brought rivals together. “I started feeling good when I started to see brothers open up and take other brothers to their parents’ houses. That’s something way out to do with your rival. To take your rival to your parents’ house. Then we started going places together, going over to each other’s houses, hanging out all day.”202

This new freedom of movement extended throughout the community. A local resident explained that “[n]ow it’s quiet, peaceful.”203 This resident felt comfortable allowing her young child to play in her front yard. “I don’t mind them playing outside now. You can take a walk, water your grass. You don’t have to worry about anything.”204 Youth teams could now compete within the Watts Friendship Sports League without fear of indiscriminate attacks or worrying about their uniform colors. According to a youth coach, “[w]e’re able to go to Imperial Courts and not fear for our lives. We’re able to go to Jordan Downs and feel good about playing.”205 Community leaders also recognized the long-term benefits. Sports teams motivated children and kept them from becoming involved in the gangs.

While many gang members supported the Treaty, some were initially skeptical that it would change behavior.206 Others were unwilling to accept

197 Id. at 779–80.
198 Id.
200 JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 334 (interview with “Twilight Bey”).
201 Id. at 257 (interview with “Leon”).
202 201 Id. at 257 (interview with “Leon”).
203 Cotton, supra note 179, at 443; Ford, supra note 199.
204 Cotton, supra note 179, at 443.
206 This skepticism extended beyond the gangs. According to a medical official in the L.A. County Department of Health Services, the truce was unlikely to have a meaningful impact on gang violence. Cotton, supra note 179, at 443. (They are part of . . . our environment. I find it hard to believe that they have suddenly shaken hands and we have a Middle East peace truce in South Central Los Angeles. Even if we do, that’s just one small part of the gang problem, one small part of town.”).
it. One gang member raised such concerns by noting, "I know my homeboys aren’t going to be with any peace treaty, so I’m not with it. Man, that ain’t going to last."\textsuperscript{207} Another gang member expressed similar concerns. "I didn’t really like the [P]eace [T]reaty anyway. If I kill you today, then one of your homies who’s like 11 or 12 now is gonna remember it, and when he gets older he’s gonna blow my head off. That’s what’s happening today."\textsuperscript{208}

However, other gang members were willing to believe the Treaty could work. Some even entered “enemy” territory to test the Treaty. As described by Ronald “Kartoon” Antwine, a prominent member of the Bounty Hunters gang from Nickerson Gardens, “[o]ne day I said, ‘Let’s find out,’ and we all started walking through the Nickersons, Bloods and Crips. The young homies were stunned, but they joined in. It was beautiful.”\textsuperscript{209} A similar experience was described by another gang member:

I was standing on the other side of the projects, and everybody was running around saying, “There’s a Crip walking through the neighborhood.” He was with one of the guys from the Villains [a Blood]. So we were wondering what they were up to. The youngsters were running around preparing to get the dude. The Crip stepped to some of the older dudes that were sitting out there, along with me and a couple of other guys, and he said, “I know I’m in violation, but I think it’s time for brothers out here to come to peace. It’s time to stop all of this. If you brothers are going to do me, go ahead and do me now. Whatever, man, I just feel like it’s time for somebody to step up and say it’s time to have some peace over here.”\textsuperscript{210}

As news of the Treaty spread, trust grew and support extended throughout the community.\textsuperscript{211}

3. The Treaty’s Long-Term Impact

The Treaty’s long-term impact was also significant. Crime statistics reveal a pronounced decrease in violence in south Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{212} In addition, gang homicides in Los Angeles County fell during this period, from 803 in

\textsuperscript{207} JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 49 (interview with “Red”).

\textsuperscript{208} Michael Krikorian, War and Peace in Watts, Part Two, L.A. WEEKLY (July 14, 2005), https://www.laweekly.com/war-and-peace-in-watts-part-two/, archived at perma.cc/8QLC-GA28 (interview with “Scrap”). Another gang member raised similar concerns. “I hope it does [last], but it probably won’t . . . People’s brothers been killed, their mothers, fathers. There are too many grudges.” Terry, supra note 3, at A21.

\textsuperscript{209} Krikorian, supra note 208 (interview with “Scrap”).

\textsuperscript{210} JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 256 (interview with “Leon”).

\textsuperscript{211} Id. at 73 (interview with “Angelo”); see also Ford & Rivera, supra note 3.

1992 to 399 in 1998.213 By 1999, homicides dropped to their lowest levels in thirteen years.214 Drive-by shootings by gangs in the city of Los Angeles also decreased during this period, from 1,548 in 1991 to 1,070 by 1993.215 While numerous factors contributed to the reduction, criminologists, police officials, and medical researchers all cited “periodic truces among violent street gangs” as a contributing factor.216

To be clear, gang violence did not end in Watts. On January 13, 1994, for example, Tony Bogard was shot and killed at the Imperial Courts housing project.217 On January 10, 2004, Aqeela Sherrills’s son was shot eight times and killed while visiting home from college.218 Such individual tragedies continued to occur. But the overall reduction in gang deaths was noticeable.219 As stated by the police commander overseeing south Los Angeles, “[t]here’s no question there has been a real decrease in violence among [B]lack gangs.”220 He pointed to a decrease in drive-by shootings and murders by Bloods and Crips as two examples. Another L.A. deputy police chief shared the same view: “Just looking at these statistics, one would have to feel it is a very positive situation developing. We hope it is going to last indefinitely, and we’re going to try to do what we can to ensure that it
lasts”221 Yet despite their public statements, law enforcement did little to support the Treaty.222

By its express terms, the Watts Gang Treaty was only applicable to Watts and the four gangs that had participated in negotiations and agreed to its provisions. This explains, in part, why the number of gang-related homicides outside of Watts did not fall.223 In fact, gang violence continued in other communities throughout Los Angeles.224

However, the Treaty served as inspiration and model to other groups. As noted by a gang member from Compton, “[t]he truce started in Watts, then Compton, that’s it, but there were other gangs that were coming to Watts, because that’s like the Holy Grounds, so you could go over there, Blood, Crip, or whoever. If you’re down with Black-on-Black unity, then come on over to the projects.”225 Similar truce efforts began to develop in surrounding areas, including East Los Angeles, Long Beach, Pasadena, and Santa Ana.226 The truce movement soon extended beyond Southern California into other parts of the state and throughout the country, as reflected in a 1993 gang summit in Kansas City.227 Such was the goal of the Treaty’s drafters.

221 Cotton, supra note 179, at 443.
225 JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 76–77 (interview with “Angelo”).
B. Compliance and Enforcement

1. Promoting the Treaty

As with any peaceful settlement between countries, “developing a system to enforce the truce is a major challenge.” Proponents of the Watts Gang Treaty used several strategies to promote compliance.

Gang truce parties became a key strategy for maintaining the peace. These parties brought rival gang members, and eventually their families, together at local parks. Music, food, and sports promoted an atmosphere free from violence. “Children romped, while their mothers chatted. Football, baseball and domino games were organized.” Music at truce parties was carefully chosen to minimize offending rival gangs.

In fact, rap and hip-hop music became an important mechanism for promoting the Treaty. Some local rappers addressed the Treaty in their music, such as the 1993 song, Peace Treaty, by Kam:

Bound by a peace treaty . . .
It’s now or never.
More than ever,
Black people have to stick together.
But yo. Let’s hear it for the Bloods and the Crips.
I gots to admit it, y’all brothers did it.
I just hope it don’t cease.
For the sake of all the homies that’s restin’ in peace.

In his song, Gotta Lotta Love, rapper Ice-T sang “[t]he gang truce is on, so you wear whatever.” As a member of the Crips, Ice-T’s lyrics and support for the Treaty resonated with gang members. Such acts of cultural support

228 UMEMOTO, supra note 16, at 166.
230 Musical artists were associated with particular gangs. See AVERY, supra note 7, at 83.
231 KAM, supra note 8.
232 ICE-T, supra note 8.
233 Ice-T referred to the Watts Gang Treaty as “the most dramatic turning point in American history from my perspective.” ICE-T, Forward to JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 9.
are not surprising.234 There is a long history in Watts and south Los Angeles of using music and art to address social issues.235

Gang leaders worked to reduce provocations in other ways. For example, certain colors had long been associated with distinct gangs: blue represented the Crips, and red represented the Bloods.236 These colors served to identify both friends and enemies. Because of the Treaty, these colors became less provocative, something that local residents observed: “I see them (gang members) walking together with blue and red rags (bandannas). A few months ago, whenever you saw a red rag, he was looking for a blue rag to kill.”237 Clothing with blue and red colors was distributed at various events with messages of unity and positive references to the truce.238 Posters acknowledging the Peace Treaty often referenced the Crips and Bloods and included both colors and symbols of peace.239


236 See Afary, supra note 7, at 82; Ford, supra, note 199.

237 Ford, supra note 199.

238 Afary, supra note 7, at 82–83.

239 The United Black Code, which accompanied the Treaty, included a provision that gang members should not wear provocative clothing, including gang colors. See Katz & Ford, supra note 5.
Sports also served as an opportunity for community building. Propo-
nents of the Treaty organized football, basketball, and baseball games to
build positive relationships within the community.\textsuperscript{241} Each neighborhood
was encouraged to put together athletic teams. These activities gave gang
members an opportunity to develop relationships with their peers in the com-
munity and defuse potential conflicts. Hundreds of people attended these
games.\textsuperscript{242}

Various groups within the community supported the gang truce. Long-
standing organizations, such as the Coalition Against Police Abuse and the
Amer-I-Can Program, used their political and community networks to sup-
port the truce.\textsuperscript{243} Newly established groups also supported the Treaty includ-
ing Community in Support of the Gang Truce, Hands Across Watts, Mothers
Reclaiming Our Children, and Focusing on and Creating Ethnic Solidarity.\textsuperscript{244}
While these groups were established to promote distinct goals, they each

\begin{flushright}
\textit{Poster acknowledging Watts Gang Treaty.}\textsuperscript{240}
\end{flushright}
recognized the value of supporting the gang truce.245 These groups engaged in various projects to promote peace. They conducted fundraising campaigns, including car washes and clothing drives.246 They organized rallies to generate support for the truce.247 They engaged in political advocacy.248 They held workshops on conflict resolution.249 They even filmed videos to celebrate the truce and encourage peace within the community.250

Many of these events addressed the Treaty as part of a broader social justice movement. In May 1993, for example, a group of activists inspired by the gang truce organized a poetry festival, Peace L.A.: The Poetics of a Gang Truce, to highlight community concerns, including lack of employment opportunities, limited funding for education, and the failure of the political process to address local problems.251 Event organizers viewed poetry as a way to bridge the gap between inspiration and action. According to one of the organizers, “[t]he gang truce document is far-reaching. It’s a working piece of art we can act on, help make real. This is a celebration of peace, not war.”252

The work of Community in Support of the Gang Truce reflected the broad nature of the community response. Its mandate recognized “the truce is not just a cessation of gang warfare, but a dynamic militant movement for social justice.”253 The group recognized the risks faced by the Treaty’s supporters and their efforts to promote unity among competing gangs. To support the Treaty, the group developed several programs, including a speaker’s bureau and a “grass-roots rumor-control network to counteract misinformation.”254 The group denounced the mass incarceration of minority youth and lobbied for jobs.255 It called for economic support programs, from the establishment of neighborhood cooperative zones to funding for local schools and community programs.256 It targeted labor and religious organizations, social

245 Id. at 75–77; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Mothers Reclaiming our Children, in THE PEOPLE, PLACE, AND SPACE READER 122 (Jen Jack Gieseking et al. eds., 2014).
247 Mydans, supra note 2, at A1.
248 AFARY, supra note 7, at 102–13.
249 Id. at 110–13.
250 Independent Video Archive, See Watts Up?, MEDIA.BURN (1992), mediaburn.org/video/watts-up/, archived at https://perma.cc/XJG3-9QWM. The Watts Up? Video was produced with the support of several groups, including the Coalition Against Police Abuse, Hands Across Watts, Mothers Reclaiming our Children, and the Amer-I-Can Program.
252 Id.
254 Id. at 265.
256 Zinzun, supra note 253, at 265.
The Watts Gang Treaty

clubs, and businesses and promoted a variety of causes, including criminal justice reform. To further support the Treaty, the organization even drafted a truce plan for the broader Los Angeles community.\footnote{Kelly, supra note 97, at 48.}

In May 1993, Hands Across Watts helped organize the Los Angeles Gang Peace Summit, which was held to bring together gang members from throughout the city. As described in the New York Times, it was “part business meeting and part motivational seminar.”\footnote{Seth Mydans, Gangs Go Public in New Fight for Respect, N.Y. Times (May 2, 1993), https://www.nytimes.com/1993/05/02/us/gangs-go-public-in-new-fight-for-respect.html, archived at https://perma.cc/ZZB4-VDZC.} During the conference, a video by Stanley Tookie Williams, the purported co-founder of the Crips, was shown to summit attendees. The video was recorded by Williams from death row in San Quentin with the assistance of Barbara Becnel, a member of Hands Across Watts. In his recorded remarks, Williams expressed support for the gang truce movement.\footnote{Barbara Cottman Becnel, Stanley “Tookie” Williams: The Crips Co-Founder Now Re- alizes Violence Does Not Solve Anything, L.A. Times (Aug. 22, 1993), https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-08-22-op-26460-story.html, archived at https://perma.cc/L5D5-2QLL.} Williams had previously been skeptical about the Treaty, but came to recognize that it could succeed.\footnote{Id. at 145 (interview with “General Robert Lee”).} He continued to express support for the truce movement until his execution in 2005.

Local media outlets in Los Angeles offered a valuable forum for promoting the Treaty.\footnote{AFARY, supra note 7, at 90.} The KJLH radio station, which was owned by Stevie Wonder, established a radio show titled Peace Treaty that was hosted by former gang members.\footnote{Gronau, supra note 9; JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 47, 249. See generally Phylis Johnson, KJLH-FM and the Los Angeles Riots of 1992: Compton’s Neighborhood Station in the Aftermath of the Rodney King Verdict (2009).} The show “provided opportunities for many ordinary African Americans to participate in an ongoing dialogue on the gang truce movement” and “gave gang members a forum through which they could initiate truce activities in their local communities.”\footnote{Id. at 72.} In fact, several gang members noted how the radio program influenced their decision to support the truce.\footnote{JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 30–31, 47, 145, 234–35, 249.} As noted by one gang member, “that program saved a whole lot of lives.”\footnote{Id. at 145 (interview with “General Robert Lee”).} Another gang member observed how the program “allowed us to all come together and talk about changing things.”\footnote{Id. at 47 (interview with “Red”).} Other Black-owned media, such as The Sentinel newspaper, played an important role in addressing the social, economic, and political conditions affecting minority communities in Los Angeles. Given concerns about the mainstream

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media's depiction of the truce, these alternative media outlets were particularly important.267

2. Challenges to the Treaty

Political leaders had mixed reactions to the Treaty.268 Some politicians became strong supporters of the gang truce and were sincere advocates. Congresswoman Maxine Waters endorsed the truce and challenged assertions that the Treaty was ineffective.269 To promote similar peace-building efforts in other parts of Los Angeles, Waters referenced the Treaty as a template for gang cooperation. California State Senator Tom Hayden was also a strong advocate of the Treaty and even hired Dewayne Holmes in 1996 to work in his Senate office, a reflection of his commitment to support the treaty drafters.270

Other politicians were skeptical of the Treaty and reluctant to provide the gang authors with any credibility. Of course, they celebrated the reduction in gang violence in Los Angeles. Some even took credit for the reduction in violence. Local leaders, including the mayor, police chief, and district attorney attributed this reduction to new legislation and heightened policing efforts.271 They cited gang injunctions, curfews, and the state’s adoption of the three-strikes law in 1994 in support of their claims.272 Demographic changes and an improving economy were also offered as explanations.

To the architects of the Treaty, these claims were exaggerated and inaccurate. Daude Sherrills noted, for example, that politicians “always downplayed the gang truce because they didn’t start it, the gangs did.”273 Sherrills added, “[y]ou can bet if the mayor or City Council started up the Watts [G]ang [P]eace [T]reaty, you’d be hearing about it every . . . day.”274 Dewayne Holmes emphasized that “the people on the streets” who were “on the front lines” were overwhelmingly responsible for the decrease in crime.275

267 See Afary, supra note 7, at 70-72, 90; see generally Ronald N. Jacobs, Race, Media and the Crisis of Civil Society: From Watts to Rodney King (2000).
270 See Hayden, supra note 23, at 193.
271 Krikorian, supra note 208.
272 Id.
273 Id.
275 Krikorian, supra note 208.
Some political leaders expressed concern that gangs would grow in strength, focus their efforts on criminal activity, and direct their violence at law enforcement officers. For example, Councilwoman Joan Milke Flores expressed conditional support for the Treaty, but noted that “if the result is that you have one larger gang instead of two smaller gangs . . . I’m not so sure that’s a plus.” L.A. police officials were more direct: “We received intelligence well in advance of the [Rodney King] verdict that there would be certain informal truces among gangs. There is a belief and perception now that . . . they are directing their efforts towards police.” These allegations were made on several occasions. This dynamic was captured by social critic Mike Davis: “the police and military occupiers of Los Angeles give no credence to any peaceful, let alone entrepreneurial, transformation of L.A.’s black gang cultures. The ecumenical movement of the Crips and Bloods is their worst imagining: gang violence no longer random but politicized into a black intifada.” Concerns about growing gang power eventually led to the deployment of crime suppression task forces into the Watts community, despite fears that such efforts would undermine the truce.

On several occasions, police used excessive force to break up truce parties, resulting in violence among attendees and numerous arrests. Watts residents denounced the police intervention, which often occurred with dozens of police in riot gear supported by helicopters. As noted by one long-time resident, the parties were a way of uniting the community. Even if they were loud, “I’d much rather have them doing this than going out and killing each other.” Community activists made similar observations. “If the gangbangers are serious about what they’re trying to do, they should be sensitive to the residents they’re disturbing . . . But for the police to be insensitive to the gangbangers is also a downer. The way they’re responding doesn’t do nothing but incite more things to happen.”

To many, the heavy-handed manner in which law enforcement responded was counterproductive. At one truce party, a young resident ob-

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279 See, e.g., Ben-Ali, supra note 222, at 17.
280 Davis, supra note 187, at 745.
282 Lacey & Hubler, supra note 229.
283 Ford & Rivera, supra note 3.
284 Katz, supra note 277, at B1.
served, “[t]here wasn’t no fighting until the police arrived. . . . They were ready to fight. People didn’t like getting hit, so they fought back.” 285 Such actions undermined the truce by connecting heightened law enforcement activity in the community with the Treaty. 286 When police officers in riot gear entered the community and disrupted social gatherings, it provoked conflict. It also perpetuated the existence of a “martial” state in Watts, where resources were allocated to law enforcement operations at the expense of community building.

The police reaction was not surprising to gang members. 287 They were convinced law enforcement officials actively opposed the treaty. 288 As noted by one gang activist, the police want to destroy gang unity. 289 The police see the Treaty “as a threat and attempt to crush it because it is out of their control.” 290

Such aggressive law enforcement tactics stood in stark contrast to the limited political and economic support offered to the truce movement or broader efforts to revitalize the Watts community. 291 In the aftermath of the uprising, local leaders and community activists called for economic support to rebuild destroyed buildings and generate employment opportunities for local residents. Weeks after the uprising, Mayor Tom Bradley announced the creation of Rebuild L.A., a non-profit organization that would spearhead these efforts. 292 Heralded with much fanfare, the organization had limited success in promoting community revitalization. 293 While Rebuild L.A. worked with several private companies to establish job programs, these efforts did not generate sufficient jobs to create meaningful change in the community. Critics also pointed out that the primary beneficiaries of Rebuild

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287 As explained by Mike Davis, “[t]he ecumenical movement of the Crips and Bloods is their worst imagining: gang violence no longer random but politicized into a black intifada.” FELKER-KANTOR, supra note 46, at 241.
288 Ford & Rivera, supra note 3 (“Worse, some gang members alleged, some police officers appear to be trying to sabotage the truce by harassing gang members, hoping to provoke a violent reaction.”).
289 AFARY, supra note 7, at 94.
290 Id.
L.A. were politicians and corporations instead of the affected communities. By 1999, Rebuild L.A. ceased operations.

In May 1992, a provocative economic proposal was released in Los Angeles, although its origins and authors remain unclear. The proposal called for political leaders to undertake a massive infusion of financial support into the community, including a $3 billion financial commitment to rebuilding Los Angeles. It highlighted five broad initiatives: (1) a “face-lift” of the community that would improve structures, buildings, lighting, landscaping, and sanitation; (2) an education initiative to improve L.A. Unified schools as well as increased funding for teachers, school supplies, tutoring programs, and financial incentives for students; (3) a law enforcement program to revise policing; (4) an economic development proposal to encourage loans for local businesses; and (5) a human welfare proposal to improve hospitals and health care centers as well as a demand for the wholesale restructuring of the welfare system. In return for implementing these demands, the proposal indicated that “the Bloods/Crips Organization” would undertake to provide financial support for rebuilding Los Angeles. Unsurprisingly, the proposal gained little traction. Apart from its cost, the proposal required city leaders to respond within seventy-two hours along with the admonition, “[m]eet these demands and the targeting of police officers will stop!” As a result, it was never seriously considered.

The lack of meaningful economic support for the Watts Gang Treaty is one of the most significant failings of political and business leaders. In contrast, gang members recognized the importance of economic development. As noted by a local community activist, “[i]f [we] don’t address the issues of unemployment and underemployment and poverty, we are inviting (the warfare) back.” In June 1992, for example, Daude Sherrills helped establish Hands Across Watts as a non-profit organization to promote jobs and economic opportunities in the community. Sherrills noted that “[t]his is
our first step.” Tony Bogard was more direct: “Economics plays a major role in maintaining the peace. If we had industry and venture capital we wouldn’t have all the drug selling and robbing that’s going on. Economics is the key to everything.” Other local groups, including the Coalition Against Police Abuse and Community in Support of the Gang Truce developed job training programs for local residents, including silk-screening classes and training on the use of pesticides for pest control.

C. Desuetude

I. An Ending

While the truce held in Watts for several years, tensions eventually began to emerge. Given the ebb and flow of conflict, this should be expected. Gang disputes are similar to other forms of violent conflict, which also go “through stages of escalation and decline.” Demographic, economic, and societal developments also played a significant role in explaining this fluctuation. The lack of economic opportunities had a profound influence on the community. As noted by Dewayne Holmes, “[w]e are seeing people going back to what they used to be doing, the familiar ways of surviving—selling drugs, robbing, gambling, stealing, hustling . . . People do all sorts of things to live, to survive, to pay their rent and their bills.”

It is also unsurprising that support for the truce waned as gang leaders who had been involved in the original negotiations stepped away from their gang affiliations. Aqeela Sherrills moved to New Jersey and became a nationally recognized gang violence and community intervention specialist. In July 2021, he was invited to the White House to meet with President Biden. Daude Sherrills was instrumental in establishing Hands Across
Watts and has continued his activism in the community. He is also producing a documentary on the Treaty. Twilight Bey eventually moved to London and used his experiences to address gang conflict in England. Soon after the Treaty was finalized, Dewayne Holmes was arrested and sentenced to seven years in state prison. Yet even from prison, Holmes urged the community to support the Treaty: “Watts is the foundation of the Truce and if it fails so shall every gang that stands with it. I’m asking you to do whatever you can so that this does not happen. Don’t let everything that we have worked for be all for nothing. Please! Who among us is listening?”

Upon his release, Holmes went to work for California State Senator Tom Hayden and became a community organizer, including serving as an active member of Focusing on and Creating Ethnic Solidarity. Unfortunately, not all the Treaty drafters survived the conflict. Tony Bogard was killed in a gang-related shooting less than two years after the Treaty was finalized.

As new gang members entered the community, they did not have the same connections to the Treaty and began to challenge the status quo. The racial composition in Watts also changed—from a predominantly Black community to a more diverse population. In addition, economic factors played a role in the Treaty’s gradual demise. Inequality became even more pronounced in Los Angeles, placing further pressure on the Treaty. Indeed, employment opportunities fell drastically in Watts, which lost 55,000 jobs between 1992 and 1999. Many of the structures destroyed during the 1992 uprising were never rebuilt.
By 2005, news reports indicated that the Treaty had died, although Aqeela Sherrills explained that it simply faded away.\textsuperscript{322} Unlike its origins in April 1992, there is no single moment that would clearly reflect the Treaty’s desuetude. But as described by a former \textit{Los Angeles Times} reporter, the change was evident:

The nights of mixing purple, blue and red are over. Gone are the days when the Grape Street Watts Crips from Jordan Downs (purple), the Bounty Hunter Bloods from Nickerson Gardens (red) and the Project, or PJ, Crips from Imperial Courts (blue) could encounter one another without fear of death . . . So far this year there have been at least seven killings in and around the projects, dozens of shootings, a reported 187 violent crimes and, with all that, the acknowledgment that there is no more treaty. Long gone are the joyous parties and rowdy football games that homies from the projects threw and played together. Gone are the days when a gangster from the Jordans who had a child with a lady from the Nickerson could have a lazy Sunday-afternoon barbecue in peace.\textsuperscript{323}

2. \textit{A Legacy}

While the Watts Gang Treaty is no longer in force, its legacy remains. The Watts community takes great pride in the Treaty. The architects of the truce view their work as a profound accomplishment. The broader Los Angeles community celebrates it as well.\textsuperscript{324}

\footnotetext{322}{Stoltze, \textit{supra} note 318.}


\footnotetext{324}{In June 2019, KCET and Tastemade produced a short documentary on the social and economic situation in Watts. The documentary was titled “W.A.T.T.S: We Are Taught to Survive,” and was part of a larger series called “Broken Bread.” See \url{https://www.kcet.org/shows/broken-bread/broken-bread-episode-guide}, archived at https://perma.cc/UML9-EKPE.}
In April 2012, the Watts community celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Treaty. At the event, Aqeeqa and Daude Sherrill as well as other members of the Watts community spoke about the Treaty’s history. They also addressed its legacy in Watts. In 2014, Daude Sherrill marked another anniversary with the following statement on social media:

Today mark the anniversary of the watts Los Angeles truce between gangs . . . 22 years ago brother and sister came together in solidarity to address serious issues that affect the lives of family love[ed] one[s] and friends. The 1992 gang truce save so many lives and launch many social efforts and organization that produce jobs and a better quality of living. So today salute to all those who where [sic] active in those days and salute to all those who are still in the trenches today peace!!

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Treaty, the community held a series of panel discussions, film screenings, and other festivities. Videos

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326 Id.


328 Sherrill Facebook Post, supra note 325.

329 Muhammad, supra note 100.
celebrating the Treaty were also produced. Reflecting on the anniversary, Aqeela Sherrills acknowledged that gang violence had created a war zone and that the people living there still suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, hyper vigilance, and vicarious trauma. Because of this, Sherrills argued it was important for the community to address these harms and recommit itself to peace.

As Watts approaches the thirty-year anniversary of the Treaty, it reflects a community shaped by racial discrimination, marred by violence, and yet inspired by hope. There is an optimism and resilience even as poverty remains.

III. Reflections on the Watts Gang Treaty

The Watts Gang Treaty was the product of a social movement led by gang members. As described by Tom Hayden, “[t]he truce was truly a movement, needing individual steps of courage from the bottom up.”

While social movements can encompass a diverse array of groups and issues, the unique origins of this movement and its ability to generate meaningful change within the gang community in Watts merits further reflection.

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332 Muhammad, supra note 331.


334 HAYDEN, supra note 23, at 189.
A. Understanding the Anatomy of Peace in Watts

1. Credibility

Most significantly, the Treaty was crafted from within the community, by gang members who had a personal stake in its success. They were motivated to save their own lives and to protect their families and friends. The Treaty’s language reflected a formal structure and hierarchy that gang members understood. Moreover, it was explicitly drafted by gang members and directed at them. The Treaty signaled the idea “that black youth were serious.”

Because it had been drafted by their leaders and peers, the truce was seen as credible by gang members. This basic point was made clear by one gang member: “[T]he only way this is going to work is if it is an inside job. It has to be an inside job. Within every hood they have to be peacing with themselves.” Moreover, the internal hierarchy of gang culture ensured compliance as senior leaders had the authority to dissuade errant members inclined to violate the agreement. In fact, the active participation of gang members in monitoring the Treaty was essential. According to Daude Sherrills, “[w]e school those guys that get out and try to be destructive . . . We educate them on the value of the treaty and of unity. We work at it all the time. You’ve got to work on the healing.”

2. Socialization

Gang leaders recognized that group socialization was essential for building trust. Thus, they promoted meetings to bring gang members together. Larger meetings, such as gang truce parties, complete with picnics and sports contests, became commonplace. The consequences of these efforts were pronounced. As described by Ivory Clemons, a gang member liv-
ing in Nickerson Gardens, “[w]e party together every night” and “I embrace fellas who tried to stab and shoot me.”

Inviting close family members to attend these parties sent a clear message of support for the truce. According to a gang member who supported the Treaty, “[t]hat’s how it has to go if you’re really about peace.” When family members and children began attending, truce parties became “indistinguishable from family reunions” and the socialization process was firmly in place.

3. Symbolism

Symbolism was paramount to every aspect of the Treaty and its success. Alluding to its origins in the 1949 Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement, the Treaty drafters acknowledged the historical parallels between the Arab-Israeli conflict and the experiences of “Black America.” By framing their efforts through the language of military conflict and diplomacy, the Treaty drafters generated interest and credibility within the gang community. A cease-fire agreement structured as a treaty between rival gangs was an obvious response to a conflict that killed both “combatants” and “civilians.”

More broadly, the Treaty drafters hoped that Black leaders “would one day get a chance to review the rudimentary principles outlined in every article and annex of the gang truce” and realize how “serious street organizations wanted to see a better way of life while they live and not after they die.”

Perhaps the most powerful symbols of the conflict were the red and blue colors that many gang members wore as a depiction of their respective affiliations. Before the Treaty’s adoption, both gang and non-gang members were often targeted because of the color of their clothing. Advocates of the gang truce reframed these colors as symbols of unity. On some occasions, gang members would carry both red and blue bandannas. On other occasions, red and blue bandannas were tied together as a symbol of unity and a reflection of the truce. According to one gang member, “[t]he little homiez were going to school tying up red rags and blue rags together, telling

345 JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 50 (interview with “Red”).
346 AFARY, supra note 7, at 80.
347 PERRY, supra note 87, at 22.
348 Id. at 10.
350 Terry, supra note 3, at A21.
351 Ford & Rivera, supra note 3; RICE, supra note 41, at 127.
the dudes in the schools, ‘this ain’t what it’s about.’” These colors would regularly appear in posters and clothing, which served as further evidence to gang members and the broader community that the Treaty was working.

4. Empowerment and Respect

For decades, Watts had been ignored by civic leaders. Residents felt isolated, disempowered, and disrespected. The absence of political engagement and economic opportunities created a vacuum. It is not surprising that gangs would emerge in this environment.

The Treaty served to empower the gangs in a non-violent manner. “We are empowering people who have never been empowered before,” noted Daude Sherrills. Treating gang leaders as community leaders with obligations to the broader community reframed the manner in which they viewed their lives. As explained by Aqeela Sherrills, community members have “to become public safety experts themselves by policing their own communities and being responsible for their own neighborhoods.” This realization was painted on a gym wall in the Nickerson Gardens housing project.

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352 JAH & SHAH’KE¥AH, supra note 74, at 257 (interview with “Leon”).
353 D. Sherrills Interview, supra note 4; A. Sherrills Interview, supra note 4.
355 Dunn, supra note 246.
The Treaty offered gang members something that civil society did not—respect. Countless forces marginalized gang members. Police tactics routinely stripped them of their dignity. Lack of employment opportunities prevented them from taking care of themselves and their loved ones. In this environment, there were no meaningful career prospects. In addition, the cycle of violence between gang members perpetuated fear and mistrust. In contrast, gang members felt valued under the Treaty. They also felt respected by their peers. This motivated gang members to continue supporting the Treaty.

Mural located in Watts


358 JAH & SHAH KEYAH, supra note 74, at 217 (interview with “T. Rodgers”).

359 Id. at 300 (interview with “Q-Bone”).

360 Monica C. Bell, Safety, Friendship, and Dreams, 54 HARV. C.R.-C.L. REV. 703 (2019).

361 Ford & Rivera, supra note 3.

362 JAH & SHAH KEYAH, supra note 74, at 97 (interview with Don Gordon).
5. Community Support

The Treaty generated support from local residents, parents, and social activists. Several non-profit organizations with roots in the community were active in supporting the Treaty. While each organization served different constituencies, they shared a common interest in promoting peace. The Amer-I-Can Program offered leadership development and life-skills training. Many gang members participated in the Program and viewed it as a path away from gang life. Communities in Support of the Gang Truce had been formed by community leaders combating police abuse. Mothers Reclaiming Our Children was established by parents in response to the growing crisis of incarceration within communities of color. Hands Across Watts and Focusing on and Creating Ethnic Solidarity were both created by gang members to back the truce. These organizations supported the Treaty through various activities, including public advocacy, community events, workshops on conflict resolution, and promoting employment opportunities.

Religious leaders also played an important role in promoting the Treaty. Indeed, they were involved from the beginning. The Tabernacle of Faith Church in Watts was used as a meeting place in the early stages of the peace process. The Masjid Al Rasul mosque was also an important location for talks. As described by Jitu Sadiki of the Black Awareness Community Development Organization, neutral grounds were essential for these conversations:

In this place, a neutral zone, the guys could cry about their pain, the loss of loved ones . . . The Imam allowed them to discuss and work things out for themselves, but when things got sticky, he would step in and pray about it. Many reminisced about going to school together when they were little, about the invisible borders that rose up between them and didn’t allow them to cross that line. They began to remember the things they did as youngsters.

363 See Message to the Grassroots: We All Need to Support the Gang Truce, MEDIA BURN (Jan. 1, 1993), https://mediaburn.org/video/we-all-need-to-support-the-gang-truce/, archived at https://perma.cc/VQ44-PBLN.


365 Zinzun, supra note 253, at 258, 265.

366 AFARY, supra note 7, at 121–22.

367 Id. at 109, 110–13, 117.

368 The Reverend Charles Mims, Jr. played an important role in promoting gang summits in the late 1980s. See Baker & Stevens, supra note 90.

6. Religion and Spirituality

Religion provided inspiration and a path to redemption.\textsuperscript{370} According to one gang member, the Treaty “was meant to be. This is God’s work. Nobody else could pull people that had been warring like that together and, at the spur of the moment, bring about peace. It’s not possible for any one man to be able to do that. That’s God’s work.”\textsuperscript{371} In fact, many gang members were deeply religious. As explained by Twilight Bey, “[w]e have a strong belief in God, even though we’re out here doing all of these terrible things, and going stark out of our minds, a lot of us believe in God.”\textsuperscript{372} In describing the power of religion and spirituality, T. Rogers noted that “[y]ou have to acknowledge that there is something greater than you.”\textsuperscript{373}

To some, there was even a mystical component to the Watts Gang Treaty. Watts was viewed as the physical and psychological center of Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{374} Aqeela Sherrills also noted how the housing projects in Watts were all connected, akin to ley-lines.\textsuperscript{375} “One of the things I came to is that three of the four major housing projects—the Jordan Downs, Imperial Courts and the Nickerson Gardens—fell in a perfect ninety-degree angle.”\textsuperscript{376} These connections reinforced his belief in the Treaty as a mechanism for uniting the distinct groups living in the projects. According to Sherrills, “[m]y epiphany was if we connected the Jordan Downs and the Nickerson Gardens, if we brought those two neighborhoods together, we would create a domino effect for peace all across the country.”\textsuperscript{377} Oshea Luja also spoke about these connections in his poem, “Historic Watts Ley-lines:"

**Historic Watts Ley-lines Afro Mejicano.**
Lot’s Watta gotta rep my.
Marching down Central Ave. in the drum line.

\textsuperscript{370} D. Sherrills Interview, \textit{supra} note 4; \textit{JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra} note 74, at 217 (interview with “T. Rodgers”) (”[T]here has to be some form of religion, some spirituality in your life. You have to acknowledge that there is something greater than you.”).

\textsuperscript{371} \textit{JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra} note 74, at 259 (interview with “Leon”); see also \textit{id. at} 159 (interview with “Godfather Jimel Barnes”).

\textsuperscript{372} \textit{Id. at} 318 (interview with “Twilight Bey”).

\textsuperscript{373} \textit{Id. at} 217 (interview with “T. Rodgers”). Anthony Perry connected the Treaty’s origins to religious inspiration. \textit{PERRY, supra} note 87, at 16 (”Since one of Black America’s well known civil rights activist, [sic] Ralph Bunche, negotiated the Egyptian/Israeli agreement of 1949, I wonder if he too realized the truth about what Muhammad of Arabia had developed in Medinah?”).

\textsuperscript{374} \textit{CHANG, supra} note 8, at 358.

\textsuperscript{375} A. Sherrills Interview, \textit{supra} note 4; \textit{HAYDEN, supra} note 23, at 186. Ley-lines represent sacred or mystical alignments of buildings and landmarks. The concept of ley-lines rose to prominence in the early twentieth century. \textit{See generally DANNY SULLIVAN, LEY LINES: THE GREATEST LANDSCAPE MYSTERY} (2005); \textit{ALFRED WATKINS, THE OLD STRAIGHT TRACK} (1925).

\textsuperscript{376} \textit{CHANG, supra} note 8, at 360–61.

\textsuperscript{377} \textit{Id.}
The Watts Gang Treaty

No charades Watts parade.
Shout at one time. 378

B. Beyond the Watts Gang Treaty

The Watts Gang Treaty is not the only agreement established between
gangs. Similar truces appeared in other California cities and in other
states.379 Some were inspired by the Watts Gang Treaty.380 Others grew inde-
pendently through local efforts. A review of these agreements reveals a
broad diversity within the truce movement. These agreements involved a
multitude of distinct gangs, whose membership varied based on race and geography.381
Agreements sought to prevent violence between gang mem-
bers, promote economic development, and establish a common front against
racism and discrimination. They reflected the influence of various religious
groups, community organizations, and even politicians.382

The active participation of gang members in monitoring agreements be-
came a model for gang intervention programs throughout the country.383
These programs contained several core features. They used former gang
members to monitor conflict in local communities.384 When conflicts arose,
these individuals worked to mediate disputes. Their familiarity with gang
culture gave them credibility and allowed them to navigate the complex rela-
tionships in the gangs.385 Numerous studies highlight the success of this
strategy.386

In June 1994, for example, two gangs in west Los Angeles negotiated a
truce to end a violent conflict.387 The morphology of this conflict mirrored

378 Luja, supra note 34.
379 See, e.g., Brian Charles, Baltimore Gangs Agree to Truce Similar to One During 1992
perma.cc/DVZ9-F98D; Efrain Hernandez Jr., Latino Gang Truce in Valley is Praised Despite
is Arrested by DEA Agents, L.A. TIMES, Sept. 26, 1992, at B1; Lisa Richardson, Once-Bitter
Enemies Unite to Help Others, L.A. TIMES, Sept. 10, 1992, at B3; Eric Young, Gang Truce
380 MUHAMMAD, supra note 103, at 37–41; cf. RICE, supra note 41, at 127, 131.
381 AFARY, supra note 7, at 98–102; Juan Francisco Esteve Martinez, Urban Street Activ-
ists: Gang and Community Efforts to Bring Justice to Los Angeles Neighborhoods, in GANGS
AND SOCIETY: ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES 95 (Louis Kontos et al., 2003).
382 AFARY, supra note 7, at 98–102.
383 See Jennifer M. Whitehill, Daniel W. Webster & Jon S. Vernick, Street Conflict Media-
tion to Prevent Youth Violence: Conflict Characteristics and Outcomes, 19 INJURY PREVEN-
tION 204, 204 (2012).
384 A. Sherrills Interview, supra note 4; Whitehill et al., supra note 383, at 204.
385 A. Sherrills Interview, supra note 4.
386 See generally DANIEL W. WEBSTER, JENNIFER MENDEL WHITEHILL, JON S. VERNICK &
ELIZABETH M. PARKER., EVALUATION OF BALTIMORE'S Safe Streets Program: Effects on Atti-
tudes, Participants’ Experiences and Gun Violence 2 (2011); Wesley G. Skogan et al., Evalua-
387 UMEMOTO, supra note 16, at 143.
the story of the Watts Gang Treaty in several respects. It was a racialized conflict between two gangs, although V-13 was a predominantly Latino gang whereas the members of the Shoreline Crips were Black. The conflict began with individual attacks and retaliatory shootings between the gangs. Both gang members and non-gang members were injured and killed. The growing death toll led gang members to seek a negotiated solution. The truce itself was brokered by gang leaders with significant support from community activists. The success of the truce could be measured by a tangible reduction in gang attacks. Finally, the truce required active monitoring, both by gang members and the local community.

A very different gang truce emerged in Los Angeles in September 1993. A series of internal discussions within the leadership of the Mexican Mafia culminated in a large-scale meeting near downtown Los Angeles where gang leaders announced a “no drive-by” edict. As described by the Los Angeles Times, “under the new rules, gangs are still allowed to attack rivals with whom they have a personal beef, but they have been instructed to do it face-to-face, taking care not to harm bystanders.” The consequences for non-compliance were significant, and sanctions would be imposed in jail or prison if a gang member was arrested for a drive-by shooting. Unlike other truce efforts, this gang truce appeared to be motivated by strategic considerations among the gang leadership to consolidate their power and protect their lucrative drug trade.

In 2000, State Senator Tom Hayden proposed a Blueprint for Gang Peace that built upon his own experiences working with gang members in Los Angeles. The proposal included five core provisions: (1) the creation

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388 Id. at 2.
390 UMEMOTO, supra note 16, at 143.
392 UMEMOTO, supra note 16, at 166–68.
395 Lopez & Katz, supra note 226.
398 HAYDEN, supra note 23, at 50–51.
of a peace process coordinator; (2) a peace council; (3) violence prevention projects; (4) education and skill training; and (5) jobs. The document reflected Hayden’s long-held belief in the importance of working within the gang community to promote peace. It also recognized the essential nature of economic development.

In 2004, Stanley Tookie Williams released his Protocol for Peace. The Protocol was drafted to serve as a template for gangs seeking to promote peace and reconciliation. Like the Watts Gang Treaty, it was drafted to appear as a legal document. While it was similar to the Treaty, it also contained additional features. It began with an affirmation:

This word-of-honor agreement binds the aforementioned rival factions to put aside their differences, be they ideological, political, religious, philosophical, racial, economical, geographical, criminal, material, personal and collective retaliation, or any social reliance on violence or murder. This document is an oath of responsibility for the parties involved to co-exist in peace and reconciliation for the security of their communities, residents and offspring.

Substantively, the Protocol established a cease-fire and the development of buffer zones between the parties. In addition, it called for the formation of a Peacekeepers and Monitoring Committee that would work to promote peace and community stability. Violations of the Protocol were to result in fines or community service. Each provision of the Protocol was meant to be signed and dated. The Protocol was eventually used by gangs in Indiana and New Jersey to develop their own agreements.

Gang violence is not unique to the United States; it exists throughout the world. Agreements between gangs have also developed outside the

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399 Id.
402 WILLIAMS, supra note 98, at 361.
403 Id. at 349.
404 Id. at 356.
405 Id. at 353-354.
406 Id. at 352.
407 Id. at cover.
United States. In some instances, agreements have even developed between gangs and law enforcement. The gang crisis in El Salvador reflects this dynamic. Salvadoran gangs, such as MS-13, first arose in the United States and were exported to El Salvador through the deportation of gang members. Eventually, these gangs became a leading cause of violence in the country. In response, the Salvadoran government entered negotiations with leaders from the two gangs. An ensuing truce was established in 2012. Initially, the truce led to a significant reduction in gang violence. Reports indicate that the homicide rate in El Salvador dropped by almost 50%. However, there were substantial concerns that the government had offered concessions to gang leaders that allowed for selective criminal activity. Public pressure led the Salvadoran government to rescind its support for the truce. In response, homicide rates eventually returned to their pre-truce levels. Gang truces have also been documented in other countries, including Honduras, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Twenty-eight years after the Watts Gang Treaty, the death of noted social activist and rapper Nipsey Hussle in south Los Angeles further highlights the Treaty’s significance. Hussle was well-regarded within the Black community because he promoted numerous philanthropic causes while counseling against gang violence. He had credibility because he had been Gang Treaty shared their experiences around the world. See Message to the Grassroots: Gang Truce: The International Scene (Nov. 16, 1994), https://mediaburn.org/video/message-to-the-grassroots-gang-truce-the-international-scene/, archived at https://perma.cc/YW8N-FQBL. See generally JENNIFER M. HAZEN & DENNIS RODGERS, GLOBAL GANGS; STREET VIOLENCE ACROSS THE WORLD (2014); SMALL ARMS SURVEY, SMALL ARMS SURVEY 2010: GROUPS, GANGS, AND GUNS (2010); Mahern, supra note 408, at 767.


415 Id. at 12–13; Ahmed, supra note 412.


a member of the Rollin’ 60s, a Crips gang. When he was killed on March 31, 2019, local leaders feared reprisal attacks. Such fears were mitigated when gang members agreed to a cease-fire agreement. However, negotiators had to make clear that a cease-fire agreement was not akin to a treaty. As noted by the *Los Angeles Times*, “[i]n gang culture, the difference between a cease-fire and a truce is crucial. A truce implies friendship beyond the mere cessation of violence. Some who are not ready to accept a truce may accept a cease-fire.” This explains why gang members from Watts sought inspiration in a forty-year-old armistice agreement located in a university library and used it as a template to draft a peace treaty to end their own conflict. They sought hope for a durable peace and a focal point to build a better life.

IV. THE MEANING OF HIDDEN HISTORY

Hidden history surrounds us. Its stories reside beneath the common narrative of power and privilege that exists in the world. Some stories are intentionally hidden because they do not align with ideological or political agendas, or they run counter to assumptions about race, color, or class. There is a rich and diverse history of storytelling in law. Some stories are intentionally hidden because they do not align with ideological or political agendas, or they run counter to assumptions about race, color, or class. However, while some hidden history has been found, other stories remain to be discovered.
Other stories are obscured through ignorance or neglect, unnoticed by those who record history. While such neglect may be unintentional, it often reflects a perspective that is unable to see the world as it really is. Or, in Ralph Ellison’s words, these stories are “invisible . . . simply because people refuse to see [them].”

Within this hidden history, marginalized communities fight against entrenched forces. In their struggles, many of these groups build social movements to challenge the status quo and attack extant subordination. The power of social movements is well-documented and a rich scholarship chronicles their role in promoting racial justice and equality. Some movements seek structural reform at the national level. Other movements seek change in their local communities. Some social movements are led by lawyers; others by activists.


The Watts Gang Treaty was publicized in the Los Angeles Times and several other media sources. However, it has not generated meaningful analysis. Today, the Treaty’s legacy exists through the efforts of former gang members and community activists to keep its memory alive.

RALPH ELLISON, INVISIBLE MAN 3 (1947).


The Watts Gang Treaty reveals the hidden history of a unique social movement—one led by gang members. It also reveals the power of private ordering and its potential role in marginalized communities long isolated from public law and often ignored by political institutions. Private ordering involves a set of norms, rules, and institutions that operate outside formal legal systems. Private ordering often develops when political institutions are unable or unwilling to address societal problems.

In Watts, gang members drafted a self-enforcing peace treaty to address the intractable problem of gang violence. Prior to the Treaty’s adoption, drive-by shootings were rampant throughout south Los Angeles. Most of these attacks could be traced to conflicts between rival gangs. Law enforcement operations did little to stop the violence. In fact, police activity would often exacerbate tensions in the community. Public confidence in law enforcement suffered due to racial profiling and the excessive use of force. The failure of political institutions provided gang leaders with an opportunity to develop their own solution to the ongoing conflict. Gang members researched the Treaty. They drafted its provisions and presented the agreement to their leaders for ratification. Moreover, the Treaty did not rely on


Bey Transcript, supra note 72; Katz, supra note 277, at B1.
public officials to monitor or enforce its terms. Instead, compliance was maintained by the hierarchical structure within each gang and the support of the broader community, including family, friends, neighbors, religious leaders, musicians, and social activists. The Treaty’s development within the Watts community was essential to its success. As explained by a gang member, “[I]t ha[d] to be an inside job.”

The Watts story highlights the role of symbolism in the success of social movements. In south Los Angeles, colors—red, blue, and purple—were often used to self-identify gang affiliation. When the treaty was adopted, colors were used to convey a different message—one of unity. Gang members would show their support of the treaty by mixing gang colors together. As rapper Ice-T explained in his song, *Gotta Lotta Love*, “[t]he gang truce is on, so you wear whatever.”

The Treaty itself served as a powerful symbol in Watts. The decision by gang leaders to use the 1949 Armistice Agreement between Egypt and Israel as the template for their own agreement was intentional. It was informed by the parallels between the gang conflict in Watts and the Arab-Israeli War, both of which were seen as intractable and deeply violent. The connections between the Armistice Agreement and the Watts Treaty were further heightened by the pivotal role of Dr. Ralph Bunche. To gang members, it established a tangible and direct connection between the Armistice Agreement and the Watts Treaty.

In Watts, the land was symbolic. The four major housing projects—Jordan Downs, Imperial Courts, Hacienda Village, and Nickerson Gardens—converged in Watts, which was described by gang members as “Holy Grounds.” In south Los Angeles, territory had long played a role in gang conflict. It defined gang membership and established zones of control. The Treaty acknowledged the importance of land and the need to protect both

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438 AFARY, supra note 7, at 79–80.
439 JAH & SHAA’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 49 (interview with “Red”).
442 Ford, supra note 199.
443 Ice-T, supra note 8.
444 MUHAMMAD, supra note 103, at 13.
445 MUHAMMAD, supra note 103, at 46; Katz & Ford, supra note 5.
446 A. Sherrills Interview, supra note 4.
447 JAH & SHAA’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 76–77 (interview with Angelo).
The Watts Gang Treaty

gang members and non-gang members; living in these neighborhoods.449 The Watts story also reveals how land could be used to transcend gang affiliation. The ley-lines that formed in Watts inspired gang leaders.450 The land gave their movement both meaning and a clear connection to their community.

To be clear, gangs continued to exist in Watts even after the Treaty’s adoption. In fact, gang structure was essential for the Treaty’s success because it gave gang leaders power over their members. Without this structure, there would be no mechanism, formal or otherwise, to monitor compliance and promote enforcement in the event of a breach.451 It also empowered leaders to bring their members together and coalesce around a common goal.452 Gang members were now “bound by a peace treaty.”453

Studying hidden history acknowledges and celebrates the lives of the people that reside within its stories. The Watts story conveys agency and provides a human face to a deeply marginalized community.454 Few groups in American society suffer more from isolation and dehumanization than gangs.455 The word “gang” itself immediately creates negative images and assumptions.456 In fact, gang members are keenly aware of this dynamic.457


449 Watts Gang Treaty, supra note 138, art. I.
450 A. Sherrills Interview, supra note 4; HAYDEN, supra note 23, at 186.
451 Id. at 32–36.
452 JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 95 (interview with Don Gordon).
453 KAM, supra note 8.
456 JAH & SHAH’KEYAH, supra note 74, at 301 (interview with “Q-Bone”) (“The problem is that the society needs to start accepting the gang members back into the community as human beings and take that label off of us.”); Gang members are often the subjects of targeted sanctions under civil and criminal law. See Matthew D. O’Deane, GANG INJUNCTIONS AND ABATEMENT: USING CIVIL REMEDIES TO CURB GANG-RELATED CRIMES (2012); EDWARD L. ALLAN, CIVIL GANG ABATEMENT: THE EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPLICATIONS OF POLICING BY
They recognize that they live in a dangerous world and that their members often contribute to its violence. Yet, many gang members seek peace and stability for themselves, their families, and their communities. They also seek respect. In Watts, they joined forces to draft a treaty that would end the “war-like destruction of the parties” and establish a “permanent peace.”

Finally, the stories in hidden history are valuable because of what they provide to their communities. These stories memorialize a shared struggle and create a legacy that can be conveyed to future generations. They also provide a counter-narrative to the dominant perception about marginalized communities. There was poverty and violence in south Los Angeles. But there was also hope as peacemakers sought to build a better life. The writing of hidden history reflects what Milan Kundera wrote about the struggle of man against power: it represents “the struggle of memory against forgetting.” These stories are worth recording because they are worth remembering.

CONCLUSION

Given the connection between the Watts Gang Treaty and the 1949 Armistice Agreement between Egypt and Israel, it is unsurprising the gang truce would confront serious challenges. Seven years after the Egypt-Israel
Armistice Agreement was signed, the Suez Crisis developed between Egypt and Israel, leading to Israel’s invasion of the Sinai Peninsula.\(^{466}\) Armed conflict between Egypt and Israel also occurred in 1967 and 1973.\(^{467}\) A lasting peace between Egypt and Israel would take thirty years to achieve and was not concluded until the Camp David Accords of 1979.\(^{468}\) A key element to the eventual peace agreement was the U.S. commitment to provide billions of dollars in financial support to both countries.\(^{469}\)

In his 1950 Nobel Laureate Lecture, Ralph Bunche acknowledged the strong connection between economic development and lasting peace. To those “who have known only suffering,” he wrote, peace “must be translated into bread or rice, shelter, health, and education, as well as freedom and human dignity—a steadily better life.”\(^{470}\) For peace to be secure, Bunche argued that the “long-suffering and long-starved, forgotten peoples of the world, the underprivileged and the undernourished, must begin to realize without delay the promise of a new day and a new life.”\(^{471}\)

The Watts Gang Treaty provided such an opportunity for “a new day and a new life.” While political leaders gave tacit approval to the truce, they failed to take advantage of the peace. As Dr. King acknowledged when he visited Watts in 1965 after the first rebellion, “a mere condemnation of violence is empty without understanding the daily violence that our society inflicts upon many of its members.”\(^{472}\) He rightly recognized that “[t]he violence of poverty and humiliation hurts as intensely as the violence of the club.”\(^{473}\) In Watts, limited support by political leaders could not overcome decades of neglect and continued isolation.\(^{474}\) Their unwillingness to make meaningful financial investments in the community prevented the truce from building a civic infrastructure and generating the economic prosperity neces-

\(^{466}\) See generally Kirsten E. Schulze, \textit{The Arab-Israeli Conflict} 22 (2d ed. 2008).

\(^{467}\) Id. at 32, 39.


\(^{472}\) Id.

\(^{473}\) \textit{KING}, \textit{supra} note 44, at 295.

\(^{474}\) Id.
sary to ensure its permanence.\textsuperscript{475} Relying on gangs alone to solve gang violence proved unsustainable.

The Watts Gang Treaty reveals the power of localized social movements—even those led by gangs—to achieve meaningful change. However, it also reveals the limits of such efforts in the absence of political support, financial investment, and structural change.\textsuperscript{476} For a durable peace to be secured, it must be accompanied by economic development, employment opportunities, civic infrastructure, and respect.\textsuperscript{477} For Watts, this support never arrived.\textsuperscript{478}

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\textsuperscript{475} See, e.g., Stoltze, supra note 316 (“The gangbangers that are in the community, that are slinging drugs—put an economic plan together and then they’ll quit selling drugs . . . You have to substitute something.”).

\textsuperscript{476} FELKER-KANTOR, supra note 46, at 240–41 (“Yet for the millions of dollars fueling the city’s carceral state-building, none of the money was redirected in support of the truce or of efforts to rebuild the city on an equitable basis.”); Johnston Hernández, supra note 117, at 147 (“Economic development programs, job training, counseling and other programs are needed on a massive scale if cities are going to be able to provide a viable alternative to gangs.”); HAYDEN, supra note 23, at 50 (“The need for an inner-peace process, led by former gang members or inmates with street knowledge, respect, and the capacity to be role models, must be reinforced by a peace movement in civil society demanding economic and social reform.”); RICE, supra note 41, at 142 (“[P]overty does not cause gang violence . . . [b]ut it makes a great petri dish in which violence hides and the violent thrive.”).

\textsuperscript{477} See Martin Wolk, \textit{Father Gregory Boyle Has an Ambitious Plan to Expand Homeboy Industries}, L.A. TIMES (Dec. 5, 2019), https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/books/story/2019-12-05/gregory-boyle-barking-to-the-choir-book-club, archived at https://perma.cc/JKN8-KVFT (“Homeboy Industries has long been known for Father Gregory Boyle’s slogan, ‘Nothing stops a bullet like a job.’”); Henderson & Leng, supra note 422, at 497 (“As long as society fails to eliminate problems such as poverty, racism, drugs, and social marginalization, urban youths will find gang membership an attractive, if ultimately illusory, means of achieving security, self-respect, and a sense of power in an oppressive and threatening environment.”).

\textsuperscript{478} Krikorian & Krikorian, supra note 101 (“The only tragedy of the truce was that society needed to reward [gang members who created it] and didn’t do a damn thing.”).