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## Black & Latino: A New Face for Hate Violence

Contributed by NAM, Earl Ofari Hutchinson  
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Editor's Note: A federal racketeering investigation culminated Thursday in the arrest of 147 members and associates of a predominantly Latino gang charged with murder, weapons and drug trafficking, and carrying out racially motivated attacks against African Americans to drive them out of a southern California city.

Two weeks before U.S. Attorney Thomas O'Brien made what he called the biggest gang bust in recent history in Los Angeles, in which the Latino gang members rounded up allegedly attacked blacks, an African-American family, who had been terrorized by a Latino street gang, fled their home in Duarte, a suburb east of Los Angeles.

A few months before that, a Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations report on hate violence for 2007 found that overall Latinos committed nearly half of the hate attacks in the county, while blacks committed 30 percent of the hate attacks. The victims of the race violence almost always have been other blacks or Latinos.

The dirty and painful secret is that blacks and Latinos can be racist, maybe even more racist than whites, toward each other. They easily buy into the racist myths, stereotypes, and negative typecasting of blacks, and their targets are almost always the weakest, most vulnerable and innocent.

The gang attacks no doubt are deliberately designed by the gang hate purveyors to send the message to blacks that this is our turf, and you're an interloper. That was the case two years ago when the feds made the first big bust of Latino gang members for years of terror attacks against black families in a South Los Angeles neighborhood. But despite arrests, police crackdowns, gang injunctions, assorted anti-violence marches and rallies, and community peace efforts, the black and Latino low intensity battle has shown no sign of abating. Federal officials even boasted after the arrest of the Florencia 13 gang's top cats that they had broken the back of racially motivated gang crimes in the area. The boast was just that -- a boast.

The spike in Latino hate-crime violence also is due in part to the undeclared war between blacks and Latinos that has raged in some of California's jails and prisons. Jails that are grossly overcrowded, lacking in medical services and recreational activities, and rife with brutality and racial segregation. That battle has spawned an even bigger fight in poor neighborhoods between gangs over crime and drug turfs. The gang and prison violence has resulted in dozens of injuries and a few deaths. And there are constant rumors that black and Latino prison gangs have ordered retaliatory hits on other blacks and Latinos on the streets as part of their street turf battles.

In Los Angeles County jails, officials have set up special isolation units exclusively to keep Mexican mafia leaders from issuing orders for hits on gang rivals and blacks. The problem is that innocent black residents in Hawaiian Gardens and Duarte are the ones who are most likely caught in the deadly crossfire.

But the gang attacks are not solely due to wars for control of drugs, the rackets and turf. They are also because of America's changing ethnic demographics. Latinos have now toppled blacks from their long held perch as the nation's biggest minority. The impact of the surging Latino numbers has been acutely felt in many urban neighborhoods across the nation that were once exclusively black, but are now either significantly or majority Latino.

In L.A., blacks and Latinos increasingly rub shoulders with each other in neighborhoods, schools, parks, stores, and on jobs. This has stirred tense competition for low-end jobs, scarce school resources, and the use of public services.

In the past, racially motivated gang violence was relatively rare. Researchers at the University of California, Irvine found that of the 500 murders in South Los Angeles between 1999 and 2004, almost all of them were Latino-on-Latino or black-on-black. Most black and Latino residents lived in mixed neighborhoods in Los Angeles and got along in relative peace, and on the surface, anyway, with minimal friction. But as the increase in black and Latino hate crimes sadly shows, that's changing.

A few years ago, no one could have predicted the surge in hate crimes by Latino gangs, but it's happened. And the greater danger is that L.A.'s terrible spike in Latino gang racial violence could be replicated in other cities. Stemming the inter-racial hate crimes will take a loud outcry from Latino and black leaders against hate violence and an ongoing effort to ease tensions in L.A and other cities to insure that this doesn't happen.

Short of that, the fed crackdown on gang hate crimes will be little more than a high profile, Band-Aid measure that will do little to alter the grim, ugly and changing face of hate violence in America.

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