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# The evolution of modern Central American street gangs and the political violence they present: Case studies of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras

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The Evolution of Modern Central American Street Gangs and  
The Political Violence They Present: Case Studies of  
Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras

by

Tristam W. Lynch

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	i
LIST OF TABLES	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
ABSTRACT	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Primary Objective	2
CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	4
The Departure of Spain and the Arrival of England	5
Early History: 16 <sup>th</sup> –19 <sup>th</sup> Centuries	6
Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras: Civil Wars and Exploitation	9
Foreign Influences – 1800s	12
The Liberal Republic	14
CHAPTER THREE: MODERN HISTORY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS	17
Guatemala/Revolution/Counter-revolution	18
Continued Prosperity	19
Foreign Policy and Military Coup	21
Economic Conditions	22
Migration due to Poverty	27
El Salvador	30

The Late 1970's -1980's-----	33
Honduras-----	39
CHAPTER FOUR: TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES ----	48
Migration into the United States-----	48
Living Conditions of Migrants in United States-----	52
Living Conditions of Teenagers In Central America-----	55
Gang Types-----	56
Emergence of Dangerous Youth Groups/ Gangs in U.S. -----	59
Emergence of MS-13 and Mara 18 in Central America -----	64
Economic Activity of Gangs in Central America-----	65
CHAPTER FIVE: ADVERSE EFFECTS OF U.S. DEPORTATIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND RE-ENTRY TO THE UNITED STATES-----	68
The Strong Hand Legislation -----	68
Recruitment and Expansion of Gang Members -----	70
Re-Entry into U.S.-----	72
Gangs' Control of Local Governments and Communities -----	75
Threats to Security and Sovereignty -----	76
Procedural Democracy-----	77
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION -----	78
Effects of Globalization -----	81
Alternative Responses to Strong Hand Legislation-----	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY -----	84

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Gini Index: Guatemala 1984-2004-----	23
Table 2. Distribution of Monthly Family Income in El Salvador, 1976-1977-----	35
Table 3. Mean Production of Coffee (1,000) Pounds in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador 1909-1943-----	43
Table 4. Gini Index: Population and Population below Poverty Line in Honduras-----	43

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Population Migration-----	29
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THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN CENTRAL AMERICAN STREET GANGS AND THE  
POLITICAL VIOLENCE THEY PRESENT: CASE STUDIES OF GUATEMALA, EL  
SALVADOR AND HONDURAS

TRISTAM W. LYNCH

ABSTRACT

Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras have experienced a history immersed in political, economical and violent turmoil that has resulted in centuries of unsettled government, weak economies, alienation, and exploitation of the masses. This turmoil dates back to Spanish forms of dictatorial rule in the sixteenth century, and English and German control of commodities and land during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Along with foreign influence, forms of dictatorial rule resulted in poor socioeconomic conditions, internal anarchy within Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras and the onset of civil wars. During the Reagan Administration, the United States used these countries in Central America for strategic military, agricultural and political purposes. The poor economic and politically violent conditions continued, resulting in the formation of dangerous street gangs, youth groups violently taking control of territories and later engaging in drug trafficking. Presence of the United States military operations, the civil wars, namely the Nicaraguan Contra War throughout the Central American region, resulted in a variety of opportunities for immigrants, to migrate into the United States. Other opportunities included left over weapons by the United States military, guerillas and contras, which were used by these violent youth to intimidate the local governments of Guatemala, El Salvador and

Honduras. However, after the Central American families migrated to avoid the poor conditions within these countries, some children became gang members due to lack of alternatives in the U.S. The U.S. authorities deported many of these youth back to their respective Central American countries because of the crimes they committed in the U.S. This deportation increased further political turmoil in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras such that these violent youth groups threaten procedural democracy from functioning. This thesis examines the historical evolution of first, second and third generation Central American street gangs, and the political violence they present in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras have a long history of alienation and exploitation of the masses due to centuries of domination and military dictatorships. The evolution of Central American street gangs and the political violence they present are based on the long, complex, rich, yet interesting political history of three specific countries, examined here as case studies: Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. To broaden the explanation of their evolution, one cannot ignore their surrounding Central American neighbors, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Early history indicates that repression within the region was widespread as reported by Edelberto Torres Rivas (1993 and 1989)<sup>1</sup>. More recently particular wars, civil wars in Guatemala, El Salvador and the United States against Nicaragua in the Nicaraguan Contra War, as examined by Schmalzbauer (2005), played a role in Honduras' poor economy in the 1980's. These wars helped pave the way for the emerging youth and the ensuing violence they now present. Poor conditions, in particular anarchy, dictatorship, civil war, and poor economies throughout their respective backgrounds, caused many citizens of these countries to emigrate to the U.S., a process known as transnational migration. A look into the history of these transnational migrants' past explains how these Central American street gangs have evolved and the political violence they currently present for the respective Central American countries and the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> Edelberto Torres Rivas was born to a Nicaraguan father, educated in Guatemala, and worked in Costa Rica. He is an expert adviser on the history and society of Central America and many scholars and students have referred to his works including those cited in this thesis.

## Primary Objective

The primary objective or research question for this thesis is “How did street gangs evolve and eventually flourish in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras?” For the purpose of this thesis, the term “flourish” is selected to study the factors that contribute to the spread and infiltration of gangs within and across societies. To address this research question, my methodological approach will be an historical analysis of these three specific countries as case studies in order to explain the evolution of Central American street gangs and the political violence that they present for the respective governments and societies. Prior to discussion of these case studies, the early history and background on the Central American region will be briefly discussed because particular Central American neighbors interacted with these three countries.

For the purpose of this research, the term “gang” will be referred to using Miller’s alternate definition, as his definition includes three specific types of gangs: turf-oriented, gain-oriented and fighting gangs. Miller refers to these as law violating youth groups. According to Miller (1982)<sup>2</sup> (cited in Howell 1994: 497), “a law violating youth group is an association of three or more youths whose members engage recurrently in illegal activities with the cooperation and/or moral support of their companions”. The reason I decided to use Miller’s definition of a gang in my research is because Miller’s 1982 description of fighting gangs, his third gang type, is similar to the concept of a third generation gang provided by Manwaring (2005). Both definitions consist of the same elements and are congruent with each other, but

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<sup>2</sup> Miller’s research (1982) was used in early studies because of limited knowledge of gangs in The United States and thus became a baseline for the research conducted by Howell (1994), director of the office of juvenile justice and delinquency at the United States Department of Justice.

have different names and their studies appeared in different years. The fighting gang described by Miller (1982) and the third generation gang described by Manwaring (2005) are of most relevance to my research because this type of gang is new and has evolved over time. The third generation gang includes all the elements of the first generation (turf-oriented) and second generation (gain-oriented) gangs, which will be discussed in this thesis.<sup>3</sup> Chapter Two introduces the reader to the politically violent background and sets the stage for the causes of migration. Chapter Three discusses the modern history and socioeconomic conditions of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Chapter Four examines transnational migration to the United States. Chapter Five examines adverse effects of U.S. deportations in Central America and re-entry to the United States. Chapter Six concludes this thesis with an overview of the effects of globalization as well as alternative responses to strong hand legislation, which emerged out of Central America, specifically Honduras.

Throughout this research, I will stress important factors such as political violence and the effects of the violence on the masses, particularly the Indians, farm laborers, and campesinos, (peasants), explaining why people within these countries leave and travel to the United States. Within the research, I will also discuss cultural attributes that the particular youths develop while living in the United States, followed by a brief discussion on how they return to the United States even after they have been deported.

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Manwaring holds a B.S. in Economics, a B.S. in Political Science, an M.A. in Political Science, and a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Illinois. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army War College. Source: Manwaring, 2005. IV. Biographical Sketch of The Author. "Street Gangs: The New Urban Insurgency."

## CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Dating back as far as the sixteenth century, Spain claimed monopolization of the region after the Spanish Conquest, the masses, namely the Indians, farm laborers and campesinos had been discriminated, alienated, and exploited by the Spanish empire and the Crown's quest for total domination over the region. Such domination from the Spanish was particularly evident in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. As time went on forward, the Spaniards continued repression of the masses and monopolized the region's agricultural products, namely cochineal, cacao, corn, sugarcane, and fruits. The region itself suffered historical cyclical ruptures. Too many agricultural products had been shipped back to Spain, the motherland, draining the agricultural economy (Rivas 1993: 1-11).

In addition, a lock down on trade and a block on most of the Central American economy had also prevented stability in the region creating very poor socioeconomic conditions for the masses at very early stages in their respective countries. In short, Spain and its hegemony hindered the improvement of economic conditions for the masses in the entire region it dominated as a direct result of these cyclical ruptures. In other words, repetitive cyclical conditions of a poor economy for most of the masses continued resulting in widespread poverty, disease, land loss, and slavery. Spain therefore, had a monopoly over the Central American region.

The Spanish monopoly was not broken until the arrival of England and the trade problems had not been improved until the enactment of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1714, which facilitated some free commerce and inter-colonial trade. However, it was not until 1744 that

free trade was authorized for other countries within the region, namely, Peru, New Grenada, and the Guatemalan territory, a part of the Captaincy General of Guatemala, New Spain. According to Rivas (1993), colonial Central American society was more of an administrative appendage of New Spain, now known as Mexico (Rivas 1993: 1-5).

After Independence from Spain, Rivas (1993) reports that the Federal Republic composed of five Central American nations organized in 1824 began the process of invigorating the old passive colonial system. Annexation to Mexico had been rejected, and monopolies had been abolished, events that highlighted nascent liberalism and a sign of the first attempts at modernization (ibid). However, too much turmoil continued to exist within the Federal Republic. According to Rivas (1993: 2-3) who cites José Colonel Urtecho, anarchy and dictatorship were the two poles that tore apart the Federation. Civil war and anarchy had erupted during the five decades of separation from the peninsular rule (ibid). Rivas (1993) asserts that this particular historical moment is recognized as a time of great frustration in attempts to organize political life in the region. The Federal Pact came to its demise and broke apart definitively in 1842.

#### The Departure of Spain and the Arrival of England

The influence of England over the region made economic matters appear better with the effect of liberal measures opening up the possibility of trade. As Rivas (1993: 6) reports, those benefits were mediated by the English and stimulated by the European industrial revolution. Thus, between 1821 and 1825, commercial activity had doubled and optimism and confidence grew among the masses. The British influence during this era is also recognized when Central America attempted to consolidate via great public loans. These

public loans to modernize their respective countries' infrastructure were bad ideas for both parties, the English, the lender, and the respective Central American country, the borrower. Although it had appeared that economic prosperity was growing, and optimism and confidence among the masses was getting stronger, the reality is that the Central American countries had been borrowing more than they could actually pay back, causing major credit problems and debt issues (Rivas 1993: 6-7). Moreover, the English were left without repayments on many of their loans, which caused tensions to flare. This was the beginning of anarchy within the region and the search for political and economical stability continued to be a main concern for all countries involved, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

#### Early History: 16<sup>th</sup> –19<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Early anarchy within the region had been first delivered through Spanish policies. According to Rivas (1993: 2), the policies of the Crown made attempts at transforming the colonies into a viable system unsuccessful. For example, they failed to produce a strong export economy and reversed any gains that the colonists had made, producing a weak economy. Crisis in the Central American region continued when ties had been broken with Spain. The breaking of the ties with Spain caused a major agrarian crisis. The agrarian crisis weakened the local economies and placed a heavy burden on the campesinos. Much of the problems existed during the early 1500's because the local economies throughout Central America had been heavily reliant on Spain. The absence of a colonial economy based on agriculture and mining prohibited a solid economic structure and political stability (ibid). Moreover, Rivas (1993: 3) reports conditions worsened for the masses, namely the Indians

and peasants, due to the breaking of the Federal Pact of 1842.

First, the failure of the liberal federalist policy showed a weakness and inability of any social class to bring about a sense of nationalism. A hegemonic power could not be constituted in the face of separated forces of resistance. No one particular social group could dominate. Anarchy continued because of far too many disagreements between the federalists, centralists, liberals and conservatives. Apart from the main political groups, confrontation existed between the Creoles and Mestizos, arguing for greater productive opportunities (Rivas 1993: 7).

Dictatorship in the earlier periods of Central America emerged after Spanish rule and English influence, yet control came from the United States. The Spanish form of exploitation consisted of control over the economy in the form of trade inequalities because trade exports from Central America were unequal to the trade the Colonists received from Spanish imports. Furthermore, Spain decided to block most trade and utilized brutality over individuals and groups that tried to bring about reform over the conditions they faced, leaving many Indians and peasants living in a world of underdevelopment (Rivas 1993: 1-7; Jonas 1991: 13-14). Underdevelopment, then, was a direct result of the Spanish Conquest and administration, in particular in Guatemala (*ibid*).

England's forms of exploitation of the masses consisted of control over trade by any means after Spain's departure. Once the English arrived, they seized most of the wealth of the former Spanish colonies leaving only a small fraction of wealth for the peasants and Indians. In addition, they seized some Central American lands for both military and commercial expansionism, including Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (Rivas 1993: 5-7). Thus, in many respects, Central America became a strategic military base for England. Rivas (1993)

noted the English also decided both diplomatically and militarily to abuse their power to forestall any unionist undertaking in the region (ibid).

England brought about dictatorial rule in a variety of forms, exploiting the locals by way of controlling trade, anchoring the peasant farmers to the land, and creating widespread poverty. The U.S., like England, also disrupted any forms of reform attempts, including the emergence of unions (Rivas 1993: 6). Rivas (1993) further reports the Americans also took control of these countries' economies, and offered capital in the form of credit, causing greater debt for the less developed countries' economies and those who depended on them. This increased debt created widespread poverty and unrest among the working people. In addition, the U.S later controlled and seized lands for global military reach in this part of the world and the Caribbean Basin, beginning during the Theodore Roosevelt administration, 1901-1909 (Holland 2004: 211).

Roosevelt believed that only his country could make policies for Latin American affairs. The forceful imposition of the U.S. continued, known as "the big stick," stems from the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine<sup>4</sup> (Papp, Johnson and Endicott 2005: 110-111). Technically, Roosevelt acted as the world's policeman. His Corollary emerged between 1902 and 1904 due to specific events occurring in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela. For instance, in 1903 both Germany and England captured Venezuelan ships and set up a blockade due to Venezuela not making timely payments on \$15 million dollars they had borrowed from the German and English investors years before (ibid).

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<sup>4</sup> The Monroe Doctrine, enunciated in December 1823, was a rejection of further extension of European political system to the Western Hemisphere. The doctrine stressed the basic difference between the American political system and that of Europe. (Ohaegbulam 1999:21)



The Roosevelt Corollary stated: “If a nation shows that it knows how to act with decency in industrial and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, then it need fear no interference from the United States. Brutal wrong-doing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may finally require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the United States might act as a policeman, at least in the Caribbean Region” (ibid). This intervention on the part of Roosevelt hindered the German and English military exercises, which had to be settled diplomatically later to the Permanent Court at the Hague (ibid). Such foreign intervention gave the U.S. a strong hold over the entire Central American region. Greater dependency resulted on the foreign power of the U.S. Poverty and internal political and economic chaos continued to spread as a result of such a reliance. These conditions had a significant impact on all Central American governments and families, including the destruction of these countries’ infrastructure, and weakening of their local governments and economies. This political and economic unrest caused great disturbance for all Central American families and further instigated poverty.

Of particular interest is the emergence of political violence in these three countries: Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. The political control and conditions of each country are briefly introduced in order to explicate the causes of transnational migration out of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, in order to explain and place emphasis on the modern Central American gangs that have evolved.

#### Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras: Civil Wars and Exploitation

Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras share a history immersed in early Spanish and

English domination between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. They also share a common relationship of civil wars brought on by their rights to claim independence from the great powers of Spain and England. Independence of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and their neighbors, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, was a cause, not a consequence of civil war and much of the revolutions that later emerged from these countries (Rivas 1993: 1-5). Later, the military dictatorship, oppression and violence, especially in the 1950s through the 1970s, created further discontent among the masses. These conditions were among the worst in Central America, creating unrest among the poorest populations – Indians, blacks, farm laborers, and campesinos. This unrest resulted in widespread death and migration of thousands of people. To make matters worse, civil wars added only fuel to a fire of discontentment creating a breeding ground for poverty, diseases of all kinds, and forced the masses, at least most, to become revolutionaries.

Civil war also created further economic issues such as underemployment and unemployment, leaving many farmers without work. Civil war in Guatemala left this country barren and poor. As in its early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Guatemala's civil war during the 1950s-1990's was among the worst in Central America leaving some 200,000 civilians dead or missing (Jonas 1991: 214) and later explicated by Vanden and Prevost (2002: 253). Civil war and the upheavals of the 1980's in El Salvador were a continuous problem, (some 70,000 died) taken into account with Guatemala and Nicaragua, (more than 30,000 people had been killed) one sees the deadly nature of the civil war (Jonas 1991: 214).

El Salvador, like Guatemala, was governed by military dictatorships, and suffered from conditions of abuses of power, poverty, inequality, and dependency on military rulers and the oligarchy, wealthy families that owned much of the elite land that produced a wealth

of coffee. The oligarchy had long ties to the military and both worked with each other. Sighted by Spain in 1522 and settled by Spain in 1526, Spanish control over indigenous populations in El Salvador occurred in 1537 (Montgomery 1994: 25). The Spaniards had destroyed the military democracy that was organized by the local tribes who had ownership over the land (Montgomery 1994: 25-28).

Exploitation of the Pipil Indians occurred early by the Spaniards. The Indians' primary source of wealth was cacao. Cacao was only to be dealt with by Spanish or Mestizo exporters, who had *encomienda* (royal authority over land) during this early period 1560-1600 (Montgomery 1994: 26). The Spaniards had begun slavery and shipping of the slaves to vast areas of the region including Peru and Panama. Thus, the Spaniards actually became the early dictators and the Pipil Indians became their slaves. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the primary source of exploitation in El Salvador came from a system of tribute, a form of extortion. Tribute kept the wealthy Indians in check, because it had been levied on their property, draining the profits produced from their cacao plantations (*ibid*). It is important to remember that the Spanish monopoly had not been broken until the arrival of England. The trade problems were lifted with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1714, which facilitated some free commerce and colonial trade (Rivas 1993: 1-5). Thus, the Indians had been exploited for quite some time, which facilitated anger and frustration for years. Those in Honduras had experienced severe problems for the masses also.

Honduras was not immune to the early periods of civil war throughout Central America in the 1800's. Civil war continued throughout its history as it did in other parts of Central America in the 1970's-1980's (Schmalzbauer 2005: 50-51). Early exploitation and control over the Honduran economy came from Spain and England. Later the United States

exercised control through the production of agricultural products. As noted in Rivas (1993), one of the major problems had to do with trade inequalities. Spain created trade blocks and deprived the Honduran economy of European imports, while at the same time; the Spanish raped the Honduran economy of its primary sources of wealth, such as beef, cotton, watermelons, coffee and bananas. Such trade inequalities placed the local campesinos and farm laborers in a position of hardship and poverty. The English used the Honduran farmers to produce the goods that were in demand in Europe at the time – coffee and fruit. Yet, like Spain, England only permitted unequal economic trade agreements. This type of exploitation angered the masses, leaving thousands well below the poverty line and all of them dependent on a foreign power. As a result, underdevelopment and dependency continued to spread.

#### Foreign Influences – 1800s

The entire region of Central America, specifically Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador has been exposed to the foreign influences of Spain, England, the U.S., and Germany. Such foreign influences included Spanish and English occupation within the region, loans and credits from English financiers out of banks in London, capital and technological investments from the United States, and German land techniques associated with its vast land such as mass production of primary agricultural commodities (corn, cotton, beef, coffee, and bananas). These Western European and U.S. influences left the region and its unsettled political and economical system struggling for organization in the midst of chaos. In terms of England and their loans, prior to 1856, Guatemala had assumed 67,900 lbs sterling in debt, of which the majority of that was left in arrears to England (Rivas 1993: 6-7). In 1856, the Guatemalan government borrowed an additional 100,000 lb sterling just to cover the

first loan (ibid). This type of lending and continuous borrowing left their society in debt, compounding their economic burden as their debt increased. This type of foreign influence intensified, spreading into El Salvador and Honduras, creating further burdens for public debt and worsening the conditions of poverty for the masses, particularly the Indians and peasants.

El Salvador although more careful with its finances than Guatemala and Honduras, cancelled its debt to England by 1860 (Rivas 1993: 7). In 1889-1892, the government negotiated loans in London for 800,000 pounds guaranteed by a tax and a mortgage on its national railroad (ibid). Loan monies were not adequate enough and what money had been borrowed was squandered during El Salvador's civil war between 1889-1892. This squandering of money and debt to England broke the economy and decreased the general public spending and purchasing powers substantially.

The Honduran government was dependent on England during the 1860's for loans, like Guatemala and El Salvador. Honduras negotiated loans in London, England and Paris, France between 1867-1870. The government decided to borrow some 6.1 million pounds sterling to build a transoceanic railroad (Rivas 1993: 6). The railroad was time consuming and was not completed until the 1960's (ibid). Therefore, these large loans left the masses of these countries impoverished. Much of the borrowed money fell into arrears with England, causing conflict between the countries and tension. Since England's money was left in arrears, tensions flared between the English government and the governments of these three countries. The governments of Central America, specifically Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, had alternated their power between the conservatives and the liberals between 1821 and 1871. Taking this alternation of power into account with poor economic conditions, as described in the form of incurring debt and borrowing from foreign

powers, the masses became angry and very much revolutionary. The whole region except Costa Rica fell into a state of anarchy.

An exception to this chaos was Costa Rica. In 1845, Costa Rica was unique because of its open society, open to capitalism, and the benefits of a capitalist society as well as its egalitarian values. For example, the Costa Rican government introduced its primary product of coffee into the world market with England in 1845 sharing a common interest-unrestricted trade. Such an economic venture into the free market brought Costa Rica world notoriety and profits. For this and many other reasons, Costa Rica experienced a more relaxed economic and political environment making it less revolutionary and more democratic than the other countries, and less prone to the harsh civil wars (Rivas 1993: 17). Costa Rica's government realized that land and its produce was their source of power and influence. According to Rivas (1993), other Central American countries needed more than thirty years to catch up with Costa Rica's economic position. Rivas (1993) reported that "land became a symbol of power and influence and coffee was the easiest road to altering one's social position".

### The Liberal Republic

In Honduras, the liberal reforms had failed to construct the nation state in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Efforts to organize the nation, economically and politically and attempts to strengthen internal communications were frustrated for decades. There were far too many foreign interests controlling the Honduran economy. Although Honduras incorporated its economy into the world market at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was already controlled by foreign governments from centuries before. Spain controlled its metal, silver, in the sixteenth century, followed by cattle, leather, cotton, bananas, and coffee. (Rivas 1993: 14-

20). The U.S. started controlling the agricultural sectors of the economy out of Honduras, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and even in the twentieth century. The U.S. still has a large control over its economy (World Fact Book 2008). Honduras was, and remains, heavily dependent on the U.S. These liberal reforms took place throughout the entire Central American region. The liberal reform in Guatemala was very much like the liberal reforms in El Salvador, in that both saw the rise of the hacienda in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The hacienda represented the very first stages of capitalist development. In Guatemala, the hacienda immobilized campesinos and farm laborers through subsistence plots by compensating their salaries and anchoring them to the land (Rivas 1993: 23-24; Montgomery 1994: 26-27).

In El Salvador, land was important to those who owned it, as it produced agricultural products creating wealth for the owner and immobilizing the campesinos and farm laborers who labored to till the land, creating a sense of dependency (Rivas 1993: 23-24; Montgomery 1994: 26-27). As Jonas (1991) reported, in Guatemala, the Catholic Church expropriated lands from the Indian communities, and left the Indian communities destroyed. The best of land was used for the production of coffee, and placed in the hands of the new land-owners, Finqueros – the owners of Fincas – large farms. The worst of land was left for the campesinos. Some of these new land-owners were wealthy Guatemalans. But, the majority of the new land-owners were foreigners, mainly Germans. The Indians and the peasants had consistently become dependent on the new land-owners, who exported much of the land products, leaving food shortages and further poverty. Thus the wealthy foreign land-owners (mainly Germans) residing in Guatemala for the purpose of capital, exploited the Indian farmers for the purpose of mass production of their natural commodities and exporting their products produced from the land back to Germany (Jonas 1991: 17-18). Thus, the Indians and

peasants who worked the land were dependent on these wealthy German land-owners and others for survival. Dependency and underdevelopment was spreading throughout the countries involved because of these foreign influences and their powers' quest for profits. This placed continuous economic burdens on the Guatemalan government and created terrible socioeconomic conditions for the Indians and peasants.

In El Salvador, the liberal reforms and the development of the hacienda created a feudal relationship between the land-owners and the peasants who worked the land. These relationships were established through debt. The land-owners had bound the Indians to the hacienda by tricking them into debt knowing the Indians could never repay (Montgomery 1994: 28). The Indian Colonos (sharecroppers) were bound to the hacienda and depended on the land-owner for survival. Underemployment and unemployment was very high due to the fact that many crops grew only for three months in the calendar year, which left many peasants out of work most of the year. The conditions really did not improve until around 1880 when banking institutions appeared and were tied to export products. Any attempt to improve conditions were quickly shut down, such as one year later in 1881 when President Zaldivar dictated community expropriation laws when coffee had been the principle export product (Rivas 1993: 16). By 1897, the Entitlement Law of Rural Land had passed to the peasants. This law assured the country's rural structure to the peasants. That same year, 1897, the Registry of Property was created to facilitate and document the movement of land and property (Rivas 1993: 15-16). The law granted the peasants some economic prosperity despite the interruption of President Zaldivar, which created a sense of independence for a time as opposed to the earlier period when the Indians were tied to the hacienda through the brutal feudal relationships that had emerged.



## CHAPTER THREE: MODERN HISTORY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

### Guatemala

In 1820, Guatemala witnessed an Indian uprising in which Indians and Criollos reached their height of discontent over economic crisis and natural disasters. Tensions continued to increase while their relationship with the Spanish was viewed by all sectors of society to be a heavy burden. The only two sectors within society that disagreed with Guatemala's independence were the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown. Therefore, after 1820 and the Indian uprising of Totonicapán, the Criollo elite declared independence in 1821 (Jonas 1991: 16). Thus, Guatemala's independence much like all Central America was not a consequence, but rather a cause of its civil war (Rivas 1993: 3). After independence, Guatemala saw very little changes occur. The only main change that did occur was the fact the neo-colonial era diversified external contacts and the power of Spain was replaced with the dominant power of England (Jonas 1991:13-20). The Guatemalan government needed to find social order and peace, and knew that the only way to do so was to end their ties with Spain (ibid).

Within Guatemala, power had alternated between the conservatives and the liberals after independence, 1821-1871. The liberals had consolidated their power under Mariano Gálvez from 1831-1838 (Jonas 1991: 16-17). Next, the conservatives consolidated their power from 1839-1871 under the dictatorship of Rafael Carrera (ibid). The peasantry continued to be exploited under his dictatorship and conservative regime, protecting commercial monopolies and giving privileges to the church. The conservatives held their

power for a long period of time until the liberals took their power back in 1871, under the military revolt led by Justo Rufino Barrios (ibid). Liberalism stood for federalism, free trade, political reforms, and special interests. These reforms protected the ladinos, but were very harmful to the Indian communities. The liberals were represented by Criollo Latifundistas, the Ladino, intellectuals and pro-independence activists (Jonas 1991: 13 -20). With some exceptions of slight democratic interludes in the 1920's, the liberals maintained power until the overthrow of dictator Jorge Ubico in 1944 (Jonas 1991: 16-17).

#### Guatemala/Revolution/Counter-revolution

The policies of Jorge Ubico, 1931-1944, consisted of exploiting the Indian labor force. Prime examples of this exploitation include Ubico's social-base, the Cafetero-export-import oligarchy allying with U.S. monopolies. The problem was that these alliances failed to industrialize, so that during the 1930s they responded by protecting their interests, while ignoring the needs of the Indians and exploiting them by paying lower wages (Jonas 1991: 20-22). Furthermore, Ubico's regime executed those who were labor or opposition leaders. In 1944, a small student strike for student autonomy erupted in Guatemala City. This strike developed into a larger general strike against the military dictatorship of Ubico (Jonas 1991: 22). The general strike developed after students' demands had not been met, constitutional guarantees were denied and shots were fired against demonstrators. After a demonstrator was killed, Ubico resigned in 1944 because he could no longer stand the mounting pressure (ibid).

After Ubico resigned, Juan José Arévalo was freely elected March 15, 1945, as the first revolutionary president, and served from 1945 to 1950 (Jonas 1991:21-22). His first order of business was to establish a political democracy after the military dictatorship of Ubico

ended. Under his leadership in 1950, universal suffrage had been granted to all adults except illiterate women and 95.2% of Indian women (Jonas 1991: 23). As inferred from Jonas (1991), these actions were vast changes for adults, especially for literate women, as they had no voice under the dictatorship of his predecessor, Ubico. Juan José Arévalo also granted freedom of speech so that the press and political parties were allowed to organize freely, except the Communist Party. Social welfare programs were established and created economic growth by building schools, roads, homes, and hospitals. The cost of the building was one third of all state expenditures, but the measures were critical to improving socioeconomic conditions in Guatemala. Under President Arévalo, reform results gave Indians and some women the chance to organize, create change, and improve their living standards, changes they had long been denied (Jonas 1991: 23-25). This prosperity continued with the next President, Jacobo Arbenz 1951-1954.

#### Continued Prosperity

Jacobo Arbenz continued many of the policies of President Arévalo. Power was bestowed upon him in 1951. Arbenz was freely elected, noted Jonas (1991), but later overthrown. His strategy was to build upon the capitalist economy left by his predecessor Arévalo. However, his strategy was confronted by challenges that included the landed oligarchy, foreign investors of which one of the largest was the United Fruit Company or (UFCo) (Jonas 1991: 26-34). The UFCo did not care for the policies of Arbenz because his policies threatened the vast amount of land owned by the UFCo and the fruit they produced.

Under Arbenz's leadership, dramatic changes in foreign policy resulted, especially toward the U.S., and internal monopolies over fruit, crops, rail and electric companies.

Arbenz sought to break dependence on these monopolies within Guatemala (Jonas 1991:26-27), and set up a competitive infrastructure for socioeconomic growth. “Thus he undertook three major construction projects: a government-run hydro electric plant, which would provide cheaper and better service than the electric company or (EEG); a highway to the Atlantic to compete with the Central American Rail or (IRCA’s) expensive monopoly on transport; and a new Atlantic port, Santo Tomas, to compete with UFCo’s Puerto Barrios” (Jonas 1991:26). However, Arbenz’s new policy objectives presented political and economic problems for the United States. He was unwilling to comply with U.S. foreign policy and he confiscated 26,000 acres of land, which decreased the profits of the UFCo (ibid).

This action created significant discontent between the peasantry and the Finqueros, (Jonas 1991:27-30), and political violence ensued. Within a two-year period, the political violence between the peasants and the Finqueros became a matter of class distinction. According to Jonas (1991), “Politically, the agrarian reform polarized the entire country into supporters and opponents of the revolution as a whole” (ibid). Land was distributed to the peasants, a total of some 223 acres in all. In return, these peasants would pay the Guatemalan government at a variable rate of 3% to 5% of their annual production (Jonas 1991: 27). His regime also aided about 100,000 peasants gain access to land, credit, and technical assistance (Jonas 1991: 26-34). Later, the peasants’ economic and political status as land-owners was eliminated under the regime of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, and the land was redistributed to the Finqueros. This reversal of rules resulted in internal conflict, violence, and oppression. Foreign intervention from the U.S. took action to replace Guatemala’s political regime of Arbenz.

## Foreign Policy and Military Coup

Arbenz purchased firearms from Czechoslovakia, which was a real scare for the United States under the government of Dwight Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. The reason for this scare is because communism had been spreading across Western Europe as it was in the Middle East (Ohaegbulam 1999: 319). Other political issues included the fact that Arbenz failed to succumb to U.S. foreign policies, in particular cooperating with the United States to contain communism. As a result, the U.S. viewed him as a proponent of communism. The U.S. wanted Arbenz out of power and drew up a plan to replace him. President Eisenhower and U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles sought his replacement, electing for his overthrow and support of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas (Jonas 1991: 26-34). Their plans began as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) planes bombed the capital of Guatemala in an effort to force out Arbenz. This bombing instilled fear in his own armed forces ultimately causing them not to defend his regime any longer, resulting in his resignation from government on June 27, 1954 (Jonas 1991: 28-30).

## Terrorism.

Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas became President of Guatemala on July 8, 1954 (Jonas 1991: 29-30; Vanden and Prevost 2002: 276). He reversed most all the policies that had been put in place for the masses of Guatemala during the revolution and regimes of Juan José Avévalo and Jacobo Arbenz. His election was fraudulent, un-democratic and annulled in 1957 (Jonas 1991: 59). Armas revoked the peasants' rights, status and benefits granted under Arévalo and Arbenz. Within the first two months of his regime he murdered an estimated 8,000 peasants (Jonas 1991: 41). Moreover, Jonas (1991) reports he revoked all social and

economic legislation returning lands back to the American UFCo (Jonas 1991: 41-42). He also censored the press and introduced penalties for insulting the president (ibid). Armas allowed 90% of the banks to be monopolized by the large crop growers. The new cry was communism. “The Preventive Law against communism legislated the death penalty for a broad range of ‘crimes’. The ‘communist’ label was used against thousands of non-communist organizers and Indian village leaders and the entire operation was carried out with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles at the helm” (ibid).

In 1967, only 22,000 peasant families had received land (less than 0.5 million acres total); whereas, 100,000 peasant families had received three times as much under Jacobo Arbenz (Jonas 1991: 45-46). Armas was an incompetent leader and the U.S. had to contribute to running the Guatemalan government for a few years; costing the U.S. large sums of money in the form of \$80-90 million U.S.D. (Jonas 1991: 57-59). Guatemala, like El Salvador, and Honduras was now witnessing a new form of dictatorship with brutal acts carried out by military dictators. These types of dictators made an already underdeveloped country from earlier centuries even more underdeveloped and the socioeconomic conditions for Indians and peasants only worse.

### Economic Conditions

Economic conditions worsened overall for the masses within Guatemala. The conduct of the Armas government was sloppy and precarious, as the state contributed to its own impoverishment through its own taxation. The masses, including the Finqueros, had to find new activities to get involved in and form new social groups (Jonas 1991:43). The political conflict and outrage of the masses only grew stronger because of many conditions including

the mass murders of innocent, defenseless civilians, poor economic conditions, dictatorship, excessive Central American tax structure, and formation of social groups. Jonas (1991, 58-59) reported that “According to figures from the U.S. AID and the IMF, as of the late 1960’s, total central government revenue was only 7.9% of gross national product (GNP) and tax revenue was 7.1%, the lowest in Central America; direct taxes were 10.8 percent of total revenue, also the lowest in Central America”.

These socioeconomic conditions combined with the violence created the foundation for greater internal violence and ultimately transnational migration of the masses. The violence worsened before people could leave the country. Table 1. Gini Index, Guatemala 1984-2004 indicates that the socioeconomic conditions in this country still has not improved as evidenced by 2004 and 2007 figures of economic inequality based on the Gini Index<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, many Guatemalans continued to believe that migration to Mexico or the U.S. was the answer for a better life. As Jonas (1991: 183) explained, such migration was expected to only grow in the future.

Table 1. Gini Index: Guatemala 1984-2004

Economic Inequality Score	Population	Pop Below Poverty Line
55.1	12, 728,111 (July 2007 est.)	56.2% (2004 est.)

Source: (The World Fact Book For Guatemala, Central Intelligence Agency, March 6, 2008).

Thus, these economic indicators were tough in the past for the average peasant and apparently, they are not much better today according to the facts set out in *The World Fact*

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<sup>5</sup> Economics, Business, and the Environment — Income Equality: Gini Index Units: Index, 0-100, higher numbers indicate greater inequality; Available April 5, 2008 at <http://earthtrends.wri.org/text/economics-business/variable-353.html>

*Book* for Guatemala and those who still reside there. More than half its population are currently living below the poverty line and family income is very unequally distributed today as it was in the early 1960s and later 1970s, a time when the death squads and controlled elections were in full swing.

#### Death Squads and Controlled Elections: The 1960s.

The indigenous population really had no say in politics at this point, as elections were controlled by military dictatorship. Elections went from what appeared to be open and honest under the government of Julio Montenegro of the Partido Revolucionario (PR) 1966-1970, to the dishonest fascist Movimiento de Liberación Nacional or (MLN) (Jonas 1991: 60-61). Jonas (1991) reports that in particular, the MLN is commonly known as the party of organized violence. Organized violence was exactly what the MLN was all about. A major component of the counterrevolutionary politics was the replacement of democratic legality by terror. The MLN used fear-inducing tactics and the victims were the innocent and defenseless civilians targeted by these terrorists. The ring-leader of the violence was Mario Sandoval Alarcón, who is historically known as the Godfather of the death squads (Jonas 1991: 62).

#### Tactics and Targets of Death Squads.

Lead by Mario Sandoval Alarcón, the groups who made up these squads consisted of off duty security forces based in the army or police forces. They had the cruelest tactics known to mankind committing the most immoral acts on civilians, typical of terrorists. First, they instilled fear in the masses by publishing death lists. Next, they would round people up once the death lists had been published and the mass kidnappings began. After they kidnapped their targets, civilians, they tortured them, raped women, even Miss Guatemala herself had been raped by these right wing forces and tortured before being killed. University



professors and students were tortured and killed as well as the political leaders between 1960-1970. The worst killings of all were the local workers who were primarily peasants. About 8,000 people had been murdered in the 4 years between 1966 and 1970, while Guatemala was governed by Julio César Méndez Montenegro (Jonas 1991:61-63). All this terror on the civilian population took place simply because the moderate leftist opposition forces within Guatemala wanted reform and change. Simply put, if one voiced opposition in Guatemala, one was quickly silenced by members of the death squads. In some cases, the person just disappeared.

The outlook in Guatemala was not good for those who opposed the military dictatorship. Living standards and conditions along with civil war were so bad in Guatemala that 200,000 Guatemalans lost their lives from 1954 to 1996. In addition to the lost lives in Guatemala due to civil war, an estimated 200,000 plus people lost their lives in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua in the 1980 upheavals, totaling an estimated loss of life of over 500,000 civilians (Jonas 1991: 214-215).

#### Human Rights: 1970s-1980s.

The influence of President Jimmy Carter on Guatemala during his Presidency 1976-1980 had a significant impact on the government in Guatemala at this time. During the mid 1970s the Congress of the United States began to connect U.S. foreign aid to human rights. Never before, and not really since, has a U.S. President implemented these provisions of foreign assistance laws, nor has any U.S. President worked as hard as Jimmy Carter to place emphasis on them. Guatemala at the time was the worst human rights violator, so obviously the government at the time under Kjell Eugenio Laugerud García, 1974-1978, despised President Carter and the United States for such implementation given the Laugerud

government was by no means in compliance with the new law and its implementation under Carter. Thus, the Laugerud government chose to purchase its arms elsewhere. Under this terrible regime in Guatemala, President Carter had earned a new name by those in the Guatemalan army “Jimmy Castro” they shouted to the world (Jonas 1991: 195).

Although President Carter worked very hard and sincerely to enforce and implement the laws on human rights, the same statement could not be made for his successor, President Reagan. President Reagan, the 40<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, and his Administration were less concerned with human rights in Guatemala. Reagan and his advisers worked very hard to work around the human rights laws, previously implemented by the Carter Administration, and developed very close ties with the ultra-right military and civilian forces associated with the death squads. The Reagan Administration accepted donations from the MLN forces and even allowed Mario Sandoval Alarcón of Guatemala who worked closely with Roberto D’Aubuisson of El Salvador, the leader of the death squads in El Salvador, to attend Reagan’s inauguration (Jonas 1991: 198). Reagan and his advisers referred to the MLN as the “responsible right.” The only motivation the so-called “responsible right,” often seen as nothing more than terrorists, had in this deal, was the promise of U.S. military aid and training (Jonas 1991: 195-199).

The Reagan Administration knew that renewing the military assistance and aid into Guatemala would not be easy. Furthermore, the United States even approved of the March 1982 military coup (Jonas 1991: 199). The Ríos Montt regime had long connections to the U.S. counterinsurgency with Reagan. The Assistant Secretary of State, Thomas Enders tried to convince the American and Guatemalan public that Ríos Montt was improving the human rights and living conditions, when in fact he was making them worse. Moreover, Reagan

himself even stated Ríos Montt was doing a good job (Jonas 1991: 199).

The United Nations and political historians would soon advise that Ríos Montt did anything but a good job. Later, the United Nations in December 1982, under a resolution revealed that the Ríos Montt regime, had in no way improved the human rights conditions in Guatemala. The resolution condemned him for a major wave of human rights violations. Only the United States and its allies condemned the U.N. resolution, while the rest of the world applauded it (Jonas 1991: 198-199). As Susanne Jonas (1991) stated “ Following two decades of upheaval and resistance before the Sandinista triumph in 1979, the struggles of the 1980s have seen advances and setbacks. But above all, these revolutionary processes have permanently transformed the region and its people, and they can be expected to continue into the future, albeit in new forms and on new terms” (Jonas 1991: 214-215).

#### Migration due to Poverty

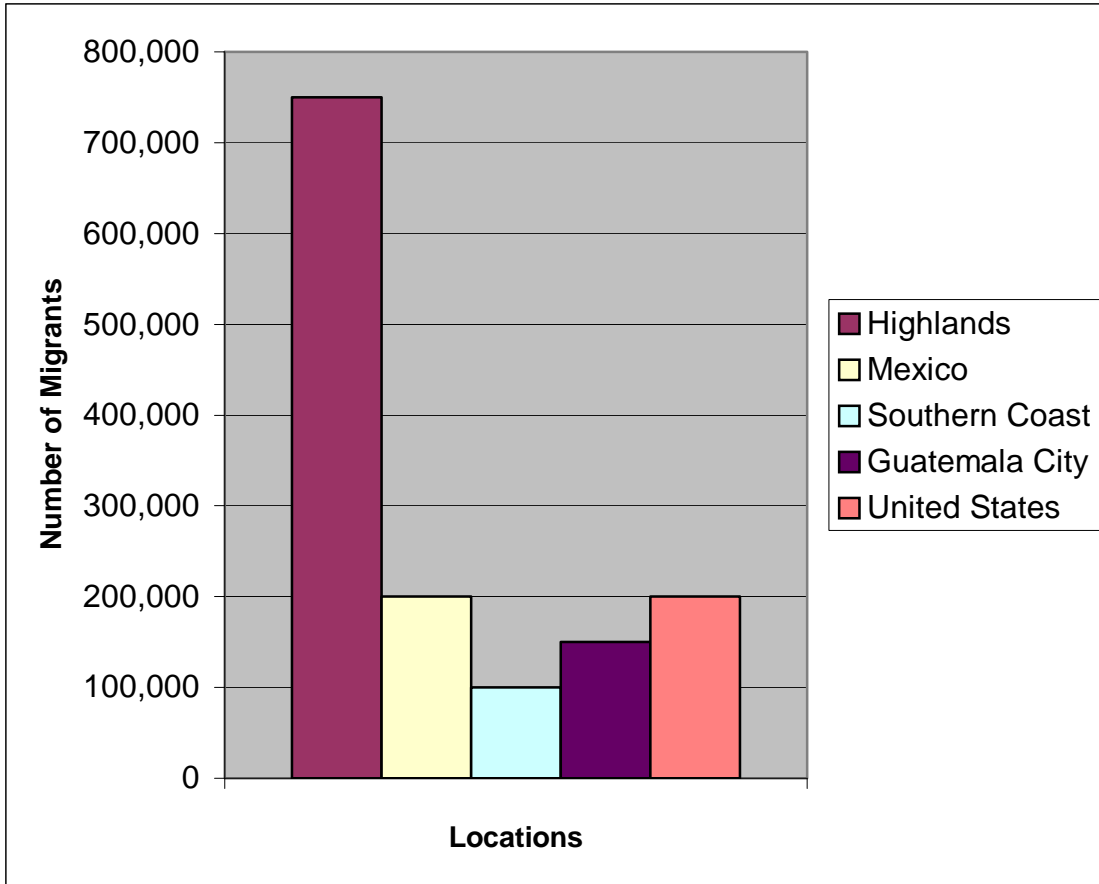
With poor socioeconomic conditions, mass killings, terror, conflict and ongoing political violence between the right and the left, the masses began to think of life elsewhere. They began to think of migrating out of the troubled conflict ridden areas. They feared continued terror and the fact that the conditions of poverty would continue for each other as adults in the family setting and for their children. They dreamed of a government that was not a dictatorship, rather a strong economy with reasonable pay for work performed, and a promising future for their children that was free from terror. Guatemalans began to think of migrating to various different locations within Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, and even the United States.

Some 1 to 1.2 million people had been displaced as a direct result of war in the 1980s.

Approximately 200,000 Guatemalans emigrated into Mexico. However, in 1990, 26,000 people (13%) returned from Mexico to Guatemala. An additional 100,000 Guatemalans went to the Southern Coast of Guatemala, another 150,000 people went to Guatemala City, and 750,000 people migrated into the highlands of Guatemala.

The migration of Guatemalans continued beyond the early 1980's; they carried on well into the mid 1980's with many Guatemalans never returning. New waves of emigration had occurred thereafter to Mexico and the United States. The three key states and points of entry of these Guatemalan families included (California, Texas and Florida) via Mexico according to the Washington Office on Latin America [WOLA] (as cited in Jonas 1991: 182-183). Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of these Guatemalan migrants.

Figure 1. Population Migration



Source: (Jonas 1991: 182-183), Figure: Tristram W. Lynch 2008.

Moreover, the capital of the Republic of Guatemala realized increased migration due to the war within the country, the 1976 earthquake, and poor socioeconomic conditions that spread throughout. Economic issues in other parts of the country caused the capital's population to double between 1976 and 1987, which created urban poverty due to too much demand and not enough resources (ibid). Thus, the government of Kjell Eugenio Laugerud García was partially responsible for much of the unsuccessful economic climate, while his successor Fernando Romeo Lucas García 1978-1982 was not much better. Poverty in Guatemala had become widespread. It was in this context that the modern Central American

gang began to develop based on the violent political climate and economic conditions that the Guatemalan family had been exposed to in Guatemala, forcing migration and displacement of families into other countries as noted in Figure 1. Population Migration. In 1985, 200,000 Guatemalans left Guatemala and traveled to the U.S. mainly by land, plane or boat and the process of legal immigration. In 1990, 200,000 Guatemalans immigrated lawfully to Mexico, traveling by land travel – bus, train or car, due to its close proximity. However, the 750,000 Guatemalans that went into the highlands traveled also by land using obvious forms of transportation or walked. These same socioeconomic and political conditions were no better for the Salvadorans. In El Salvador, life for the peasants was equally as harsh and the military dictatorship was just as bad.

#### El Salvador

El Salvador had established its modern Constitution in 1886. The Constitution had established suffrage for those unable to read and write and granted citizenship, albeit second – class, to women. However, this was a giant leap for the masses because the Spaniards had attempted settlement in 1522, ruining social and political systems of the military democracy that had been arranged by the local tribes who had ownership over its land (Montgomery 1994: 20-26).

Like Guatemala, El Salvador's civil war resulted in the loss of more than 200,000 people. El Salvador endured serious confrontations and revolution, which can be traced back as far as its roots to the 1600s. The conditions that led to a major peasant revolt in 1832 in the city of Los Nonualcos are deeply rooted in the depression within El Salvador dating back to 1610 due to poor demand and decline of cacao and the development of haciendas. The

hacienda represented capitalist enterprises operating with limited capital and untold numbers of non-specialized workers who cultivated the product, in this case the peasants and Indian population for large land-owners producing the products destined for foreign markets.

The question was “what crop should replace cacao?” The answer was indigo, a blue type dye which was not as laborious to produce and maintain as cacao had been. However, even the production of indigo and the lands on which it was grown, were concentrated into these haciendas. This produced serious economic problems, namely poverty. To make matters worse, the government imposed collection of taxes on indigo, causing major tension on top of tribute collection, which was abolished by Spain’s Parliament in 1811. It was a priest who informed the Indians in 1814 of such abolishment, which further caused revolt. Thus in 1832 Anastacio Aquino led 3,000 peasants to battle the government for one year but, he was captured, beheaded, as a warning to the peasantry to never try such an overthrow again.

One hundred years later, they did (Montgomery 1994: 25-29). The oligarchy had maintained a monopoly over political power and they used their power to control and maintain a hold over the economy as well. In other words, they, like the military, abused power. These oligarchic families worked closely with the military to maintain power (Taylor and Vanden 1982: 110-111). The masses were left without needed land and employment. Wealth and other necessities of survival were now concentrated in the hands of the elite, thus class distinctions became easily recognizable (Taylor and Vanden 1982: 110). The authors further report that in 1932 one hundred years after the peasant revolt of 1832, around 60,000 Indians, peasants and workers had risen up against the then dictatorship of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez. The revolutionaries had been led by Faribundo Martí and members of the

Communist Party in El Salvador, but their attempts at revolution would be devastating.

### The Massacre.

The massacre, or La Matanza, resulted mainly because those who made up this small group of revolutionaries led by Faribundo Martí simply advocated change. The problem according to Taylor and Vanden (1982: 110-111) was that they had no outside source to help them with their cause to overthrow the dictatorship of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez. The resulting attempts failed, and some 30,000 men, women, and children were murdered, making the point that El Salvador's rulers would never have to deal with such an uprising again. It should be noted that most all of the dead were innocent, defenseless people, many of them indigenous. Thus, one begins to see the similarities between the conditions in El Salvador and Guatemala. One also sees that like Guatemala, fear and terror was instilled in the masses at a very early stage in their history and the conditions at reform attempts by these revolutionaries in El Salvador led by individuals like Anastacio Aquino and Faribundo Martí were very similar between 1832 and 1932. It would be unfair to argue that these types of conflicts that existed in these countries were simply civil conflict, because the targets were civilians. In these cases, innocent indigenous people that had no defenses except for their voice for change against dictators who had every weapon at their disposal to repel such change. Moreover, those who had been targeted for death were highly selected. Confrontation between the masses and the government in this country had ample historic precedent.

### Confrontation and Migration.

Confrontation between the masses and the military cost 75,000 lives in the years 1975-1992, which sent 500,000 Salvadorans to exile in the United States as discussed by Montgomery (1994) and further reported by Vanden and Prevost (2002: 238). Like



Guatemala, El Salvador was no stranger to political conflict, and later terrorism. Of the main actors mentioned, the key actors in El Salvador that stimulated revolutions were the coffee oligarchy, the military leaders, the peasantry and particular actors from Guatemala and El Salvador around the late 1970's. These included Mario Sandoval Alarcón, leader of the MLN, José Napoleón Duarte-early 1980's and Julio Adolfo Ray Prendes, San Salvador's mayor, Archbishop Romero of the Catholic Church, and Roberto D'Aubuisson. Roberto D'Aubuisson was known as Major Blow Torch, leader of the death squads in El Salvador that were formed with assistance from Mario Sandoval Alarcón out of Guatemala. Some of these actors and their actions also stimulated a response from the United States government due to human rights violations.

#### The Late 1970's -1980's

The Carter Administration was a beacon in the world for human rights. Therefore, President Carter and his staff were appalled by the political violence that continued in El Salvador, particularly under the Romero regime between the years of 1977 - 1979. In the Plaza Libertad for instance, violence had been the cornerstone for two and a half years. El Salvador suffered major violence between July 1, 1977, and October 15, 1979, in the form of mass demonstrations and protests, government repression, left wing kidnappings, occupations of public buildings, labor strikes, disappearances, and death squads (Montgomery 1994: 72-73).

Once again, it is important to stress that this political violence ends up in the form of terror rather than civil conflict as it stems out of protests brought about by the masses /revolutionaries, simple peasants and Indians that push the government elite for change. Civil

conflict does not involve particular targets within the civilian population by the government, death lists, death squads, disappearances, and major human rights violations; but, political terrorism does. Therefore, this dreadful history of violence and terror existed in El Salvador creating fear for the Salvadoran family and their offspring for centuries stemming from Spain, and lived on in the mindset of the Salvadoran children after they left the country and traveled abroad.

### Economic Conditions.

Like Guatemala, El Salvador was no stranger to poverty or to military dictatorship and its' squandering of political power and wealth. Table 2. Distribution of Monthly Family Income in El Salvador, 1976-1977 illustrates how difficult the socioeconomic conditions and vast differences in incomes were in El Salvador for the Salvadoran families during the years 1976-1977. One can infer from the data provided in Table 2. that the percent of families with income less than \$40 per month, with an average of \$27 per month, was 2.3% of all families, and comprised 12.4% of the total income of the entire population in El Salvador (1976-1977). In contrast, 28.3% of all Salvadoran families had an income of >\$400 /month, with an average income of \$649 per month, comprising only 6.2% of the total income in El Salvador, 1976-1977. Of the income categories, the largest percent of families (25.8%) was in the income category of \$120-\$240 per month and an average monthly income of \$163.00. This Table displays the extent and range of poverty of the Salvadoran population based on 1976-1977 income and population data, the average monthly income for the total population being \$143/month.

Table 2. Distribution of Monthly Family Income in El Salvador, 1976-1977

Income Categories in US Dollars	Number of Families per Income Category	Percent of Total Families per Income Category	Total Income (# of families x Category group dollars)	Percent of Total Income	Average Income Per Family in Dollars
<\$40	97,046	<b>2.3%</b>	\$2,621,402	12.4%	<b>\$27</b>
\$40-\$80	288,711	12.0%	\$13,431,278	29.4%	\$59
\$80-\$120	164,263	14.4%	\$16,086,080	21.1%	\$98
\$120-\$240	176,805	<b>25.8%</b>	\$28,762,948	22.7%	<b>\$163</b>
\$240-\$400	64,229	17.2%	\$19,174,067	8.2%	\$299
>\$400	48,711	<b>28.3%</b>	\$31,599,999	6.2%	<b>\$649</b>
Total	779,765	100.0%	\$111,675,744	100.0%	<b>\$143</b>

Source: Ministry of Planning, "Distribution del ingreso y gasto por deciles de hogares, 1976-77" [Distribution of income and expenditures by deciles of households], January 1980, tables 1-4 cited in (Montgomery 1994: 73).

Between 1979-1982, El Salvador's gross domestic product (GDP) declined while its budget deficit increased. For instance, (GDP) for 1979 was \$138.4 million, in 1981 it was \$123.2 and in 1982 it was \$111.6 million dollars. The deficit on the other hand in 1979 was \$43.6 million, in 1981, \$204.8 million, and in 1982, \$770.4 million dollars. Such poor ongoing economic indicators combined with the loss of land and deaths of peasant farmers (campesinos) some 5,000 plus in 1981 forced many Salvadorans to migrate to the United States. Many peasants and indeed many from the oligarchy took up residence in Miami, Florida U.S.A. (Montgomery 1994: 142-143). Thus, thoughts of migration grew stronger not only due to these poor socioeconomic conditions, but also due to the harsh realities of the military regimes under which they lived. As Montgomery (1994) reported, El Salvador was so

desperate by the early 1980's, that it would have totally collapsed had it not been for the United States economic assistance. Such situations were very similar in Guatemala, where the U.S. essentially ran its government for a time after the incompetent Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas regime (Jonas 1991: 57-58).

Like Guatemala, its land had been squandered by the government, which led to poverty. Land was poorly distributed and the law, Decree #207, was poorly drawn. The University of Wisconsin Land Tenure Center analyzed the problems with the decree. They found the major flaw to be a top down land reform process whereby much of the land was controlled by the government with little or no participation by the peasants. This finding led to the creation of The National Financial Institution for Agricultural Lands (FINATA). The purpose of FINATA was to process applications for land titles. FINATA had been busy, for there were over 150,000 new landowners. Thus, in 1981, a State Department official noted that 6,000 pre-applications were filed by claimants and only a total of 345 provisional titles were granted (Montgomery 1994: 138-139).

#### Political Violence.

The economic conditions and political violence only got worse in El Salvador after 1977 when in 1979 Roberto D'Aubuisson and his business colleagues met with the dictator of Guatemala in Guatemala City, Mario Sandoval Alarcón founder of Nationalist Liberation Movement (MLN). The purpose of the meeting was the fact that Roberto D'Aubuisson and his agents wanted Mario Sandoval Alarcón to assist them and supply them with the formation of a paramilitary underground and arms with intent to seize control of the Salvadoran government, another typical act of political violence (Montgomery 1994:132).

Mario Sandoval Alarcón supplied advice, raised money with right wing Miami exiles

for the political activities of Roberto D'Aubuisson's cabal. He also helped to smuggle weapons into El Salvador supplying pilots to do the job and hit men to counter attack anybody interfering with the operation. Furthermore, Montgomery (1994) reports Salvadoran exiles living in Miami backed up the operation to aid in destroying the reformist government to the tune of millions of dollars by financing death squads and terrorizing those affiliated with the reformist government (Montgomery 1994:132). The direction of the death squads and their targets were orchestrated by the agent Roberto D'Aubuisson. The terror continued and members of the Catholic Church were not immune to all the violence, especially Archbishop Romero.

The death squads were operating out of Guatemala with Salvadoran Roberto D'Aubuisson at the helm. These particular death squads were interested more so in the killings of what they deemed to be quality killings. Unlike modern terrorists and gangs that exist in El Salvador to date, these squads went after famed faces and so they killed by quality not quantity (Montgomery 1994:133-134). Archbishop Romero and the Christian Democratic Party were familiar faces with very loud voices of opposition. After spending time in Guatemala, Roberto D'Aubuisson and agents returned to El Salvador with intentions to defend their land from what they deemed to be communism. Under the nickname of Major Blow Torch, he and his assassins killed Mario Zamora, a leader of the Christian Democratic Party and standout public figure by shooting him in the head ten times in his own home. Next, they went after Archbishop Romero.

According to Montgomery (1994:133), the first attempt on the Archbishop's life failed when he noted a briefcase after his 5:00pm mass in honor of Mario Zamora. Fortunately, the briefcase was removed. The church personnel discovered that it contained seventy-two sticks

of dynamite with a timer set for 5:00, without indicating morning or evening. Roberto D'Aubuisson warned the Archbishop to change his ways and work with the structure of his government, but Archbishop Romero declined. Two weeks after the first attempt on his life had failed, the second attempt succeeded. The only precautionary method the priest used to avoid further attempts on his life after the first one was to change places of where he slept at night. Obviously, Archbishop Romero was very stubborn, resisted changing his ways, and refused to let terrorists led by Roberto D'Aubuisson intimidate him. In the end, the price for being stubborn cost him his life. Even the former U.S. Ambassador Robert E. White believed that Roberto D'Aubuisson ordered this assassination as explicated by Taylor and Vanden (1982: 115). All this violence against such public figures in El Salvador was from the right wing death squads and was their leaders' way of usurping power. They intimidated the masses using the label of communism as their only excuse for these atrocities.

José Napoleon Duarte, member of the Christian Democratic Party and mayor of San Salvador the capital of El Salvador, had run for president first in 1972 only to be defrauded in his election, beaten, tortured, and exiled for seven years. He returned and became president in 1979, in a newly formed junta. The only problem was that he failed to control the growing opposition forces, and the result led to the second Matanza. Since that time, 1979, killings increased for those who advocated for reform and spoke out, with Archbishop Romero being a classic example (Montgomery 1994: 136-139; Taylor and Vanden 1982: 111-113). The violence was so severe that some 8,000 civilians had been killed by 1980, among which 6,000 were murdered by Salvadoran government forces (ibid).

### Human Rights.

President Jimmy Carter made it quiet clear that protection of human rights would be a

major criterion as to whether or not a government would receive military assistance and funding from the United States (Montgomery 1994: 72). Given the massive human rights violations on some 8,000 civilians and given his dissatisfaction with the Duarte government for human rights violations, Archbishop Romero asked the United States to stop military assistance and funding for El Salvador (Taylor and Vanden 1982:112-113). Archbishop Romero spoke out too much against the opposition forces and touted his concerns about human rights violations involving the peasantry, which led to his assassination in 1980. Thus, the political violence, terrorist tactics and connections between these two Central American countries were very similar. The Indian population and peasant workers felt the brunt of the repression and economic deprivation. As a result, they began to consider migration as an option. Because of the close proximity of El Salvador to the United States, migration was feasible by land, air or sea. The socioeconomic conditions and political circumstances in Honduras were also similar to those of El Salvador and Guatemala.

## Honduras

Honduras as of the late 1970's and early 1980's was by no means at all as revolutionary as was Guatemala and El Salvador. It did however, suffer some revolts but not to the same extent. Honduras was very dependent on Spain in its colonial past and then the United States in terms of capital and foreign policy, and currently still is very much reliant on the U.S., its main trading partner (World Fact Book, March 6, 2008). Thus the country has long been understood to be oriented toward dependency, especially on the U.S. In terms of its political history, Honduras had been defined by the American owned fruit companies who held the majority of its productive lands since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, causing dependence on its

banana industry (Latin America Bureau: 1985 as cited in Schmalzbauer 2005: 8). Both the American owned Standard Fruit and the United Fruit companies controlled all of the best of land to the extent of 75% of much of Honduras' lands in the northern territory (ibid). Of note, the civil wars in each Central American country differed and the dictatorships were very similar in Guatemala and El Salvador as evidenced by the history in this chapter, but this was not the same situation in Honduras.

#### Government Actions: Reformism.

The structure of the Honduran government was liberal, which to some extent had benefited the country in terms of land reforms in conjunction with the fact that the American fruit companies held much of that land. At a time when military dictatorship was strong in Central America, particularly in Guatemala and El Salvador, the Honduran liberal government could pass agrarian land reforms with ease with the help of a strong anti-communist peasant reformist movement. Those reforms took place in 1962, 1972 and 1975 (Euraque 1996: as cited in Schmalzbauer 2005: 9).

#### The 1980s.

Because Honduras is famously known for its production of bananas, it had been called the quintessential banana republic. When President Ronald Reagan took the White House, Honduras suddenly became known as a pentagon republic. Some say, namely Schmalzbauer (2005), it seemed to have become an occupied country for the U.S. military, which essentially had large numbers of military in it during the 1980s (Schmalzbauer 2005: 10). All this was done under the Reagan Administration so as to launch the Nicaraguan Contra War. Thus, one would assume then, with all the aid and friendship of the United States at this moment in its history, 1981, that Honduras could prosper especially with the U.S. influences and assistance



from the U.S. fruit companies. On the contrary, such an assumption is not entirely true.

#### The Honduran National Security Doctrine.

The Honduran National Security Doctrine was an anti-communist platform carried out by then President Cordovo. His Colonel Alvarez and the U.S. ambassador John Negroponte<sup>6</sup> headed up the U.S. forces associated with the Contra War. They used whatever means necessary to enforce this doctrine. Those means included repression and human rights violations, disappearances, tortures, judicial killings, all of which targeted primarily political organizations. This approach expanded from a micro-level to a macro-level, targeting all of the Honduran society. It was this fear, this historical moment, violence, poverty, and on going killings that caused the first wave of Honduran migrants to the United States (Schmalzbauer 2005: 10).

#### Political Movements.

Honduras had not experienced the same breadth of civil war and conflict as Guatemala and El Salvador. Yet, Honduras did rely heavily on foreign influences, as did Guatemala and El Salvador. Much of its society was underdeveloped and poor. Land was always important in Honduras for the purposes of producing bananas and raising beef (Rivas 1989: 5-6). These economic products helped Honduras enter into the global capitalist society and its benefits, such as free market capitalism.

After World War II, power had alternated and wavered in conjunction with fifteen years of economic stagnation. Social movements rose from the ground to counter much of the authoritarian politics along with the rise of popular national-reformist movements (Rivas

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<sup>6</sup> John Negroponte currently serves as the United States Deputy Secretary of State Appointed by President George W. Bush as of 2004-2008.

1993:66). Movement activists typically push for social change, but not so much for reform. They desire only to be recognized within the polity and they usually look for the overthrow of a particular social order (Tarrow 2006:161).

In Honduras, just like in Guatemala and El Salvador, many of the indigenous people formed social movements for the purpose of inclusion in the polity with special emphasis placed on the need for land in order to grow crops and raise beef. With land and the production of these products the indigenous could have a voice in government, create policy and become wealthy.

Without the land, they really had nothing and so agrarian reform was usually met with repression as has been evidenced with the roll backs of the peasants gains especially in Guatemala and El Salvador, and even in Honduras with the peasants demands over the land associated with growing cotton. To be sure, land distribution for the purpose of coffee production in Honduras was irrelevant. The real primary products of production in Honduras became cotton, beef and bananas. Historically, Honduras' land was not as arable for producing coffee as were the lands of Guatemala and El Salvador. Thus, with such stiff competition and mass production of coffee in Guatemala and El Salvador, it is easy to see why they, the campesinos and farm laborers used land distributed to them for alternative economical products, namely beef, cotton, and bananas. Table 3. Mean Production of Coffee (1,000 Pounds) in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador illustrates why the campesinos used their land for other agricultural products rather than focusing on coffee production.

Table 3. Mean Production of Coffee (1,000 Pounds) in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador 1909-1943

Years	Honduras's/Average	Guatemala's/Average	El Salvador's/Average
1939-1943	3,704	99,605	116,228
1934-1938	3,616	104,191	119,403
1929-1933	3,351	96,431	112,833
1924-1928	2,998	103,441	97,353
1919-1923	1,102	95,637	83,820
1914-1918	1,102	84,658	75,178
1909-1913	1,102	86,642	64,596

Source: The Worlds' Coffee. Exports in the fiscal year ending July 31, as cited in (Rivas 1993: 137).

Consistently throughout its history and even in the present day, Honduras was, and remains, no match for producing coffee with its land compared to the other Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and even Costa Rica. Thus, these farmers today, as in the past, in Honduras need each other in order to produce the goods that matter, bananas, beef and cotton for their economy over all and their own potential to make a living for their families. But, poverty among the families was, and continues to be a problem. Table 4. Gini Index, Population and Population below Poverty Line in Honduras shows how poor these Honduran families currently are, with 50.7% of its population living below the poverty line in 2004.

Table 4. Gini Index, Population and Population Below Poverty Line In Honduras

Economic Inequality Score	Population	Pop Below Poverty Line
53.8	7,483,763 (2007 est)	50.7% (2004 est)

Source: (The World Fact Book for Honduras, Central Intelligence Agency, March 6, 2008).

These farmers needed to work with each other in the form of movements, social movements, because they could not achieve much alone. However, their movements have not

been successful and their ability to mobilize and influence the government is miniscule at best. They were struggling economically, and migrating seemed a solution to their problems. Honduras' economy suffered major inequalities as did Guatemala's and El Salvador's, especially for Honduras with such a small population in a country not much bigger than the state of Tennessee.

### Political Violence.

The campesinos' social movements within Honduras relied heavily on mutual acquaintances to acquire land, a process known as using social capital (Bourdieu 1985: 248 as cited in Portes 1998: 3). Although it is important to note that there are a variety of definitions of social capital, bridging versus bonding for instance, bonding, the type of social capital referred to with this movement, required loyalty. Bonding social capital requires strong in-group loyalty, but it also might create strong out-group antagonism (Putnam 2000: 23). Putnam advises that with this type of social capital, negative external effects are usually more common than positive ones. The problem with these movements was that they also relied heavily on mass mobilization of the people. Often it was difficult for social groups to gather support needed to bring about social change. The loyalty of one hundred campesinos working together in Honduras could hardly be as effective as one million, such as the O Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra, the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil as reported by the authors Wright and Wolford (2003). In Honduras, like Guatemala and El Salvador, the governments that emerged after the economic crisis of the 1930's had been replaced by middle-class leaders and political groups headed by popular movements like the campesinos movement (Rivas 1993: 69).

According to Rivas (1989: 77), this campesino movement was grounded in violent

actions and land seizures marking the difference between this country and El Salvador with respect to landownership. The landowner had to live in an insecure environment, not the members of the social movement. Attempts had been made at stabilizing the situation in 1972 under the civilian government of Ramón Cruz only to be overthrown by a military coup lead by Oswaldo López Arellano (Rivas 1989: 77). The military was able to reform briefly and lost credibility thereafter producing nothing more than an agrarian reform program. For the social movement itself to form and be successful, it needed good organizers from pre-existing associations emerging from a struggle. Most social movements that emerged from a long tormenting interactive process of state formation had been successful (Tarrow 2006: 200-201); but, the campesino movement, like this one in Honduras, had competition. As a result, the campesinos movement was not so successful.

Outbidding and counter protests are often the result when two movements mobilize against each other, particularly were one movement's success jeopardizes the success of the other in a context of heightened mobilization, in this case the campesinos movement versus popular movements, and the outcome can bring about terrorist campaigns (Tarrow 2006: 88). What this means is when one movement threatens the success of another in terms of its ability to mobilize, it can bring about outbidding and counter-protesting. In other words, one movement's success might be to the detriment of the other and as a result, the movement that appears to be failing, counter protests using any means necessary to achieve its goal including violence. Della Porta and Tarrow (1986) refer to a classic example such as the right and the left feeding off each other in Italy in the 1960s. Tarrow (2006) further advises "movements that employ violence invite physical repression". Such violence and repression lead to harsh economic conditions. Both the legal and bureaucratic structures of the Honduran government

went through a violent period in order to deal with the new economy that had been emerging since the economic crisis after 1930.

### Economic Conditions.

The Honduran economy, particularly the export sector, had suffered a major blow prior to the 1950 period in addition to foreign investment. For example, in 1929 U.S. investment in this country was \$80.3 million dollars, the highest amount of money invested in all of Central American countries by the United States followed by Guatemala second, with \$58.8 million U.S.D. (Rivas 1993: 49). The problem was the fact that the Atlantic coastal land, the banana plantations property devalued the rest of the land in the country, which created passivity and reinforced isolation. Rivas (1993) reported that in 1950 for every 100 square kilometers of land, only 3.2 kilometers of highways existed (ibid). Moreover, ever since 1929, Honduras relied heavily on foreign investments especially from the United States. The export sector managed to make a recovery thereafter into the 1970s, however, it was meager. Out of all the Central American countries discussed in this research, the Honduran economy was the most vulnerable, mainly because of its dependency on foreign controlled production (Rivas 1993: 74). Therefore, the economic conditions worsened and the violence increased due to dictatorial rule and a foreign controlled economy. As a result, Hondurans, particularly the peasant farmers and their families, sought migration as a means to escape the poor socioeconomic conditions of poverty and violence. They saw migration to the U.S. as a feasible option for freedom and prosperity.

### 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

Since the 1970s-1990s onward, thousands of Hondurans have, and continue, to emigrate to the U.S. because of harsh economic conditions and natural disasters in the country,

specifically, hurricane Mitch, which caused tremendous devastation in 1998 to the country's infrastructure, while displacing Hondurans (Schmalzbauer 2005: 50-51). However, not all Hondurans emigrated lawfully. According to Sullivan<sup>7</sup> (2005: 5), the numbers of undocumented Hondurans that migrated to the U.S. after Hurricane Mitch in 1998 was approximately 82,000. These Hondurans were granted temporary protected status by the United States, protecting them from deportation, because the Honduran government would not be able to cope with the massive waves of Hondurans being deported back into the small country.

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## CHAPTER FOUR: TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

Migration is the movement of individuals in general, between cities, and states. Transnational migration involves movement to other nations, crossing international borders and when legal, meeting the entrance eligibility requirements to visit, work or become citizens. Basch, Click, Schiller and Blanc (1994) defined transnational migration as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (as cited in Schmalzbauer 2005: 4). Borders between countries are loosely defined and monitored in areas such as Central America, whereas movement from national borders is regulated through governmental controls.

### Migration into the United States

For many Hondurans, Guatemalans and Salvadorans, they chose to leave their country for entry into the U.S. because of its reputation for freedom and prosperity. Many of the families from these three specific countries have come to popular cities in the U.S: Los Angeles, San Antonio, San Francisco, Phoenix and other known cities, particularly the Boston and New York City areas. The top ten cities for gangs are New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Detroit, San Diego, San Antonio, Phoenix, San Francisco, and Boston (Howell 1994: 498). According to the 1990 Census Bureau, the greatest number—probably over 100,000—settled in Los Angeles, where the biggest concentration of Central Americans in the United States resided at that time. There were



also significant numbers of Central Americans in Houston, Chicago, New York City, Washington D.C., southern Florida, and San Francisco. Smaller enclaves are found in Miami, New Orleans, Phoenix/Tucson, and other cities in Texas and North Carolina. These families were searching for a better life, free from poor socioeconomic and brutal conditions associated with dictatorship and terror in their countries of origin. They were in pursuit of better economic conditions (Jonas 1991: 182-183; Schmalzbauer 2005: 10-11). However, this migration effort resulted in legal and illegal immigration patterns; those that followed the regulatory migration requirements and those that did not. Because many of these migrants came to the U.S. illegally, most of the Central American influx was secret and illegal, and much of mainstream America was at first ignorant of its magnitude. But, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) kept a close eye on the situation.

During the 1980s, migrants from these Central American countries settled primarily in cities with large existing Latino communities. They clustered together to maintain the language and culture of their homeland. Their communities became a lure for their families and friends. Yet, relations with other Latino groups near whom Central Americans often lived were strained. The more established Latino and Mexican communities resented the newer residents because of rivalry for low-paying jobs. Yet, a number of Native American groups have been very supportive of indigenous Guatemalan, Salvadoran and Honduran immigrants to the United States and empathize with their struggle against genocide and cultural oppression.

According to U.S. Census (1990) and Schmalzbauer (2005), these migrants moved into impoverished communities in cities such as Tucson, Arizona for Guatemalans, Chelsea in Boston for Hondurans and Miami, Florida and San Francisco,

California for Salvadorans. It should be noted that while family and friends attracted these migrants to migrate into specific cities within specific states, ethnicity and the labor markets, particularly the agricultural economy also played a significant role in such migration patterns (Eekhoff and Avalos 2003: 12-16). Los Angeles, in California is the main city for Guatemalan and Salvadoran migrants, second to Louisiana for the Hondurans. In fact, the fastest growing states in the U.S. for Guatemalans between 1990 and 2000 according to the U.S. census were Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming. North Carolina and New Mexico had the highest rates for Hondurans.

According to Eekhof and Avalos (2003: 13), “The mid-west and southern states are attracting more and more Central Americans”. They report that Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming experienced the fastest migrant growth during 1990-2000. These researchers studied the unique migration of specific migrant groups using census data at state and national levels. They report that Hondurans migrated mostly to North Carolina, New Mexico, and Louisiana, whereas Salvadorans migrated mostly to Vermont, Arkansas, and Tennessee. Guatemalans however, migrated mostly to Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eekhof and Avalos were able to calculate migrant group rates using these data: “Guatemalan migration grew by 1030% each year between 1990 and 2000; Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Raleigh, North Carolina, are attracting greater numbers of Hondurans; Salvadorans have been going to Fayetteville, Arkansas at the rate of 737% increase per year” (2003: 13).

Eekhof and Avalos (2003) also examined migration patterns in relation to the labor market. They studied news articles and labor patterns to ascertain if migrant patterns changed with improved employment and labor markets. Central American

migrants found the U.S. economy and working conditions to be better than their countries of origin. In contrast, U.S. laborers would not work for these lower wages and poor conditions. So the influx of migrants into labor markets was welcomed by the agricultural businesses.

However, the migratory numbers are probably underestimates, as the census data were not complete. Because of their illegal and undocumented migrant status, not all migrants were tracked and entered into census databases. But, their rapid growth was challenging to the U.S. communities. They faced many challenges related to work, health and acculturation. They relied on social welfare systems for their food, housing and healthcare. While they created an un-welcomed social burden during difficult economic times in these cities, these migrants relied on their friends and families to retain their cultural practices. Migrant families and friends united for socialization and protection. The parents found employment as undocumented immigrants in low-paying jobs such as farms, meat factories, and as servants.

Their children grew up in these poor conditions, and like their parents, wanted socialization and protection. Since the children were poor, and sometimes sought unlawful means of excitement and money, their lives were insecure, so they went to the streets for security with their peers. The children were negatively influenced by unhappy home lives and witnessed their parents' abuse, poverty, and feelings of hopelessness (Fairfax County Virginia.Gov). These children as they aged, essentially wanted a different life – a life of control, power, and money. To achieve these desires, they turned to unlawful actions with their peer groups, creating strong bonds within territories. These unlawful, territory- based youth groups became known as gangs. The main reasons why

youth join gangs are due to broken family households, poverty and urban life (Martin 2005: 7). Thus, gangs evolved over time, mainly due to the families' exposure to poor economic conditions, anarchy, dictatorships, uncontrolled governments, single-family households, poverty, and urban life. Maxson and Klein (1993) (cited in Howell 1994: 506), explained that 39% of gang members move because of family relocation versus only 20% because of an expanding drug market.

#### Living Conditions of Migrants in United States

These migrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras faced multiple hardships once they arrived in the United States. However, it should be noted that they were used to extreme hardships given the violence in their homelands as discussed in Chapter Three. Yet, the hardships they faced in the U.S. were by no means as extreme. In the U.S., they faced first and foremost, a lack of proper documentation, mobility barriers in school for their children and workplace for the adults, fear of deportation back to the country of origin, lack of or poor English skills, illiteracy, poverty, segregation, and recently the adoption and passing of the United States' Patriot Act by the current President George W. Bush and U.S. Congress (Schmalzbauer 2005: 33).

These barriers made life very difficult for these migrants in the United States, so the life they expected and hoped for in the U.S. was not the life they actually experienced. The adults struggled to find employment and make enough money to live, while the youth had a difficult time acculturating into U.S. cities. As a result, the youth got involved with drugs, violence, and illegal group activities, all associated as gang behaviors.

The parents who tried to raise these younger children in America struggled to keep them out of trouble, while they worked hard to send the remittances back home to the grandparents, the “other mothers”, who remained in Central America to care for their teenage sons and daughters left behind by the parents (Schmalzbauer 2005: 30-40). While the immigrant parents worked hard to improve life for their families, they lost control of their children who became members of street gangs in American cities, becoming known as Central American Gangs or simply Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants. However, in reality, the gang-structure was present also in Central America among teenage youths of the sons and daughters left behind with their grandparents. Thus, the other sons and daughters back in Central America formed gangs and were engaged in the same unlawful and violent acts on Central American streets due to their need for socialization and protection and their struggle to escape poverty.

This process of gang formation takes place first through youth solidarity. In the U.S., these youth carve out their own boundaries and territories within cities and villages, developing gang communities with unique names. These youth gangs form, multiply, and evolve to eventually battle against each other for power, control and territory. The primary reason the youth join gangs is because they felt they had no other alternatives to escape poverty and broken homes in the U.S. urban cities (Martin 2005: 7; Anderson 1999: 42-45). They blamed the government for not creating alternatives for them. They have lack of respect in their lives and want it, so many use drugs as a means to gain access to money to support each other financially and to fulfill their drug addictions, which includes: marijuana, heroin, alcohol, and other drugs.

A classical case of a youth group who formed and carved out territory in Los Angeles, and gave themselves a name, is the notorious Mara Salvatrucha street gang (MS-13). These gang members were primarily made up of Salvadoran immigrants, children of transnational migrant families that left San Salvador, El Salvador, because of dictatorial rule, mass murders, death lists and death squads. To date, the Federal Bureau of Investigators has ranked this gang as the most dangerous in the world. The sad part of their life is that for many of them, they may never see their family back in El Salvador again due to transnational migration or a lifetime spent in prison for their crimes.

Still, these migrants dreamed of their lives back in their country of origin and hoped for future reunion. For example, one particular Honduran migrant, Dorotea, tells her story about being miles apart from her family she had left behind in Honduras with a dream to earn money in the U.S. to support them and unite with them someday.

Dorotea Dreams of Reunion.

“I hope that someday we will all be able to be together again. I have always said that I believe this is the biggest obstacle in my life, to not be with my kids... Because when I was there with them I had goals, I studied, and I had enthusiasm. But here I have little enthusiasm. I’m always thinking about my children, what they are doing, that they are getting bigger, that things are happening in their lives, and these thoughts obstruct my ability to be happy” (Schmalzbauer 2005: 68).

Obviously, Dorotea suffered from being homesick and missed her family so much that a question was marked in her mind: Was the arduous journey to the United States worth it? Dorotea and many others like her who fled Central America, Guatemala and El Salvador, did not realize the peril their children continued to face in Central American countries. Many of

these children lacked alternatives to escape poverty and danger, as noted by Kemp (2007). Kemp conducted gang research in El Salvador, discovering some of the most violent youth in the world were serving time in the worst prisons in El Salvador for their crimes. Unfortunately while individuals like Dorotea were in the U.S. trying to earn money to send the remittances back home to support her children, she did not realize that they were actually engaged in unlawful violent and drug-related activities, endangering their own lives. The deportees of 1992 (maras) had begun the recruitment process of these young children aged between 9 and 19 as inferred from Arana (2005). Therefore, all though some of these kids did unite with their families, the families had no idea they had actually already been recruited by these gangs in Central America.

#### Living Conditions of Teenagers In Central America

After the migrants fled to the United States from these Central American countries, those teenagers who stayed behind were left with the damages caused by earlier civil wars and the damage caused by the recent United States military presence, especially in Honduras after the military departed, particularly after the Contra War was over. The culture that persisted was extremely violent. Having being exposed to years of violence, one can understand perhaps how these violent youth that threaten the political system have evolved. The teenagers that now walk the streets of Honduras and even Guatemala and El Salvador are very dangerous. As Manwaring (2005: 13-14) specifically indicated, “El Salvador has some 39,000 current gang members and in Guatemala in 2004 they murdered more than 3,500 people of which more than 455 of those were women in broad daylight”. Sullivan (2005: 2) reports, that even in Honduras and its close neighbors, Guatemala and El Salvador, it is

poverty, unemployment, and the leftover weapons from the 1980s that has fueled these gangs. Living conditions have been so bad, the youth felt little or no other alternatives in their lives, so they took matters into their own hands.

As the author Schmalzbauer reports, “Drugs, a central but less publicized component of the covert wars in Central America (Scott and Marshall: 1991 as cited in Schmalzbauer 2005: 10), have become pervasive in Honduran cities. As has been the case in the United States and the inner cities around the world, drugs have intensified violence, especially among the young. San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa are now two of the most gang-infested cities in all of the Americas”. In short, the covert wars enabled drugs to further develop in these inner cities especially after the United States left Honduras. Because of the drug activities selling, distributing, and usage and left over weapons, the youth who have been exposed to years of violence have only become more violent, evolving into gangs and gang activities as reported by Sullivan (2005).

### Gang Types

Although multiple definitions of gangs are found in sociological literature, the definition provided by the government of Fairfax County coincides with that provided by Miller. Miller (1982): states that gangs are law violating youth groups. Specifically, Miller defines a gang as “an association of three or more youths whose members engage recurrently in illegal activities with the cooperation and /or moral support of their companions”.

Three types of gangs are noted in the literature: first, second and third generation gangs (Manwaring 2005). Miller (1982) first referred to these gang types as turf-oriented,



gain-oriented and fighting-oriented gangs. The new modern Central American street gang is a fighting gang, having all the elements of the first and second-generation gangs. This gang is different than simple turf-oriented and gain-oriented gangs. Each type of gang is briefly discussed.

Two points of view are provided to help identify the first type of gang, first generation or turf-oriented gang. The first offered by Miller (1982) (cited in Howell 1994: 497), while the other offered by Manwaring (2005: 9-10). Miller refers to gangs concerned with control of neighborhoods and city blocks as turf-oriented gangs. They are not very sophisticated, have very loose leadership, and focus on petty cash. Manwaring (2005) refers to them as first generation gangs. Anderson (1999:117), another researcher, noted that they typically control the streets and their turf. Yet, when drug trafficking becomes profitable, other dealers move in on their turf, violence follows and often people are hurt or killed in the process. A second type of gang is the gain-oriented gang. The gain-oriented type gang tends to be more sophisticated and places emphasis on controlling their markets, in particular the drug market and businesses (Miller 1982). Manwaring refers to this gang as the second- generation gang.

Miller (1982) classified the third type of gang as the fighting gang, later called the third generation gang by Manwaring (2005). This gang is new and has all the elements of both the first two types of gangs (Manwaring 2005: 10). This gang is the most dangerous, and seeks to control ungoverned territory challenging the role of authorities; essentially, it challenges the role of the government and the police. This gang type has the potential to topple weak governments and to control cities just like those in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. Examples of these types of gangs are the MS-13, Marasalvatrucha, and the M18 Central American street gangs. In summary, a first generation gang centers its attention on

turf protection, suffers with loose unsophisticated leadership and focuses on petty cash. A second generation gang organizes for business and commercial gains; whereas, a third generation gang has all the elements of the first and second generation gangs with the clear difference being that this type of gang pushes to control and in some cases take over power by way of corruption and coercion. Manwaring (2005: 10) asserts that the third generation gang places itself against the political will of these weak countries and enters into a battle space known as “intrastate war”.

According to Kemp (2007) the members of the MS-13, a third generation gang, continue to argue that they are at war. They claim that they are at war with their local government in San Salvador and other gangs, notably the M-18 street gang, reported by Kemp after interviewing gang prisoners at a prison in El Salvador. These types of gangs are difficult enemies to battle with because they are not a state or an army and often they attack and cause harm with little if any notice to their targets.

“They inevitably begin to control ungoverned territory within a nation-state and /or begin to acquire political power in poorly-governed space. This political action is intended to provide security and freedom of movement for gang activities. As a consequence, the third generation gang and its leadership challenge the legitimate state monopoly on the exercise of control and use of violence within a given political territory. The gang leader, then, acts much the same as a warlord or a drug baron” (Manwaring 2005: 10).

Clearly, the MS-13 gang is a third generation gang, the most dangerous of the gang types. For this reason, law enforcement must make every effort to contain this gang and stop its global reach of crime and violence. This gang challenges the role of police and military authorities. Because of their expanding growth and violence, these third generation gangs can

ultimately control targeted cities and counties, e.g. Frederick, Maryland, Orange County, California, San Salvador, El Salvador, San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, Honduras (Manwaring 2005: 12; Schmalzbauer 2005: 10-11). Current literature reports the fact that these types of gangs are already controlling such major cities and counties by way of dictating to the role of authority including the authority normally carried out by politicians and police. The effects of such activities on governments at the local, state, and federal levels can be devastating and expensive particularly if members of the MS-13 gang have already been deported and yet found their way back across American borders.

#### Emergence of Dangerous Youth Groups/ Gangs in U.S.

These Central American children and many young minorities like them, particularly young African American males, emerged and became dangerous in the U.S. because of the lure to get involved in the sale and distribution of drugs. That lure involves the fantasy of getting rich quick. They wanted to get rich quick because they lived in conditions of poverty. Thus, they sold drugs for American drug dealers who would threaten them with the use of violence if they did not sell a specific amount of drugs, particularly crack to their customers. Sometimes drugs would be advanced to the customer and always delivered by the youth, but sometimes the money for the drugs would not be paid to the dealer (Anderson 1999: 116). As a result, the dealer would take his or her violence and in most cases his violence, out on the children. This kind of violent behavior would be instilled in these children at very early stages in their lives and they would take those violent lessons learned and experiences of abuse in U.S. society with them. Such abuses and experiences represent their early developing stages of gang membership in the U.S. in the city of Los Angeles. Violent attributes were quickly

established and many innocent people fell victim to these violent youth groups.

The roots of these gangs first emerged in Los Angeles, California, due to the transnational families' prior settlement in that city. When the families took their young children out of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras to avoid civil wars in their homelands. These families settled in the slums of Los Angeles in the 1980s, so that their young children grew up in these slums integrating with other poor Salvadoran families. As the young children aged, they mixed with other young children and associated themselves with other families who also migrated to Los Angeles. During the 1980's the influx of migrants increased while the current children were aging, becoming unlawful youth groups of Salvadoran immigrants living in poverty.

Riots occurred in the early 1990s, with unprecedented looting and violence. The Los Angeles Police Department determined that the origin of these riots and violence were Salvadoran immigrants, the early formation of the MS-13 in the U.S. (Arana 2005: 99). The patterns of their gang violence were considered first generation according to the research of Manwaring (2005) because in their early stages, they were primarily concerned with only territory. In response to these riots, California implemented new laws that targeted a crackdown on gang violence explained by Arana (2005). State prosecutors decided it would be best to charge young gang members as adults, rather than minors. The first law, the Anti-gang Law was enacted in 1992. The second law implanted in 1994, the Three-Strikes-and You are Out Law, which increased the jail time for offenders convicted of 3 or more felonies. The third law, 1996, passed by the U.S. Congress extended the get-tough-approach to immigration law. As a result of these laws, law enforcement captured hundreds of young Latin criminals, who were then sent to jail for crimes they committed. The Salvadoran

Immigrants rounded up by the police gave themselves the number 13 in line with 13<sup>th</sup> street out of the City of Los Angeles (Bruneau, 2005: 20). They added to these words to be named Mara trucha 13: Mara, a Spanish slang for “gang”, and “trucha” stands for “trout” in Spanish, and is the slang word for a shrewd person. ... and they used prison as a cell for gang communication (Bruneau 2005: 20).

Historically, this gang has grown since its inception in the 1980s out of Los Angeles from a first generation turf-oriented gang to a well developed third generation level gang and is currently a global transnational criminal organization. The MS-13 gang became very well known to law enforcement particularly in the city of Los Angeles, California in the early 1980s (WOLA 2006:3; Flores and Romano 2005: 23-24). They present some of the worst problems for law enforcement across the states of Texas, California, New York, Maryland, and to a somewhat lesser degree, Florida (Cardenas 2007: 1-4). Its membership varies, between 10,000 and 20,000 in the U.S., but some figures are higher (Kraul, Lopez and Connell 2005:1-3; Bruneau 2005: 2). Howell (1994: 498) noted they have even inhabited cities across the U.S. with populations of one half million or less; so, it would not be surprising to find this gang in cities like Frederick, Maryland, with a population of 57,009 as of 2004. As a result of this gang proliferating across the U.S., the FBI has set up an MS-13 gang task force unit in an effort to contain the gang from proliferating even more (Kraul, Lopez and Connell 2005: 1-3). This gang is made up of the transnational families’ children that took up residence with their family primarily in Los Angeles.

This same kind of violence spread rather quickly around other states as youths took up residence, particularly in the streets of Chicago, Illinois. These youth became afraid of the dealers they worked for and the territories the dealers controlled. They carved out their own

territory as a result and many of them carried out their own drug trade. No longer was it acceptable to them to simply control territory, they wanted to dictate to authorities. This insecurity is instilled into individuals living in the neighborhoods in which these gangs take up residence and creates fear for the residents. They take up residence by way of occupying abandoned homes and buildings from fearful residents and business owners due to their horrific crimes, especially murder. A classic case of this situation has been reported in Orange County, California (Villa and Meeker 1999: 15). As a result, people move out of such gang neighborhoods in fear for their lives.

Orange County, California had to find a way to deal with the gang related crimes it had been enduring, so the law enforcement there implemented a new program to hinder the activities and functioning of these violent youth groups. The program was led by the Orange County Chief's and Sheriff's Association or (OCCSA) and the Gang Steering Strategy Committee or (GSSC). Specifically, it was a gang incident tracking system or (GITS). The system was put in place in 1993 and data from the system explained in a study conducted by the gang researchers Villa and Meeker (1999) through the years 1994-1997, that violent incidents exceeded all other incidents. Violent gang related incidents being for example, terrorism, homicide, assault and battery, kidnapping, sexual assault, and robbery had far exceeded other crimes such as arson, auto theft, and burglary. Thus, in 1994 there were 1,628 violent gang incidents in this county, whereas there were only 7 incidents associated with arson, 169 incidents associated with auto theft, and 316 incidents associated with burglary in the same year. This made a total of only 492 property incidents brought about by gangs in Orange County. The total violent incidents by gangs in this county in 1995 were 1,598 compared with only 425 property incidents. In 1996 violent incidents increased to 1, 832

compared with only 235 property incidents and in 1997 violent incidents associated with gangs was 1, 578 compared with steadily decreasing property incidents, a total of only 204. Indeed, the gang incident tracking system or (GITS) that had been put in place by the Orange County Chief's and Sheriff's Association proved useful. In fact, as these results of violent gang incidents became so evident, the U.S. Congress began to take notice and such incidents led to the enactment of some very tough new laws.

As the U.S. gang violence increased, Congress extended get-tough approaches to immigration law. Young gang members were sentenced to prison and convicted as adults as were their crimes. In 1996, Congress enacted laws to strip any foreign-born American felons of their citizenship and expelled them from the country after they served their prison terms. These new laws increased the crimes that qualified as deportable crimes to include property convictions such as burglary and other convictions such as driving under the influence or (DUI), crimes considered moral turpitude or the act of wrong doing. (Arana 2005: 99) reports that as a result of these tougher laws, "an estimated 20,000 young Central American criminals whose families settled in Los Angeles in the 1980's after fleeing civil wars at home, were deported to countries they barely knew. Many of the deportees were native English speakers who had arrived in the United States as toddlers with their parents, but had never bothered to secure legal residency or citizenship." The deportees were sent to countries throughout Central America including Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras and because of the new immigration laws that had been passed by the U.S. Congress in 1996, the criminal backgrounds of the deportees could not be disclosed. According to Arana (2005), U.S. official's hands were tied by the new law passed, they could not disclose to the Central American governments who the new arrivals really were.

## Emergence of MS-13 and Mara 18 in Central America

The emergence of the mara's in Central America dates back to 1992. It all started for the Central American governments as they had no idea initially who these kids were. Large waves of U.S. deportations had taken place after the Los Angeles riots of 1992. Thus, Central America, specifically El Salvador and Honduras began to see the new arrivals along with the dangerous threats they posed. Because many kids had been left behind in the large waves of transnational migration of families in the 1980s, many of these gang members of MS-13 and the 18<sup>th</sup> street gang out of Los Angeles found recruitment of new members due to the large numbers of disenfranchised youth left behind by the families from years before. In Central America, the 18<sup>th</sup> street gang took the name Mara 18 or M-18. As Arana (2005) reports, the more the deportations of MS-13 and 18<sup>th</sup> street gang members rose out of Los Angeles, the greater the number of maras grew in Central America. Basically, all the U.S. Congress and Immigration did, was transplanted the problem soon to grow into a bigger problem.

In El Salvador, with a population of only 6.5 million people as of 2004, these gangs could now boast membership of 10,000 with 20,000 very young associates. Further reports out of Honduras according to the Honduran authorities, put the gang population at 40,000 and the United Nations reports that 45 percent of Central Americans in general are 15 years of age or younger. In summary, transnational migration of Central American families and U.S. deportation laws of U.S. gangs, specifically, the MS-13 and the 18<sup>th</sup> street gang, played significant roles in the emergence of the modern Central American street gang today in Central America. These gang members recruited thousands of young disenfranchised children as young as nine years of age in these Central American countries. Joining the gangs was easy



enough, as long as one was willing to endure a beating by way of suffering kicking and punching from adults for 13 seconds. Interestingly, the juvenile members of these gangs in Central America, just like their counterparts in the U.S., participate more in petty crime, while the adults serve more of the serious criminal activity. Honduras currently has a murder rate of 154 for every 100,000 people because of these gangs (Arana 2005: 100). Such a murder rate strongly suggests the bulk of these killings in Honduras, if not all of them, are carried out by adult gang members. Arana (2005) indicated the average gang member is 19 years of age.

#### Economic Activity of Gangs in Central America

These gangs and the wars they engage in over territory, create a very unsafe environment for the public, businesses, and law enforcement officers in Central America. In fact, today, as has been the case in the past, in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, it is advisable not to walk the streets after dark because the risks of violence associated with these new Central American street gangs are far too great (Schmalzbauer 2005: 10). The same is true in El Salvador, particularly its capital, San Salvador where clashes occur between the MS-13 and the M18 gangs. They now control not only territories and businesses, but intimidate the local residents in these Central American countries. The evidence suggesting gang presence in these horrific Honduran cities is evident on trains, corporate buildings, shops, and other forms of transport and facilities, even the police are afraid and have been for quite some time. Apart from being under funded and short staffed, the police and their families' are given life threats for any interference on the gangs and their desire for control of space and territory-power. Because of these specific incidents that occur today and the poor economy of the past and present, many Honduran parents left this poor country in search of better prosperity for their

families.

### Migrant Remittances.

The Honduran migrants remit more than \$500 million dollars per year back to their respective families, which according to data from (Inter-American Development Bank: 2001) (as cited in Schmalzbauer 2005: 11), is more money than Honduras can earn from all of its banana, coffee and seafood industries within the same period of time. Therefore, it is no wonder why these particular family members would be motivated to leave for better pay and working conditions in the United States. Remittances play a major role in terms of paying the fees to help many migrants travel across borders into the U.S. legally and illegally. Schmalzbauer, (2005) a Honduran family researcher, interviews a transnational migrant.

### Interview of a Transnational Migrant: The Role of Remittances.

“My aunt was the first one here. Then she brings her sister, then her brother. Each helps each other. Because we have a big family, and from each family they bring one child. Then I have one aunt in Honduras who has seven kids. She has one child here, and she’s planning on bringing one of her sisters. And we always help. Like they helped me come, because my mother has four kids. And they helped my brother. They left two of my sisters. And now I bring one of my sisters. And the other one is staying over there with my mother. To get each person here, we all get together and everyone gives a little money until we have all the money we need, and then we send it”. (Schmalzbauer 2005: 63), interview of a transnational migrant (Beatriz) living in the United States.

The trouble is that many migrants overstay their visas and violate the conditions of work permits and therefore fall into the category of illegal immigrant status, which prompts U.S. immigration officials to go on a man-hunt to detain, penalize and deport them. Many

however, simply leave these Central American countries and travel on tourist visas to the United States with no intention of returning, which is a crime and some receive temporary protected status once they arrive. They find work with construction companies, meat slaughter companies, private health, and other industries by word of mouth from family who emigrated lawfully to the United States, particularly those Honduran families that claimed and qualified for the amnesty program of 1986 under President Ronald Reagan and his Administration (Schamalzbauer 2005: 22-33).<sup>8</sup>The emergence of the MS-13 continues to become a growing problem and deportation is only damaging Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, increasing insecurity in the United States.

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<sup>8</sup> Amnesty Program of 1986 was a program developed during the Presidency of Ronald Reagan designed to grant legal status to illegal immigrants who had been in the United States during this time. Many of these immigrants included, Salvadorans, Guatemalans and Hondurans.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ADVERSE EFFECTS OF U.S. DEPORTATIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND RE-ENTRY TO THE UNITED STATES

Deportation of members of violent youth groups/gangs back to their countries of origin had several adverse effects for the respective Central American country, increased crime and local political and economic manipulation in the form of intimidation of politicians and harassment of business owners. The biggest challenges for these gang members upon deportation from the U.S. back to the respective Central American country was their lack of legal documents, lack of Spanish language skills, education, and money. They had no access to gainful employment and schools, so some continued to participate in the drug trade for monies and support for their own drug habits as well as human trafficking of migrants, robbery, and rape. Also, many of the older adults participated in contract murder particularly of select targets, often politicians or their family members. Later, they threatened businesses, and bus routes mainly in El Salvador and Honduras (Kemp 2007). Arana (2005) reported that the Soyapango neighborhood of San Salvador has become an area subject to fierce turf wars between the MS-13 and the M-18. Many of the immoral attributes they developed in Los Angeles became even worse after deportation in San Salvador, as evident in their violent acts described by Rhodes (2000). Additional laws were enacted in attempts to deal with the increased violence of these deported gang members.

### The Strong Hand Legislation

According to Arana (2005), legislation of the strong hand law (*mano dura*) in

Honduras had its roots in the attempted kidnapping and subsequent death of a young man by the name of Ricardo Ernesto Maduro Andreu. Maduro's father, Ricardo Maduro, was devastated by the fact his son had been killed by the maras. In fact, his son's death in 1997 was one of the main motivations behind his drive to run for President in 2001, later becoming President, serving between January 27, 2002 to January 27, 2006 with the National Party of Honduras, (PNH). This tragedy broke Ricardo's heart and his thirst for revenge against these gangs increased.

After Ricardo Maduro became the President of Honduras in 2002, he quickly implemented a new anti-gang law known as "the strong hand," which imprisoned anybody that looked like a gang member or even suspected of being a gang member (Arana 2005). This new law imprisoned many youth for many years, up to twelve, merely on suspicion of being affiliated with a gang. Maduro's legislation was extremely tough for many of the youth. The prison systems swelled by as much as 200%. The prison conditions worsened with overcrowding and riots resulted during the years of 2003 through 2004.

The strong hand legislation implemented by the President was working as far as President Maduro was concerned, reducing gang violence on the streets, which impressed other Central American countries. Shortly after 2004, Guatemala and its neighbors Panama and Nicaragua considered such legislation with intent to adopt similar models (Arana 2005: 100). Due to Ricardo Maduro's strict legislation and tough law platform, these violent youth groups became more aggressive and violent in retaliation against these tough laws and those politicians who drew them up. These youth gangs increased their violence in the form of gruesome deaths and mass killings, particularly against young women. They used machetes to cut off heads and left the decapitated bodies in open sight in the Honduran and Guatemalan

streets. Their means of murder became their signature.

This extreme violence was a political demonstration on the part of the maras against these new adopted anti-gang laws, all in an attempt to show the Guatemalan and the Honduran governments that the maras would not be intimidated by the authorities or the newly adopted legislation. Thus, these gangs became increasingly violent precisely because of these new anti-gang laws passed by leaders such as Ricardo Maduro, explaining the unintended consequence of the strong hand legislation in the Central American region (Arana 2005: 98-110). Ricardo Maduro's revenge was a very tough platform, but the maras revenge would be even tougher.

#### Recruitment and Expansion of Gang Members

Because there were large numbers of Central American children disenfranchised throughout the region, specifically, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, the MS-13 members who had been deported out of Los Angeles to these countries in 1992 found thousands of new recruits. As gang membership grew, so too did the laws against gangs and the authorities in these countries just became more inhospitable toward these youth. Manwaring (2005:12-13) estimated that the Salvadoran gangs included approximately 39,000 active members in El Salvador. These gangs include the famed Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), Mara 18, and several others in El Salvador-Mao Mao, Crazy Harrisons Salvatrucha, and Crazy Normans Salvatrucha. According to Arana (2005: 98), "the marabuntas or maras (known after a deadly species of ants) pose the most serious challenge to peace in the region since the end of Central America's civil wars". As these gangs recruited thousands of new young recruits, they became a much bigger and more sophisticated gang as a result. Due to their size as reported by Manwaring (2005), the authorities were hunting them to stop their

reach across borders. As a result, some gang members have turned their sights to Tapachula, Mexico bordering Guatemala as of early 2003. They found a way to make profits other than drug smuggling. To date, they act as border patrol agents, albeit illegal agents. They actually charge migrants who try to cross the Mexican border into the U.S. monies to get across the border. The fee according to Arana (2005) ranges between \$5,000 to \$8,000 U.S.D. per migrant. Migrants who fail to pay the fee are murdered by way of machete or AK-47s. The maras work in connection with the alien smugglers (coyotes) who provide the means for the migrants to get across the border. For those migrants that ran the risk of trying to cross the border without the aid of the gangs in connection with the coyotes, they faced being caught either by the gangs themselves or the border patrol officers. Migrants who took this risk were often caught by the gangs. The gangs would kill them in such a way by decapitating their bodies as a warning to other migrants thinking of avoiding their fee and crossing the border. Some of them have also learned to become bi-lingual and work with others in the U.S., particularly the coyotes-alien smugglers. One way to hunt them is to search them out by their identifiers, predominantly gang graffiti and body tattoos.

#### Gang Identity.

Gang identity is strong and important. Gang graffiti and body tattooing help define their identity and gang membership (Kemp 2007; Aizenman 2006). Their tattoos tend to be gothic in style and art, with specific designs adopted by a select gang. Individuals bearing these tattoos and are no longer gang members, are unable to gain employment because of their association with gang membership. Many employers are afraid to hire these non-gang individuals because of their prior gang association. As a result, these non-gang individuals try to have the tattoos removed by going to special clinics. Those who cannot afford the removal

fee attempt to remove the tattoos by using acid on their skin.

To date, these clinics have come under fire by the members of the MS-13 for assisting these individuals and are undergoing extreme death threats and harm to their businesses for their assistance in removing the tattoos from these individuals as noted by Aizenman (2006). These death threats that these youth use on society are very similar to the death threats posed in earlier history by death lists and death squads used against their families who, as discussed, were mostly simple peasants, farm laborers and campesinos. Kemp (2007) notes the tattoos present another problem for these youth. The tattoos help authorities to make a quick identification for capturing these youth when they try to come into the U.S. or are deported and those who make it into the U.S. are deported back to Central America. The tattoos therefore, make it easy for the authorities to determine the type of gang they may belong to and the respective Central American country they should be sent back to.

#### Re-Entry into U.S.

According to Coutin (2005: 5-33), the gang members either re-entered the United States alone as adults, or they came back in groups, typical of younger individuals. Alien smugglers known as “coyotes” were a primary means of re-entry for the younger groups. These illegal smugglers were often U.S. citizens or in some instances, corrupt profiteering border patrol officers. For a fee, these corrupt patrol officers decided which individuals they would illegally allow into the U.S. Thus, the new MS-13 that re-entered the U.S. between 2004 and 2005 had money to contract with the corrupt border patrol officers and coyote smugglers to successfully traffic themselves and others back into the U.S. The illegal and corrupt triangle for gang re-entry into the U.S. was underground and dangerous.



Many Salvadorans, Guatemalans and Hondurans re-entered the United States through Mexico as discussed in Chapter Three. The members of the MS-13 are no exception here. Once they entered the United States via Mexico with the aid of alien smugglers as noted by Coutin (2005), they migrated across states ranging from California, Texas, Florida, further north to Washington D.C and even New York, and Massachusetts. They clashed with other gangs such as the Black Guerillas, The Latin Kings, Skin Heads, and created problems, committing crimes that range from petty to much more serious such as murder. They essentially spread from the West Coast to the central parts of the United States on to the East Coast states spreading south even as far as Miami (Kutler as cited by Cardenas 2007). This spread required that governments develop strategic solutions and alternatives to decrease the spread of these fighting gangs and their threats to society.

The gang that has emerged today has its roots in the deportees of 1992, the difference is that the deportees of 1992 were territorial minded only, first generation characteristics (Manwaring 2005), and not organized or sophisticated. The gang that came back is a transnational problem, third generation (Manwaring 2005), capable of recruiting, organizing, crossing borders, and carrying out all the functions of the first and second-generation gang types. This organization and sophistication came from the extreme experience and exposure to the strong hand anti-gang laws that emerged in response to the growing gang problems in Central America as a direct result of U.S. deportation in general and the death of Ricardo Ernesto Maduro Andreu in Honduras specifically, which caused his father to initiate the tough anti-gang laws. The maras needed to find more hospitable lands moving north toward the U.S. again. "In one of the most in-depth studies in El Salvador on youth gangs in San Salvador, the influence of these U.S. gangs with Central American members can be found through the

leadership of the gangs, some of whom are deportees”(Eekhoff and Avalos 2003: 35). They are a real transnational problem with so many youth who have no aim in life except robbery, drugs, extortion, rape, human trafficking, and murder. “What is far from clear is the level of transnational exchange that exists between young people who participate in these gang activities in different places” (ibid). To date, the maras have some 5,000 members in the Washington D.C. area and according to Arana (2005), their favorite killing weapon is the machete, the working tool of the Central American peasant (campesino).

Those who make it to U.S. soil claim their right to asylum. Coutin (2005) goes on to say, “Once they arrive in the U.S. some of them gain access to activists, who help them to claim asylum granting them time to stay”. According to Vanden (2007), asylum is granted to those who successfully claim that they would be killed if returned back to their homeland. Of course, the authorities must verify these facts before granting asylum to these individuals. The problem for many of these youths out of Central America particularly San Salvador, El Salvador and Tegucigalpa as well as San Pedro Sula, Honduras, is that they find themselves excluded in their home country. When they migrate illegally to the United States naturally with no legal documents, they find themselves excluded again. Deportation then further elevates their anger and frustration with society, thus they turn to drugs and fellow gang members of the same gang as a means for inclusion, respect and belonging. These gangs then communicate within their respective cliques by using body signals, idioms and language modifications (Eekhoff and Avalos 2003: 35-36). This creates significant problems for law enforcement, particularly those who are recent hires or trainees who do not understand such gang language.

The gangs’ scope of power and control was a direct result of their terror, violence, and

growth. The gangs reacted to strong hand laws within and across countries, fighting against all efforts to constrain and stop them. They became increasingly aware of political influences to contain and capture their members within their territories. Manwaring (2005) reported that some 39,000 active MS-13 gang members had claimed territory in El Salvador, and were controlling political, racial and ethnic activities and membership (Martin 2005: 23). As their gang membership expands, their political awareness and control increases (Martin 2005). Thus, the third generation gang is highly institutionalized and networked within and across territories and borders, becoming increasingly sophisticated and violent as it grows. Martin (2005) reported that it has become a direct threat to the U.S. in terms of security because they disobey and disregard U.S. law in all phases of crime.

#### Gangs' Control of Local Governments and Communities

Gangs cause so much crime that local governments and communities become destroyed, whether in the U.S. or Central America. Aizenman (2006) described the extent of destruction MS-13 gangs caused to El Salvador's businesses and communities in just one month - one month of gang violence consumed one year's worth of success. The members of the MS-13 threatened business owners and forced them into paying the gang members' rent in exchange to allow the business owner to continue working in their respective communities (Aizenman 2006). If the business owner failed to pay the rent, the gang would retaliate by burning buildings, threatening their lives and that of their families. Kemp (2007) noted that even local bus drivers had to pay gang members to run the local bus through particular routes. Failure to pay would result in the bus driver being forced to take a different route. In some cases the gang member would either assault or shoot the bus driver for non-payment. This

research by Kemp (2007) on gangs confirms the research from Arana (2005: 98)

The destruction to communities includes loss of roads, bridges, schools, shops, homes, and local businesses. In El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, the government becomes very vulnerable and victim to the demands of the gangs. Government official too must pay attention and meet the demands of these gangs. Their governments often do not have sufficient funds to provide law enforcement officials with the necessary human and equipment resources to combat the occurrence and spread of MS-13 and M18 violence, nor do they have the proper infrastructure to stop gang proliferation, which requires intervention and prevention. This situation is exactly why some experts believe that Central American governments' sovereignty and power are threatened by the MS-13 and the M-18 gangs.

#### Threats to Security and Sovereignty

The security becomes compromised as these gangs build up in particular countries. Communities become run down as the gang members take control over their territory they claim, which results in higher crime rates. The sovereignty in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras falls into jeopardy as the rules of those countries and the roles of the authorities are violated. In many areas, the police are basically ignored while these gangs seek to make and create their own rules of authority, as inferred from Manwaring (2005).

These Central American governments are threatened by the MS-13, which ultimately threatens their ability to demonstrate procedural democracy in this part of the world. "It cannot be emphasized enough how tentative and fragile these Central American political-economic systems are following decades of authoritarianism and internal conflict. It would not take much to destabilize them now." (Boraz and Bruneau 2006: 39-40). Because the U.S.

has a long history of promoting democracy throughout the world, fighting corruption, poverty, and dictatorial rules of government, it would be in the interest of the U.S. to stop the growth of this gang so that democracy can flourish. Deportation only fuels their growth.

### Procedural Democracy

Manwaring (2005: 29) suggests that procedural democracy exists wherever there are elections regardless of the corruption, lack of national development, as well as protection of human rights and liberties. Procedural democracy tends to focus on the election of civilian political leadership and the level of participation on the part of the electorate (ibid). Elections are held regularly in Central America, which includes Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, but leaders and candidates as well as existing politicians are threatened and sometimes assassinated for running. Additionally, their family's spouse and children receive direct threats from the gangs and the Mara Salvatrucha is no exception as this gang is involved in a political battle for space and territory (ibid). They sometimes intimidate political parties and support radical groups (Boraz and Bruneau 2006: 40). Elections are hindered and political candidates, simple civilians, are often killed. Procedural democracy is delayed, essentially prohibited by these gangs. Thus these new fighting gangs need to be controlled and contained by the U.S. authorities in other ways rather than deportation, as this procedure, deportation, has many adverse effects for all countries involved.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This research has explained the historical evolution of modern Central American street gangs, specifically the fighting gang as defined by Miller (1982) in Chapter One, and referred to as the third generation gang by Manwaring (2005). In Chapter Two, the history of these three specific countries, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, explained the conditions of anarchy, civil war, which lead to poverty, unemployment, underemployment, internal political chaos and reliance on foreign powers. Some families from these countries fled those countries, which resulted in migration to other parts of Central America and emigration into parts of the U.S., due to the brutality and economic conditions as discussed in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, the process of transnational migration was explained in relation to the emigration of these families to flee the conditions they were originally living in. They came to America to improve their socioeconomic status and escape dictatorial rule. Many of these migrants came to the U.S. lawfully, while others came unlawfully. Chapter Five explained the conditions for those who came to the U.S. unlawfully. Additionally, the adverse effects of deportation back to their homeland were discussed, focusing on violence within and across borders. Due to the violence across borders and the onset of globalization, these violent youth groups/ gangs have developed hybrid identities and have become growing transnational criminal organizations.

The direct impact of these violent youth on government and international affairs is that these fighting gangs now jeopardize domestic and international politics in terms of electoral

and diplomatic breakdown. In some ways this threatens the security and in some respect sovereignty of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, due to the challenges they present for the authorities in addition to hindering procedural democracy from functioning properly in these countries. In some ways the U.S. is affected as its diplomatic and foreign exchanges between these countries can become hindered due to the threat of democracy from failing. These gangs have compounded years of struggle on top of authoritarianism and internal struggle from years before, so procedural democracy struggles to function in a world of prior and present corruption. The fighting gang seizes control of territory and space, which in turn reverses the roles of authorities in all phases of the local governments in these countries and places that same power the authorities normally have into their corrupt hands.

By deporting the gang members out of the United States and back to their countries of origin, the national government and local governments in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras are being weakened because these youths have taken back all the forms of crimes they committed in the United States with them; intensifying them because of the culture of violence and use those same acts there, which includes murder, robbery and felonious assault (Villa and Meeker 1999: 15). This is very much a new fusion of culture and a new breed of gangs that has evolved. The key difference is that they destroy the weaker communities and governments quicker than they could have in the United States had the U.S. authorities found another alternative to deal with these gang members other than the process of deportation. Therefore, the entire process of the judicial and prison system fails to work in the way in which it was initially intended, because prison itself is only a training ground for these criminals who find ways to communicate with other members in the U.S. and these respective Central American countries. As the prison system swells, members of these gangs eventually

are released and many of these become messengers for those still detained to those on the streets. Because many of these gang members are very young, they are released and relay communication for those in prison and these young members develop the new skills and body language when they are being held in prison by the older members of the gangs. Members mix with each other therefore and eventually multiply. Processing the inmates is much like deporting them. The problem only grows into a bigger problem and these gangs become larger and more sophisticated as a result.

As Manwaring (2005: 18-19) noted, these gangs use different strategies to accomplish their goals. “These organizations help transnational criminal organizations, warlords, drug barons, and insurgents erode the effective sovereignty of the nation-state; and, gangs phenomena are challenging the traditional ways of dealing with law enforcement and national security issues. Effective response requires not so much a redefinition of military and police missions as the holistic use of all the instruments of state and international power.” As a result of gangs and the threats they pose to the state, state failure occurs. Manwaring (2005: 33) indicates that state failure is a process by which a state loses its capacity and will to perform its essential governance and security functions. This is currently happening in San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa, Honduras and San Salvador, El Salvador such that you should not walk all too many streets of these cities after dark (Schmalzbauer 2005: 10-11) as the authorities have no control over these violent gangs nor the horrific acts they commit. Although they may not be as great a threat in the U.S. mainly because of adequate technology, funding and manpower to stop them, they certainly have become a real and imminent threat in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras due to the weaker government and their lack of funding and manpower as inferred from Kutler and reported by Cardenas (2007). In essence, the developing global



world in which we all now live in has aided these violent youth to become a global transnational criminal organization resulting in global gang crime and hybrid identities.

### Effects of Globalization

Scholte (2000: 160-161) argued, “globalization has contributed to a growth of hybrid identities and overlapping communities in contemporary world politics.” “Hybridization compels a person to negotiate several national and/or non-territorial affiliations within the self. To explicate, in a world where communities are usually constructed through reciprocal exclusion, people with hybrid identities (an increasing proportion of the population) tend to be lost souls” (Scholte 2000: 161). I would argue that the MS-13 gang members are no exception here; thus, these very different people, politics and indeed gangs clash and cause feelings of exclusion even more so, especially in these gang towns across Central America, such as Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Good examples of gangs in conflict are the mara 18 or M-18 street gang, clashing and competing for space with the MS-13 living in San Salvador, El Salvador.

This competition for space and territory results in solidarity within communities and tension with outside foreign territories referred to by Scholte (2000: 161) as “us-them oppositions”. However, globalization and crossing borders requires that individuals and groups hybrid their identity because of multiple national affiliations. To Scholte, this view of clashing communities explains strains among governments. Scholte (2000: 161) states that “Under contemporary globalization, as in earlier modern history, large-scale communities have consolidated primarily through ‘othering’ where ‘we’ are separated from ‘them’, and the ‘inside’ is opposed to the ‘outside’”. I would argue that as long as this concept of “us-them

oppositions” continues, the local government and law enforcement across the U.S. and Central America will have to deal with the threats these evolving and clashing gangs present.

#### Alternative Responses to Strong Hand Legislation

A partial solution to the problem is for governments to provide law enforcement with the proper technology, funding and manpower to monitor the movements of these gangs, a suggestion that is provided throughout the academic community as noted by President Carl Kutler of St. Petersburg College and reported by Cardenas (2007). Although getting at the root causes (civil strife, poverty and broken families) may offer the only lasting solution. This is why one cannot simply ignore this problem and focus primarily on Iraq and Afghanistan in terms of homeland security. Non-state actors like the MS-13 are also all over; it just depends on which ones are most relevant to capture. Putting GPS devices around either their wrists or ankles at all times after serving time for their crimes would be another possible way to monitor their movements. Providing law enforcement the needed tools such as computers in the less developed countries, particularly Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras would be a good response to the law violating youth group phenomena.

In 2007, Cardenas reported that Kutler donated all of St. Petersburg Colleges old computers to the Guatemalan police force in an effort to combat gang violence in Guatemala because the Guatemalan government could not afford to adequately staff its police forces to combat these modern Central American street gangs, let alone pay the associated costs for such technology. As reported by Cardenas (2007), Kutler found after a visit to Guatemala, that one way to stop the gang phenomena was to find a way to help the Guatemalan police forces control these gangs; so donating all of the college’s old computers to the local

Guatemalan authorities was a good start. His concern was to not only prevent gang growth in that country, but also to prevent their growth in his home state, Florida.

Other solutions to resolve gang formation and problems associated with gangs is to teach youths the importance of not joining gangs, to learn what currently works with gangs and prevent kids from joining in the first place. Other ways to control youth behavior are to set up programs to train parents how to control the behavior of their troubled youths; but again, these kinds of programs tend to cost, so it is just a matter of deciding which program works best and which one is most feasible. Other suggestions, include teaching the youth the values associated with school, guidance councilors, and enhancing schools' potential for helping them obtain employment. Unfortunately, the youth associated with the MS-13 and other gangs, have a long history of crime because there family's history has been exposed to years of brutality and this brutality is instilled in these youth. Deporting them greatly decreases their chances of doing something positive with their lives and causes more frustration in their lives breeding anger with the governments and societies involved, and is, then, only making the problem worse.

It might be time to rethink approaches to the gang problem.

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