

Gang Ceasefire Agreement Launched in Los Angeles

Written by Charlene Muhammad ID2815
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FinalCall.com

Can you change the course of a historic, deadly path that is prophesied? If so, then how, especially if that path is all that you have ever known? Where do you begin when bloodshed has infiltrated bloodlines? How do you stop the killing? These questions and more engulf the creation and purpose of the long-anticipated, newly forged Cease Fire Agreement primarily between feuding Crip gang factions throughout Los Angeles County.

A L.A. County Sheriff representative cited approximately 235 gangs countywide, while gang interventionists indicate that there are over 100 Crip gang sets. According to the Cease Fire Steering Committee, at the initial launch of the Cease Fire Agreement on March 18, seven sets have adopted the Agreement, including two which have been rivals for 23 years and two at odds for 11 years.

Some would say circumstances which sparked the Cease Fire Agreement began strange. The notorious Crips have made history many times over for various infamous deeds, but last December they overshadowed their past when, together with scores of Blood gang members, they dwelled in peace at the day-long memorial service for Stanley "Tookie" Williams, a reformed Crip, Nobel Peace Prize nominee, children's author and peacemaker. Mr. Williams was executed by the State of California for murders which he maintained, until his death, that he did not commit.

From there the H.E.L.P.E.R. Alliance—Help Establish Learning, Peace, Economics and Righteousness—formed as a haven for members of various Crip gangs to meet regarding the real issues and barriers to peace. The Alliance consists of various intervention and prevention-focused organizations that launched the concept of education and information dissemination in January. Every Wednesday at Bethel A.M.E. Church they come together to craft a methodology that can be tailored to various sets and neighborhoods.

The Los Angeles Police Department recently reported that despite an 11 percent reduction in citywide crime totals, violence in South Los Angeles reigns supreme. Chief William Bratton noted, according to a Los Angeles Times report, that although it contains 13 percent of the city's population, it accounts for 43 percent of homicides. The Times noted that a wide racial divide

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regarding violent crime is attributed to socioeconomic factors.

Triple O.G. (Original Gangster) Big Pete asserted, "A lot of people say it's these youngsters. We can't blame it all on these youngsters. They're just doing as we've done. At some point, they were born into madness!"

The Alliance began dealing with Crip sets due to the street organization's internal war where sets were killing each other, sometimes from the same neighborhood, according to Stan Muhammad, Western Region Gang Intervention Representative. He said that in order to have a real Cease Fire movement, "We have to clean up our own backyard first."

"We determined that we can't just go to the Brothers and say, 'let's have peace,' so we presented the Cease Fire as a compromise," Mr. Muhammad stated, adding that the absence of peace stems from self-hatred, pain and grief due to a 30-year civil war.

Mr. Muhammad insisted that without the steering committee, comprised of intervention efforts Venice 2000, Unity Three, Unity Two-Chapter Two, Detour, Mothers Cry No More and Concerned Citizens of South L.A., the Cease Fire would not be happening.

Nation of Islam Western Region Representative, Min. Tony Muhammad, told the initial Cease Fire gathering that what they are witnessing was pre-written in the scriptures.

"It is already written in the Bible that the government of America and wealthy White supremacists, through Operation Nutcracker, have found a way to benefit from our ignorance and people like the front line soldiers for gang intervention are the number one enemy of the police," Min. Tony said.

He continued, "You are more powerful than what you think you are and when we are in unity, no one can mess with us, but your word has to be your bond. Anybody that is sent in to stop the unity of us is really the big enemy and we can't let that happen because we'd be putting another generation to death."

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Tony Massengale, co-director of the Unity Collaborative, a gang intervention network serving South Los Angeles, said the fundamental message is for Black folks to stop killing Black folks and Latino folk to stop killing Latino folks. Certainly he said, not everyone is with the Cease Fire Agreement, and it has taken through 2006 for ex gang leaders and members to build enough critical mass for stopping violence.

Big Pete concurred. "We're not asking you to go do any partying. Right now, just a little respect. If you go by somebody and they're from there, just a nod will do to say 'I'm grown. I understand.' You don't have to shoot them and you don't have to die," he said.

Mr. Massengale noted that part of the problem is that there has not been a sufficient amount of public commitment over a sustained period of time addressing the problems of gangs, because it has almost always been viewed as a law enforcement problem. "We've seen police forces grow, but they haven't stopped the gang problem. It's actual a society and community problem and it's going to take society and communities to invest in youth and young adult development and gang intervention," he said.

(For more information on the Cease Fire Agreement or the H.E.L.P.E.R. Alliance, write to P.O. Box 2541, Venice, CA 90291, email Venice2000@sbcglobal.net or call (310) 925-2071.)

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