

City of New York

The Special Commissioner of Investigation
for the New York City School District

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE LATIN KINGS: No Tolerance for Gangs in Public Schools

“We make our family strong because our crimes are organized. What better way to elevate ourselves than The [sic] secretive world of organized crime...we are Crimelords in the truest forms.”

- from Latin King literature seized
on 9/3/97, pursuant to this investigation

EDWARD F. STANCIK
SPECIAL COMMISSIONER

ROBERT M. BRENNER
First Deputy Commissioner

By: **Suzan Flamm**, Executive Counsel
Leah Keith, Special Counsel
William Kleppel, Senior Investigator

October 1997

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This examination was accomplished under the supervision of Chief Investigator Thomas Fennell, Deputy Chief Investigator Maureen Spencer, and Group Supervisor Andre Jenkins. Senior Investigator William Kleppel conducted the investigation and was assisted in his efforts by Senior Investigator Joseph Lamendola, Senior Investigator Edward Miller and Investigator Ayesha Winston. Senior Investigators George Johanson and Michael McGarvey provided technical assistance.

The entire investigative division provided invaluable assistance to this effort.

The office gratefully acknowledges the assistance provided to this investigation by:

- The New York City Police Department's Street Crime Unit, Citywide Anti-Gang Enforcement Squad, including Capt. John Walsh, Lt. Venton Holifield, Sgt. Louis Savelli, and Officers John Rodgers, Carlos Pacheco, John McDonald, Frank DiNatale, and Yolanda Acosta.
- Mary Jo White, The United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard B. Zabel, Deputy Chief, Narcotics Division, and U.S. Attorney Investigator John O'Malley.
- The Bayonne Police Department, including Lt. Leonard Sullivan and Sgt. Mark Smith of the Detective Bureau, and Sgt. Neil Ward of the Narcotics Bureau.
- The NYPD Cold Case Squad, including Lt. Joseph Pollini and Det. Angelo Cioffi.
- The Federal Bureau of Investigation, including Special Agent Terry Meehan.

Special thanks to Kelly Diemand, who aided in the legal research.

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE LATIN KINGS: No Tolerance for the Gangs in Public Schools

About this Report	1
The Almighty Latin King Queen Nation	7
The Career of King Roman	13
The Sex Harassment Charges Against Harry Roman	21
Harry Roman’s Connection to Bayonne Drug Dealing.....	25
The Impact of Gangs on Schools.....	29
Columbus High School.....	29
Junior High School 19: King Tone.....	31
Public School 94: King Ace.....	32
Benjamin Cardozo High School.....	34
Flushing High School.....	35
Hillcrest High School.....	38
Franklin K. Lane High School.....	40
Junior High School 258: The Bloods.....	44
King Roman: Schools and School-age Children	45
Handling Gangs in New York City Schools	49
CONCLUSION.....	53
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	55

About this Report

This report urges the dismissal of School Safety Officer Harry Roman, an admitted long-time member of the Latin Kings street gang. We make this recommendation after conducting a six-month examination concerning the nature of Officer Roman's ties to the Latin Kings. The evidence demonstrates that Roman has both endorsed and assisted in the gang's use of violent and unlawful acts against its members and enemies alike, making him unfit for duty as a school safety officer. This report also explores the broader issue of the Latin Kings and other gangs in the New York City public schools, and the methods used to control their presence. Our recommendations for combating gangs in schools appear at the conclusion of this report.

Some of the most compelling evidence against "King Roman," to use the gang name that Officer Roman himself has adopted, comes from his own admissions made recently while he was in the custody of police in Bayonne, New Jersey. On September 3, 1997, Roman was arrested in Bayonne after police found him in possession of a gravity knife, a street weapon that gets its name from the manner in which its blade opens—a rapid hand movement and the force of gravity causes the knife's blade to snap open, much like a switchblade. The police also found a small quantity of marijuana in his backpack, along with binders containing writings pertaining to the Latin Kings, writings that identified Roman as a high-ranking member of the gang, holding the title of "Political Advisor." Roman was taken to police headquarters in Bayonne where he was charged with possession of a prohibited weapon, and possession of marijuana.

New York City police officers were performing surveillance of Roman the day of his arrest in Bayonne, in cooperation with the investigation being conducted by this office. And so it was NYPD Officer John Rogers who sat down with Roman to take a statement from him that evening at police

headquarters in Bayonne. Roman pleaded with the officer not to notify New York authorities of his arrest. This notification, Roman explained, would likely cost him his job as a school safety officer. It should be noted that all school employees are required to notify the Board of Education of any such arrest, by mandate of the Schools Chancellor.¹ It appears that Roman had no intention of providing the requisite notification, and, instead, planned to conceal his arrest just as he has long concealed his participation in the violent ways of the Latin Kings.

In the course of his statements to Officer Rogers, Harry Roman admitted the following:

- He intentionally concealed his Latin Kings membership from his superiors at the Board of Education.
- He frequently smokes marijuana and has been doing so for years.
- It is a good thing that school safety officers are not required to undergo urinalysis tests for the presence of marijuana. If that were the case, he would have been fired years ago.
- He has been a Latin King for 27 years, and has held every ranking position in his “tribe,” gang terminology for a local division, from “5th crown” on up to “1st crown.”
- His duties as a King have included keeping records of membership, dues, and violations. When asked if “violations” meant beatings, and whether he had attended any such beatings, Officer Roman did not deny this.
- He frequently carries a knife.
- Many of the students at the schools to which he was assigned knew he was a Latin King.
- Students asked him on a daily basis about the gang. In response, Roman explained to these students that the gang helps kids from broken homes and that after they turn 18 they too can join the gang.² Roman admitted that this could be considered an effort to recruit students.
- He “looked out,” to use his words, for students who were also members of the Latin Kings. When asked if he had an obligation to report misconduct on the part of a student who was a Latin King, Roman repeated that he looked out for the kids who were Latin Kings, implying that he would not

¹ Chancellor’s Regulation C-105.

² In fact, Roman was active in recruiting “peewees,” typically junior high and high school age children.

report their criminal acts, but would instead look the other way.

By his own admissions, Officer Roman has confirmed crucial evidence against him that has been provided to this investigation by fellow members of the Latin Kings who are presently incarcerated in connection with crimes committed on behalf of the gang. Three gang members who have cooperated in providing evidence to the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York agreed also to provide information to this office. These three witnesses, who are separately incarcerated and not in contact with each other, all described episodes in which Roman himself had a role in gang-related violence. These witnesses have a compelling reason to tell the truth about Roman: according to their agreements with the United States Attorney's Office their punishment for lying about any matter to investigators would be a term of life imprisonment. The substance of their recollections concerning Roman appears in this report.

Taken as a whole, our findings make clear that as a member of the Latin Kings, Officer Roman faces an irreconcilable conflict between his loyalty to the Kings, on the one hand, and his duties as a school safety officer on the other. As a safety officer, he is charged with the responsibility of helping to prevent, as well as report, criminal activity that takes place on school property. We have found strong evidence that the Latin Kings count among their members a significant number of school-aged youths in New York City. It is not unlikely then that Officer Roman—or any Latin King acting as school safety officer—might become aware of criminal activity involving students who are also Latin Kings or Queens. Thus, it is quite likely that Roman would find himself in the position of having to report the wrongdoing of fellow gang members, who happen to attend the school to which Roman is assigned.

Yet by his own admission, Officer Roman's inclination is to "look out" for the students, rather

than report their infractions, as is his duty. In fact, “King Roman” could not report the crimes of fellow gang members without violating his oath to the Latin Kings. The gang’s code of conduct forbids one member from reporting to law enforcement authorities the criminal acts of another member. And, in some cases known to the police, the penalty for such disloyalty on the part of a King has been a brutal beating, if not execution. This puts Roman in the position of performing his school safety duties at his own peril. As a consequence, his willingness to carry out his duties cannot be fully trusted. The same could be said for any member of the Latin Kings who seeks to perform these two utterly irreconcilable roles. Hence, our recommendation at the conclusion of this report is that no member of the Latin Kings be allowed to work as a school safety officer.

It is important to note that the allegations of misconduct against Officer Roman are not limited to his involvement in crimes connected to the Latin Kings, or to the charges that he committed a felony on September 3, 1997, when he was found to be in possession of an illegal weapon in Bayonne, New Jersey. Officer Roman also violated the Board of Education’s ban on improper relationships between school personnel and the students in their care. As described below, in October 1995, Roman improperly sought a romantic relationship with an eighteen-year-old female student at Bushwick High School. His romantic advances toward the student were stated in a letter that he first denied writing, and then later admitted composing.

In response to this charge of an improper relationship, Chancellor Crew has sought to terminate Roman’s employment. However, Roman contested his dismissal, and exercised his right, conferred by civil service law, to challenge it.³ During the course of the administrative trial concerning the charges against him, Officer Roman admitted that he wrote the letter to the young woman, and did not deny

proposing an improper sexual relationship. However, Roman claimed that the charge was not filed against him within the eighteen-month period that the law allows for such proceedings. On September 30, 1997, an Administrative Law Judge ruled that by giving the student the letter, Roman had “engaged in conduct unbecoming his position” and recommended that his employment with the Board of Education be terminated.⁴

Officer Roman’s improper overtures toward the female student are but another indication of his willingness to exploit the students whose well-being should be his primary concern. He has assumed two roles that are fundamentally inconsistent: offering himself to the Board of Education for the duty of safeguarding students, while, at the same time, being charged by the Latin Kings with the responsibility of turning school-aged youths to the often vicious and unlawful ways of a street gang.

Given Roman’s willingness to abuse his position as a school safety officer, his employment must be terminated. The Board of Education can little afford to entrust students’ safety to a member of a gang that sanctions brutal beatings and killings while demanding absolute loyalty at all costs.

³ Civil Service Law, Article V, section 75.

⁴In the Matter of *NYC Board of Education v. Harry Roman*, Index No. 1555/97, Report and Recommendation, pps. 24-25.

Our investigation also revealed that violent street gangs, including the Latin Kings, are a dangerous presence in New York City's schools, and that this problem must be addressed swiftly. A number of recent incidents involving gangs in the schools are described below, and are followed by our recommendations concerning the problem.

The Almighty Latin King Queen Nation

The “motherland” of the Almighty Latin King Queen Nation is Chicago, where the gang is believed to have been established sometime during the 1940’s. The founders of the Kings were attempting to attain strength and power by forming a gang along racial lines. Many recruits joined the Latin Kings while in prison, and then continued their involvement upon their release. While Chicago was the starting point, the Kings have since spread to other urban areas, such as New York City. Indeed, by Officer Roman’s own account, his father was a Latin King, and Roman himself has stated that he became a member in the late 1960’s.

Roman and other Latin Kings in the New York area found themselves under new leadership beginning in the mid-1980’s. It was then that Luis Felipe claimed to establish the so-called “Almighty Latin King Queen Nation” in New York State. At the time, Felipe was a prisoner at the Collins Correctional Facility in the Catskills region of the state, having been convicted of manslaughter. Apparently, Felipe felt that black prisoners dominated Latinos in his section of Collins. Determined to make Latinos the dominant group among inmates, Felipe organized a chapter of the Kings at the prison. He anointed himself “number one supreme crown,” took the name King Blood, and quickly recruited fellow Hispanic inmates. Within a short time, the Latin Kings were a significant presence at Collins.⁵

⁵ *The Latin Kings Play Songs of Love*, New York Magazine, February 17, 1997, p. 32.

Felipe was known for his fiery writings about his ideals and ambitions for the Kings, and his followers carried his message and his orders outside the prison system. During the decade-long reign of King Blood, it is believed that the Kings' numbers grew significantly in New York, with some estimating that members now number in the thousands. Law enforcement officials presently consider the Latin Kings to be one of the stronger and more violent gangs in the state, and the Kings have spread from New York to parts of New Jersey, Connecticut and other eastern states.

While the Kings call themselves The Almighty Latin King Queen Nation, it appears that the female component to the gang is nearly always attached to a male-dominated unit. Male Kings occupy nearly all of the high-ranking positions in New York City, even though the Queens do have female leaders of their own. Members often wear beaded necklaces and clothes in the colors of the gang, black and gold. They sometimes greet each other with a hand symbol, forming a crown with their fingers. They also use as a greeting the phrase "amor de rey," or "love of the King," and by placing a fist near to the heart, signify to one another "I am willing to die for you."

According to police intelligence reports and former gang members alike, the hallmarks of the Latin Kings are these: There is a hierarchical structure, with leaders whose orders are absolute. Violence is a common means of punishing those who violate any order or rule. While King Blood issued written prohibitions against stealing, adultery, lying, and using illegal drugs, the Kings do approve the use of murder and assault and are known to make money from the sale of weapons and illegal drugs.

The Kings demand absolute loyalty to the gang and its leadership. Thus, not surprisingly, dozens of Kings and Queens lined up in the fall of 1996 to attend the criminal trial of their leader, Felipe. He was but one of over 50 Latin Kings indicted following an investigation led by the United States Attorney

for the Southern District of New York in conjunction with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the New York City Police Department and the Department of Corrections. The investigation resulted in the indictment of these gang members on charges ranging from racketeering to conspiracy to commit murder. Virtually all those charged pleaded guilty and are currently incarcerated.

Felipe, however, chose not to plead guilty and ultimately faced trial. Some of the most damaging testimony against him was given by two former Latin Kings named Alex Figueroa and Nelson Torres. Figueroa and Torres are themselves convicted felons, both having pleaded guilty to various crimes committed in the name of the Latin Kings. While awaiting sentencing, both agreed to cooperate with the U.S. Attorney by testifying against Felipe. In this way, both hoped to be given a reduced sentence.

Taken together, their testimony depicted the cold-blooded reign of Felipe, who managed to maintain control of the Latin Kings' organization even though he was incarcerated. Figueroa made periodic visits to Felipe at Attica, a New York State correctional facility where Felipe was serving time.⁶ There, Figueroa testified, he reported to Felipe transgressions by various members of the Latin Kings. In some instances Felipe gave Figueroa orders to beat or kill the offenders, and it was Figueroa's job to have these orders carried out.⁷

Figueroa and Torres recounted for the jury some of these "terminations," or killings, ordered by Felipe. The Latin Kings refer to such assassinations as "terminations on sight," or "T.O.S." Similarly, they use the term, "beatdown on sight," "B.O.S." or "beatdowns" to refer to assaults on errant members—assaults intended to injure, rather than to kill.

⁶ Trial Transcript, *United States v. Luis Felipe*, pps. 543 and 555.

⁷ *Id.* at pps. 528 and 560.

According to Figueroa and Torres, Felipe—King Blood—ordered punishments for such infractions as the failure to obey Blood’s orders, for espousing teachings that conflict with the rules set by Blood, for making advances toward King Blood’s Queen, and for stealing from the Kings’ treasury. As an example, Figueroa and Torres described in chilling detail the execution of a Latin King named William Cartegena, known as “Li’l Man.” For his particular infraction, namely a botched assassination attempt on another member, Cartegena was strangled, decapitated, had his hands and gang tattoo sliced off, and was then set afire in a bathtub. Figueroa explained that the decapitation was performed because another high-ranking King wanted Cartegena’s head as proof that the order to terminate him had in fact been carried out.⁸

The testimony of Figueroa and Torres graphically depicted the brutality of the Latin Kings and the degree to which violence is integral to the operation of the gang. What is more, their testimony was supported by Felipe’s own writings, which were introduced into evidence. He was ultimately convicted and sentenced to a life sentence in solitary confinement. Solitary confinement was the only means of putting an end to the cellblock reign of Felipe, according to the sentencing judge. Thus, Felipe’s conviction and resulting sentence put an end to the rule of King Blood.

⁸ *Id.* at pps. 601-602.

Even before Felipe was convicted and sentenced, a new leader of the Latin Kings began to publicly emerge, Antonio “King Tone” Fernandez. King Tone made it clear that he had grand ambitions for the Latin Kings, not unlike Felipe. However, he added a new twist. With the glare of media attention focused on the grisly testimony at Luis Felipe’s trial, King Tone announced a new higher purpose for the Latin Kings. The Latin Kings would henceforth focus on civic good and ethnic pride; the old ways of B.O.S. and T.O.S. would be no more.⁹

King Tone orchestrated something akin to a public relations campaign in the winter of 1997. He managed to win publicity for the Latin Kings in newspapers and magazines, as well as an appearance on a nationally televised program, ABC-TV’s “Nightline.” In fact, the Nightline appearance featured King Tone, as well as in interview with Officer Harry Roman. In front of a national audience, both King Tone and King Roman portrayed the Latin Kings as a peaceable group, committed to civic good and community improvement.

King Tone’s attempt at painting a new, cleaner image of the Latin Kings has been met with widespread skepticism. From the start, law enforcement and police intelligence sources were doubtful of King Tone’s claims of abandoning the old ways, given the Latin Kings’ long-standing traditions of violence. What is more, crime generates revenue for the Latin Kings. According to confidential informants, the sale of illegal drugs has long provided funds for the Kings, as has the sale of illegal weapons. Consequently, there seems to be tremendous disincentive to give up these means of making money.

⁹ Village Voice, Ed Morales, *King of New York: Can Antonio Fernandez Change the Mission of New York’s Notorious Street Gang*, December 10, 1996, p. 40.

King Tone's claims of commanding a repentant organization are belied by continued incidents of violence involving members of the gang, some of which are described in a later section of this report. In fact, King Tone himself was apparently marked for violence earlier this year by members of his own gang. On June 10, 1997, police officers moved in to prevent an alleged planned assassination of King Tone that had been reported to the police in advance of the hit. Ten Latin Kings were arrested, and police recovered several weapons including a submachine pistol and .380-caliber semi-automatic handguns. King Tone himself was found in possession of loose ammunition—difficult to explain in the face of his claims that the Latin Kings have disavowed their violent ways.

Despite the recent turmoil and factionalism, the Latin Kings have not lost sight of the importance they place on cultivating youthful recruits. The Kings revere their youngest members, believing them to be key to a bold future for the “Nation.” Both researchers and gang members alike have reported that two of the most fertile areas of recruitment for the Latin Kings are prisons and schools. In New York City, some schools have proven to be an effective recruiting environment, according to school safety officers, given the presence of other street gangs and the realities of teenage peer pressure.

Access to prisons is relatively simple for the Latin Kings to attain, since so many gang members are in and out of jail. Access to schools, on the other hand, is not as easy to achieve. Thus, the Kings prized King Roman's daily presence in a school. What is more, it appears that Roman had a talent for mentoring the youngest members of the gang—a talent that contributed to his rise within the ranks of the Latin Kings.

The Career of King Roman

“A King goes as far as the betrayal of his duty to his office in society in order to release an imprisoned king. Even if he is the most stubbornly resistant criminal.” Excerpt from “Almighty Latin King Nation—A King’s Contract,” copied in the handwriting of Harry Roman.

Harry Roman has only recently provided law enforcement with crucial details about his nearly thirty-year-long association with the Latin Kings. This occurred on the evening of September 3, 1997, while Roman was in police custody in Bayonne, New Jersey, as described in the first section of this report.

Until September 3, Roman was somewhat coy in his public remarks about the nature of the Latin Kings and his stature among its members. In an April 8, 1997 broadcast of the news program “Nightline,” Roman sought to portray the Latin Kings as group formed to provide a crucial community service. In Roman’s words: “Basically, [the gang] was to protect the neighborhood from people coming from the outside who would want to come and rob people in the neighborhood.”

The March 3, 1997 edition of *The New York Post* pictured Roman and quoted him as taking pride in his status as a Latin King. He was also quoted as insisting that he would never recruit youngsters for membership in the Kings while on the job as a school safety officer. The following day Roman was quoted in *The New York Daily News* as saying he was involved in the Latin Kings as a means to “organize Latinos politically.” He was also quoted as stating, “Once I’m off the job, what I do on my free time is nobody’s business.”

Still another characterization of Roman’s involvement with the Latin Kings is set forth in papers he has filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In a petition challenging his dismissal by the Board of Education as unlawful discrimination, Roman describes his involvement with the Latin

Kings as a religion, claiming it is the religion of “Kingism.” He further claims that by its efforts to terminate his employment the Board of Education is discriminating against him on the basis of both his religion and his national origin.

This benign, and somewhat self-righteous, portrayal is dramatically different from the picture of King Roman that emerged on September 3, 1997, when Roman was interviewed while in police custody. Roman was arrested that night and charged with criminal possession of a weapon and possession of marijuana. NYPD Officer John Rogers questioned Roman about his membership in the Latin Kings. Roman stated that he had risen to the top—first crown—of his particular chapter of the Kings, after serving in other crown positions. He also acknowledged having served as a record keeper, which meant he had to record “violations.”

Officer Roman was unwilling to elaborate on what he meant by “violations.” However, at the time of his arrest, he possessed a quantity of written materials about the Latin Kings that members are supposed to safeguard and keep secret. These writings, including a manifesto and a constitution for the Latin Kings, shed some light on the nature of Latin Kings’ violations, and the role that Roman, as a crown or ranking King, must have played.

According to these materials, a Latin King accused of breaking a rule stands at the mercy of the crowns who are his superiors. The first crown is to serve as judge and jury, deciding guilt or innocence. The third crown then sets a punishment, with approval of the first crown. The punishment may be one of three types: probation, meaning the violator is ostracized for a period of time and must endure separation from the gang, a monetary fine, or a “physical.”

The Latin Kings have become notorious for the third option, the “physical,” or so-called beatdown. The literature in Roman’s possession describes the physical in this way: “He has to allow

the family to beat him for a determined amount of time (no facial hits allowed). If he refuses he will then suffer severely [sic].” Such physical punishments are also indirectly mentioned in a copy of the Latin Kings’ constitution, which was also found in Roman’s possession. The constitution includes this passage: “No King shall swing at or hurt another King without proper authorization [which] will be that of all officers after an investigation.” In other words, no beatdown until ranking Kings have investigated the charges and declared the punishment.

Given Roman’s admission to the police that he himself has served in all the crown positions in his tribe, this means that not only has he kept records of violations, as he stated, but it can also be inferred that he has ordered punishments—including beatings—of the Kings under his rule. That is, after all, one of the responsibilities of the third and first crown, as described in the writings Roman carried with him in his backpack.

Additionally contained in the written materials found in Roman’s possession is a reference to a “T.O.S.” or termination on sight. Among a lengthy list of rules for Supreme Chapter members of the Kings is the following guideline: “Who ever dare [sic] to brake [sic] the code of silence in any form or fashion will be T.O.S. without excuse.” T.O.S. is known to have one meaning only—an assassination ordered and executed by the Latin Kings.

Also among the materials found in Roman’s possession is a recent “Supreme Manifesto,” listing “King Tone,” Antonio Fernandez, as the Sunset Inka, or ultimate ruler. This manifesto is dated September 27, 1996, and appears to reflect King Tone’s determination to give the gang a cleaner, more community-minded image. Interestingly, the manifesto refers to “King Blood,” meaning Luis Felipe, whose brutal reign as Inka ended when he was sentenced to life in prison for his part in ordering the murders of certain gang members. According to the manifesto, “King Blood,” is a “councilor [sic] to

the Almighty crown, and [is] to be respected at all times.” This exalted status seems somewhat at odds with the Latin Kings’ public posture of rejecting the violent ways of King Blood. The manifesto also names “King Roman” as “political adviser,” whose duties include these: “He is also the central information line. He will be responsible to get activities done within the school board, the government, our communities, and allies of this nation.” Thus, it is clear that King Roman continues to be an important player in the Latin Kings, despite his claims, recently made to investigators, that he has willingly relinquished the opportunity to play a significant role.

Roman’s admission that he has held crown positions confirms important aspects of the descriptions of King Roman that were given to this investigation by the three federal witnesses referred to earlier who are all presently incarcerated for crimes that each committed while active as a Latin King. Each has knowledge of criminal activity involving Harry Roman, whom they knew as King Roman. In the world of gang life described by these former Kings, survival and upward mobility required a talent for violence, money-making, or recruiting. If neighborhood safety or political organizing—central tenets of the Kings, according to statements attributed to Harry Roman—were ever agenda items at Latin King meetings, they left no impression on these sources. Instead, all three witnessed discussions and incidents of violence, revenge, gang discipline and recruitment. Though they are three unrelated individuals who know little about each other, their accounts of Harry Roman’s career as a Latin King are consistent in many crucial respects. The recollections of two of these witnesses are discussed here. The recollections of the third are discussed in a later section.

Until three years ago, Alex Figueroa was a Latin King ascending quickly within the ranks of the gang. He briefly held the number two position in the state, Second Supreme Crown Prince, until a sentence of incarceration, imposed in January of 1994, halted his career. While in prison Figueroa

learned that a T.O.S. had been issued against him by Felipe.¹⁰ Facing a T.O.S. behind bars, there was—quite literally—no place for Figueroa to hide. He had seen for himself the vicious methods by which gang justice was imposed in prison, often by means of an “ox,” a slang term for a razor hidden in an inmate’s mouth and used to inflict serious, or fatal, wounds.¹¹

At this time federal agents approached Figueroa and he agreed to provide them with information. As part of this negotiation, Figueroa pleaded guilty to an additional set of crimes connected to the Latin Kings, thus exposing himself to the possibility of life in prison. He hoped to be given a shorter sentence as a result of his assistance in the ongoing investigation of the Latin Kings.

While active as a high-ranking Latin King, Figueroa came to know Harry Roman. Figueroa remembered that Roman often volunteered to handle “security” at Latin Kings meetings, meaning that Roman, and any others with that assignment, served as a lookout whose job was to deflect the attention of any passing law enforcement. The Kings performing security were responsible for holding any weapons brought to the meeting, as armed Latin Kings are not allowed to enter the “cipher,” the circle formed by gang members for a meeting. Typically, according to Figueroa, the weapons handed over for safekeeping included nine-millimeter, .38- and .45-caliber handguns.

Figueroa recalls one meeting in particular which took place in Sunset Park in Brooklyn a short time before Figueroa was sentenced to prison in early 1994. According to Figueroa, one reason for this meeting was to impose a punishment on a gang member. The member was to be severely beaten for having declared his intention to leave the Kings, a decision he apparently had reached after his closest gang associate had been the victim of a termination on sight. The punishment imposed was a

¹⁰ Trial Transcript, *U.S. v. Luis Felipe*, at pps. 799-801.

¹¹ *Id.* at pps. 719-29.

“beatdown on the spot,” but without the usual limitation that the victim could only be struck between the neck and waist.

At this meeting, Figueroa recalls, Roman was performing the task of security. Figueroa was later told that a police car had entered the park while the meeting was in progress and that an officer approached Roman, who was on the perimeter. The officer asked Roman about the large group. In response, Roman showed the officer his Division of School Safety credentials and told him that that the gathering was school related. The officer left, never knowing that by the conclusion of the meeting a man would be beaten unconscious and left in the park.

Roman’s willingness to put the interests of the Latin Kings above those of the office he holds is confirmed by the writings found in his backpack on the day of his arrest. Perhaps most incriminating is the passage quoted at the beginning of this section, written in Roman’s own handwriting, and apparently copied from official Latin King material.¹² In it, Roman states that a King “goes as far as the betrayal of his duty to his office” to effect the release of an imprisoned criminal if the criminal is a King. Thus, with his own hand, Roman penned the reason why his continued employment as a school safety officer is untenable—even Roman knows he cannot be trusted to carry out the mandate of his officer’s job if it conflicts with his duties as a Latin King.

A second witness who has provided us with information about Harry Roman is also presently incarcerated in federal prison. His identity cannot be revealed here without compromising his safety; thus we will refer to him as Witness 2. He is also a former Latin King, facing a lengthy prison term as a result of crimes committed as a gang member. He too has agreed to cooperate with the United States

¹² Handwriting expert Gus Lesnivich compared the document to known specimens of Roman’s handwriting and concluded that they were written by the same person.

Attorney's Office in exchange for the possibility of a reduced sentence.

According to Witness 2 he knew Harry Roman when Roman was a "fourth crown" in his local gang tribe. In that leadership position, Roman was required to attend Latin King "universal" meetings, gatherings which included participants from all the tribes and Chapters within the gang. In 1994, these universals took place, on average, once a month during the summer time, and somewhat less frequently during the colder months of the year. At many if not most of these meetings, a "violation" was carried out, that is to say a gang assault on a member. Roman attended these meetings as expected and was therefore in a position to witness these beatings.

Witness 2 also recalled that Roman was involved with the younger Latin Kings. He remembered one particular episode when a young King was beaten. According to the witness, this beating took place on the night of a tribe meeting that was held in an abandoned building in Brooklyn. Witness 2 recalls that the peewee was forced to endure a "three minute violation," as other peewees attacked the young victim, striking blows between his neck and waist while the victim stood, as required, with his hands in his pockets. According to Witness 2, both he and Roman were witness to this beating, while another King, the Third Crown—the officer responsible for enforcement of punishment—timed the three minutes. As crowns, neither Roman nor the witness was required to participate in the assault. And, in the case of a peewee, according to Witness 2, it is the peewees themselves who administer punishment to one another at the direction of the adults in charge.

The Sexual Harassment Charges Against Harry Roman

*“I like you and I would really love to make you my woman. . . .”
“. . . Are you willing to? Are you ready for a real man in your life?”*

These lines are contained in a three page letter handwritten by Officer Harry Roman in the fall of 1995 to an eighteen-year-old single mother who was attempting for the third time to complete the tenth grade at Bushwick High School. Officer Roman, who was 39 years old when he wrote the letter in October 1995, was then assigned to that high school. While the nature of his involvement in the Latin Kings was not yet known to the Board of Education, it was apparently known to many of the students at Bushwick. In fact, the recipient of the letter, who will be referred to here as Student A, was well aware that Officer Roman was a Latin King. She reported the letter, fearing that if she rejected Officer Roman’s sexual overture, she would suffer retribution at the hands of the Latin Kings.

Officer Roman delivered the letter to Student A at school—a fact that he first denied, but now admits.¹³ Upset by the contents of the letter when she received it, Student A reported it that same day to a social worker connected to the school’s Teen Parent program, a program intended to provide support services to young parents in an effort to help keep them in school. The social worker was not a Board of Education employee, but rather a post-graduate student performing fieldwork as a social worker in the Teen Parent program. During the course of her conversation with the social worker, Student A contemplated dropping out of school in order to avoid Officer Roman. The social worker noted this fact in her report to the principal,

¹³ *NYC Board of Education v. Harry Roman*, Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings Index No. 1555/97, transcript of hearing at pps. 117-8.

stating “teen parents have enough of a struggle regarding truancy, and I am fearful for her [Student A’s] safety.”

The principal, Jose Fraga, promptly reported to this office Roman’s sexual overture toward the student, as required by Chancellor’s regulations.¹⁴ Investigators from this office approached Student A the next day, November 2, 1995, and interviewed her about the incident. She refused any further cooperation, saying she had sent the letter to her boyfriend and did not wish to pursue a case against Harry Roman, given his connections to the Latin Kings.

Stymied by the victim’s refusal to hand over the letter, this office sought to question Harry Roman. On February 9, 1996, investigators approached Roman and asked him whether he wrote a letter to Student A proposing a romantic relationship. Officer Roman denied it. We then asked him whether he had made sexual advances, written or otherwise, toward any student at Bushwick High School. Again, he flatly denied it. These denials would later prove to be outright lies by Roman’s own admission, but nevertheless resulted in a closing of the case, given the lack of evidence against Roman at that time.

In March 1997, while the current investigation concerning Roman’s connection to the Kings was underway, Student A was again approached by investigators from this office. This time, she agreed to produce the love letter written to her by Roman. Subsequent handwriting analysis clearly demonstrated that the writing contained in the letter is Harry Roman’s.

¹⁴ Chancellor’s Directive of May 6, 1991, redistributed October 13, 1993.

With that evidence in hand, Schools Chancellor Rudolph Crew began steps to terminate Officer Roman's employment on April 28, 1997. As is his right, Officer Roman filed an immediate challenge pursuant to the state's Civil Service Law.¹⁵ *NYC Board of Education v. Harry Roman*, Office of Admin. Trials and Hearings Index No. 1555/97.

At a June 19, 1997, hearing triggered by his challenge, Officer Harry Roman testified under oath. There, confronted with his own handwritten letter, Roman finally admitted writing the letter and giving it to Student A at school. Thus, he no longer denies writing these lines in his letter to Student A:

*I am a man and I would never play with your feelings.
Since I first layed [sic] my eyes on you I was attracted to you
but I respected you to the utmost because you had a man.*

*I know for fact that you don't have a man and thats
[sic] why I asked you out the other day.*

*What you're looking for is what I'm [sic] looking for.
A good woman. Age is nothing but a number.*

... ..

*Fuck what the people say or think. What count's [sic]
is what makes you happy and what makes me happy.*

When questioned at his administrative hearing about the propriety of suggesting a sexual relationship to a student, Officer Roman answered as follows:

Q. Mr. Roman, did you have an inclination that a school safety officer shouldn't give a letter like this to a student, truthfully, really?

¹⁵ Civil Service Law, Article V, Section 75.

A. No, when I met her on the outside, besides knowing that she was a student at the school, I already – once I had laid eyes on her, you know, and spoke to her for a brief moment, I liked her, I liked her.

Q. Did you know, Mr. Roman, that it was a little inappropriate for you to give her a letter, in school?

A. Yes. I made a mistake. I'm not going to deny that. I gave her the letter in school.¹⁶

There is no doubt that Officer Roman did, in fact, make improper sexual advances toward a student, in violation of the Chancellor's directive banning such conduct. Finally confronted with his own handwriting, Roman was left to fight the charges on procedural grounds, insisting that he was not properly served with notice of the written charges against him within eighteen months of the incident. On September 20, 1997 the Office of Administrative Hearing and Trials decided against him on the procedural ground, and additionally recommended, based upon the letter to Student A, that Roman's employment with the Board of Education be terminated.

¹⁶ *NYC Board of Education v. Harry Roman, supra*, at pps. 117-18.

Harry Roman's Connection To Bayonne Drug Dealing

On September 3, 1997, police officers assigned to NYPD's Street Crime Unit, Citywide Anti-Gang Enforcement Squad, who were conducting surveillance of Harry Roman in cooperation with this investigation, observed Roman as he removed a key from his pocket and used it to enter a private residence on East 31st Street in Bayonne, New Jersey. The home was well known to the Vice Division of the Bayonne Police Department as it had been the subject of several complaints from nearby residents, who suspected that drugs were being sold there.

The police's suspicions that they were watching a drug dealing operation that day were corroborated by the pedestrian traffic they saw at the location, and by other sources. During the course of their investigation the police confirmed that, in fact, marijuana was being sold from the home, and that one of the dealers was Harry Roman's seventeen-year-old-son. The police learned that Roman's son lived at the location with Roman's brothers-in-law, the brothers of Roman's recently deceased wife. They also learned that prior to her death on August 4, 1997, Roman's wife, from whom Roman was separated, lived at the home with their children.

Later that same day, September 3, 1997, Roman was arrested for possession of an illegal gravity knife, a felony. A subsequent search of Roman revealed a small red plastic bag containing marijuana. Roman was thus also charged with possession of the drug, a misdemeanor. The details of the arrest echoed statements investigators had heard just months before, when a federal informant and former Latin King, described previously in this report as Witness 2, told them that Roman's weapon of choice was a knife, and that he both smoked and sold marijuana. Bayonne police released Roman the

next day, September 4, 1997, yet he did not notify the Board of Education about his arrest, despite the Chancellor's Regulation, C-105, which requires him to do so.

As described in a previous section, discovered in Roman's backpack the day of his arrest were hundreds of documents relating to the Latin Kings, including copies of the gang's rules and laws, known as "lessons," and manifestos written by gang leaders. According to Captain Jack Walsh, the head of the NYPD Citywide Anti-Gang Enforcement Squad, the materials found on Roman were unusually voluminous and comprehensive. In his experience, the gang leadership would not have disseminated documents of that nature except to a Latin King in some position of authority. Thus, their discovery indicates to Walsh that Roman has risen through the ranks of the gang to a high level.

Another source confirms that Roman was important to the Latin King Nation. That is Witness 3, the last of the federal informants noted above. This witness, like Figueroa and Witness 2, is currently incarcerated in connection with crimes he committed as a Latin King. He is presently cooperating with the federal government in the hopes of obtaining a more lenient sentence. According to Witness 3, Roman's prominence within the Latin King Nation is illustrated by the role Roman played in returning Witness 3 to the gang in 1995 after the witness decided against active gang participation for a period of several months. By the witness's account, it was Roman who found and approached him about resuming his former gang role. Roman claimed to be delivering this entreaty to Witness 3 on behalf of Zulma Andino, a leader of the Latin Queens, and Luis Felipe, the Latin King Inka and first supreme crown.

Witness 3 recalled an even more telling detail. According to him, sometime in 1995 Roman rose to the level of a Supreme Crown, thus assuming a position in the statewide leadership of the Latin

Kings.

The arrest of Roman only heightened the interest of the Bayonne Police Department in the residence on East 31st Street. The next day, September 4, 1997, the police learned that Roman's son, in the senior Roman's presence, refused to sell a prospective buyer marijuana, fearing that the police were watching the location. The son's parting words to the would-be buyer were "the cops are all over, come back in a week."

Finally, during the very early morning hours of September 11, 1997, the police executed a search warrant at the house. Found in one room was a clear plastic bag containing 45 smaller red zip lock bags of marijuana, having a street value of approximately \$900. Also discovered in that room was a loaded .40 caliber semi-automatic pistol.

In another room, close to the room in which the drugs and weapon were discovered, the police found walls laden with graffiti, posters, newsclips and drawings, including at least one drawing bearing Latin King emblems. The newsclips concerned the Latin Kings, and Roman himself. Discovered in a closet in that room, hidden behind ceiling rafters and under insulation, were hundreds of pages of Latin King materials.

Roman's son and his two brothers-in-law were arrested that night. The three were charged with felony crimes, included unlawful possession of a weapon, possession of marijuana with intent to sell, and the distribution of drugs within close proximity to school property. The presence of the drug business in the near vicinity of a school, in this case a public elementary school, heightened the degree of the crime and the possible penalties.

Both the individuals arrested, and the site of their arrest, are closely connected to Harry Roman.

Roman's close association with the Bayonne drug dealing operation is made evident by these facts, as well as by his own statements, at the time of his arrest, and the statements of his son, subsequent to the son's arrest the night of the search. Roman acknowledged that since his wife died he had been "back and forth" between the East 31st Street home in Bayonne where his children lived with his in-laws, and his New York City home. His son, after his arrest just a week later, put it this way: "my father lives at both places," which explains why Roman carried a key to the Bayonne home on his person. Last, the marijuana discovered on Roman at the time of his arrest was packaged in a red plastic zip lock bag, identical in size and color to the bags containing marijuana seized the night of the search.

Our investigation of Harry Roman, the results of which are described in detail above, did not focus on Roman alone. Instead, we simultaneously examined the larger issue of gangs in the city schools, and learned, as described below, that Roman is not the only gang member present there. Rather, gang members, and the visual manifestations of their affiliations, are a daily influence in many New York City high schools. Our findings in this area are described next.

The Impact of Gangs on Schools

It often begins with graffiti on the school walls, so that a school is “tagged.” Or the evidence may be less subtle: students come to school wearing the colors, jewelry or tattoos of a particular gang. However, the most powerful evidence of gangs gaining a foothold in any one school is the violence or the threat of violence that comes with disputes involving gang members. In order to gauge the degree of gang involvement in the city’s schools, this office reviewed close to a hundred incident reports, generated by the Board’s Division of School Safety, describing gang-related disturbances taking place during school. We also interviewed police officers, Division of School Safety officials, and several high school principals to determine the degree to which school administrators themselves view the presence of gangs as a problem, and to explore their methods for combating gang influence.

The following summaries of several separate incidents illustrate that the Latin Kings, as well as other gangs, are a dangerous presence in schools and that these gangs have used school grounds, or their perimeters, to meet and conduct business. The incidents also illustrate what is easily predicted: gang influence quickly escalates teenage disputes from the verbal stage to a dangerous level of violence. The mix of gangs and schools is a volatile one, with ramifications for entire schools, for individual students, and for their families.

COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL

In the morning of February 2, 1994, New York City Police Officer Gerard Quinn’s attention was drawn to a group of about twenty men, assembled in a circle just a few blocks from Columbus High School in the Bronx. A vehicle near the men was parked haphazardly, and appeared to be connected to the group. Quinn and two other officers followed the vehicle when it departed from the

area, and directed the driver to stop when he violated a traffic law.

The traffic violation turns out to have been the least of this driver's problems. The passengers had between them: a 9 mm. Intratech semi-automatic pistol and ammunition; a .25 caliber Raven semi-automatic pistol and ammunition; a knife with brass knuckles attached; ski masks; and Latin King beads. The police later learned that the 9 mm. weapon had been used in the homicide of a Latin King, Ismail Rios, known as King J.R. The two passengers, Samuel Santiago and Jose Torres, known to the gang as King Sammy and King Chino, respectively, were later convicted as a result of the federal prosecution of the Latin Kings described in a preceding section. Santiago was implicated in the murder of King J.R.

According to John O'Malley, a federal investigator assigned to the U.S. Attorney's examination of the Latin Kings, the presence of Santiago and Torres in close proximity to the high school was anything but coincidental. Rather, they had been ordered there by their Latin King superior, Alex Figueroa, one of the federal witnesses referred to earlier, who was known as King Sombra. Their purpose at the high school was to escort and protect a Columbus High tenth grade student and Latin Queen, Student 1, on her way into school that morning. Student 1, a former girlfriend of King Sombra, had triggered the protection order when she complained that a member of a rival gang, the Zulu Nation, had sexually harassed her. Santiago and Torres' assignment was twofold. Besides serving as Student 1's escort on her way to school, they were also to find the offending Zulu at Columbus High, and take whatever steps necessary to end the harassment.

Santiago and Torres were successful on both counts. They escorted Student 1 into school that morning, and, after finding her harasser, made him understand the consequences if he continued to be a

problem. Fortunately, the two made their point without resorting to violence. Nonetheless, given the gang-related motive to assert dominance and control, the ready availability of powerful weapons, and the presence of hundreds of students, the potential for tragedy in or near the school that day was frighteningly high.

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL 19: KING TONE

Three federal witnesses discussed in this report—Figueroa, Witness 2, and Witness 3—recounted incidents of Latin King meetings on school grounds after-school and on weekends. In fact, along with public parks, school grounds are among the most common sites selected for these gatherings, for obvious reasons: often schoolyards are easily accessible, and they can accommodate large groups.

Antonio Fernandez, known as King Tone and, since about 1996, the Latin King leader, has cause to remember one such school-yard meeting. This gathering took place during the evening of May 12, 1995, on the grounds of Junior High School 19 in the Bronx. That evening Police Officer Jim Murphy and his partner responded to a radio call that a Latin King meeting was in progress, and that a man with a gun was present. The officers were directed to the street behind Junior High 19 where they observed between 50 and 60 people standing in a circle in the schoolyard. Near them was a smaller group of three or four people, one of whom matched the description given by the caller as possessing the gun.

That individual, Fernandez, was arrested that evening for possession of marijuana and a .38 caliber revolver. The marijuana was recovered from Fernandez' striped jacket. The stripes included the colors of the Kings: black and gold. The charges against Fernandez were ultimately dismissed

when a judge ruled against the prosecution at an evidentiary hearing, and suppressed the use of the gun as evidence against him. Although much regarding the arrest and subsequent search was challenged during the course of the hearing, the following particularly interesting fact was never questioned: on the evening of the arrest 50 to 60 Latin Kings had taken effective possession of the Junior High School 19 school yard, where they were discovered in a “cipher,” the prerequisite for serious, and often violent, gang business.

PUBLIC SCHOOL 94: KING ACE

As noted above, a regular feature of gang business, conducted within the cipher at meetings, is the “B.O.S.,” short for “beatdown on sight.” Beatings are imposed on wayward Latin Kings by their fellow gang members for breaking the Nation’s rules—rules that forbid, among other things, propositioning another gang member’s girlfriend or violating the code of silence by “snitching” on gang members to law enforcement officials.

Richie Colon learned the consequences of reporting a Latin King to his local precinct first hand, and he learned it in the school yard of P.S. 94 in Brooklyn. Colon violated an almost sacred tenet of the Latin Kings when he reported to the police that a Latin King, Thomas Correa, robbed him of some jewelry after threatening him with a machine gun. Correa, known as King Chickie, was arrested sometime in 1994 as a result. According to Jim Gaynor, the NYPD detective who arrested Correa, Colon’s fear of retaliation, and other issues, caused the charges to be dismissed.

Colon then decided to join the Latin Kings, and took the gang name of King Ace. Because he was guilty of having reported King Chickie to the police he was immediately required to submit to a beating in the school yard of P.S. 94. Apparently not satisfied that the B.O.S. was adequate

punishment for his transgression, Colon was also robbed at the time of the beat down. This time his complaint to the local precinct resulted in two arrests: that of King Chickie, and also that of Mario Quinones, known as King Bosco.

After the arrests, Det. Gaynor learned that King Ace seriously feared that his continued pursuit of the criminal case against the two Kings would cost him his life. His cooperation with the police had already led to his ostracism from the gang, and, as King Ace confided to the detective, threats had been made against him.

According to federal witness and former Latin King Nelson Torres, described in a preceding section, it was at this time that King Ace was promised that if he “dropped the charges, he would come back to the family.”¹⁷ The threats, and subsequent promise, proved effective. Colon withdrew his complaint and the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office was forced to dismiss the charges against Correa and Quinones a short time later.

Unknown to Colon, a T.O.S., “termination on sight,” had already been ordered against him. In the language of the Latin Kings, his fellow gang members had been “sleeping him,” that is, tricking him into believing that the relatively minor penalty of a beatdown would serve as adequate punishment for “snitching,” as long as Colon withdrew the charges.¹⁸ His execution, only a few months after he joined the Kings, was particularly brutal. Deceived into believing that he had been invited onto a Bronx rooftop to smoke marijuana, he was shot in the back of the head, and then five times in the face, by those who had promised him forgiveness, and his old place in the family.¹⁹

¹⁷ Testimony of Nelson Torres, *U.S. v. Luis Felipe*, pps. 1152-53.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.* at pps. 1154-57.

BENJAMIN CARDOZO HIGH SCHOOL

Student A, who in September of 1996 was a new tenth grader at Martin Van Buren High School in Queens and a member of the Ñeta street gang, found himself the subject of frightening threats of physical violence from within his own gang. These threats were so serious that they came to the attention of the administration at the school, and through the school, to the student's parents. Van Buren has an active gang presence, a fact that was made evident to an SCI investigator who, during a recent visit to the school, observed several students exchange the Latin King hand signal as they greeted one another in the corridors.

When the school administration could not guarantee student A's safety from the gang, his parents elected to transfer Student A from Martin Van Buren, just weeks into the tenth grade, to another high school in Queens, Benjamin Cardozo. Unknown to his parents, Student A's tenure at Benjamin Cardozo would also be short-lived, and for similar reasons.

Like Van Buren High School, Cardozo is home to various street gangs, including Ñetas, Latin Kings and the Zulu Nation. Student B was a tenth grader at Cardozo during the 1996-97 school year. He did not belong to any gang, but was well aware of their presence in the school. One incident in particular made an impression on him. Early in that school year Student B learned that a Latin King at the school, Student C, known in the gang as "King Venom," had badly beaten another student, Student D, a ninth grader at the time. According to Student D's mother, her son later left Cardozo for a private boarding school. Student B was not disappointed to hear that Student C, an eleventh grader, stopped going to school shortly after the incident. Student B, in fact, believed that Student C had been

suspended.

Student C, however, returned to Cardozo on April 3, 1997. Student B was in the lunch room when Student C entered and caught his eye. He approached Student B and demanded to know what the student was “looking at.” Apparently not satisfied with his answer, Student C and another student started a fight with Student B. Bystanders intervened to stop the fight after Student C cut Student B across the back with a knife, and was attempting to inflict further injuries. Before leaving the scene, Student C warned those who had witnessed the slashing that they would be killed by the Latin Kings if they reported his involvement.

Among the group of witnesses that heard the threat was Student A. Because of the incident he has decided not to return to Cardozo. He is currently enrolled in a private school. Student B was taken to an emergency room after the assault, where a four inch cut on his back was sutured. He has not returned to Cardozo since the attack, and has not re-enrolled in any other school. Although police responded to Cardozo when alerted of the slashing, Student B declined to press charges and so no arrests were made.

FLUSHING HIGH SCHOOL

Joel Helfenbein has been an assistant principal at Flushing High School since 1993. He both supervises the guidance counselors there and has direct involvement with students in the school, especially those who are disciplinary problems. Helfenbein readily admits that there is a disturbing gang problem at Flushing. Among the several gangs that have a presence at the school are the Latin Kings, the Ñetas, and the Zulu Nation.

Several of Helfenbein's efforts concerning gang members have produced disheartening results.

One Latin King member, Student 1, came to Helfenbein's attention on several occasions. On September 29, 1995, the student, who was not enrolled in any school at the time, appeared at the school, having been brought there by police officers who suspected him of being a truant. He was found to have a knife in his possession, and, according to Helfenbein, was thus enrolled at Flushing, so that he could be suspended. Helfenbein was disappointed to learn that a suspension hearing officer later ruled that the search of Student 1 which revealed the knife had been improperly conducted. Student 1 was thus reinstated at the high school. Upon his return, the student made a point of taunting Helfenbein, telling him that he was a Latin King, and asking, "What the fuck are you [Helfenbein] going to do about it?"

Helfenbein again became involved with Student 1 when he was arrested for a robbery which had taken place in a building adjacent to the high school. On that occasion, January 5, 1996, the student told Helfenbein, and the police officer and school safety officer who were also present, that they were "all dead" and that they did not know who they were "fucking with." This, finally, resulted in a year long suspension.

Helfenbein had other encounters with gang members and they were equally frustrating. He recalled one student only by her gang appellation, Queen Green Eyes. This student was the subject of complaints when she attempted to recruit another female student into the gang. When Queen Green Eyes' parents came to the school to discuss the issue, Helfenbein learned that they were also Latin Kings, and observed that her father prominently wore the gang beads. Queen Green Eyes was transferred to Queens Vocational High School. Rather than cease her recruiting activities, however, the

Latin Queen simply focused her attention on the new student body. Helfenbein learned of this when an assistant principal at Queens Vocational called him to complain that the student was recruiting at that school.

One particularly disturbing incident which Helfenbein could not resolve involved Student 2. During the summer of 1996 this 14-year-old boy joined what he called a “crew.” Not as organized or large as the well-known street gangs, crews generally claim youths from the same street or neighborhood that band together for criminal activity and for protection. Student 2 admittedly admired the Latin Kings. At one time he hoped that a Latin King he knew would sponsor him for membership into that gang.

That same summer, of 1996, hostilities developed between Student 2’s crew and a rival crew from a different neighborhood. After a fight with that crew he learned that one of the rival crew members had been armed with a knife. Although the knife had not been used, the fact that it was present, and could have been used to inflict a serious injury, was particularly alarming to Student 2. The next day he witnessed the beating of a close friend and fellow crew member by the same rival crew, and realized that he was powerless to protect his friend, or himself. He wanted to leave the crew and decided to walk the “apache line,” the price he had to pay to end his membership. While crew members stood in two parallel lines, Student 2 walked between them three times, submitting to their blows. Should he have fallen during the ordeal he would have had to start over.

Although Student 2 was now released from his crew, he found that his problems with the rival crew were not over. One day a member of that crew dropped a piece of paper in his lap during gym class bearing a series of numbers which Student 2 believed to be a code for murder. Student 2 was

now convinced that this crew intended to kill him. Helfenbein agreed that the student was in danger and tried to set up a program of home instruction. The student, on the other hand, asked for a transfer to a particular high school where he thought he would be protected. The transfer was not available and in early May of 1997, Student 2 simply stopped going to school. He has not been back since.

HILLCREST HIGH SCHOOL

Like Student 2 at Flushing High School, Student 1 at Hillcrest High in Queens found that a gang-related problem, with origins on his neighborhood streets, would become a problem for him within his school walls as well.

On January 11, 1996, Student 1 accompanied his friend, Student 2, on a grocery shopping expedition at the request of Student 2's mother. At the time, both students were enrolled at Hillcrest—Student 1 in the tenth grade, and Student 2, who has since graduated, in the eleventh. En route to the store, the two encountered Student 3, then a ninth grader at the same school, who was an active member of a neighborhood crew. According to Student 1, Student 3 had a “problem” with Student 2 from a previous interaction. According to Student 2, Student 3's problem was not with him, but with Student 1. In any event, a fight started, and Student 3 was joined by a large group of fellow crew members. Students 1 and 2 took flight, and managed to escape unharmed.

The next day, however, Student 1 was not as fortunate. During gym class Student 3, who was almost 16 despite the fact that he was only in the ninth grade, approached Student 1 with a box cutter hidden in his hand, and slashed his left arm. Student 3 was arrested, and prosecuted pursuant to the juvenile justice laws as a youthful offender. He is currently incarcerated, pending trial on unrelated

charges. Student 1's injury, which left a permanent scar, was sutured at a hospital. He transferred to a different high school shortly after the assault. Student 2 also transferred to a new school after his mother learned of the incident.

Student 1 was a probationary peewee member of the Latin Kings at the time he was slashed. Student 2, who is older, was a regular member of the Latin Kings. Each claims that their gang involvement had nothing to do with the altercation and that Student 3 was unaware of their gang affiliation. This account, however, is at odds with the written version of the event, prepared by a school safety officer, in which the officer asserted that the victim, Student 1, showed Student 3 his Latin King beads immediately before he was cut.

According to Student 2, he voluntarily left the Latin Kings sometime after the incident with Student 3 by signing a "Golden Gates." Until recently there was no method by which an individual could resign from the gang without risking death, or, at a minimum, a severe beating. According to recent media accounts concerning the self-proclaimed metamorphoses of the Latin Kings, however, gang members are now allowed to relinquish membership by signing the Golden Gates form, without submitting to physical violence.²⁰

While Student 2 was thus able to avoid any physical consequence for his decision to separate from the gang, his resignation was not without a price. As indicated by a review of the form, a blank copy of which was recovered from Roman when he was arrested on

²⁰ *The Latin Kings Play Songs of Love*, New York Magazine, February 17, 1997, p. 31; *King of New York: Can Antonio Fernandez Change the Mission of New York's Notorious Street Gang*, The Village Voice, December 10, 1996, p. 42.

September 3, 1997 in signing the Golden Gates members must “confirm” that they never witnessed any criminal activity on the part of the gang. According to Student 2, he has had no further involvement with the gang since signing the form.

Student 1, on the other hand, is now an active member of the Latin Kings having successfully completed his probation. Significantly, his hair is dyed a bright shade of yellow—meaning that appearing in full gang regalia is a simple matter of donning a black garment.

FRANKLIN K. LANE HIGH SCHOOL

Maryann Kellin is an Assistant Principal at Franklin K. Lane High School. She readily acknowledges that the Latin Kings are a large gang presence in the school, with some 15 to 20 members of which she is aware. Besides the Latin Kings, according to Kellin, the Ñetas, Bloods, Crips and Zulu Nation each claim some followers. Kellin knows Antonio “King Tone” Fernandez, the current leader of the Latin Kings, as she was his high school math teacher. Fernandez has visited Kellin in her office at the school, and left her his business card, where he is officially identified as King Tone of the “Almighty Latin King Queen Nation, Inc.”

According to Kellin, at one time, an ongoing rivalry between the Latin Kings and the Ñetas caused problems at the school. In an attempt to mediate the conflict, the administration instituted monthly meetings between the two gangs over which Kellin presides. The administration also prohibits the wearing of gang colors or paraphernalia on school grounds.

Notably, King Tone developed a special relationship with Franklin K. Lane. When a student at the school, believed by police to be a member of the Bloods gang, was slashed in the school on September 15, 1997, a Latin King was implicated in the assault. Law enforcement officers suspected

that the incident was related to an ongoing rivalry between the Bloods and the Latin Kings. Shortly after the slashing, Fernandez was seen in front of the school, and in its vicinity, holding court with reverential adolescents. He was seen there again on September 18th and 19th, stationed at an ice cream shop near the school that has become, along with a nearby pizzeria, a regular meeting spot for Hispanic Franklin K. Lane students who are gang members and followers. Notably, no one has been arrested for the slashing because, according to the police, the victim has refused to cooperate.

In Assistant Principal Kellin's view, the school's approach of mediating gang disputes has been largely successful. Students and parents might well question that conclusion, especially if they were present during the week of September 15, 1997 as police officers converged in the vicinity of the school, both in the air and on the ground. Their massive presence around Franklin K. Lane that week was in response to news of an anticipated confrontation between the Latin Kings and the Bloods, another street gang, triggered, in part, by the slashing described above.

A recent visual inspection of the school, as well as interviews with students there, also calls into question the standards by which Kellin measures success. Walls, both interior and exterior, are covered with graffiti, usually the handiwork of gang or crew members who "tag" a location by affixing their gang symbol to any available spot. According to a custodial worker at the school, over the summer months he simply locks several of the bathrooms in the building as the only effective means of preventing new graffiti from appearing on those walls. Gang colors and beads were also visible on school-age individuals in front of the school, as was an occasional exchange of gang hand signs between those individuals.

Student 1, a member of the Ñeta school gang, might also be skeptical about the degree to which gangs are under control at Franklin K. Lane. Early in the 1996-97 school year, at the beginning

of the ninth grade, Student 1 dated Student 2, who was also a ninth grader. They stopped dating, but later in the year Student 2 heard rumors, which she attributed to Student 1, that the two had had sexual relations. On April 8, 1997, Student 2 confronted Student 1 with her suspicion that he started the rumor, and slapped his face. Student 1 complained to several of his friends, and later that day, as Student 2 was walking home, a group of girls attacked her in front of the pizzeria mentioned above. She was knocked to the ground and hit, but managed to walk away without serious injury.

The next day, Student 3, Student 2's brother and a tenth grader at the school, took up his sister's cause and confronted Student 1. Though not a gang member himself, Student 3 counts among his friends several Latin Kings. When an argument inside the school did not resolve the issue, Student 3 went to the pizzeria in search of Student 1. A gang fight ensued between the Latin Kings and Ñetas, during which Student 1 was beaten. He then found himself surrounded by Latin Kings, and was attacked by Student 3. Defenseless, he did his best to protect himself with his arms, withstood the beating, and made it home on his own without major injury.

Student 1 was lucky. His not so exceptional teenage conflict became a gang cause, yet he escaped with a few scrapes and bruises. As described next, not every high school student is as fortunate.

Fifteen-year-old Jessica Keohane was shot to death on July 2, 1997 in a Brooklyn park. The man accused of murdering her is 33-year-old Sonny Rodriguez, who is alleged to be a Latin King. According to the police, Rodriguez shot Jessica because she had come between Rodriguez and his 15-year-old girlfriend by trying to convince Rodriguez's girlfriend, who was also Jessica's good friend, to end the relationship.

At the time of her death, Jessica was a freshman at Franklin K. Lane. By all accounts, she had

an attentive mother and father, and had grown to trust a counselor at school. In other words, she had adults in her life who wanted to help her.

Nevertheless, in the months before her life ended, Jessica flirted with life in the gangs, according to her father Richard Keohane. She dreamed of becoming a Latin Queen, but was ineligible because she was not a full-fledged Latina—her father was not Hispanic. So she did the next best thing, by joining with a group of friends who named themselves “las locas,” or “the crazy ones.”

Eventually she tired of her parents’ entreaties that she find a different, less troubled, group of friends. She chafed at the rules set by her parents, and repeatedly ran away from home. Her parents lost contact with Jessica on May 9, 1997, only to learn two months later that she was dead.

Richard Keohane recalls one particular occasion when he found out that Jessica had skipped school—a fact that he learned when a friend called to report seeing Jessica on television. The friend described the television appearance as a news report about a school safety officer who had been suspended from his job because of the officer’s involvement with the Latin Kings. A group of students had joined with the officer, Harry Roman, in front of I.S. 302, to show support for Roman. According to the friend, Jessica was among the youthful supporters mugging for the television camera and flashing Latin Kings hand signals. To her father, the memory serves as a reminder that Jessica’s desire to tangle with gang life may have cost her own life.

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL 258: THE BLOODS

The Latin Kings are just one of the gangs which plague the city’s schools. Another particularly violent gang is the Bloods. Members wear red shirts and bandanas and identify themselves with three

cigarette burns, often on their shoulders in the form of a triangle. One form of initiation is known as “slashing,” in which members prove their mettle by cutting an unsuspecting victim across the face. On August 19, 1997, police arrested 167 Bloods as part of an effort to eradicate their presence in New York City.

According to NYPD Sergeant Kevin Yorke of the 79th Precinct, students at Junior High School 258 in Brooklyn did not need news of the arrests to learn about the Bloods. As early as 1994 at least one student in that school joined the gang; in a brash move he even flashed the Bloods sign in a candid yearbook photo. According to Sergeant Yorke, starting in about February 1997, Bloods who had graduated from J.H.S. 258 a few years earlier started robbing current students at the junior high school. Before and after school, they would wait in the vicinity of the building, target certain students and repeatedly take their money. Reluctant victims were gripped in chokeholds and threatened with box cutters.

The Bloods, however, offered the victims a way out: join the gang. In at least one case, they were successful. Student 1 was 14 when the Bloods robbed him outside the school. It only took one instance to convince Student 1 to join the gang. Just a few weeks later, Student 1 was on the other end of the chokehold—robbing students at J.H.S. 258 as a newly initiated gang member. When police arrested him, they noticed a new addition to his shoulder—three cigarette burns in the form of a triangle signifying membership in the Bloods.

KING ROMAN: SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

Alex Figueroa, the federal witness described in a preceding section, knew that Roman was a Latin King, and knew that he was a school safety officer at Bushwick High School. This fact was

important to Figueroa and to the rest of the gang leadership. The Kings were determined to increase their membership by recruiting junior members, “peewees,” who would in turn help ensure the gang’s future and extend its power. According to Figueroa, Latin King influence at a high school, such as Bushwick, could mean not only an opportunity for recruitment, but also control over any drug activity and its profits at the school.

According to Figueroa, young recruits, or peewees, are particularly valuable to the gang. Youths arrested with guns or drugs typically face minimal penalties under the law, when compared to their adult counterparts. There was thus a perverse logic to the Latin Kings arming a fourteen-year-old to guard a drug operation. While an adult might be more street-wise, the severity of punishment faced by the adult far exceeds that facing a youth under the age of sixteen, who has a chance of walking away without a criminal record. It could be said, then, that while youthful Kings are viewed as important to the future, they are also useful participants in the criminal activity of the present.

Figueroa himself gained access to two Manhattan schools in order to tell students about the Latin Kings. On both occasions, he was joined by other gang members and the mother of one of the members, who had arranged the sessions. At each school, according to Figueroa, these individuals met with a group of young students and explained the benefits of being a King, which include having “someone there to watch your back,” and a close association with a “family-like” group. Figueroa recalls that the Kings making the presentations—who were armed at the time—also advised the students about safe sex and the dangers of drug use. Figueroa could not recall the names of the two schools, but did describe their locations, which match those of P.S. 101 and Junior High School 99, both located in Manhattan. It should be noted here that the principals of both schools deny that this ever happened, explaining that such an overture toward students would have been in violation of school

policy.

According to Figueroa, he and the other leaders fully expected Roman to use his position of authority at Bushwick High School to recruit. The fact that Roman was a school safety officer was of particular benefit, Figueroa concluded, since the students would naturally look up to Roman in that position. Figueroa recalls discussing this during a 1994 conversation involving Roman and several other influential gang members. Together they told Roman to look for the kids that came from broken homes, and to stress that the Kings offer family and protection. They also advised Roman to tell the kids not to wait any longer for love from their families, but to find it with the Kings. There is powerful corroboration for this in Roman's own admission to the police that students at Bushwick High School approached him about the Latin Kings on a daily basis, and that he responded by telling them how membership in the Kings helps to compensate for a broken home.

Figueroa remembers that gang membership in the Bushwick area increased around this time, a gain that he attributed to Roman. He also recalls that on one occasion, Roman appeared at a Latin King meeting with a group of "probies," or probationary members. According to Figueroa, it is not unusual that Roman would bring this fact to Figueroa's attention, since it was common practice to warn the leaders whenever probationary members were planning to attend a Kings meeting. In this way, the group could avoid any beatings or violations of members in the presence of probies who had not yet attained full membership. Once these individuals committed to membership in the gang, however, there was less concern about alienating them with acts of violence. It was assumed that few if any members would end their affiliation after becoming a King since, according to Figueroa, there was only one way out—death. This, understandably, discouraged a voluntary drop in membership.

Witness 3, like Figueroa, also recalled that Roman used his position with the schools to the

advantage of the Latin Kings. As previously recounted, Witness 3 had been absent from gang participation for several months. Sometimes in 1995, Roman strongly suggested that Witness 3 attend a Latin King meeting. The witness initially balked, for fear that the meeting would include a violent beating as punishment for his prolonged absence from the gang. According to the witness, Roman assured him that he was not being led to a beating, since the meeting was going to take place in a school, where no such violence would occur. The witness asked Roman how the Kings managed to arrange a meeting site in a school building, to which Roman replied that he (Roman) is the one who has the means to secure the use of a school.

By Witness 3's account, Roman had a talent for dealing with the younger members, an ability to connect with them and command their respect. In fact, Witness 3 recalled that Roman had a particular interest in the tribe's peewees, the youngest members of the group who were still in their early-to-mid teens, and were thus of school age. According to the witness, Roman was given responsibility for the peewees. In that role it was Roman's job to order discipline, including beatings, against peewees who violated gang rules. It should be noted that at the time of his arrest on September 3, 1997, discussed above, Roman had among the Latin Kings materials in his possession a list of rules pertaining to the peewees.

The incidents described here make clear that the separation between school life and gang life, if not aggressively maintained, is easily compromised. As will be explored below, maintaining that distinction requires that school administrators honestly assess the extent to which gangs are a factor in their school environment. Only then can those administrators take the next step of making their school buildings gang-free.

Handling Gangs In New York City Schools

That gangs are a serious presence in New York City schools is accepted as fact by the police department, from its youth officers in the local precincts, to its gang experts in the NYPD's Citywide Anti-Gang Enforcement Squad. The Board of Education also recognizes the problem, having established its own gang unit within its Division of School Safety. Recognizing the problem, however, is not the same as implementing a uniform policy in the schools to solve it. In fact, interviews with several New York City High School principals and assistant principals indicate that school administrations take widely divergent approaches to gang activity within their own school walls.

Gerard K. Beirne is the principal of John Adams High School in Queens. For the last two years he has worked closely with the school safety officers assigned to his building to carry out his policy concerning gangs - a policy that could be fairly summed up as "zero tolerance." Beirne acknowledges that gangs are a problem in the neighborhood; but gang colors, beads and other paraphernalia are not allowed inside the school. Those items are confiscated by school staff and safety officers whenever observed on students. Moreover, those students, from whom gang items are removed, are not allowed to return to school unless accompanied by a parent.

At one time gangs, and gang activity, were as much a problem at John Adams as at any other high school in New York City. According to Mr. Beirne, he has not experienced any gang related incidents since instituting the school's policy. In fact, investigators who toured the school did not see any obvious signs of a gang presence, such as graffiti, beads, identifying colors or the exchange of hand signals, all of which suggest that this policy may be working.

The principal of Brooklyn's Franklin D. Roosevelt High School, Adele Vocel, articulated an

identical policy, and was also satisfied with the results. A visual inspection of the school offered some confirmation of the principal's assessment. Like John Adams, this school was free of any obvious signs of an active, and tolerated, gang presence, even though, according to Vocel, gangs are a fact of life in the surrounding neighborhood.

The approach at Roosevelt and at John Adams, namely, acknowledging that students at the schools are gang members, but taking unambiguous steps to keep the schools "gang free," is by no means universally adopted in the city schools. Peter Goldfein is the principal at Martin Van Buren High School in Queens. In the face of unmistakable indications of gang life inside the school, such as hand signals, colors and beads observed by investigators, Goldfein maintained that he did not have a problem with gangs in the building. Similarly, Arnold Goldstein, the principal of Benjamin Cardozo High School, also in Queens denied the existence of a gang problem even though a visual inspection of the building demonstrated otherwise. Interestingly, the student referred to in the report as Student 1, described above, left Van Buren, and then Cardozo, because of problems with gangs that, according to these principals, do not exist in their schools.

Yet a third approach is illustrated by Jay Schechter, the principal of Sarah J. Hale High School in Brooklyn. Schechter does not deny that there is a gang presence in his school. He sees what is also very apparent to investigators—beads, gang colors, and gang hand signs. He is also aware that gang members are recruiting his students. Yet Schechter does not know how to solve the problem, and is unaware of any uniform Board policy which might be of help. Without guidance, he addresses gang issues on an ad hoc basis, and readily acknowledges that he has not found a solution.

As already discussed, yet another approach was evident at Franklin K. Lane High School in Queens. In that school, gang leaders have been invited by the administration to negotiate grievances

under the guidance of an assistant principal. Gang tensions at Lane are currently so high that earlier this month a massive aerial and ground police presence was deployed at the school to prevent outright gang warfare. This, as well as other incidents described above, suggests that the school's policy, which, in effect, tacitly acknowledges the authority of gang leaders, is flawed.

The Board of Education's Division of School Safety is well aware that gangs are a presence in schools, and, in 1996, instituted a Gang Intelligence Unit headed by Captain Eleazin Ortiz. Originally staffed with six officers, the numbers in the gang unit were increased this school year to 14. The primary purpose of the unit is to gather information concerning gangs, their members, and their activities within the schools. With that information, the members of the unit take whatever steps they can to prevent gang related violence.

Those steps include calling upon gang leaders, such as the Latin King's Antonio "King Tone" Fernandez, to prevent gang conflicts by directing Latin Kings assembled near schools to disperse. According to Ortiz, he saw Fernandez accomplish that task at his request outside Bushwick High School with a simple display of a hand sign accompanied by a wave. After learning that Harry Roman was a Latin King, Ortiz's unit called upon Roman also to provide the same function—which Roman did, also with a hand signal and a wave, at Intermediate School 302.

According to Ortiz, there is some gang presence in every high school in New York City. In the absence of any direction or guidance from the Board of Education, however, each school is responsible for devising a policy and method for controlling the problem on its own. Like our investigators, Ortiz has encountered the wide variety of approaches to the issue, from "zero tolerance," to complete denial that a problem exists. Ortiz acknowledges using gang leaders to quell disturbances, and admits that there are problems with this method. He argues for a more coherent, unified approach to the

problem—a position shared by this office. Our recommendations for a uniform, city-wide policy, follow.

Conclusion and Recommendations

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE LATIN KINGS:

The Latin Kings street gang is a criminal organization placing its own rules above any legitimate authority, including parents, schools, and the New York State's Penal Law. The gang functions in prisons, on the streets, and in the schools, and members are regularly involved in violent crimes including murder, assault, robbery and drug dealing.

The group is tightly organized on both the state and local level. Its hierarchy is often controlled from behind prison walls, where leaders can communicate with neighborhood "tribes." "Peewees"—typically of middle-school or high-school age—constitute the new recruits, but acquire increasing power as they perform more tasks for the group, aspiring to become a "crown," part of the gang's leadership hierarchy.

School Safety Officer Harry Roman is currently a member of that hierarchy, listed as "political advisor" to the gang's leader on recent document seized in this investigation. Roman's stated duties include all matters relating to the gang's interaction with schools.

Schools are in fact critical to the Latin King's success. The Kings use graffiti and gang "colors" to intimidate students who want to stay out of trouble. They actively seek out children from troubled

homes, offering a perverted sense of family. Once brought into the gang, the students, now recognized as peewees, start making their way through the organization. Peewees are often utilized to hold weapons or drugs for older members, because they are less likely to face serious jail time if apprehended. Many peewees ultimately find their way to prison nonetheless. Schools and school playgrounds are often used as meeting grounds and as places where “beefs” are settled, sometimes with violence.

The Latin Kings enforce their rules through violence and the threat of violence. A typical punishment for an infraction is a “B.O.S.,” meaning a “beating on sight.” The offending member is forced to stand helpless with his hands in his pockets while beaten for a set number of minutes. When peewees commit an offense other peewees administer the beating. For the most serious infractions, the punishment is a “T.O.S.,” meaning “termination on sight,” that is, death.

While the gang has sought to clean up its image through a vigorous public relations campaign, this investigation has revealed that the gang’s criminal activity continues unabated. Indeed, the gang proclaims its goal to “become deeply enmeshed in all legitimate and illegitimate enterprises in our communities, as well as constantly expand.”²¹ Further, the growing presence of rival gangs, particularly the “Bloods,” makes it more likely that Latin King criminality will increase rather than decrease.

There has never been a comprehensive policy on gang-related issues in school. Some principals

²¹ Excerpt from “Almighty Latin King’s Nation,” a document recovered in September 1997, pursuant to this investigation.

practice a “No Tolerance” policy, while others try to appease the gangs or deny their presence altogether. The lack of a uniform policy even takes a visual form—in some schools there is no evidence of gang influence, while in others, gangwear and graffiti are graphic reminders that school administrators have conceded some portion of control in their buildings to violent gangs.

SYSTEMIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Chancellor, working with appropriate city officials, should adopt a uniform anti-gang program for the schools. This program must be thoroughly disseminated and enforced throughout the school system. We favor a “No Tolerance” approach,²² which should include the following:
 - Prohibiting gang related graffiti, known as “tagging”, gangwear, and other elements essential to gang recruiting and intimidation strategies in the schools. Where tagging occurs, it should be removed as soon as possible and those responsible should face strong disciplinary action.²³

²² Kenneth Trump, the president of National School Safety and Security Services in Cleveland, Ohio designed and supervised the Youth Gang Unit of the Cleveland Public Schools. In his view, “[p]rincipals must adopt a ‘no tolerance’ policy toward gang activity.” *Knowing No Boundaries, School Safety*, Winter 1993, p. 10.

²³ Experts in the field of violent street gangs concur that tagging and gangwear in a school detract from the perception of safety. See Shirley Lal, *Gang Activity at School: Prevention Strategies*, June 1997; *The American Street Gang*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, p. 169 and Malcolm Klein, *Tell Teen Gangs: School’s Out*, *The American School Board Journal*, July 1993, p. 40.

- Gang related offenses should be reported to the police without delay. This step is of critical importance and may prevent injury or death.
- Gang-related offenses should be given special priority in the school’s disciplinary system. School officials should proceed quickly and forcefully, applying fair, firm and consistent penalties.
- School officials, including school safety officers, should not meet with gang leaders or members to “mediate” gang-related disputes. While mediation can be, and already is, a successful method of handling many student disputes in the public schools, it should not apply to gang-related matters. When gang members and issues are involved, “mediation” by the school lends an air of legitimacy to these criminal organizations and might well end up with schools overlooking gang-related offenses as a means of appeasing the gangs. Further, affording gang members or leaders an official status, which is likely to be well-known to the student body, puts pressure on students to join. We recommend that the schools give no legitimacy to gang leaders or to the gangs themselves.

- Anti-gang education programs need to be expanded so that children, parents and educators can know the dangers of gang involvement.²⁴ It is particularly important that parents know the warning signs of gang activity.
- This list is not meant to be exclusive. The provisions listed are those we consider crucial to sending a clear message that schools will be “gang-free” zones.

2. Professional law enforcement offices—such as the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York, the New York City Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, all of which were so critical to this investigation—should have full control over investigations into the Latin Kings and similar street gangs, whether the gangs’ criminal activities take place inside or outside the school gates.²⁵ This will require full cooperation by school staff, especially principals and school safety officers.²⁶

²⁴ Dr. Ronald Stephens, Executive Director of the National School Safety Center, telephone interview, September 19, 1997; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Gang Suppression and Intervention: Community Models*, U.S. Department of Justice, February 1996, p. 19.

²⁵ This includes, of course, the many other fine law enforcement agencies and prosecutors’ offices in the New York City area.

²⁶ Several experts agree that the participation of professional law enforcement is critical to the control of gangs in schools. Kenneth Trump, *Youth Violence and Gangs*, Education and Urban Society, August 1996, p. 502; Shirley Lal, *Gang Activity at School: Prevention Strategies*, June 1997; and, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Gang Suppression and Intervention: Community Models*, U.S. Department of Justice, February 1996, p. 18.

3. No member of the Latin Kings, or any other similar criminal street gang, should be employed as a School Safety Officer. There is an irreconcilable conflict of interest, as the Latin Kings' own rules state that the members' duty to the gang comes ahead of any other authority.²⁷

4. School Safety officers should undergo drug testing. The need for drug testing is made clear by Roman's admission that he smoked marijuana regularly during his long career as a school safety officer.

²⁷ The issue of a conflict can obviously arise with other school employees who are members of a violent street gang. Because this case concerns a school safety officer, whose conflict of interest is so obvious, we limit our recommendation to that position. Close consideration should be given to the issue of conflict with other employees who are gang members.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING INDIVIDUALS:

Harry Roman's employment as a School Safety Officer with the Board of Education should be terminated immediately.