



# Risk & Respect: LISTEN UP

INFORM

Spring, 1993

## Introduction

This document was prepared to inform you about some important issues that affect people in our community. It addresses how we, as students in public schools, feel about respect and danger in our school system. Research for these articles was based on interviews with students and teachers. We presented our initial ideas to a group called the Pittsburgh Council for Public Education (PCPE). We asked them what they could do to help us get our message out into the community.

From the research and the feedback from PCPE, we began to write our views on the issues of “respect” and “risk” and to explore possible solutions. In writing our entries, mentors from Carnegie Mellon University helped us to expand our views and to get our main points out.

We want people to consider our views, and we invite them to join us in working to improve our schools. In reading this, we hope that you will realize how important these changes are.

- Brandy Shiring  
high school student,  
Pittsburgh Public Schools

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## The Community Literacy Center

A Community/University Collaborative with the  
Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy at Carnegie Mellon

## Gangs Think They Run the Neighborhood

by Pierre Johnson

One day some friends and I were walking around downtown when two teenagers about 17 or 18 years of age walked down the street with blue bandannas tied around their faces and blue rags hanging out of their pockets. This meant that the gang they were members of was the CRIPS. The people that I was with were members of the BLOODS, which wear red.

So the gang that I was with, the BLOODS, started screaming, "WOO-WEE," which is what the BLOODS say in case they need help or are letting people know who they are. The CRIPS across the street started running because they knew there were too many of us. One of the boys I was with caught one of the CRIPS on Forbes Avenue and slammed him in the street. Then three others that I was with jumped on him. Meanwhile, one of the other two boys I was with hit the remaining CRIP in the head with a bottle. By this time, everyone was in McDonald's fighting and the BLOODS threw one of the CRIPS out the window and broke the window. After that, everybody ran away.

I am telling this story to let other people know how gangs can take over a neighborhood or a city without police able to be there all the time. I, myself, didn't feel comfortable being around when this incident happened. What else could I do but run, and if I ran then the people I was with would look at me as a traitor.

This is a tough call to make. This situation pushes young teenagers into joining gangs for fear of being an outcast. I am not for joining gangs and I wouldn't advise it to anyone else. But why do I and others have to sit around and watch the scene be taken over?



*Pierre Johnson*

People are no longer free to walk around in public (which they have the right to do) for fear of having a run-in with a gang. There aren't many options for dealing with the situation except running or ignoring the situation. A lot of gangs form in order to retaliate against other gangs or out of a need for respect and identity. The main reason, however, is for power and control. If this is the reason why people start gangs, shouldn't it also be the solution? There are other ways to get power and control besides joining gangs, and these alternatives are what we need.

## A Usual Day in Wilkinsburg

by Mark Howard



*Mark Howard*

One day I decided to go to see my friends in Wilkinsburg. At that time Homewood (better known as the Crips) were doing drive-by's in the Wilkinsburg area, home of the "Wilkinsburg Cripp Killas'." Me and my friends were standing in front of the pizza shop on Center Ave. when we noticed a truck that was customized. Everybody knows certain vehicles in their neighborhood because they may stand out, and this truck was unfamiliar to the people who hung around in Wilkinsburg. When the truck came down the street, it parked and the driver turned off the lights. Some of my friends were scared because they thought it might be a drive by, so they went into the pizza shop. The rest of us decided to stay outside because we didn't think anyone was going to do a drive-by. We continued talking while every once in a while we looked up the street to see whether the truck was still there. When the truck started up, about fifteen minutes later, everyone turned around to see if it was coming towards us. Five minutes later it pulled out of its parking space very slow. A girl and her boyfriend went into

the pizza shop. All of the sudden we heard the truck coming very fast down the street towards us. When my friend Rob seen that the window was rolled down, he yanked me and we ran down the alley as we heard the gun shots from an automatic weapon. My other friends dropped to the ground trying to avoid getting shot. After the truck had passed by, me and Rob ran back up the street to see if anyone was hit. We were sure that one of our friends had got hit, but no one did. About five minutes later we all decide to go over our friend Neil's house. On the way over, Erika (a female friend of our "group") seen that same truck in back of us, following slowly. Erika yelled and everyone ran for cover. When the truck started shooting we all jumped behind something. The truck stopped and the door opened so we had to find somewhere to hide. We ran in a house, out the back door, and just kept running. We didn't see them for the rest of the night. We were all thankful for our lives. The whole night until I went to sleep, I was shaking up by this horrifying experience. Some people would probably think that we may have did something to provoke the drive-by when we were just sitting there talking. The only thing we were guilty for is living (or being) in a certain neighborhood. We just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. We really don't have to do anything these days to have problems between neighborhoods and gangs, because one gang is always doing something to the other and the war

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## From a Female's Point of View

by Monique Jackson

I just thought I'd let you guys know how some, if not all, of the ladies feel about this gang nonsense occurring in our schools. I mean, fellas, well "crips" and "bloods" or whatever, don't you think that you're being a little ridiculous about this whole thing? We do (meaning the ladies). I mean, we have nothing to do with what you're doing, but yet we find ourselves in the middle of it all. For instance, our boyfriends. If I happen to like another boy from another neighborhood, somehow that makes you angry enough for you to threaten or jeopardize my relationship with that person. Then if your threats don't work, you actually go after him. WHY? And another thing. Why should I have to worry about wearing the wrong colors to school? Why should I tell my mother when she takes me clothes shopping that I can't wear what she picked because it's blue or red? Don't quite have an answer, huh! Or maybe you do. It's just not the answer we're looking for. We don't want to hear the usual, "Yeah that's right. You can't wear..." WRONG!

Anyway, back to the point. It's time you know how your foolish ways are making us suffer. You're probably laughing right now saying, "How you sufferin'? You ain't out there trying to get yours and worrying about dodging bullets." And that's my point. You shouldn't be either. But just to let you know how scary it can get for those of us not involved, here's a little story for you (from a female's perspective).

You come to school on a regular day. The usual shows up. You know, your friends, a couple of boys who are pretty cool; Oh, and a new boy. Where did he come from? Wait a minute, he's from Northview, and you just happen to know him. So you walk over to him and say, "What's up?" You converse for a while then go to class. All's well until you see another friend from your town (Homewood) and he wants to know why you were talking to that boy from Northview. So you try to tell him that the two of you are pretty cool. Of course, he doesn't want to hear that you're cool with a "crip" when you're from Homewood. But what can you do but try to plead your case. Of course, he doesn't want to hear anything you have to say. So finally, aggravated, you give up and realize that you shouldn't have to explain anything to him. That's when you find out that he was listening because he decides to sternly make sure that you are not around that "crip." So after he walks away, you think to yourself, "How does he even know if he's a blood. So what if he lives in Northview. Just because he doesn't like him that doesn't mean that I can't." But, unfortunately, in some cases it does. Especially when your buddy from Homewood is a pretty powerful and intimidating person. And you most likely do not want to find out first hand how powerful they can be. So the next time you see your friend, you think back to the warning you just received. As a result, you walk past him and don't even acknowledge him. Of course, he later wants to know why you didn't speak. But what do we say in a position like this?

Hmm! What do you suggest guys? Should we just fess up and say, "Oh, such and such said that I shouldn't speak to you," and just walk away? Or do we just play dumb and act like we didn't see him? A or B guys? Those of us put in situations like this know what to say. We use C. The, "Oh I didn't see you. I was looking

for my cousin from Homewood," plot hoping that he'd get the hint. But he doesn't. Instead he gets mad and wants to know, "Who's your cousin from Homewood that told you not to speak to me?" Now there's a real problem. Actually, NO. This whole "copy-cat gangs" situation is a real problem. Maybe



Monique Jackson

if you watched the news instead of "Boyz in the Hood" you'd know that more than two years ago these "bloods" and "crips" you seem to be so wound up in wanting to be like, called a truce and are no longer feuding. Or maybe you do know and just choose to ignore the fact. What I and your parents, and your girlfriends, and your families want to know is WHY? What are you getting out of this? I'll tell you what I see happening. I see a cousin of mine being shot and killed at the tender age of fourteen because he has a blue bandanna. I see my boyfriend running away and leaving me in the mall because the guys we just walked past noticed he had on a red outfit. I just don't get it. We spend almost half of our suppressed lives trying to find out about our past and trying to get closer as a race, then we destroy everything by killing each other and wrecking our own homes. And I say "we" and "our" because what you do as a person for some reason seems to affect us all as a group. Just in case you're thinking that I'm putting all the blame on you, I am. Just to make you feel guilty for wrecking your own homes, destroying and even ending other people's lives, for destroying the value of our neighborhoods, and especially for making your parents worry.

What are we going to do about GANGS? HMMM! How do we get rid of them? How do we save our generation and help it to become what everyone expects us to be? Because at this rate, "the next generation" could become "the lost generation." As they say, "The one that got away." But it's not too late to try and get it back.

As for the ladies. I'm pretty much aware of how you feel, and I'm sorry I didn't direct more of what I was saying to you. But I would like to say to those of our kind who are joining gangs to wake up and prove your intelligence and superiority.

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### *A Usual Day in Wilkinsburg, continued*

then never stops. It seems that if one group would just come to a halt and stop the shooting, there would be no reason for another group to shoot the other. The point is that there is a gang problem and until people start to accept it there can't be anything done about it. Instead of denying that there is a gang problem in Pittsburgh, see what you can do to help the gang members come to an understanding or try to get them together to find out why they feel they have to join and be a member of a gang.

## Gaining Mutual Respect Through Evaluations by Brandy Shiring

I think there is a lack of respect in today's classrooms and this situation needs to be improved. Lack of respect causes improper classroom conditions. People other than the students and teachers need to know what is being taught and the kind of environment that is present in school classrooms. This is why I am proposing classroom evaluations be done on a regular basis.

Consider this example. I once had a class that had no order whatsoever. I believe this is because the teacher had no respect for a student's right to an education and the students had no respect for the teacher as a teacher. Once our teacher assigned us a thirteen-page report on a country in Africa. We were given a list on what needed to be included in the report to receive full credit. He then said he would not read our reports, just look and see if each area on the list was covered.

I think that this is terribly wrong and disrespectful to the students. If someone puts time and thought into work, the teacher should at least have the common courtesy to look at

what has been done. And if that cannot be done, then the work should not have been assigned in the first place. Of course, most of the students took advantage of this situation for an easy grade. This will only hinder them in the future. Classrooms should be for learning, not to be taken advantage of. There is a fault on both parts in this example: the teacher's for not encouraging the students to do their work and the student's for not caring enough for their own education to take it upon themselves to make changes.

I propose that classrooms should be evaluated on a regular basis, because there is no way conditions can be improved unless the people outside of the classrooms know what needs to be improved. The classrooms could be evaluated by other teachers, administrators, and maybe even concerned parents. Hopefully these evaluations can become a starting point in the long run of improving classroom conditions.

## Student-Teacher Respect Checklist by Arlena Ptomey

### Does the teacher...

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> put students into a leadership role?                  | <input type="checkbox"/> ignore students' suggestions?                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> try to show concern for students?                     | <input type="checkbox"/> rewrite essays without explaining the changes?                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in student activities?                    | <input type="checkbox"/> discuss individuals' grades in front of class?                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> look at and listen to students?                       | <input type="checkbox"/> insult students by comparing them to other students?           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> let students voice their opinions about class issues? | <input type="checkbox"/> embarrass students by reprimanding them in front of the class? |

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### Does the student...

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> bring books, pens, and paper to class?                          | <input type="checkbox"/> talk to friends instead of participating in class? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> attend class regularly?   | <input type="checkbox"/> use class time to arrange to make up missed work?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> answer teachers' questions?                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> finish homework during the class it is due?        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> read and finish homework at home?                               | <input type="checkbox"/> use foul language?                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> actively listen to the teacher and other students in the class? | <input type="checkbox"/> come to class late?                                |

In a respectful relationship, the answers to these questions should be YES.

The interaction between students and teachers should be mutually courteous and attentive.

In a respectful relationship, the answers to these questions should be NO.

Class time should be used for learning. When teachers and students are engaged in learning they are showing each other the greatest amount of respect.