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One of the giants of American literature is no match for the reputation of a Torrance-area gang, it seems. That's because when Bert Sierra and her family decided to open a new Mexican restaurant in Old Torrance, they picked the name Tortilla Flats, a reference to an early John Steinbeck novel. Unfortunately, in Torrance the name is associated more with a Latino gang that claims territory just outside the city in Harbor Gateway than with literary allusion to the gentle fable "Tortilla Flats" written by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author. "It had a very interesting name," said Marilyn Ron, owner of the nearby Antique Attic shop and one of several neighboring business owners who voiced concern about the restaurant name. "I thought, you guys might want to rethink this," Ron added. "That's why I called up and said, 'Did you know you're naming your restaurant after a notorious gang?'" Sierra, who is from Gardena, did not. After all, there are plenty of Mexican restaurants named Tortilla Flats sprinkled around the country in such disparate locales as Mission Viejo, Texas, Michigan and Rhode Island. "They're not in Torrance and that's the difference," Sierra said. "I had no idea that the name is associated with a gang in Torrance," she added. "We didn't want to create problems or invite problems so we changed the name." So the proposed Tortilla Flats Grill & Sports Bar has morphed into the Tortilla Cantina even before its projected November opening. The restaurant, which will specialize in meats cooked in slow roast ovens, will sit in leased space at the corner of Sartori and El Prado avenues that formerly housed an antique store that closed recently. Sierra, a former partner of the Stick & Stein sports bar in El Segundo, hopes to win Planning Commission approval for the eatery next Wednesday. nick.green@dailybreeze.com Originally Published: September 8, 2009 at 12:00 AM PDT CHERYL Green was hardly the first.Since the 14-year-old was shot to death in December in the forgotten strip of Los Angeles known as Harbor Gateway, she has become a symbol of the region's gang and racial strife. For the record: 12:00 a.m. March 12, 2007 For The Record Los Angeles Times Monday March 12, 2007 Home Edition Main News Part A Page 2 National Desk 1 inches; 49 words Type of Material: Correction Harbor Gateway: An article in Section A on March 4 indicated that Harbor Gateway is a 13-block neighborhood in Los Angeles plagued by racial strife. The neighborhood is a small part of Harbor Gateway, the long strip of land connecting the bulk of the city to the harbor area. Yet long before the mayor, police chief and FBI director showed up to decry the violence, the tiny neighborhood lived with it.For more than a decade, many say, the neighborhood Latino gang -- called 204th Street -- had been attacking blacks. African Americans had taken to warily surveying their streets for Latinos, and few dared go north of 206th Street, which the gang had set as a boundary for blacks.In 1997, 11-year-old Marquis Wilbert, an African American youth with no gang affiliation, was shot and killed by a 204th Street gang member on a bicycle.In September 2001, Robert Hightower, a 19-year-old Pasadena high school senior, was shot to death after hugging his sister, whom he had been visiting. A 204th Street gang member shot him, according to court testimony, because he was upset that a black boxer had beaten a Latino in a prizefight.In 2003, Eric Butler, 39, was shot to death as he drove from the neighborhood's lone business, the Del Amo Market, which the gang considered to be in its territory. He'd gone there to intervene after gang members began harassing his 14-year-old stepdaughter. She was shot in the back and lives today with a bullet lodged near her spine.Butler's wife, Madeline Enriquez, organized marches to bring attention to the problem, without success.Instead, the violence spread.From 1994 to 2005 in Harbor Gateway, there were nearly five times as many homicides, assaults and other violent crimes by Latinos against blacks as by blacks against Latinos, according to Los Angeles Police Department statistics.Cheryl's shooting -- allegedly by two 204th Street gang members as she and friends talked on a street in broad daylight -- underscored a new reality: that since the mid-1990s, according to the L.A. County Human Relations Commission, Latino gangs have become the region's leading perpetrators of violent hate crimes."It took this girl's death to show what's going on," said Khalid Shah, director of Stop the Violence, an anti-gang nonprofit group that has worked in Harbor Gateway.Two weeks after Cheryl's death, the gang allegedly struck again, stabbing 80 times a white man they believed to be a witness to her shooting death. Five gang members were charged last month in his slaying.None of this makes sense to Cheryl's mother, Charlene Lovett. "My daughter's dead and I don't know why," Lovett said at her kitchen table after Cheryl's killing. "That's the question I would like answered: Why?The answer goes well beyond a single slaying or a single neighborhood.Packed into the 13-block area where Cheryl Green lived and died is a story of many of the forces fueling gang and racial violence in Los Angeles and the region today.It is a story of civic neglect and the rise of the low-wage economy, of immigration, changes in federal housing policy and the street influence of a prison gang.But the story begins, as does so much in this city, with real estate development.From fields to familiesBefore World War II, the neighborhood was mostly vacant fields.Then came factories, attracting workers who needed housing. So builders filled those fields with small houses and duplexes. "This is where the workers lived," said Sharon Wyatt, who moved into the neighborhood with her husband, Jack, a shipyard worker, in 1971. "The contractors didn't even live here. It was the people that built the houses."Cubans settled nearby in the 1960s, and a wave of Mexican immigrants arrived in the 1970s. Few blacks lived in the area, but on the Wyatts' block of 207th Street lived white families like themselves, Latino families, a Middle Eastern man.Harbor Gateway was like other parts of Los Angeles in many ways. But tucked as it was into a strip that connects the city to the port, it was an afterthought to local politicians consumed with the port, San Pedro and Wilmington. Residents themselves didn't always know to which city they belonged: The neighborhood was in Los Angeles but had a Torrance mailing address.In the competition for city services, Harbor Gateway usually lost. Wyatt remembers that street sweepers came by maybe once a month. Street lamps didn't arrive until the late 1980s. The area had no park, no school nearby. Los Angeles police, always strapped for officers, patrolled intermittently.Homeownership anchored the community. Wyatt and others said. Families clanned in front of their places. People knew each other.All that changed in the late 1980s. Southern California was absorbing immigrants and refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, Iran, Mexico and Central America. Demand for housing rose -- especially for apartments.From 1985 to 1989, 187,000 units were built in Los Angeles County -- almost 30% more than all those built since, according to the Construction Industry Research Board.Harbor Gateway was transformed. From 1985 to 1992, city records show, about 75 houses gave way to apartment buildings -- adding 650 units. The neighborhood gained roughly 1,500 residents -- a 65% increase -- with no new amenities or open space. Residents "didn't have the knowledge, or the resources, or the time" to fight it, Wyatt said.While Torrance made developers add trees, landscaping, open space and enclosed garages, Los Angeles required only sewer and school taxes."It was the Wild West," said Ken Sideris, who built more apartments than anyone else in the neighborhood -- about 20 buildings. "It was developed wrong. There was no plan, no thought."By 1992, the real estate boom had ended; recession arrived. Building owners needed tenants. The union jobs that had sustained earlier residents were disappearing. "For about five years there, everyone on this block was laid off at one time or another," said Sharon Wyatt, whose husband lost his shipyard job.The people who moved in were cashiers, gardeners, mechanics and swap-met vendors. Most were Latino immigrants.Blacks also moved in. The neighborhood's African American population more than doubled, from 313 in 1990 to 835 in 2000.Many were fleeing the gang war zones of South Los Angeles, Inglewood and Compton in search of affordable housing.Others came from housing projects, as federal policy shifted and concentrated developments for the poor fell into disfavor. They came with Section 8 vouchers, tickets to subsidized housing, in hand. Many were former residents of Normont Terrace, a housing project two miles from Harbor Gateway that the city's housing authority razed in 1995.With so many renters and a dearth of city services, conditions in the neighborhood deteriorated. Discarded sofas stayed where tossed for weeks. "The neighborhood got dirtier," Wyatt said.Landlords reinvested less, and tenants, divided by race, culture and language, no longer knew one another.Sideris sold his last building in 1993 and hasn't built since."I feel bad. I felt the neighborhood could have gone the other way very easily," he said. "Where they have too many apartment units like that, it's unfortunate."Feeling "penned in" in 1994, Toni Bowden moved to 207th Street from Compton with a Section 8 voucher. At the housing office, the neighborhood was listed as Torrance, said Bowden, who is black. "I said, 'Oh wow, a way out of Compton.' Over the next few years, Bowden saved money, bought a house, and then, however, Bowden began numerous shootings. She and other blacks didn't dare walk the Del Amo Market, which had become the gang's chief outpost. The 204th Street gang had started as a clique years before. However, it had recently split from Tortilla Flats, a larger gang farther east. Asserting their dominance, gang members began attacking blacks. They shot at Bowden's daughter and her boyfriend as they went to the movies, she said. "You feel penned in," Bowden said. "You don't have extra money to just jump and move someplace else."For their part, Latino gang members feared for their turf. "In jail, people would comment, 'The blacks took over your neighborhood,'" said one gang member, who asked not to be identified, fearing retaliation from other gang members. "It's embarrassing, because it's true."Before that, the neighborhood had been "kind of like a little TJ," he said, referring to Tijuana. "People would say, 'Hey, what's up?' or offer us a beer. You got tamales. Drugs. It was a great neighborhood for gang members."Tensions worsened when a small black gang formed -- the 208th Street Crips. The Crip gang's willingness to go to the police with complaints offended the Latino gang's sense of honor.Blacks were "writing on our walls, throwing bottles at us and telling on us at the same time," said the gang member. The 204th Street gang figured "that's kind of disrespectful ... so [we] are going to shoot every black guy up there."By L.A. standards, the 204th Street gang was small-time, with no more than a few dozen youths. But it was large enough to terrorize a neighborhood."We'd call pizza and they didn't want to deliver," said Blanca Hernandez, a resident for more than 30 years. "The mailmen were afraid. Everyone was afraid."Meanwhile, larger forces were transforming Southern California Latino street gangs, which for years had mostly gotten along with their counterparts in black gangs.The change "happened almost overnight," remembers LAPD Officer Liavaa Moevao, who was a young Harbor Division gang officer in the area in the early 1990s.Older 204th Street members began attending meetings held by representatives of the Mexican Mafia prison gang (known as Eme, Spanish for "M"), he said. They reported back "that Eme wants us to get rid of all the black gang members," Moevao said.Mafia representatives told Latino gangs to stop feuding among themselves and to collect taxes from drug dealers on behalf of Eme, according to law enforcement officials and gang members.Blacks were drug-dealing competition. Mafia representatives said, "Don't let the [blacks] move in," recalled Leo Downs, a recently retired prison-gang investigator and one of the state's leading Eme experts. Across Southern California, "even those gang members who didn't go to the meetings still abided by Eme edicts," because they had to answer to the Mexican Mafia when they went to jail in Harbor Gateway, graffiti and racist shootings climbed."There was no doubt that there were directives from the Mexican Mafia" coming from prison and at the meetings, said Robert Lara, a Torrance police sergeant who worked gang detail during the mid-1990s.The 204th Street gang was too small to warrant a lot of Eme attention. But when the gang "lit off a grenade, or burned [a black person's] house down," Mafia representatives "would be like, 'That's what I'm talking about,'" said the gang member.Residents fight backIn 1997, police, the county Human Relations Commission and neighbors organized to fight the gang and the blight.The city added bulletproof streetlight covers. Residents repaired holes in fences -- escape routes for gang members. Girl Scouts, accompanied by officers, picked up trash and painted over graffiti. More than 100 gang members -- black and Latino -- were sent to jail for parole or probation violations. Police patrols increased. Violence fell.But the campaign dissipated, and gang members slowly returned. By 1999, the Latino-on-black violence resumed.In April, Michael Richardson, a 22-year-old African American, was shot to death by a 204th Street gang member on a bike in front of Toni Bowden's apartment.Bowden returned to Compton.Charlene Lovett moved into her place, thinking she was leaving gang violence behind in her West L.A. neighborhood, just as 204th Street gang attacks increased.By 2001, the 208th Street Crips, never rooted in the area, faded away.With squad cars again scarce, neighbors stopped reporting shootings and chases. Instead, gang members now patrolled the streets, brazenly circling 207th Street and Harvard Boulevard on bicycles.Marie Keith, who is black, moved from South Los Angeles with her three daughters in 2000, believing she'd come to Torrance. One day black children playing on the street began screaming that "the 204s were coming."Keith watched as gang members drove through, shooting. Black youths dived into the neighborhood walls.Since then, Keith's children have not been allowed to play in front of their apartment. When she has to travel more than half a block, she drives.In August 2006, Carl Wagoner, an African American auto-shop owner, was shot in the leg outside his 207th Street apartment. He lost his leg -- and his shop -- and is now bedridden, said his wife, Dunya.As the years passed, older members of the 204th Street gang went into semi-retirement. Some moved as far away as San Bernardino and Rancho Chuacongma. They took jobs, bought homes, started families. Yet they returned on weekends to the Del Amo Market and drank beer with the younger members. "They're keeping that 204th street name and atmosphere alive," said Dan Vasquez, an LAPD detective who has worked on the gang detail recently.Renewed attentionSince Cheryl Green's slaying, street sweepers pass through Harbor Gateway regularly.Police roll by often, the city attorney's office is preparing an injunction against the 204th Street gang and Councilwoman Janice Hahn wants the city to buy land for a community center.For now, no one hangs out at Del Amo Market.Liavaa Moevao is back, now the LAPD's senior lead officer for the area. His task is to restore the sense of community that sustained the neighborhood years ago -- though he says Harbor Division has half the patrol officers it had in the early 1990s.Meanwhile, weakened by economics, the neighborhood remains divided by race, language and thug culture.Or at least, that's how it seems until entering a certain darkened apartment on 207th Street.One recent afternoon, a television screen lighted the faces of best friends Flavio and Gary, both 12. They were playing an online version of the card game Uno, chatting with opponents from Seattle, Kentucky and New York via video cameras.Gary is black. Flavio's parents are Mexican. They understand little English and live in the building next door.Though the two boys can connect to the world, they cannot walk this neighborhood together.Fear of the 204th Street gang has forced Gary to live most of his life inside this apartment. That's why he is overweight, said his mother and grandmother. The family has several computers, televisions and video-game consoles to keep him and his brothers occupied.Gary's mother, Lisa, runs inside every time she sees a Latino youth.Still, in this neighborhood where so much divides blacks and Latinos, this apartment holds a secret: The families rely on each other.Flavio's mother, Rita, drives the boys to school each morning before heading to her job as a 99 Cents store cashier. Gary's mother, Lisa, picks them up in the afternoon.It is a small daily act, born of common necessity -- yet one the mothers protect like an orchid.They declined to be photographed or reveal their last names, preferring that their secret not leave this darkened apartment, where they live like members of an underground resistance.sam.quinones@latimes.comTimes staff writer Doug Smith and librarian John Tyrrell contributed to this report.<#BEGIN TEXT OF INFOBOX>Harbor gateway</#>Unchecked apartment construction in the 1980s and 1990s transformed the racial dynamics of this isolated 13-block neighborhood, heightening gang tensions. Violent crime committed by Latinos against blacks has become a problem.Reported violent crimes"(1994-2005)"--\* Suspect Victim Crimes Black Black 71 Black Latino 23 Latino Latino 117 Latino Black 111\*--\*.\* Includes homicide, manslaughter, assault with a deadly weapon and shooting at a residence or a vehicle.--1980 Total population: 2,139Latino: 53%White: 39%Asian: 5%Black: 3%--1990 Total population: 2,945Latino: 55%White: 22%Asian: 12%Black: 11%Other 1%-2000 Total population: 3,548Latino: 61%White: 7%Asian: 6%Black: 24%Other 3%--Note: Census Bureau statistics are for the area bounded by 205th Street, Western Avenue, Denker Avenue and Torrance Boulevard Crime statistics are from LAPD reporting district 504. Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.--Sources: ESRI, TeleAtlas, Census Bureau, LAPD. Data analysis by Doug Smith and Sandra Poindexter"Victims of the violence</#>terracial homicides" in Harbor Gateway, 1997-2006Victim: Marquis "Mark" Wilbert, 11, African AmericanDate: March 27, 1997Shot to death on Harvard Boulevard by a 204th Street gang member riding a bicycle, who was convicted of murder-- and a hate crime.--Victim: Dino Downs, 41, African AmericanDate: May 21, 2000Standing outside his house on 208th Street when he was shot to death by two Latino youths, possibly members of the 204th Street gang, who were driving by. Unsolved.--Victim: Manuel Flores, 32, LatinoDate: June 2, 1999Shot to death by a black man on 208th Street. Unsolved.--Victim: Mario Cervantes, 18 LatinoDate: July 22, 2000A recent 204th Street gang member, he was shot on 206th street by a black member of the 208th Street Crips gang, who was convicted of murder.--Victim: Kent Lopez, 20, African AmericanDate: Aug. 25, 2005Shot to death during a fight with several 204th Street gang members as he walked to a bus stop. Witnesses testified that the gang members yelled a racial epithet and death threats at Lopez. Two gang members were convicted of murder.--Victim: Robert Hightower, 19, African AmericanDate: Sept. 29, 2001A Pasadena high school senior, he was visiting his sister when he was shot to death by a 204th Street gang member, who was convicted of murder.--Victim: Eric Butler, 39, African AmericanDate: Oct. 18, 2003Believed to have been shot to death by 204th Street gang members as he drove from the Del Amo Market, where he'd gone to help his stepdaughter, whom the gang was harassing. Unsolved.--Victim: Arturo Ponce, 34, LatinoDate: Dec. 5, 2006The Mexican immigrant and cook was shot to death in front of his 205th Street apartment as he talked with friends. Witnesses say the shooter, masked and hooded, yelled an anti-Mexican epithet. Unsolved.--Victim: Cheryl Green, 14,African AmericanDate: Dec. 15, 2006Killed allegedly by a 204th Street gang member who fired into a group of black youths on Harvard Boulevard. Three others were wounded. Police say the gang member was angry after having a confrontation with another black man outside a nearby store earlier in the day. He and another 204th Street gang member face murder and hate crime charges. The list may not be complete. Some cases are unsolved but suspected to be interracial homicides.Sources: LAPD Harbor Homicide Division; L.A. County coroner. The Tortilla Flats Gang was born in Compton, California, about 1962.POLICEF poverty is the mother of crimes, want of sense is the father.- La Bruyere I was there when this monster was spawned. The Tortilla Flats Gang was born in Compton, California, about 1962. The Mendoza Mexican Tortilleria was on the east side of Willowbrook, just off of Oris Street. After church on Sundays the Mendoza brothers (all of them very large and tall) and several of their friends, including my friend and schoolmate Ronnie Gutierrez, hung out outside the store and maybe drank a little beer. Sometimes they would get out their slingshots (like David used in the Bible, and not the ones made with rubber bands) and launch rocks from the Willowbrook railroad tracks or cherry bombs at the passing freight trains. They could sometimes be a little intimidating, but Joe, the younger Mendoza brother, was also a friend and schoolmate of mine. The city of Compton already had several African American and Hispanic gangs active in the area. The Compton Farmers, the Swamp Boys, the Slauson Village, and the Businessmen passed occasionally through the small primarily Mexican American Willowbrook neighborhood. The Compton Varrio Tros, Florence 13, Willowbrook Wins, and 155th Street gang were at war most of the time in this tiny corner of Compton. Gang members were killed, drugs were sold, and citizens were robbed or beaten every day, but it never made the paper. Tortilla Flats One of the older Mendoza brothers had been reading a book for school by John Steinbeck called "Tortilla Flats." Early one Sunday morning while I was walking to church to serve Mass, I saw along the white wall north of the Mendoza Tortilleria in large black Old English letters the words "TORTILLA FLATS." The group now had a name, but it would earn its reputation later on. After junior high school, Ronnie Gutierrez, ever most of the T-Flats, dropped out of school to be a kind of leader of the gang. The gang continued to grow in numbers and violent reputation in my absence. I was gone into the service and for Vietnam (1966-1969), but in 1970 I joined the sheriff's department and returned to Willowbrook as a patrol officer in 1976. Nobody in that gang today ever read Steinbeck. Like the other surrounding Hispanic gangs they have devolved into violent psychopathic thugs with drug fried brains and no honor or ethics, they victimize their own race, neighborhood, and even their own homeboys. Chuckie Chuckie was nine when he ran away from his home in South Gate to hang out with the Compton Tortilla Flats gang. He had been sexually molested by a neighbor on White. The T-Flats became his new family. For brothers he chose Midget and Woody, two Veteran members only a few years older than Chuckie. Both had been shot and seriously wounded by rival gangs before Chuckie got there in 1993. For a mentor and father figure he chose Rafael "Crook" Gamboa. Over the years Chuckie became proficient in fighting, burglary, firearms, and grand theft auto. First his homeboy and adopted brother Woody and then later Midget spent time in the California Youth Authority (CYA) prison systems. This is the gang's higher education system and the T-Flats members were schooled and became loyal Sureños under the leadership of the Mexican Mafia prison gang there. Chuckie too spent years in juvenile camps and CYA facilities hardening his Sureño heart. After being sentenced to life in prison, and being told by the sentencing judge that he should "never be allowed to set foot in free society again," Midget became a Mexican Mafia associate. In September of 2003, I was called to the LA County Jail by friends of Chuckie, Midget, and Crook. I interviewed Gamboa and learned that in 2002 the Mexican Mafia had dispatched Tortilla Flats member Dennis "Lil' Boxer" Gonzales, who was on the run for an attempted murder in Alhambra, to basically take over Oklahoma City, Okla., for the Mexican Mafia. The Eme had done this before in Albuquerque, N.M., a few years before this.Read More: Behavior and Group Dynamics in Gangs Plata o Plomo This is the method of operation. The LA gang members from a particular gang or a coalition of LA-based gangs united under the Sureño or SUR 13 name will move into your town. They will be well financed and seemingly have an endless supply of drugs (speed or cocaine). A group of them will approach the local drug dealers and "make them an offer they can't refuse" to either sell the gang's discounted dope or be killed. This is the old Mexican choice: "Plata o Plomo" (silver or lead). Greed and fear sway most to the Sureños' side. The few that resist are soon murdered. They also approach the local gangs and initiate them under the Sureño reglas or rules. In Oklahoma City this was the South Side Treste gang. So Side is another way of saying SUR and Treste is the number 13. The number 13's represents the 13th letter of the alphabet, "M" for Mexican Mafia. The T-Flats also hired local women tattooing them with "LA" on their ankles even though they were not from Los Angeles. Crook's job was to secure large quantities of drugs and drive them from California to Oklahoma City. The last shipment was 10 pounds of high-grade methamphetamine called "glase" or "ice" and 100 pounds of marijuana. Crook recruited more T-Flats (CVTF) and Compton Varrio 70s (CV70) members for muscle. His adopted "son" Chuckie arrived looking to "put in work" for the Sureños. They approached the local gang members that had relatives and homeboys in the prison system and began recruiting for the Mexican Mafia. Lil' Boxer Gonzales also supplied the local Mongol outlaw motorcycle gang with their dope. Lil' Boxer Gonzales provided the T-Flats gang members with a hit list of local dealers and gang members that would not pay or resisted in some way his control. Some were Hispanic and one was an African American. But one was different, the target was in LA, and he was an LAPD police officer. I later learned that this "green light" to hit a cop was for LAPD Officer Adrian Chin who had been involved in a shooting incident in Los Angeles in February of 2000 in which Compton Tortilla Flats gang member Oscar "Ghost" Figueroa was shot and killed. I made the notifications and warned Officer Chin personally. The Tide Turns Things were going great. Except for the few holdouts, the Sureños ruled Oklahoma City's gang underworld. Little Chuckie volunteered to be part of a team to hit the home of a local gang member and drug dealer who owed Lil' Boxer drug money. Crook Gamboa claimed that he had tried to stop Chuckie from being involved in the incident but failed. Crook did not trust Lil' Boxer and he felt that something was wrong.Learn More: Sureño Tattoos and Symbols At 19 years old little Chuckie was killed in the house of the local drug dealer. The OK City drug dealer was dead also, but rumors began that Crook and Chuckie's crime partner Clumsy had betrayed and killed their own homeboy. After Chuckie's funeral in Palmdale, California, Gamboa was arrested for parole violation. He was very remorseful, and under religious conviction. This was not a false sorrow of someone who was caught. I believe he truly felt guilty for introducing that 9-year-old runaway to the Compton Tortilla Flats gangster life, and later to his homeboys Woody, Midget, and Lil' Boxer Gamboa. I felt terrible that people were saying that he killed Chuckie, and yet he really felt that he had helped to kill him in another way. Midget's life was over, condemned to solitary confinement in the Security Housing Unit (SHU) forever; Chuckie's life was over, as he lay in an unmarked grave forever; and Gamboa's life was over also, unable to return to his home and gang for fear they would murder him. Rafael "Crook" Gamboa agreed to cooperate with the U.S. Attorneys Office in Oklahoma City, and testify against the Mexican Mafia and the gang he loved so much. I traveled to Oklahoma City to assist in obtaining Gamboa's cooperation and to try to explain the significance of his information on this huge conspiracy case. I don't think they really got it.Photo Gallery: Latino Gang Tattoos In the Aug. 28, 2006 press release the U.S. Attorney said; "Cooperating defendants, witnesses, and confidential informants all provided information that led to surveillance, arrests, search warrants, and the seizure of significant quantities of crystal methamphetamine and cocaine. Investigators were able to document the importation of additional quantities of crystal methamphetamine and cocaine into Oklahoma prior to the investigation. The organization was held accountable for a total of 42 lbs. of crystal methamphetamine, conservatively estimated to have a "street" value of over \$3.8 million and 5 1/2 lbs. of cocaine, conservatively estimated to have a "street" value of over \$515,000. IRS investigators documented Western Union wire transfers totaling over \$244,000 in drug proceeds between Oklahoma City, California, and Florida." Rafael Gamboa was promised consideration. But he was a stranger in a strange land, and he became distrustful of the Federal and local officials after they "mistakenly" placed him with the gang suspects that he testified against on more than one occasion. He was stabbed and beaten by the bad guys and given more than 20 years in prison by the "good guys."Learn More: What Patrol Officers Should Know About Gang Activity DON'T BE fooled by its name: The 204th Street gang, two of whose members have been arrested in connection with last month's racially motivated slaying of 14-year-old Cheryl Green, is what you could call a commuter gang.Of its 100 documented members, only about 20 live in the 12-block silver of the Harbor Gateway district they claim as their own. Neither of the two men who agreed to speak for the gang -- 32-year-old Jonathan O'Gorman (yes, his father is Irish) and 22-year-old Nae Torres (no, his father isn't) -- live in the neighborhood. On Wednesday, the two men arrived on their "turf" in a work truck with the name of a large air-conditioning company painted on it.What, you ask, are two grown men who have decent jobs and don't live in the area doing gangbanging? It's kind of weird, huh? Torres said. But minutes later, in response to similar questions, O'Gorman grabbed my notebook out of my hand and walked away. "Just because you move out doesn't mean you have to move on," he said, after cooling down and handing back my notes.For several days last week I skulked around the working-class neighborhood, talking to as many people as I could. What I found is that most residents -- of any background -- try to keep their heads down, go about their business and get along with their neighbors.During the day, you'll find mothers pushing strollers and children playing in frontyards. You'll see men fixing or cleaning their cars. Many, like 14-year-old Fausto Lopez, a maintenance man who's only been in this country a year, will tell you they have little idea of what's going on. "It's about the gangs," he said in Spanish. Even some victims of 204th Street's intimidation told me that they get along with most of their Mexican neighbors. Rochaan Keyes, who has lived on 206th Street for three years and has had her house tagged with the words "nigger killer," makes a distinction between gang members and the rest of her Latino neighbors. She's hoping the police can take care of the problem because, unlike her black neighbor who fled the area out of fear of her safety, she doesn't intend to leave. The same goes for Melinda Sims, who moved in next to her sister six weeks ago. Sims' front window and her side wall were spray-painted with the words "NK All Day." Her beef, she says, is not with all Mexicans but only the gangbangers who are tagging her house.The 204th Street gang emerged in the early 1990s when a group of members split from the Tortilla Flats gang, whose boundaries lie in unincorporated county territory to the east. In addition to targeting blacks, 204th's members are still active rivals of T-Flats and Eastside Torrance, another predominantly Latino gang that operates several blocks to the south. It's hard to overestimate how narrow and parochial gang identities can be. In the wake of incidents such as the Green slaying, we talk collectively about relations between large population groups -- Latinos and blacks -- or about the racial tensions among neighbors. But, at its core, what we seem to be dealing with is a pathological need on the part of hateful young men (and the women who love them) to define themselves by their enemies.The LAPD calls 204th Street an "emotional gang." Unlike many bigger gangs, 204th's members are not driven by greed; drug dealing -- methamphetamine and marijuana -- is relatively minor, and the overall crime rate in the neighborhood is actually not that high. Officer Daniel Robbins, the Harbor Division cop who works the area, says that particularly for older members who grew up here and return on weekends to party, the gang is also about clinging to "glory days." "This is like a high school football player returning to the stadium on Friday night under the lights," he said. And the alumni don't like what new residents have done to the playing field. The neighborhood's infusion of blacks, a few of whom are members of gangs in other areas, has effectively cut into 204th's territory. But it's the much larger influx of recent immigrants from Mexico that has really changed the face of the neighborhood. Although they still claim 12 square blocks, 204th members generally don't parade openly south of 206th Street anymore, and they limit their visits to nighttime tagging raids.Although it's easy for 204th members to identify rival Latino gangbangers -- whom they may know from school or juvenile detention -- they don't know who the black gangsters are. So their fear and hatred becomes generalized to all blacks, and their street warfare shifts from targeted hits on individuals from rival gangs to indiscriminate acts of violence against members of an entire racial group. That's the definition of terrorism. All for a little glory."@rodriquez@latimescolumnists.com Reddit and its partners use cookies and similar technologies to provide you with a better experience. By accepting all cookies, you agree to our use of cookies to deliver and maintain our services and site, improve the quality of Reddit, personalize Reddit content and advertising, and measure the effectiveness of advertising. By rejecting non-essential cookies, Reddit may still use certain cookies to ensure the proper functionality of our platform. For more information, please see our Cookie Notice and our Privacy Policy. Hey there, have you ever heard of the Tortilla Flats gang? This notorious gang has been a part of the Los Angeles gang scene for decades, and their impact can't be felt today. In this article, we'll dive into the history of the Tortilla Flats gang, their influence on the local community, and their ongoing presence in the city. So buckle up, because we're about to take a closer look at one of LA's most infamous gangs. Let's go! Table of Contents Understanding the Tortilla Flats Gang: History and Origins The Tortilla Flats Gang is a well-known and longstanding gang with a rich history and deep roots in the United States. The origins of the gang can be traced back to the early 20th century in California, where it was formed by Mexican-American youth in response to social and economic inequalities that they faced. The gang has been a prominent presence in the Los Angeles area for decades, establishing a strong sense of community and identity among its members. Despite the negative connotations often associated with gang culture, the Tortilla Flats Gang has also been involved in various community outreach and social programs, aiming to uplift and support the Mexican-American community in LA. Understanding the history and origins of this gang is essential for gaining insight into the complex dynamics of gang culture and its impact on society. Community Impact: How the Tortilla Flats Gang Operates The Tortilla Flats Gang operates The Tortilla Flats Gang is a well-known group in the community that has a significant impact on the daily lives of residents. Their operations are meticulously planned and executed, with a focus on maintaining control over their territory and exerting influence on local businesses and residents. Some of the key ways in which the Tortilla Flats Gang operates include: Extortion of local businesses for "protection" money Drug distribution and trafficking in the area Intimidation and violence to maintain their power It's important for community members to be aware of the presence and activities of the Tortilla Flats Gang, as well as to work together with law enforcement to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone in the area. Addressing the Issue: Strategies for Combating Gang Activity When it comes to addressing the issue of gang activity, it's important to implement a range of strategies to combat the problem effectively. This is particularly true when dealing with notorious gangs like the Tortilla Flats gang. First and foremost, community outreach and engagement are crucial in combating gang activity. This can involve programs and initiatives aimed at providing opportunities for at-risk youth, as well as fostering positive relationships between law enforcement and community members. Additionally, targeted enforcement efforts, such as increased police presence in high-activity areas and the use of specialized gang units, can help disrupt gang operations and prevent further criminal activity. Other important strategies for combating gang activity include: Providing support and resources for gang members looking to leave the gang lifestyle Increasing access to education and job training opportunities for at-risk individuals Implementing gang-specific rehabilitation and intervention programs Supporting the Community: Resources and Programs for At-Risk Youth It's important for us to acknowledge the challenges that at-risk youth face, including the influence of gangs like Tortilla Flats. We understand the impact this can have on young people, their families, and the community as a whole. That's why we are committed to providing resources and programs to support at-risk youth and help them make positive choices for their future. Our community center offers a range of services for young people who may be vulnerable to gang involvement. Here's how we're working to make a difference: Education and tutoring programs to help students stay on track in school and explore future opportunities Mentorship and counseling to provide guidance and support for young people facing challenges Recreational activities and sports programs to engage youth in positive and healthy outlets We believe that by investing in the well-being and development of at-risk youth, we can help steer them away from the influence of gangs like Tortilla Flats and empower them to build a brighter future for themselves and their community. Q&A Q: What is the Tortilla Flats gang? A: The Tortilla Flats gang is a well-known Hispanic gang that originated in Southern California. Q: How did the gang get its name? A: The gang got its name from the area it originally operated in, which was a neighborhood known as Tortilla Flats. Q: What are some of the activities or crimes associated with the Tortilla Flats gang? A: The gang has been associated with various criminal activities, including drug trafficking, extortion, and violence. Q: How has the presence of the Tortilla Flats gang impacted the community? A: The presence of the Tortilla Flats gang has had a negative impact on the community, contributing to increased crime and fear among residents. Q: Are there any efforts to combat the influence of the Tortilla Flats gang? A: Yes, law enforcement agencies have been working to combat the influence of the Tortilla Flats gang through various tactics, including increased patrols and crackdowns on gang-related activities. Q: What are some ways in which individuals can protect themselves from gang activity? A: It is important for individuals to be aware of their surroundings, avoid involvement in illegal activities, and report any suspicious or criminal behavior to the authorities. Additionally, community involvement and support for at-risk individuals can help deter gang activity. Final Thoughts Well, that's all for now folks! We delved into the history and influence of the Tortilla Flats gang, exploring their origins and impact on their local community. It's important to remember that every group is multifaceted, and while the gang may have a notorious reputation, it's crucial to consider the individuals within it and the complex factors that led them to join. Let's continue to seek understanding and empathy for all people, and work towards creating a safer and more inclusive society for everyone. Thanks for joining us on this journey into the world of the Tortilla Flats gang. Take care! The Compton Varrio Tortilla Flats (CVTF) is a Mexican-American street gang based in Compton, California. Founded on the East Side of Compton, the gang drew its name from the 1935 John Steinbeck novel "Tortilla Flat" and fell under the Sureños brand. This page may contain sensitive or adult content that's not for everyone. To view it, please log in to confirm your age.By continuing, you also agree that use of this site constitutes acceptance of Reddit's User Agreement and acknowledgment of our Privacy Policy. One of the giants of American literature is no match for the reputation of a Torrance-area gang, it seems. That's because when Bert Sierra and her family decided to open a new Mexican restaurant " Tortilla Flats," written by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author. "It had a very interesting name," said Marilyn Ron, owner of the nearby Antique Attic shop and one of several neighboring business owners who voiced concern about the restaurant name. Unfortunately, in Torrance the name is associated more with a Latino gang that claims territory just outside the city in Harbor Gateway than a literary allusion to the gentle fable "Tortilla Flats" written by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author. "It had a very interesting name," said Marilyn Ron, owner of the nearby Antique Attic shop and one of several neighboring business owners who voiced concern about the restaurant name. "I thought, you guys might want to rethink this," Ron added. "That's why I called up and said, 'Did you know you're naming your restaurant after a notorious gang?'" Sierra, who is from Gardena, did not. After all, there are plenty of Mexican restaurants named Tortilla Flats sprinkled around the country in such disparate locales as Mission Viejo, Texas, Michigan and Rhode Island. "They're not in Torrance and that's the difference," Sierra said. "I had no idea that the name is associated with a gang in Torrance," she added. "We didn't want to create problems or invite problems so we changed the name." So the proposed Tortilla Flats Grill & Sports Bar has morphed into the Tortilla Cantina even before its projected November opening. The restaurant, which will specialize in meats cooked in slow roast ovens, will sit in leased space at the corner of Sartori and El Prado avenues that formerly housed an antique store that closed recently. Sierra, a former partner of the Stick & Stein sports bar in El Segundo, hopes to win Planning Commission approval for the eatery next Wednesday. nick.green@dailybreeze.com Originally Published: September 8, 2009 at 12:00 AM PDT Varrio 204th Street also known 204th Street Gang or 204th Street 13 are an Mexican-American criminal street gang located in Torrance, California. They originated in the 1980s, around 204th Street, between Western Ave and Denker Ave. Despite, being named after a residential street, their neighborhood actually stretches from 204th Street to 209th Street near Torrance Blvd. The 204th Street Gang, were originally a sub-click of the larger Torrence Tortilla Flats, another Latino street gang located in Torrance. However, by the late 1980s, they branched off from the Torrence Tortilla Flats, and established their own identity "204th Street." Their decision to operate independently, has created tension between the two gangs. Hate Crimes The 204th Street are mainly known for their hate crimes against African-Americans, similar to the Compton Varrio 155 and the Azua 13, who also share a common hatred for blacks. In 2006, the Varrio 204th Street, made headlines after the killing of a 14 years-old blk girl, Cheryl Green, who was gunned down while playing outside in the driveway of her house located in the Harbor Gateway neighborhood. Jonathan Fajardo and Ernesto Alcarez, known members of the 204th Street Gang, was charged with first degree murder of Cheryl Green. Two weeks later, Christopher Ash, another member of the 204th Street Gang and a potential witness of the hate crime, was stabbed more than 60 times and died from wounds, after being accused of talking to the police about Green's murder (snitch). Christopher Ash, body was found wrapped in a bloody blanket with multiple stab wounds, along with 5 blunt force injuries to the head and dumped on Grace Ave, in the city of Carson. Jonathan Fajardo, was sentenced to death and 200 years to life in prison. Ernesto Alcarez, was found guilty of murder, attempted murder along with hate crime charges and sentenced to 238 years to life in prison. The 204th Street have a history of committing racially motivated hate crimes, but these acts received little to none media attention, until the death of Cheryl Green. In 1997, 11 year-old Marquis Wilbert, an African-American kid with no gang affiliation, was shot and killed by a 204th Street member on a bicycle. In 2001, Robert Hightown, a Pasadena high school student, was fatally shot after hugging his sister, by a member of the 204 Street Gang.