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IN THE GHETTO

Gangs turn to business

Ghetto young scrounge capital and start firms with the help of foundations and corporations

by Patricia McBroom

The quickest cure for poverty is money; one way to make money in a capitalist society is by going into business.

Business requires organization and capital; in the ghetto, usually thought of as disorganized and leaderless, there is one organization ready to hand—the gang. And now some capital is being made available.

For some three years now, on their own, ghetto youths have been forming corporations and running community projects with whatever financial help they are able to hustle.

They have done this independently of each other in city after city—some urban areas have several of the so-called street corporations. In Philadelphia, there are eight.

Although a few of these groups are fairly well-known—Sons of Watts in Los Angeles, for example—the true scope of the movement has only become apparent since May.

At that time, Youth Organizations United, a national coalition of youth gangs turned constructive, held its first meeting in East St. Louis. Starting with a handful of members last winter, you pulled 50 representatives from around the country to its meeting in May and has since blossomed to 89 member

groups. Growth has been so sudden, you has no figures on the actual number of young people those 89 groups represent. But the first five organizations which have submitted their membership lists claim 500 to 1,000 members each.

The movement seems to have sprung spontaneously from the street among unemployed youth with a desire to enter the marketplace on their own terms. Its leading edge comes from men in their late twenties and early thirties. But they are drawing in the teenagers—typical 17- and 18-year-old school dropouts.

The mark of a street corporation is independence. "They want to hustle up their own money and programs," explains Warren Gilmore, you president. "They're tired of sitting around and waiting for some guy in Washington to decide whether he wants to do something for a kid he's never seen."

No single description covers all you groups. Some are former street gangs; others were formed initially as corporations. Their programs run the gamut from sewing classes to sophisticated entrepreneurial projects with local industry.

Sons of Watts runs gas stations, training schools and a summer festival. The



Urban America

Marvin Bradford of the Young Great Society makes a point with businessmen.



Young Great Society in Philadelphia takes contracts from local businessmen in housing rehabilitation. It hires the carpenter and then pays him a bonus to train a few YGS members. YGS now has an agreement with the Philadelphia Housing Authority to repair 300 houses. Another group makes and sells African dress.

Members of YOU do whatever thing best expresses their interest, says Richard Wakefield, an analyst at the center for study of metropolitan and regional mental health problems at the National

last May mounted a similar conference between drug companies and the street corporations. Since traditional recruiting services have lost touch with minority youth, the FDA decided to try new avenues.

It brought in six street groups to meet with representatives of 32 pharmaceutical houses. In the words of Theodore Cron, until recently the assistant commissioner for education and information, "The confrontation was traumatic, but good.

"The kids had something to say that

What impact the bad press will have on individual member groups is difficult to judge, since their financial contacts are local and some well-established.

Youth Pride, Inc., in Washington, D.C., for instance, received a \$3.8 million grant from the Labor Department in early August. The money will expand Pride's business firms, which include an automotive center, a landscape and gardening company and a painting and maintenance firm. Pride will train unemployed D.C. youths for employment in its firms.



Urban America

A Mission Rebel leader, the Rev. Jesse James, confronts Frank C. Rabold, an executive of Bethlehem Steel.

Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Md.

"If there is hope for people in the inner city to feel they're making out, then it is through this kind of action," says Wakefield. Ironically, deprived youth have accepted the very system under attack by affluent young rebels in college, he points out.

Seeing potential in YOU groups, foundations such as Urban America have moved in to create a link to the business community. In June at its annual meeting, Urban America brought about a dozen youth groups together with businessmen and public officials. It had some success. "Each group came away with about \$1,000 they were able to hustle," reports James Goodell, assistant director of the urban design center.

Goodell believes that YOU-type activity is still a minority movement among ghetto youth, but "give it a year or two," he suggests. "I think it's a growing phenomenon . . . it's promise is tremendous."

The Food and Drug Administration

was direct and vital and they were ready to work. But they don't want to be on the payroll; they want to work on contract."

Cron sees the ghetto corporation as a promising recruitment channel for industry. "There is a tremendous amount of kinetic energy and talent in these groups," he finds. "You can't turn your back on good leadership."

Amid the bustle, Senator John C. McClellan (D-Ark.) dropped a bomb—a Congressional investigation of Federal funds used in an experimental training program with the Blackstone Rangers, Chicago's South Side gang (SN: 7/27, p. 80). The resultant publicity given the Rangers has had its effect on YOU. Negotiations between YOU and four Federal agencies for \$700,000 to maintain the organization and establish a national network of communications and assistance were brought to a halt, for 1968 at least. Officials have indicated they will reconsider funding the project from 1969 appropriations, which means any action will not be taken until late fall or early winter.

Pride's success since its formation last year is partly due to support given by Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz, who told the group. "You have given me the greatest sense of accomplishment in the past seven and a half years."

But even as Secretary Wirtz was praising the group, Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-Va.) called for a Congressional investigation into charges of salary kickbacks within the Pride organization.

Goodell believes the Ranger trouble may have set back YOU six months. Cron expects a negative effect and points out that a smear of all gangs stemming from the Ranger publicity would turn off "tremendous potential" and cut off an alternative that is only now emerging for deprived youth in the ghetto.

YOU president Gilmore, however, is somewhat more sanguine. "Things like that spook off a lot of people," he says, referring to charges of extortion, sex and pot parties leveled against the Rangers. "But we're here to stay, even if we have to continue scrounging."