



ROD PACHECO
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

OFFICE OF
THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE

Gang Injunction - Opinion Editorial
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It is unfortunate that Riverside Police Chief Russ Leach thinks that the public debate about his reluctance to enforce a gang injunction against our county's most violent gang is about him. It has nothing to do with him.

It has everything to do with Anthony Sweat, a 13-year old African-American who was shot dead as he stood with his friends. It's about Paul Parker, a 43-year old African-American who was shot while he was walking on University Avenue. It is about Edward Nwain, a Nigerian attending an economic convention in Riverside who was shot in the head while he sat in a car at a gas station. All of these merciless shootings, and many more, were committed by East Side Riva gang members.

Over the past decade, the East Side Riva (ESR) gang has been targeting African-American men, and even women, for murder and violence. ESR claims territory between Third Street and Martin Luther King Avenue from UCR to downtown Riverside and engulfs several parks, elementary and middle schools. It counts over 600 "foot soldiers" as members.

ESR gang members are so proud of their murderous actions against African-Americans they boast of them on the internet with chilling rap songs and videos. This is a gang whose members have literally committed thousands of felonies over the past several decades. They range from remorseless murders to all other types of violence and victimization one's mind can imagine.

Last year our office attempted to use another tool to prevent any further slaughter of innocent citizens – a gang injunction. This is a widely-used and effective practice in Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties, yet had never been done in our county. Law enforcement in San Clemente recently reported a 33% decrease in gang-related calls to police after a gang injunction was secured and enforced. San Juan Capistrano had an 85% drop. An injunction’s effectiveness is directly related to the very nature of gangs themselves.

A gang’s strength and power is in its members and their association. If you can limit or even stop that criminal collaboration, a gang can be broken. An injunction is a court order that prohibits gang members from associating with each other or loitering in public areas, such as parks. But it can only work against ESR if it is enforced.

Some have recently claimed that the part of our city overrun by ESR had reached a “balance” before and after the gang injunction was secured.

Yet, the day after we served over 100 ESR gang members with the gang injunction, the brother-in-law of one of ESR’s leaders, threatened to kill me and my family. He was quickly convicted by the Attorney General’s office of making terrorist threats and was sent to prison. On May 2nd of this year a young man was executed in the driveway of his home by an ESR gang member.

While some progress is being made, this is not the kind of “balance” that I, or the men and women of the District Attorney’s Office, can accept. We have a long history of working with local, state, and federal law enforcement, but we are prepared to go it alone if necessary. The stakes are too high to ignore our duty.

We will never be content with this level of violence even if the fulfillment of our responsibility brings unfair criticism. Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote, “The true measure of

a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

In the end, it has nothing to do with Chief Leach and everything to do with the citizens we each have sworn to serve. I would rather be at the center of controversy protecting them from being victimized by gang members, than be comfortable while they are terrorized. It is a simple choice.