

11/25/24 Braulio Castellanos, the asserted leader of L.A.'s "Forencia-13" street gang, and his brother, Arturo, were both doing life for murder. Castellanos, who stabbed two persons to death 35 years ago, reportedly ran the gang from his prison cell. But he developed terminal cancer, and a judge recently granted him compassionate release. Castellanos passed away at home a week ago. Seized by prison authorities, his recent writings instructed his gang how to choose a new set of leaders so that it could continue to thrive without him.

10/3/24 Dismantling a long-standing White supremacist gang, Federal and local authorities arrested sixty-two alleged members of the "SFV Peckerwoods." Based in L.A.'s San Fernando Valley, the accused - including many middle-aged men and women - ran drug houses, marketing large quantities of illicit drugs, including fentanyl, heroin and meth. They also pretended to own legitimate businesses, and used stolen ID's and prisoner names to get salary reimbursements through the COVID-19 paycheck protection program.

8/16/24 "General Hospital" actor Johnny Wactor was shot and killed on May 25th. when he confronted carjackers who were stealing his parked car. LAPD has now arrested three Florencia-13 gang members whose fingerprints allegedly match those on a floor jack they used to raise the car. Their objective: to sell its catalytic converter to a scrap dealer who would melt it down for the sake of its valuable metals.

8/7/24 Eleven Federal indictments for trafficking in fentanyl, extortion and murder have led to the arrest of twenty-three members of Florencia-13, a South Los Angeles street gang with a violent 70-year history. Eight additional accused are yet to be found; several are thought to be in Mexico. Florencia's unsavory reputation peaked two years ago when off-duty LAPD officer Fernando Arroyos was murdered by Florencia gangsters during a brazen armed robbery. The three perpetrators, who admitted to the crimes, are serving long prison terms.

7/11/24 From its origins in El Salvador, MS-13 took root in Southern California. It then spread throughout the U.S. Alexi Saenz, 29, a New York City-area shot-caller, just pled guilty to a sweeping Federal indictment charging him and his associates with a litany of murders in and around the Big Apple. Among the victims were six teens, both male and female, who had "disrespected" or otherwise come into conflict with the gang. Saenz is expected to draw 40 to 70 years. His brother, the second-in-command, still faces charges.

7/8/24 It took two hours for an L.A. jury to agree that four years ago Justin Arteaga, 23, tried to prove his worthiness as a gang recruit by shooting and killing a 29-year old

local resident who had “disrespected” a member of the Gardena-13 street gang. His victim, Evan Campbell, 29, was the son of retired Federal agent Lester Campbell. The elder Campbell ran out of their nearby home. He was fired on by another gang member and shot back, killing his assailant. A third gang armed member is serving a nine-year prison sentence for ex-con with a gun. Arteaga faces life without parole.

6/26/24 Six Hells Angels - the entire complement of the gang’s Bakersfield, Calif. chapter - were arrested by Federal, State and local officers on a slew of charges, including kidnapping and robbery. Authorities seized more than two-dozen guns, including assault-style rifles, pistols and high-capacity magazines. And they weren’t kids, with ages running from 33 to 57.

4/30/24 Armed with assault-style rifles, senior members of violent Los Angeles street gangs, including the West Boulevard Crips and Black P Stones, have formed “crews” that stake out businesses and financial firms and prey on armored trucks that bring and pick up bundles of cash. Most are ex-cons; one, who seems typical of the genre, is thirty and served twelve years for assault. Hauls of as much as several hundred thousand dollars have become unnervingly frequent.

2/12/24 Using smuggled cell phones and messaging tools such as WhatsApp, California’s imprisoned Mexican Mafia bosses control street drug deals throughout Los Angeles. A current Federal case uses transcripts of online chats to detail the interactions between Carlos Reyes, who is serving a 54-year murder term, and his “employees.” In one, he tells an 18-year old runner to deliver \$900 worth of drugs and keep \$50 for himself. In another, he authorizes an underling to keep \$100 from a \$10,000 haul. (See 9/13/22/ update)

5/3/23 In 1995, when Ezequiel Romo was eighteen, the Blythe Street gang member shot and killed a youth who punched him in the face. On the streets of Panorama City, a working-class Los Angeles suburb, that’s what earned respect. Released eighteen years later, determined to enter the ranks of the Mexican Mafia, he worked to “clean house” within Blythe Street. Now he’s back on trial, accused of precipitating eight murders within his old gang.

3/3/23 Secreted within “casitas” located in private homes and commercial storefronts, “mini-casinos” equipped with gambling machines dot less-affluent areas of Los Angeles. Operated under the auspices of the Mexican Mafia prison gang, each can generate tens of thousands of dollars in profits every month. And as the late Stephanie Marie Rojas discovered, should employees try to skim off unauthorized profits, retribution can be deadly.

11/29/22 An unforgettable [AP photo essay](#) depicts the effects of the scourge of fentanyl on Los Angeles' homeless population. [According to the DEA](#), the synthetic opioid, "50-100 times stronger than morphine," is secretly manufactured in Mexico, then smuggled into the U.S. [A recent Federal indictment](#) alleges that the "Eastside Playboys," [a Latino gang](#), "used the U.S. Post Office, United Parcel Service and FedEx to distribute kilos of cocaine, methamphetamine and fentanyl and were partly responsible for deadly fentanyl-laced pills that flooded the drug markets of Southern California."

10/29/22 Los Angeles' Mexican Mafia leaders earn substantial profits from cash payments by friends and relatives of jailed gang members. In one scheme, the money pays for inmate purchases from a gang "kitty" that's assembled through mandatory prisoner contributions of commissary items. Inmates are also "taxed" one-third the quantity of drugs they smuggle in, and these are resold to their peers.

9/13/22 Controlled by a mostly jailed hierarchy, which issues commands through smuggled cellphones, the Mexican Mafia rules over the drug trade in California's inland empire, a vast area that includes the counties of Riverside and San Bernardino. Enforced by killings that reach into the state's prison system, its long-standing influence was recently described in an in-depth piece in the *Los Angeles Times*. (See 2/12/24 update)

8/19/22 A years-long Federal investigation using surveillance and wiretaps led to the indictment of forty-one members of South L.A.'s "Eastside Playboys" street gang for narcotics and gun trafficking. Defendants are accused of "sending kilogram quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine and fentanyl" through the mail and by private carriers and selling them on the street in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. So far twenty-eight of the defendants have been arrested. [DOJ press release](#)

6/13/22 Ramiro Valerio, a 49-year old drug store manager, was convicted of twelve counts of murder dating back to 1993 while he worked as an "enforcer" for Los Angeles' highly feared 18th. Street gang. Valerio, who went on to become a notable FBI informant, set fire to an apartment building to retaliate for its manager's complaints to police about drug dealing, causing a plunge in sales that sharply cut the protection money being paid by dealers to the gang. Valerio admitted collecting these "taxes" but denied setting the fire, which killed seven children, three women and two unborns. He faces mandatory life without parole. [L.A. Times background feature](#)

2/7/22 Los Angeles prosecutors charged nine alleged members of the "Kitchen Crips" with embarking on a murder campaign after rival gangsters allegedly shot and killed one

of their own last September. Police allege that the accused, whose typical handiwork included “multiple other shootings, attempted murders, assaults, robberies and stolen vehicles,” began hunting for and opening fire on persons they thought, sometimes mistakenly, were affiliated with the Bloods. Six victims have been identified.

9/5/21 Located near the city center, Los Angeles’ vast MacArthur Park has long been a haven for lower-income residents who patronize the food and article vendors that line the shores of its vast lake. It’s also the stomping grounds for MS-13 gang members, whose “shadow taxation system” extorts “rent” from the struggling retailers and brutally punishes, sometimes fatally, those who don’t pay up. Victims have expanded to include the transgender, whom the gang has decided simply don’t belong.

10/22/20 A major [DOJ report](#) about Federal efforts to “dismantle” the MS-13 gang cites 749 prosecutions and “more than 500 convictions” during the past four years, with sentences including 37 life terms. Of those prosecuted, at least three-quarters were illegally present in the U.S.