



# Drugs and Crime

## Gang Profile

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U. S. D E P A R T M E N T O F J U S T I C E

# Gangster Disciples

*Gangster Disciples is one of the largest and most violent street gangs in the United States. Having originated in Chicago, Illinois, the gang is structured like a corporation and is led by a chairman of the board and two boards of directors. Gang membership is estimated between 50,000 and 100,000, and most members are African American males from the Chicago metropolitan area. The gang is most active in the Great Lakes, Southeast, and West Central regions and is expanding into the Pacific and Southwest regions. Its main source of income is from the street level distribution of powdered and crack cocaine, marijuana, and heroin. The gang also is involved in many other types of criminal activity including assault, drive-by shooting, homicide, identification fraud, robbery, burglary, and extortion.*

## Background

The Gangster Disciples (GD), originally called Black Gangster Disciple Nation (BGDN), was formed in Chicago, Illinois, during the 1960s to protect members from other gangs and to profit from criminal activity. BGDN initially consisted of several hundred African American members from numerous smaller gangs that were brought together by Larry “King” Hoover. Hoover became involved with street gangs as a teenager, leading his first gang in 1966 at age 16. By 1967 Hoover had merged his gang with a rival gang, King Cobras, and formed Black Gangsters (BG). By 1969 Black Gangsters had expanded to over 5,000 members. In late 1969

Hoover merged Black Gangsters with David Barksdale’s Black Disciples (BD) gang and created Black Gangster Disciple Nation.

During the 1970s an increase in the gang’s narcotics distribution activities in Chicago resulted in an increase in law enforcement prosecutions. In 1973 Larry Hoover, second in command of BGDN, was convicted of a gang-related murder and sentenced to 150 to 200 years in prison. In 1974 David Barksdale, the leader of BGDN, died from kidney failure, and a power struggle within the gang’s leadership ensued. BGDN consequently broke into three factions—Gangster Disciples, Black Disciples, and Black Gangsters,

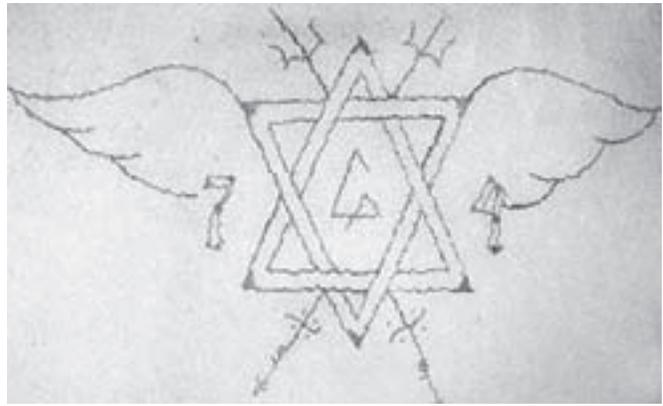
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all of which remain active. Despite being incarcerated, Hoover was able to retain the leadership and control of Gangster Disciples.

In the 1980s Gangster Disciples reorganized and expanded its membership and drug distribution operations, making it one of the most powerful street gangs in the country. From his prison cell, Larry Hoover reorganized the gang, structuring it like a corporation—with a hierarchy and a detailed set of rules and regulations. The reorganization allowed Hoover and his boards of directors greater control of the gang as its membership increased to over 20,000. The reorganization also afforded Hoover, the chairman of the board, greater control over the gang's distribution of powdered and crack cocaine, marijuana, and heroin in eight states.

During the 1990s Gangster Disciples expanded its drug distribution activities and attempted to improve its image by creating various community and political organizations. The creation of organizations such as the Growth and Development Organization and 21st Century V.O.T.E. (Voices of Total Empowerment) allowed the gang's boards of directors to exert political influence over local governments and Chicago communities. In August 1995, however, 39 Gangster Disciples board members and leaders were indicted on federal narcotics distribution charges. The federal indictment resulted in the 1997 conviction of Larry Hoover and 38 other members and caused Hoover's transfer from a state prison in Illinois to a federal prison in Colorado. The conviction of these leaders did not halt the gang's growth. Instead, it prompted geographic expansion as gang members began migrating from Chicago to smaller cities and towns in the Great Lakes and Southeast regions in an attempt to avoid law enforcement. The result was expanded turf for the gang's drug distribution activities. By 1999 members of Gangster Disciples were distributing drugs in 42 states.

Gangster Disciples remains one of the largest and most violent street gangs in Chicago and the United States. The gang is most active in



Florida Department of Corrections

*Gangster Disciples symbol.*

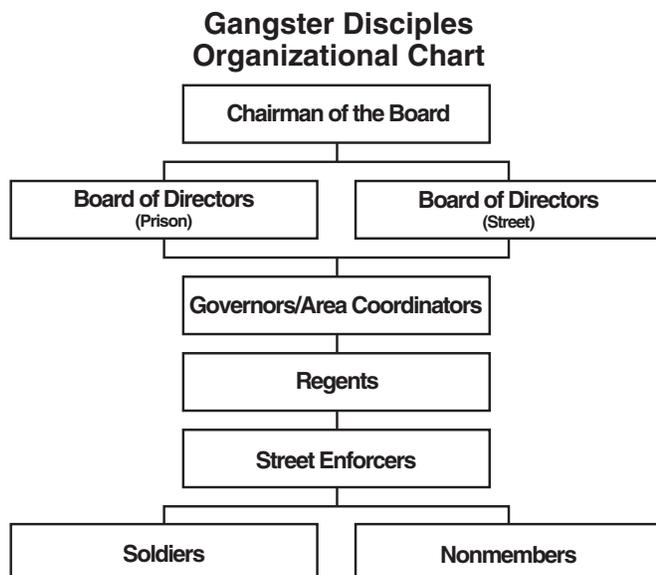
the Great Lakes, Southeast, and West Central regions and is expanding into the Pacific and Southwest regions. Larry Hoover remains the gang's leader and currently is incarcerated in the Bureau of Prisons Administrative Detention Facility in Florence, Colorado.

## **Alliances**

Gangster Disciples is the leading national group in the Folk Nation alliance system. Larry Hoover created this system as a means of protecting alliance members within the prison system. The alliance is strong within the prison system but less effective once a member is released. The Folk Nation alliance also includes Black Disciples, Imperial Gangsters, International Posse, La Raza, Latin Disciples, Spanish Gangster Disciples, Party People, and Satan Disciples.

## **Adversaries**

Gangster Disciples' main rivals are all People Nation gangs, particularly Vice Lord Nation and Black Peace Stone Nation. People Nation, which also was created to protect alliance members within the prison system, is the rival alliance of Folk Nation. The People Nation alliance includes Latin Kings, Vice Lord Nation, Black Peace Stones, Cobra Stones, El Rukn, Insane Popes, Gaylords, Future Stones, Insane Unknown, King Cobras, Latin Counts, Latin Dragons, Latin Pachucos, Latin Saints, and Spanish Lords.



## Organizational Structure

Gangster Disciples is a highly structured organization with a centralized leadership that coordinates the distribution of large amounts of illicit drugs. Gangster Disciples is led by Larry Hoover, the chairman of the board, who is responsible for creating policy and for directing and controlling all activity through two boards of directors—one made up of five incarcerated gang members and another made up of five gang members on the street. The boards of directors are responsible for implementing all of the chairman's policies and directives. Board members are responsible for overseeing and coordinating the activities of the governors/area coordinators.

Governors/area coordinators are responsible for directing and coordinating drug distribution in their assigned geographic areas. The geographic area under the direction of a governor/area coordinator can range from a single street to an entire county. Governors/area coordinators also are called upon to resolve disputes among gang members, collect dues, and report to the boards of directors. The dues collected by the governors are used to fund the organization's operations, assist members with legal problems, and provide money to the families of slain members.

Regents, who coordinate drug distribution and manage the daily operations of the street enforcers and soldiers, report directly to the governors/area coordinators. Street enforcers are responsible for ensuring that all members follow the regents' orders. Soldiers are responsible for the distribution of drugs as well as other criminal activity. Soldiers distribute drugs as a means of paying their dues. Furthermore, nonmembers who sell drugs on the gang's turf are required to pay a street tax, a portion of the profits they receive from drug sales, to the organization.

## Membership

Gangster Disciples is one of the largest street gangs in the United States. The gang is estimated to have between 50,000 and 100,000 members and associates—with as many as 35,000 members in Chicago alone. Most Gangster Disciples members are African American men in their early 30s, although members range in age from 10 to 40. All members are required to take an oath and memorize and obey all gang laws and rules. Members also are required to attend weekly meetings held by governors/area coordinators. If a member violates the gang's laws or rules or misses a meeting, the member is beaten.

Members are easily identified by the symbols and clothing they wear. Their most commonly displayed symbol is the six-point Star of David.



Ware State Prison

Star of David Gangster Disciples tattoo.

Florida Department of Corrections



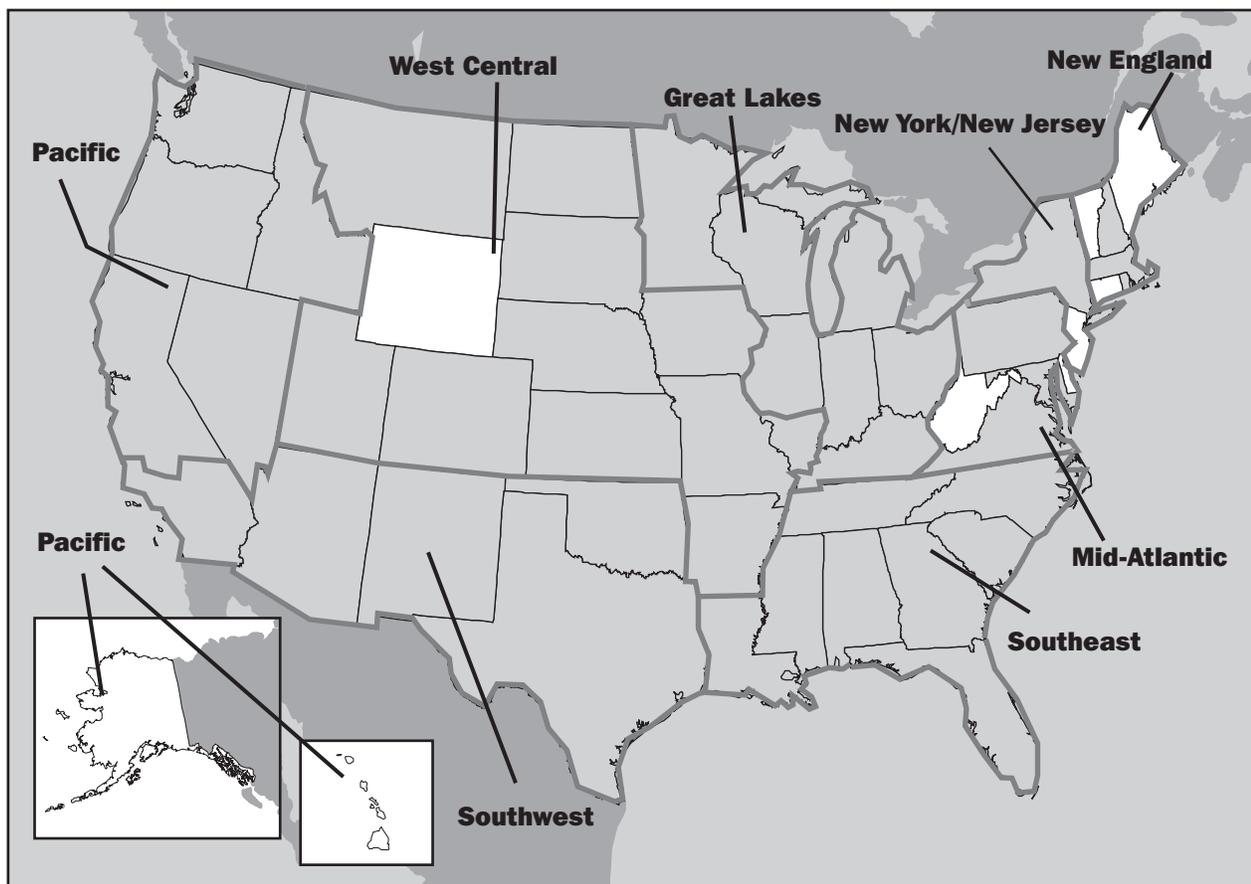
*Gangster Disciples graffiti.*

The six-point star is symbolic of the gang’s six principles of love, life, loyalty, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. The gang uses the star in graffiti, jewelry, and tattoos. Other symbols used by the gang include upward-crossed pitchforks, hearts, wings, flames, crowns, devil’s tails, the letters GD, BGD, BOS (Brothers of the Struggle),

or numbers that have a special significance to the gang. Members also distinguish themselves by wearing the gang’s colors, which are black and blue. Some members also wear their clothing to the right side of their body as a means of showing their relationship with the Folk Nation. For example, members wear black and blue shoelaces only on the right shoe, tilt their hats to the right, and fold their right pant legs.

## **Drug Trafficking**

The Gangster Disciples’ main source of income is from the distribution of powdered and crack cocaine, marijuana, and heroin. The gang transports and distributes these drugs in 41 states and the District of Columbia. Members continue to migrate from Chicago to smaller cities and towns primarily in the Great Lakes, Southeast, and West Central regions because they believe that law enforcement agencies in these locations lack the resources



*States reporting the presence of Gangster Disciples members (shaded).*

to deter the gang's criminal activities. The gang obtains multikilogram quantities of marijuana, cocaine, and lesser quantities of heroin from Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) in Chicago and Texas.

### **Great Lakes Region**

Gangster Disciples members transport multikilogram amounts of powdered and crack cocaine, heroin, and marijuana and distribute the drugs in Chicago and the Great Lakes region. The gang obtains drugs from Mexican DTOs in Chicago. Gang members transport the drugs in private and commercial vehicles from Chicago to areas throughout the region for distribution from private residences and public locations. The gang controls distribution by forcing members to buy drugs from suppliers within the gang. Furthermore, the gang requires all nonmembers who distribute drugs on Gangster Disciples turf to pay a portion of their profits to the gang.

### **Southeast Region**

The gang transports and distributes multikilogram quantities of powdered and crack cocaine and multipound quantities of marijuana throughout the Southeast region, particularly Tennessee and Georgia. Gangster Disciples members in the region obtain their powdered and crack cocaine from Chicago gang members. The cocaine is transported in private and commercial vehicles from Chicago to various locations in the region. Marijuana is obtained from Mexican DTOs who transport it in private and commercial vehicles from Texas to locations throughout the region. In May 2001, 800 pounds of marijuana were seized from a house occupied by Gangster Disciples members in Memphis, Tennessee.

### **West Central Region**

Gangster Disciples is one of the primary street gangs transporting and distributing powdered and crack cocaine and marijuana from Chicago to locations throughout the West Central region. Gangster Disciples governors/area coordinators buy multikilogram quantities of

powdered and crack cocaine and marijuana, either from members of the boards of directors or from their associates. Gang members use private and commercial vehicles to transport drugs from Chicago to various locations throughout the West Central region, typically using interstate highways.

### **Other Criminal Activity**

Gangster Disciples' main source of income is from the distribution of powdered and crack cocaine, marijuana, and heroin. The gang's boards of directors amass hundreds of thousands of dollars each year through the wholesale distribution of drugs, collection of membership dues, and extortion of nonmember retail distributors. Gangster Disciples governors/area coordinators sell kilogram quantities of drugs to lower level members at inflated prices, passing the profits to the boards of directors. Large amounts of money also are generated through monthly membership dues collected by the governors/area coordinators. Members pay their dues with money earned by selling drugs. An additional means of earning money for the gang is by "taxing" all nonmembers who distribute drugs on the gang's turf. Those who do not pay or are late in paying are assaulted or murdered.

A portion of the money generated by the distribution of drugs is laundered through Gangster Disciples' political and charitable organizations: the Growth and Development Organization, 21st Century V.O.T.E., Save Our Children Foundation, and Ghetto Prisoner Clothing, Inc. The remaining amount is used to pay operating expenses and support the lifestyles of members.

### **Violence**

Gangster Disciples is one of the most violent street gangs in the United States, committing numerous homicides. From 1994 through 1999, Gangster Disciples members allegedly committed more than 300 homicides in the Chicago area. In smaller cities and towns across the country,

Gangster Disciples members regularly extort, intimidate, assault, and commit homicide in order to further or protect their criminal activities. Most violence is targeted at rival gangs or at dealers who fail to pay extortion fees.

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## Outlook

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Gangster Disciples is a serious threat to communities across the United States. Despite the federal convictions of 38 high-ranking gang members, the gang will remain one of the largest and most violent street gangs in Chicago and in the United States. The gang will increase its involvement in the transportation and distribution of drugs in smaller cities and towns in the Great Lakes, Southeast, and West Central regions and will continue to expand in the Pacific and South-west regions.

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## Intelligence Gaps

This profile has identified various intelligence gaps. When possible, information addressing these gaps is being collected for future analysis. Critical information gaps include the following:

- Financial activities
- Drug transportation methods
- Communication among members in different locations.

If you have any information on street gang activity in your jurisdiction, please contact the NDIC Organized Crime and Violence Unit at (814) 532-4601.

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## Sources

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### Federal

Executive Office of the President

Office of National Drug Control Policy  
High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas  
New York/New Jersey  
Westchester Intelligence Center

U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Prisons  
Intelligence Section  
Criminal Division  
Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Organizational Intelligence Unit  
Office of Justice Programs  
Bureau of Justice Assistance  
Regional Information Sharing Systems Program

U.S. Department of the Treasury

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms  
Office of Law Enforcement

U.S. District Court

Northern District of Illinois  
Eastern Division

**State**

## Arizona

Department of Public Safety  
Criminal Investigations Division  
Gang Task Force

## Florida

Department of Law Enforcement

## Georgia

Georgia Gang Investigators Association

## Illinois

Chicago Police Department  
Gang Investigation Section  
*Chicago Sun-Times*

## Louisiana

Louisiana Gang Investigators Association

## New York

New York City Police Department  
Citywide Anti-Gang Enforcement

## Tennessee

Bureau of Investigation  
Criminal Investigation Division  
Criminal Intelligence Unit

**Regional**

National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations, [www.nagia.org](http://www.nagia.org)  
East Coast Gang Investigators Association  
Northwest Gang Investigators Association

**Other**

*Christian Science Monitor*

*Journal of Gang Research*

Search International

Valentine, Bill, *Gangs and Their Tattoos*, Boulder, Colorado: Paladin Press, 2000



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