Continuum:
Time, Masculinity, and Death in Chicagoland’s Mexican Street Gangs

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Introduction

“He sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress” Walter Benjamin (1968) "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

As he bikes fast down the interstate route's ruins, he makes the humid summer air cold. The 14-year-old boy is an expert in finding escapes from the otherwise mundane world about 5 minutes away from the forest hideaway where he and his brothers would ride bikes. The cool air he felt when biking was in stark contrast to not only the Chicago summer, but also to the desert that is Northern Mexico--the land from which his family recently migrated. The brothers begin making their way back to their apartment since it is almost the time their parents get home from the factory.

As they pull up to the brick buildings that jet up from a sea of concrete, they notice--for the third time--those older men. Every time these men visit the neighborhood, they make a spectacle of embarrassing and harassing the boys. Today, all Adam¹ can remember about what happened next was that "one of the guys probably called me a bitch," but whatever the reason, on that day, the 14-year-old boy walked up to the men and decided to make them prove that he "was a bitch". They agreed to let him fight one on one--pairing him up with the 19-year-old who was the youngest of their group. The older men had miscounted for what the boy's dad referred to as "a good demon" that protected the boy, or maybe just his unique desire to become a good fighter from an early age. Regardless, the young boy won the fight quickly--making it so they'd never call him or his brothers a bitch again.

¹ This is a pseudonym to protect participant's confidentiality
Immediately after, the two shook hands, and one of the men who was with the 19-year-old made the boy a proposition. "What if I make you an Inca of the Latin Kings," he asked. To be clear, he offered this boy a chapter of the Latino street gang that originated in the Northwest Side of Chicago and gave him the title of "Inca," which is among the most powerful positions within the organization. "I thought that sounded cool--I was kinda just a kid," Adam tells me, "so I got some buddies together and founded the Palatine Latin Kings."

When asked, many older members of Chicago’s street gangs will tell you they were founded as anti-racist organizations to protect against white violence during the early to mid-20th century (a time of rapidly changing racial demographics in the area). The Encyclopedia of Chicago also notes this, stating, "partly as a defense against racial violence, which by the 1950s reached Chicago's Latino communities, African American, Puerto Rican, and Mexican gangs proliferated in the late 1950s". Men have historically dominated these street gangs, and to this day, the most powerful positions are occupied by men. The formation of these organizations as forces to protect from outside racial violence, particularly violence enacted by men, begs several questions. The most obvious being related to so-called "racialized masculinity" and the role men have concerning violence--particularly as agents enacting said violence. Less obviously, one may consider the violence and the specter it presents within boys' lives as they come of age. How does deconstructing the ethos of masculinity enable a vantage point into the conditions that render these forms of masculinity logical? How might careful attention to the unique perception of time within this community undergird the relationship between violence and masculinity?

This thesis explores the relationship between death, masculinity, and time within Mexican street gangs of the Chicagoland area. In tracing a constellation between these themes, I

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seek to examine how structural violence becomes embodied and how subjectivity forms in response to the history wrapped up in the places we call home. The project unfolds in three parts, each exploring a relationship between the masculine ethos represented in these communities and time. In Part I, I consider the past in the present experience of Mexican gang members in the Chicagoland area. In exploring this, I connect masculinity and melancholia to consider the role of death in the perception of time this community holds. Utilizing these insights on the perception of time in this community, part II explores how time can be used to locate these men within the temporal desires created by U.S. social belonging--but how social death still denies any semblance of citizenship or humanity.. Part III is a refrain that utilizes critical fabulation—that is, a style of creative semi-nonfiction that attempts to explore past events through hard research and scattered facts—to revisit how the themes explored in the first two sections may have taken form during an unfortunate night in the late 1990s.3

The scaffolding I use to theorize questions of time and masculinity is drawn out of discourses originating from the anthropology of time and queer theory. These traditions together are concerned with the relationship between the experience of time and the formation of subjectivities in flux and the direction and form of time, death, class, colonization, the role of history, modernity, utopia, liberation, and perhaps most vaguely--resistance. All these concepts are beholden to--that which we simultaneously take for granted and contribute labor in maintaining or negotiating--time. By this, I mean that they are projects that treat an end as precious. An end, I stress, where society has unraveled its contradictions, the end of a historical period, or on arrival to some future and an end to contemporary life.

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Sigmund Freud defines mourning as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction." Freud understands there to be a process in which a mourner can work through grief and eventually move on—melancholy is mourning without end. Angela Garcia works with Freud's concept of the melancholic subject to consider how melancholy can be extended to address material losses, losses like land that remain present but out of reach, particularly in a context where land is constituent to cultural identity and economic survival. Tim Edensor has described the psychic influence of such non-human entities as "haunting," which aims to describe the affective relationship between space and the individual—mainly as it describes the feeling of the "past" in the present—and for Edensor, this is encapsulated by examples like working-class architecture haunting unevenly renewed urban spaces. Putting these two concepts together may help to "sort" some of the messiness of space's role on such psychic processes as the perception of time. Namely, the centrality of the individual in the concept of melancholia helps point to how space may at times hold affective power because individuals, communities, and social structures imbue said space with affective power by way of the social relationship they hold to the space.

In beginning to sort through the messiness, this may help locate the individual within the flows of matter, violence, and the social—which is imperative to understanding the relationship between space, masculine subjectivity, and time. Muñoz takes note of this when writing on the feeling of "brown," describing how gendered and racial performativity meet the depressive position in ways that exceed epistemological renderings of identity; brown feelings are not an

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individualized affective particularity; they more nearly express this "displaceable attentiveness," which is to say a more extensive collective mapping of self and other.\(^7\) Queer theory further explores time's relation to such affects as abjection and failure through the term *chrononormativity*, or how the queer subject often fails to attain a "normative" passage of time in that one doesn't attain the typical milestones of a "good life."\(^8\) Similarly, Dana Luciano has shown how grief may be used to understand how society perceives and navigates time.\(^9\) In my project, this helps connect broader ideas about time to how they may crash up against the local conceptions of time of the community I study with.

Time is often already thought of as particular within anthropology. In their introduction to a special issue of *History and Anthropology*, Hirsch and Stewart examined the role of cultural construction in views of the past and its relation to present and future.\(^10\) In response to ideas of a universal past or a universal history, Hirsch and Moretti have argued for a cultural specificity of those concepts.\(^11\) For instance, Mark Busse's exploration of historical bases for culture heroes in the Southern lowlands of Papua New Guinea is an excellent example of how western universal history may be more similar to mytho-history than a science.\(^12\) In response to this, Hirsch and

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Moretti argue for culturally specific historicities.\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, Nancy Farris has explored how conceptions of time are particular—in her case, she studied how cyclical understandings of time played a role in Mayan cosmology.\textsuperscript{14} My project looks to explore how death might play a role in how a community may experience time. Herbert Marcuse points out that history itself haunts particularly because of the value attached to imagined “alternative” histories.\textsuperscript{15} In conversation with Marcuse, Avery Gordon argues that the haunting of historical alternatives and the peculiar temporality of the shadowing of lost futures insinuates itself in the something-to-be-done, sometimes as nostalgia, sometimes as regret, sometimes as a kind of critical urgency.\textsuperscript{16} Through understanding death's role in how a community may perceive time, I hope to add to the work already done to describe various conceptions of time and history.

\textbf{Methodology}

Conversation is an important method of understanding. I dedicate most of this thesis to conversations I've had over the last six months with system impacted—defined as having been incarcerated, currently incarcerated, or having a significant relationship with an incarcerated person—Mexican Gang member in the Chicagoland area. Through these conversations, I generate an ethnographic account. In working with participants to produce narrative accounts of certain events, I follow Marisol de la Cadena's version of collaborative ethnography as outlined in \textit{Earth Beings}.\textsuperscript{17} De la Cadena and two participants co-labor to produce a text--this

\textsuperscript{15} Marcuse, H 1964, One-dimensional man: studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society, Beacon Press, Boston.
\textsuperscript{16} Gordon, Avery F. "Some thoughts on haunting and futurity." \textit{Borderlands} 10, no. 2 (2011).
methodology does not simply allow her to generate theory relevant to the question. Instead, it is itself an object that provides insight into the question through considering the politics of translation. Her participants are a father and son, an Indigenous leader during the struggle against the hacendados system, and the son is a so-called "Andean shaman" employed by a tourist agency. Neither are literate, and both are predominantly Quechua speakers. Still, de la Cadena uses this as an opportunity to locate the different relationships she and her participants have to recent history and Peruvian national identity through Benjamin's concept of translation. Finally, she attempts to learn about the "Earth Beings" and the cosmologies of her participants that she admits she will never fully understand due to her living in a world of modern evidence. However, she aims to take seriously the beliefs that seem to exceed reason or are excessive to history. Within my project, I hope to emulate the attention to the translation, understanding that though I hail from the community I work with, I nonetheless have experienced a rupture in my sense of belonging to this community—particularly given how the university has transformed the way which I understand myself and see the world.

Though other "classic" ethnographic methods in anthropology frequently rely upon one's observations while living amongst a community, I employed conversation to generate ethnography as I have for my entire life lived amongst this community. Ideally, I'd have liked to spend time in the community with the participants. The limits of COVID-19 prevented this possibility. Nonetheless, what the IRB asked of researchers wasn't exactly tenable for me, given that not seeing any of the participants would mean not seeing family members or returning home. Taking inspiration from the generative possibilities of a conversation between a father, son, and an anthropologist presented by de la Cadena, this approach as both a son and an anthropologist of this community represents new translations, vantage points, and possibilities to pursue.
Though the position of an anthropologist who is in many ways part of the community they study allows for greater ease with nuance, the presence of violence makes an analysis of history, even when we live amongst that history constantly unfolding, incredibly difficult. The difficulty presented by violence and silence in the archive calls for new methods in working through the darkness. Speculative fiction allows for a means to listen to silence. This method is perhaps necessary for studying communities that present difficulty tracing clean histories per the presence of violence complicating the archive—borrowing heavily from Saidiya Hartman’s "Venus in Two Acts."\textsuperscript{18} I write speculative fiction based on a story that came up during interviews where two members of the Latin Kings were murdered. I learned through this research to piece together a character analogous to Hartman's "Venus." This character's resonance with this community's daily experience also helps illuminate dynamics of this community that aren't easily captured by the archive. In consideration of resonance to explore silence, I draw from Przybylo and Cooper's "Assexual Resonances: Tracing a Queerly Asexual Archive."\textsuperscript{19}

Lastly, I utilize autoethnography given my proximity to this community and my familial relationship with some of these participants. I was raised by a former Inca of the Latin Kings. Autoethnography presents an intervention into where knowledge must be located and produced—the subject of an autoethnography is celebrated as having knowledge as valid as what is observed in other qualitative methods.\textsuperscript{20} An autoethnography allows the agency of the subject to be more central in questions of presentation of knowledge. This provides for autoethnography to extend


\textsuperscript{20} Ellis, Carolyn. 2004. \textit{The Ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography}. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.
the purpose of a paper from thinking of issues and perhaps outlining steps forward to actively
doing work for the paper's subject in the form of healing through thinking through meaningful
lived experiences. This somewhat resonates with me as though I don't know how much I view
a thesis as healing, it certainly clarifies and builds on observations I had growing up.

Autoethnography allows for the individual to express their emotion in a way that is most
acceptable to them. This may provide more insight into the emotional nature of our relations as
quantitative research loses the agency to decide on what terms one tells their experience and
filters the emotions of an individual through the lens of a researcher in generalizable
categories. To understand people, one must aim to document emotion in ways informed by
agency where the subject's knowledge precedes the researcher's intention of objectivity.
Therefore, autoethnography would help locate the emotional or affective—though I don't take
affect as being at all interchangeable with emotion or feeling—dimension of the relationships
within this community and masculinity (though I don't identify with masculinity). My research
gestures towards what might be gained when one treats autoethnographic methods and more
traditional methods as parts of a whole? What might we achieve through extending the agency of
autoethnography to our participants through including them in the process of drafting and
theorizing?

In returning to the question of collaborative ethnography, which I first brought up
through de la Cadena's method of conversation, blending these methods provides a way to

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Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), 429-449.

Gubrium (Eds.), *Handbook of constructionist research* (pp. 445-466). New York: Guilford Press.

23 I understand affect to be a precognitive intensity that is excessive of language which may infold contexts. See
Eric Shouse’s "Feeling, Emotion, Affect." See also “‘What Feels More Than Feeling?’: Theorizing the
Unthinkability of Black Affect” by Tyrone S. Palmer.
approach a praxis of working against silos, of disrupting the economies of knowledge that create uneven geography of theory where knowledge trickles from peripheral highlands down into academic cores that reap the benefits of a million thoughts--often without having to challenge the relationships that maintain the marginalization of specific populations. For this reason, I expand upon auto-ethnography to view it too as an opportunity for collaboration--meaning I worked with some participants to generate their own "autoethnographic" accounts of memories they feel are in dialogue with my own--and in doing this extends the opportunity to share authorship in this work. Within the confines of this paper, understanding that I may barely even approach this goal of utilizing my position as someone within the academy to allow participants to themselves theorize to and against the social theory that has often left them--whether termed the underclass, the subaltern, or what have you--as an object. I join autoethnographic and collaborative methods by including participants in the various moments of this project--from the conception of its questions to the reviews of each successive draft. Understanding, however, that ultimately this thesis, by nature and requirement, is meant to reflect my academic potential, the writing is mine entirely, and the hopes of even more collaborative methods will be bracketed as I continue to explore these questions in my future academic pursuits.

In many ways, however, my writing and thinking are not exclusively my own, but rather an influx and efflux, borrowing from Jane Bennet, of influence between a "self" and a "community"--which I do not take as essential or exclusive.24 Rather than pretending at the possibility of objectivity in any research, I wish to draw attention to the fact the interviews--even when they are between myself and a "stranger"--ultimately represent the very forces that have shaped me; from my own experience of seeing friends incarcerated or shot, feeling what it means

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to live in a land of death but on the same coin, life. The vibrant and tenacious lives of peers, family members, and strangers ultimately motivate this thesis. As I move from scenes of melancholy and ultimately towards a rejection of the future, I appreciate the perception of time of the participants. Still, I take this thesis as an appreciation of my own time spent in this community. From the pain to the joy, we don't need a future to live.
A Gathering of Ghosts: The Past, Haunting, and Masculine Subjectivity

"Those bats were in the family for, ooh, I can't even remember."

Barely able to breathe as he runs from the group of men, he quickly makes his way through his apartment complex. The buildings of brown and tar-colored bricks appear as a fuzzy beige in a night illuminated by their dimming lights. Bugs throw themselves against the lamps and die. He runs across the pit separating the complex from the street, climbs a tree, and sits silently as the earwigs next to him.

There he is. Someone has spotted him. He jumps, bending his legs as he lands, taking off with a speed that betrays the pain springing up towards his head. He runs and runs, but he isn't as fast as the men who've done this for much longer. Ultimately, his friend reaches him first, tapping him on the shoulder and pronouncing the game over. The group lets out a sigh. Now it's time to order pizza and have all the men--as old or as young as they come, and maybe some girls too--eat. Congratulations mijo, where were you hiding?

One-catch-all is a game played at least twice a week in the summers and sometimes during the school year. As the name suggests, it'd start with one person being "it," and if you were to be tagged, you'd have to help them catch the remaining people. It was played exclusively at night, and privileged the ability to run, scale buildings, climb trees, and, in a way, be creative. It encouraged an intimate knowledge of every place in the complex and rewarded the ability to find or create new ones.
This kid, the one who won this day's game, never felt part of the guys who lived there even though they had much affection for each other. He stays out a bit but eventually heads inside. His dad has left to make money for tomorrow's food. He lays on the uncovered boxspring that rests on the floor in the room he shares with his dad. An earwig crawls out from his pants, and he jumps. After dealing with it, he goes to bed.

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I first moved into Rand Grove when I was 13, though I had been visiting for as long as I could remember since it was where my family lived and where my dad had grown up. Rand Grove is a public housing project located in a suburb of Chicago. It has historically been home to predominantly Mexicans and Black Americans, though recently, most long-term residents have been evicted in one way or another, and now it is primarily Polish and Middle Eastern, from what people tell me. When I lived there, most families had a tradition of passing down their apartment to their children or other relatives. It was a highly policed area. There was a building in the middle of the complex that had live footage of most public places in the complex, making Rand Grove a public housing panopticon--this happened only a few years before most of the long-term residents would be evicted.

I am now struck by how nonchalantly people interacted with death, though initially, it hadn't phased me, perhaps because I was still learning what "normal" should be. An ethnographic account of Rand Grove must grapple with what death does to a space like this, and our participants can’t be left to the “now” or the “living,” but must also be in dialogue with all spectres still walking through the complex.

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He wakes as he hears his great-grandmother scream. He rushes down the hall and, in broken Spanish, comforts her. She explains that she had a terrible dream in which a lady in a black wedding dress was murdering her and would have succeeded had the ghost of her husband not appeared in the dream to protect her. She asks for a crystal glass filled with water to be sat at her bedside; he keeps bringing a plastic one. Eventually, the dad comes home and explains that water in a crystal glass will collect your dreams and let you sleep at peace; plastic doesn't count.

The morning always greets him with cold air seeping from a crack in the window, the sound of plastic curtains hitting each other, and clangs in the kitchen. School comes and goes, a lesson on Shakespeare, an argument with the history teacher, calculus. He used to walk to school with the kids from the complex, but his friends had each been hunted down and expelled for one bullshit reason or another; now it's just him. Walking home alone, he made sure to avoid the apartments where the SGD's live; they jumped a 13-year-old from my complex the other day.

The guys in the complex always teased that kid who got jumped, calling him gay or a fag. It was different now that he was jumped for being from Rand Grove. During that school day, the men ran through the SGD's hood and jumped some guys who had been involved.

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As he crossed through the small opening in the fence between the liquor store and the garden store, he was home. The local little kids run and scream throughout the complex. One of the littlest hugs his leg and yells, "primo!," which his dad taught him to do even though they aren't related.

In a way, however, most people in the complex have grown up alongside one another, and the same can be said for their parents. Rand Grove was a family in so far as everyone knew everyone and everyone's kids and everyone's parents. We knew that [name] was locked up, but
he'd come back from prison soon, or that [name] was at college but visits in a month. It was the most robust community he ever lived in.

The memories of that day are like a movie film in a state of decay. He can see everything clearly, yet at times he forgets the order, or one memory might be easier to focus on than another.

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He had barely entered the courtyard when he saw the kids run towards [name's] apartment near the northern parking lot. He walked over to see all the young men of the complex running upon this parade of white vans. Men yelling and banging weapons together poured out the windows of each van. As they drove off, they made one thing clear, they would be back tonight.

As all the guys walked back into the courtyard, his dad warned him not to be out when the men came back. His day-to-day made the consequence of being outside--the risk of death--seem beyond the real. From the bench where someone died on, the fact that every building in the complex was the site of someone's death, that everyone had a ghost story--many of which would uncannily match the actual circumstances of the person who died, though still, on the surface, disconnected--death felt less like an end of life than about as natural as really any other phase of life one could enter. When it came down to it, he was outside and armed the guys with metal bats. His dad had to make money anyways.

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The nights in the spring are always cool like the earth is releasing a low cold sigh. He approaches the basketball court in the middle of the complex to see why a group of men is
bothering his friend. As he approaches the court, he counts seven men. He continues though he is only with three people. As he gets closer, he realizes he knows one of these strangers.

A few weeks earlier, he saw this man, nicknamed "Gato," take a knife out of his pocket and stab someone to death in front of their family. Only after this first encounter did he learn what this man was about. Before he could assess what the best move would be, a friend of his confronted the group as words begin to exchange. Gato swings and connects with a friend's face. Before his friend hits the floor, he immediately punches Gato. Following the right cross, Gato hits the floor. He kicks Gato in the face and a brawl commences.

He would at some point win several hundred fights, both in the ring as a golden gloves boxer and in the streets as the Inca of the Palatine Latin kings. This fight was no different as he and his friends won. They run back towards his apartment. Having seen the maliciousness and egotism that led Gato to kill someone over not having paid a debt, he warned the others that Gato and the others would be back.

In the meantime, they return to their Mother’s Day cookout. His friends leave, and it's just him and his brother left outside as the charcoal begins to peter out. Among the cookout smoke, he and his brother head inside to retrieve the metal bats from the apartment. They lay the bats against the side of their building. Barely ten minutes pass before they see the men approaching in the distance.

Gato and the six men are back, this time armed with knives, and are running towards them. As quickly as they can, they grab the bats and prepare themselves. Swinging the bat, he makes contact with Gato's brother's head, leaving him unconscious. A man lunges forward with the knife. Luckily the bat can hit the man before he's stabbed. They each have hit a few of them
between him and his brother, and the others begin to run. One of the men runs into the back of a handicap sign, leaving his bloody eye dangling from a screw.

The maintenance man runs out of his house and fires a gun into the air—the last few men runoff. Unfortunately for them, the police are rounding the corner they are heading towards. The police interrogate all of them, eventually determining that the men are from Rolling Meadows and are trespassing. Those trespassing are charged with criminal aggravated battery. He and his brother contemplate how close they were to death.

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Luckily that night, when he sat outside and waited for the SGDs to come, they failed to deliver on their promises. He was back in bed before his father returned home. Those bats, which had been in the family for a while, were lost that night—likely kept by the friends he armed (as petty stealing amongst friends wasn't something the community batted an eye to). Had the night gone any other way, he may have died or lived to witness a night like the one his dad experienced in the same complex not too long ago. Yet death in Rand Grove held a different meaning; it was not taboo. Instead, amongst men, it was something we knew intimately and informed our development—even the kids believed that Rand Grove was a burial ground before it became a public housing project (often citing the oddly small cemetery next door as proof).

We've all seen ghosts, though I'd never seriously say so to an academic audience. Death was part of the landscape, and the events unfolding in that place were without end. The melancholy experienced by the men of this place isn't simply an individual affective state—it is a communal psychic state that often passes from father to child. Yet as far as certain affective states are displaceable from the individual, it is not displaceable from that place.
Connecting space to a psychic position, consequential time begins to unravel. I hoped to accomplish this through this "ethnography." However, I'm unsure if I can fully term this to call into question the imposed importance of historicity onto communities such as my own. Though perhaps confusing, I attempted to do this by severely limiting the use of the first-person perspective and names. This rhetorical strategy was so that the events generated by walking through my dad in his autoethnographic practice and putting it next to mine, one wouldn't begin to draw consequential connections between what informs one generation's decisions as predicated on the decisions made by another--as I feel we are so conditioned to do. Instead, I hoped to make space, death, and violence primary as this best describes the experience of this community through time. That is to say that the perception of time and history is particular within this community because of the immediacy of death and the melancholy it produces, and I hoped to write in a way that made that center.

In the case of Rand Grove, melancholy's engagement with space, particularly space created in response to structural violence, mutates what melancholy can be thought of. It is no longer just an individual psychic state but a product of being in a community with ghosts (abstractions) and living in the graveyard physically. Melancholia is externalized as a characteristic of space, of home, but the conditions of life--that we can't simply live our trauma every moment of every day--necessitate its further transformation. By this, I mean that melancholia becomes communal insofar as mourning is not overcome because one's participation in the community relies on the engagement with an inundation of death. This eventually becomes part of the affective potential of the space in which the community calls home because the place becomes charged with the various deaths that haunt.
Yet an outsider may come to this community and focus on the life in the community, rather than the spectre of death, but happiness doesn't preclude melancholia. Rather melancholia is transformed into various components of the community, from sport to ethos--thereby allowing for death to be made into social reproduction and transforming melancholia into a generative force without ever moving past the morning-made-celebration. Melancholia becomes sublimated and expressed through quotidian acts. Men approach death not only as a cite of terror but also as a part of the quotidian. From the way they are socialized through game, friendship, and social expectations, they formulate a different relationality with death and life--which transforms how they live their life in the here and now.

An interview explored later in this project further clarifies this entanglement between death and an ethos of masculinity. My interlocutor explains, “so in other words, you're willing to die, or go to the grave, or do your prison bid, whatever, before, you know, snitching on your crew or before turning your back on someone. It’s something that, you know, pretty self-explanatory. You know, something happens with your guy, or your pretty much die for your guys, or whatever do anything...where we grew up it was a tight knit group, it was a bunch guys, no matter if we lived a couple blocks away but were all part of the same crew, but we knew everyone, we knew the mom, the family, so everyone looked out for each other. So you know if someone was a problem, if someone had issues at school, or at work, you know we’ll make sure to have their back no matter what it is. No matter if he's wrong or not, hey, we got your back. Or if someone’s messing with your family, your little brother or whatever, hey, we’re here to look out for each other. “

Here the very ability to participate in fraternity is premised on the willingness to death, even when the death is for a friend's sibling. This requires a willingness to die as many of the
"people messing with your family" have guns or knives in the day-to-day. This is to say that this ethos requires the willingness to confront deadly circumstances on the daily, say if one finds themself having to drive through someone else's hood and risk exposure to bullets or being beaten when walking through the wrong place, or even the more subtle and slow-burning deaths-the slow degradation of one's ability to live the "good (chrononormative) life" as the one often becomes precluded from opportunity by being expected to run into situations that may result in criminalization and a slow foreclosure of liberal humanity. This other form of social death further compounds melancholia, as the "paths not taken" or denied also haunt us.25

The relationship between violence and the subject formations it enables, the melancholia of individual and place as enabled by the haunting of said violence, the perception of time because of the unique relationship to death—all work together to form a unique ethos of masculinity. Though an outsider may deem this as toxic—and certainly staying outside knowing you may die is toxic—toxicity here is turned on its head because it is a survival strategy. I say this because, in a graveyard-turned-home, one cannot turn from death—even if they can transform it. When violence is legible and ever-present, it enables the social expectation of men as protector (violent) and therefore forms masculinity that can hold this as a norm. Normativity enables social sorting surrounding who can best uphold this norm and is part of the discipline necessary to maintain itself—even if most men fail to uphold said norm perfectly.26 This then creates an ethos of masculinity that requires men to premise their identity on the possibility of death, since being a man here means upholding ideals of protection/violence, which ultimately leads to death, and

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therefore renders a statement like "death before dishonor" not only logical but a central tenet of many Mexican street gangs.

In this section, I sought to experiment with ethnography, borrowing techniques from fiction writing to tell a true story, if something could be called that. In asking my interlocutor to himself generate an autoethnographic account, after first reading mine and then recounting a memory that he feels it is in dialogue with, I hoped to further experiment with "collaborative ethnography" by sketching out what a "collaborative autoethnography" may look like (though of course all writing ultimately was my own). Ultimately, I hoped this helped to elucidate the relationship between masculinity, melancholia, space/time, and death--as encapsulated by what may be described as a people in time/space. Lastly, just as exposure to stress may cause mutation in an organism, violence is a catalyst for social change. The spectre of death transforms the melancholic experience, as a collective ethos of a community. However, Freud’s emblematic fetish here doesn't turn one away from the object. It is the transformation from opaque to translucent. Putting this in conversation with such concepts as utopia, one may begin to question what exactly is on a so-called “horizon” when a utopian society may not be able to escape all the bad that the good is made of, that ultimately every utopia is made from ghosts, is made from death.
Cruel Abstraction, Social Death

Before I asked him any questions, before he had agreed to be interviewed, there was a hope he had nurtured in himself. He had to take all the terrible things that happened in his life and make something of them. Those ghosts that he walked with daily, the memories he missed out on, and the ones that had stolen their place--something had to be done. When I asked him to be interviewed, he was eager. When the interview was over, he explained that he had a daughter my age and that he was happy to see kids like me in college. "That's what's up," is something all the people I approached as part of this project said in regard to learning that I was nearing the end of college. In many ways, this quote is about time because the somber hope this represents is the nexus of melancholy and a future. The interview itself was made possible by a meeting of melancholy, masculinity, and the influence of the more teleological "self-help" and progress narratives that come to shape how many of these men make sense of prison.

Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* works through the historical sensorium from the 1990s to the mid-2010s that propagated relationships in which an affective attachment to a particular desire prevents one's flourishing.\(^{27}\) The objects to which one cruelly pins their desires to provide some sort of insidious hope while silently maintaining certain undesirable social relations. In the case of the participants, this cruel optimism represents the confluence of telos and melancholia. The interlocutor that inspires and makes possible this section of the B.A. represents how the culture of the post-war era United States creates ripples in the melancholic temporality of this community. Namely, the individualized brand of telos--that makes the something to be done about how one may improve themselves--comes to be an important influence in the ways the

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ethos of masculinity of this community mutates as it engages with structures such as prison—which might be seen as a microcosm of the interaction with U.S. society more broadly.

This section is a shallow dive into the lagoon between mainstream ideas of time and this community’s own temporality. I move from exploring how an ethos of masculinity forms with the inundation of death that defines the experience of men in Mexican street gangs to how the broader scenes of slow death mutate these formations. In this, I argue that through examining the experience of these men in prison, one may notice how more general social attitudes are inserted into their lives through the incredible violence represented by the carceral system. The ethos of masculinity is made to consider a shallower plain of death while maintaining its same investments in death itself. That is to say, while the willingness toward immediate harm of oneself, from risking one's life or reliving the trauma in the service of others, remains present, individuals begin to think of themselves in terms of slower overarching timelines. A unique meeting of broader social telos and communal experience contribute to men choosing to have died a slow death—particularly to represent their feelings towards their families. Similar abstractions of a "good life" also will be explored as a motivation to join gangs in the first place. The role of melancholia, however, remains unchanged as loss is not surpassed, only one finds themself among the dead.

The first question I ask him is about time, notably how his perception of time changed throughout his time in prison. He responds, "Getting a routine, gambling, reading, working out, the main thing is having a routine, as long as you have a routine the days go by fast. My support system was my daughters, ex, girlfriend, sisters, parents, some guys don't have that though so it gets harder. The main thing is that time doesn't stop, you still hold onto things out there but life goes on out there. Whether you're in there for a year, a day, ten years, you know certain people
have certain expectations. You know, oh when I come out this is going to be here, or I'm going to have this job, or my girlfriend still going to be there, my kids will still love me uh, you know but time keeps moving things change. So you go out, you come out to the world and you get hit with that reality--that's what causes some people to relapse--their girl moved on, the kids are grown and don't want to talk to him, that plays a big role."

Here is a classic example of cruel optimism, many men in prison pin their hope on desires that eventually become an obstacle to their flourishing. Through routine time may be created--and certainly reading or working out may benefit an individual--but ultimately, the future they desire at the end of this period sends them back to square one, "relapse." Here telos structures the relations of cruel optimism. One labors to construct time, and time represents a ferment of the various metabolic processes that bring a before to an after.\(^{28}\) Time as a social concept that may represent some labor relation is motivated by some future desire. In the case of wage labor, it gestures at some desire to live but never encapsulate life.\(^{29}\) Here, the desire to construct time is motivated by a future abstraction, particularly by the present loss of said abstraction. The investment here isn't simply about an object but is about the labor put into producing temporal flow as motivated by a "future." It's important to note that this attachment to a future-oriented position is really about the hope that some past loss isn't gone. Here melancholia is made into a future orientation via an effort to refuse loss.

As the affective state in which one (or a community) is unable to surpass loss, melancholia is transformed just as the boys transform it to sport. Only here, the stagnancy of this temporality is artificially made into flowing waters. Yet, the loss is not surpassed as the attitudes


\(^{29}\) Ibid
towards it are constituent to the material nature that the abstraction represents. In this case, the loss is transformed into a teleological desire, but once one is brought back into the larger society, one is reminded that they have premised their lives on something gone. In this, the prison bid becomes an act of mourning—-even when the mourning is presented as hope. Trapped in denial, a phase of mourning, loss is not surpassed as this functions as means to let hope return you to imprisonment and what some may term social death.30

About the relationship between how time is experienced in and outside of prison, my interlocutor explains, "There is a separation, if you're in a gang it's easy to find out what's going on outside—-so and so is here, so and so is there, someone got killed, so and so is in jail or got kids, whatever. So inside people get the word but yeah life goes on, your family isn't going to tell you the bad stuff going on, they're not going to say your girls going out with another guy, life goes on. I was incarcerated for three years, and three years ain't nothing, I was considered a short timer, you got some guys serving a couple years, life, so for me I was lucky that my girl was still there, my kids were a good age, I didn't come to a big shocker outside. There's people who come out after 10, 15 years and the world is totally different—-they don't have a cellphone or know how to use a computer."

Orlando Patterson uses the term social death to explain how some individuals may not be considered human by broader society via certain relations of power. In his example, it is slavery.31 Joshua M. Price uses this term to describe prison as a form of social death.32 In the experience of my interlocutor, he notes that long-timers, people who serve long-term prison sentences, may lack the very tools necessary to function as an individual in contemporary

32 Price, Joshua M. *Prison and Social Death*. 
society. This prevents one from lacking markers of social belonging or citizenship but prevents even the knowledge of how to navigate the social that is constituent to these markers of citizenship. This represents a denial of consumer citizenship, which has come to be a marker of contemporary U.S. practices of social belonging and political pacification.\footnote{See: Cohen, Lizabeth. \textit{A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America}. New York: Knopf, 2003. And Cronin, Ann. \textit{Advertising and Consumer Citizenship: Gender, Images, and Rights}. London: Routledge, 2000.} In addition to the prison itself denying individuals their humanity through violence and humiliation, the hope towards the future itself denies people a future. The contemporary attitudes towards a "good life," that my interlocutor explains motivates one to survive one's prison bid, cruelly contribute to the maintenance of these social relations. This doesn't simply maintain an individual's melancholic position, but a community's as well.

This is echoed by my interlocutor, who, when asked about what he believes to be prison's main effect on society, states the following, "Prison affects society because you got kids growing up without fathers...so many people incarcerated for non-violent offenses. So many years for petty crime, and at the time you got families out here missing them, loss of income, kids growing up and the cycle just continues. You got a kid growing up without a father, that doesn't automatically disqualify them from having a good life, but the statistics show they have it a lot harder growing up. Especially in my neighborhood, where you're exposed to all this on a daily basis, not having a male figure to show you, hey stay away from this or to talk to you like a man."

The prison system perpetuates itself based on how the absence of community members perpetuates violence; violence being a justification for the continuation of prisons.\footnote{Davis, Angela Y. \textit{Are Prisons Obsolete}? Seven Stories Press, 2011.} Part of this process is the influence of social attitudes towards the future, particularly how future abstractions
motivate endurance to present suffering and prove detrimental in the long term. In the case of the kids growing up without a father, this allows for these abstractions that promise a good life to be all the more damaging. My interlocutor explains that his motivation, and the main motivation for boys to join a street gang, is to live some sort of good life. He says that, "You know you're 15 hanging out with the older guys, and they got a girlfriend, they got the cars, they got the money, so you want to do the same thing. I mean I was 15 years old, selling weed started making money. I started cutting class having little girlfriends, so you kinda like that lifestyle, that rush. Looking at it now, yeah it was the average thing to do--lets go get girls, sell drugs". The broader social attitude towards objects that promise a good life incentivize children to seek out these symbols, and prison keeps those who've already learned the cruel nature of these relationships from sharing a warning.

Continuing, my interlocutor notes, "prisons are just meant to punish, to keep you out of society. I think prison isn't trying to rehabilitate you, you're in there like you're shit, you have no rights, you could be a nonviolent offender and to get medical services you have to be damn near dying to get sent out for something. They don't care, you could be feeling like shit but unless you're dying, but, how many people die in their care for minor things? For something that could be prevented? You know they don't even offer you any skills. They say they got these programs in there but it's just one or two books and they say they taught you something. I took a few classes in there and you know they didn't teach me shit. That's why a lot, why the reincarceration rate is so high, it's ridiculous. You got brothers and fathers away from their families, mothers away from their kids. If you're Black or Hispanic you got a higher chance of getting incarcerated. Once you're in the system that's it, whether it be a minor probation--my first two cases were
probations--its on your record as a felony and then when you're applying to a job it's the same as if you spent 20 years."

The role of social death isn’t limited to simply the denial of the objects and knowledge necessary for social participation, but also how legal categories themselves contribute to a social death sentence. Stories of people in prison often include various experiences in which they are denied fundamental human relations, such as not receiving care in the face of pain or illness or access to education.\textsuperscript{35} Even during the COVID pandemic, these populations have been denied an ability to social distance, stay at home, or participate in the general practices that come to define participation in the social.\textsuperscript{36} Legally, humanity is denied via the role a felony status may have in a job search and economic participation in society--particularly given how important having a job and being a “working member of society” is to social citizenship in the United States.\textsuperscript{37} These various means of social death hint at how morning may take on a new meaning when you find yourself among the dead.

Prison does kill, especially due to poor health care and general negligence towards an aging prison population.\textsuperscript{38} Though social death, as a denial of humanity, may sound symbolic--it is important to note that it also encapsulates relations of power that place certain populations closer to death.\textsuperscript{39} In the case of the population I study, social death has looked like increased precarity--from imprisonment to poor educational opportunities--which all function as a means of denying humanity and unique relation with time. The insight on time being related to

\textsuperscript{36} See Raul Dorado’s work in Truth Out and In These Times, and the St. Louis Prison Uprisings
\textsuperscript{37} Berlant, Lauren. Citizenship | Keywords for American Cultural Studies. 3rd ed. Vol. Keywords for American Cultural Studies. NYU Press.
belonging is not a new one. Louis Althusser has argued that each level within society has its temporal relations.\textsuperscript{40} John R. Hall has built on Althusser's work by arguing that the study of history must understand social time and take note of its relation to intersubjective relationships.\textsuperscript{41} Dana Luciano puts forth the term chronobiopolitics to link grief to the study of time and historicity.\textsuperscript{42} The work of these scholars helps us understand that a community's perception of time is a vantage point into the relationship between death (in its various incarnations, from the state to the ghost) and the social forces that create histories we can call masculinity. In the case of the participants, via understanding their experience of social death, one may gain further insight into the psychic processes that factor into their daily lives.

Here social death plays a role in the melancholia of the participants via further making their lives about death. The haunting affect of having homes be scenes of death to the state violence that reminds one of their social death and the general precarity experienced daily, loss is nearly impossible to surpass. In studying the lives of these men, this means that the ethos of masculinity in this community is hard to shake. Its role in motivating men to place themselves into increasingly precarious situations--such as acting out "death before dishonor"--can't be understated as these attitudes are a product of what it means to participate in the social. The engagement with communal space, being influenced by the sensorium of U.S. society, state violence all work together to produce the temporal planes through which men in this community understand the world. These forces not only work to produce melancholy but to maintain these men as melancholic subjects.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid
Thus far, this thesis has explored how death's haunting of space influences affective belonging in a community and alters how people are socialized. The example I've explored is death's role in producing a unique ethos of masculinity among men in the Latino street gangs of Chicago. This section explores how social belonging and social institutions have a role in these subject formations. Undergirding these relations is how one's attitudes and perceptions of time further mark these processes of social belonging. In the first section, I left this at melancholy and a sense of time wrapped up in past loss. This section explored how time can be used to locate these men within the temporal desires created by U.S. social belonging--but how social death still denies any semblance of citizenship or humanity.

Further, social death creates further precarity and a sense of loss of one's own life via being denied humanity. This exacerbates the melancholic nature of masculinity in this community as living in society is wrapped up in death. Therefore, the danger is normalized. As the first section noted, part of the ethos of masculinity is to be willing to engage in seemingly illogical acts that may result in one's death. The very actions used to justify the violence done to these men--participation in a street gang, selling drugs, committing violence--is in many ways influenced by the ways they are offered participation in the social: through death and its many incarnations.
Dead Boy’s Refrain

"I feel this guy and he's evil."

Who is our Juan Doe? In this incarnation, I have found him strewn across courtyards, fields, buildings built over his grave—in news articles, cautionary tales, and scandal. He is an arm reaching from behind mist, one that you may recognize as your kin, perhaps even as yourself, but these limbs aren't human. They are no longer yours. My Juan Doe, the boys I grew up with and without, is death walking.

What else is there to know? After all, you know him when you see him: air-brushed onto shirts, a reflection in a teardrop, a cucuy. His story unfolds in my neighborhood right now, yet the archive has already marked him missing. His death is sealed in a cautionary tale—he is a boogeyman in a teacher's tool kit, "don't end up like [name]." And yet, he was already dead.

Saidiya Hartman's "Venus in Two Acts" wrestles with the impossibility of discovering anything not already known about Venus—who both represents a girl whose name was brought up during a trial, but also the Black women whose existence is only recorded in the "violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses, and identified them with names tossed-off as insults and crass jokes."43

This refrain returns to the concept of death to look at someone who is in the process of crossing over. I use Juan Doe, a name I give to someone who at once is meant to represent an

amalgamation of Mexican stereotypes and an actual individual, to write a semi-fictional narration of a history that intersects with the various experiences of the participants--but is still rooted in an actual event that took place in my community.\textsuperscript{44} I use this example of critical fabulation to round out my analysis of death, masculinity, and time via generating a "historical" account of Juan Doe--but regardless of any productive or generative end, we may take this as an opportunity to mourn.

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"[name 1], there's this person," Juan said, "I feel this guy and he's evil."\textsuperscript{45} That was when he was young. No one else knew the omen he saw. Juan was just one of the guys, a group that's been in each other's lives for years, a group that does good and bad together, friends. It hadn't been that long since one of his oldest friends, the current "Inca" (executive role of a Latin Kings chapter), had become a "new king" (retirement) to pursue higher education.\textsuperscript{46} It also hadn't been long that the new Inca was in power--and taking full advantage of the role. He'd give the guys violations over anything, and with every punch and ass-whooping, the breaking point came


\textsuperscript{45} Originally, this section was about 25 pages in length and, based on interviews, included a discussion of the role of “omens” in Rand Grove. According to one of the participants, this was a quote that one of the people involved in these murders would often say growing up. Many people in Rand Grove report having seen ghosts or omens which often appear in the form of a person. They represent a resonance between an entity and a person in this community whereby the person experiences some affective state believed to be shared with the omen. It is also believed that certain omens are associated with murders. For instance a kid around the age of fourteen had murdered his bully on one of the benches in the community, this event was explained as having been influenced by a “fear omen”. There are also “good omens” that provide protection or calm people in the face of insecurity. Many families and individuals report having seen the same omens and these omens are linked to place (the same apartment will report the same omen through time).

\textsuperscript{46} Though membership in the Latin Kings is often believed to be for life there are certain statuses that allow for members to no longer be active. This was the case in the mid 90s when the first Inca of the Palatine Latin Kings went to college.
closer and closer.\textsuperscript{47} Maybe it made sense to be stricter now. After all, now the Kings were a business--for the first time in the suburbs, the Latin Kings had begun to move drugs.\textsuperscript{48} New leadership, a new vision for what the Kings could be, and, with this, maybe they could be rich.

So, he went along with it, I mean, that was his buddy anyway, and he was the Inca. Some of the others weren't as loyal or perhaps less willing to take violations over "petty shit." The breaking point would come like high tide, crashing over onto the ground relentlessly, over and over, scraping away at where the land begins. The first wave came, and the organization split in two. The original chapter now had a renegade counterpart. The infighting this produced led to someone's death and, eventually, a hunt for the person who had snitched on the murderer.\textsuperscript{49}

Juan wakes up just to stare at a white ceiling as the minutes go by. He hears the plastic blinds clattering against each other as wind seeps in from the window. It's April, too cold to turn on the AC but too hot to let the radiator decide the room's temperature. The air in the apartment always has a grey tint, not due to smoke or gas, but simply because the light that manages to wriggle its way inside is always grey. He never rises in silence. The bed's creaks betray him. Then the room is amber, a color that only ever makes the old furniture of the apartment all the ghastlier. He walks through the hall past rooms full of family members. His parents are already at work, but the cereal box is always there to wish him a good day. Mornings in these apartments are the only quiet moments.

\textsuperscript{47} The second Inca of the Latin Kings was reportedly a very strict leader and would be very liberal with handing out violations. Violations are essentially where the gang jumps one of its members as punishment for breaking one of the rules of the gang.

\textsuperscript{48} Palatine Latin kings hadn't got involved with the drug trade till the 90s (after the first Inca of this chapter left to pursue higher education).

\textsuperscript{49} An interview revealed to me that one of the Incas (there were now two chapters in the suburbs) had set out to silence a witness to a murder and wanted this witness's cousin to reveal his location.
Juan wishes he could have stayed staring at the ceiling all day, and in some ways, he did. Though different scenes play before his eyes--work, going to la rosita to get groceries for the family, meeting up with friends, walking back and forth across the intersection as he completes errands, cars passing by--the day has the same uncanny familiarity as the ceiling he looks up at every morning.\textsuperscript{50} As a projector, the scenes of the day succeed each other with the sounds of clicks and the whizzing of tapes playing. He's 19, working some job as all his buddies do. High school ended too early for him; he'd been kicked out for something a friend did--the school barely needed an excuse to expel the poor Mexicans--so he'd been paying adult consequences for childhood actions for a minute now.\textsuperscript{51} Back then, the film was brighter, but now it's been worn out from being played on-loup.

Though the days repeated, this didn't stop him or his buddies from getting older. With age, the nature of their friendships would alter and mutate, even if routine remained the same. Today, as he walked through his life, his mind was so clouded he could hardly see. Ambling through the grey light, he made his way back home, walked inside, fell on his bed, and stared up at the ceiling for a few more moments.

“How’d I get here?” he thought. It only felt like minutes since he was running across the suburbs with the Kings, having an adventure, living a life where it felt like they’d been denied one. Compared to school--where teachers looked at you with scorn for whatever crime some other kid had committed before you, or where they let you rot in some remedial class while the white kids called you a wetback or through soap at you while you waited for the bus--running

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[50] This is based on the Rand and Dundee intersection that contains many of the local stores.
\item[51] Interviews explain that it is quite common for Mexican boys to be expelled from the local highschool. I myself was the only one to graduate out of the group of friends I had entered highschool with.
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with the Kings felt like you were somebody. Even if you'd be getting in trouble, it wasn't like you were doing anything worse than the other badass kids. That's what the gang used to be, badass kids on an adventure, but now they weren't exactly kids anymore. Neither he nor any of the other gang members knew when exactly the gang lost its naivete, but at some point, they went from "ghetto troublemaker," to "drop out," to "gang member," though in many ways they were always simultaneously subject to all these tropes.

When did "criminal" get into the mix? Maybe it was when they started selling drugs? How did teenagers start moving drugs anyways? Who first approached them and put it in their heads that this was the ticket to no longer having to be some drop out working some chump job anymore, that this was their chance to be someone again? I guess no one, not even Juan, was asking those questions. Maybe they'd all assumed that these kids were always drug dealers. Maybe the kids thought this was just a part of the adventure.

Now Juan was strapped in, watching the projection speed up, seeing his life get more and more surreal, more and more like a movie. The horror of not being able to escape one's life had begun to set in, and suddenly, at the foot of his bed, was that man. More than a figure, he was a feeling, of fear, of evil. He never said anything. He'd just appear. As the stranger lurked in his room, he got up and hurried out of his apartment.

When the sun sets, the world turns blue around him. As he cuts through the cerulean air with his paces, he eventually reaches his friends. They’re here to take him to a party. They begin to walk over, passing by the neighborhood kids playing unsupervised as the night progresses.

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52 Being in a gang giving the feeling of being someone is based on the interview included in the previous section.

53 The white students in this area would throw soap at Mexican students in the 80s and 90s.

54 It's not uncommon to walk through one of these communities at 2 am and find five-year-olds running around unsupervised. This wasn’t necessarily unsafe either because the communities were so close knit and often home to many members of the same family.
This Friday in April seems paradoxical. As new life sprouts up next to them, Juan can't shake the fear of death.

They arrive and begin to set up the chairs. Placing the supplies on the tables, they wait anxiously for the last two guests to arrive.

Outside, the two are arriving. As they pass through the doors and walk up the stairs to the apartment, each creak of the stairs is an ominous reminder of the lack of music. Maybe they're just early; maybe something happened? They make their way to the door; Juan is there to greet them. They're escorted into a room full of their childhood friends. The door closes behind them.

The party was set up to get two friends to reveal the whereabouts of their cousin, who had recently snitched on the Kings for a murder. It was an accident, it was like a movie fast-forwarding through a climax, but the actors still chose to continue. They had planned just to bind them with duct tape and beat a confession out of them. But when one of the guys was too rough, they unintentionally committed murder. In a state of panic, they killed the witness. They didn't want to die; they knew that they'd be imprisoned for life if they got caught. So, to escape this madness, they took the bodies, stole a van, took them to an empty lot in the West Side of Chicago, and set the kids and the van aflame.

So how did it get to this? Kids murdering kids? Returning to the first section, one may recall the unique ethos of masculinity within this community, namely, that the spectre of violence in this community transforms the meaning of space. The melancholia this maintains...
transforms perceptions of time and creates unique relations to death. This forms the basis through which boys understand their roles as men. In the example of the 1998 double murder, the "willingness to death" is more than literal. It also represents the willingness to "throw away" one's own life to protect a brother from going to jail and finding the snitch who betrayed what being a man means to this community. After all, being a man means, "you're willing to die, or go to the grave, or do your prison bid, whatever, before, you know, snitching on your crew or before turning your back on someone." Though this section hopes to point to, the presence of this violence isn't natural but rather represents the disinvestment in these boys that encourages death and makes life feel untenable. Growing up and seeing life denied to you, joining a gang, or dealing becomes an act of insurgency--an attempt to reclaim a "good life" or even just a life after being denied. Where mourning is a daily act, where your community is a graveyard, where with every passing day you see spectres that look more and more like you, the "violence" of gangs is an outcry--a sobbing denial that you can still mean something.

In 1998, the community lost two sons to violence and had four taken from them by the state. This week, more than two decades later, my heart breaks as I hear news of the police murder of Adam Toledo and see the CPD and Lightfoot call for felony charges to be brought against Ruben Roman. We are denied the chance to heal; every hurt is met with the state throwing salt in open wounds. I see Adam and can't help but see the kids I grew up with. In the face of such evil, I can hardly hold the names of friends. I'm reminded of the funerals I've attended for family members--especially the boys my age--I think of the biblical scenes of people tearing their sackcloth in mourning. I hope that this time the carceral state is torn along with it.

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60 From the interview in the previous section.
62 See also: https://divest-fjj.org/
Eulogy

“When you finish with college and get a big ass house, you better not forget about me, you better invite me over!”

When will the mourning end? As I walk through my old apartment complex, I wonder where everyone's gone. The buildings have been repainted, the basketball court taken down, but the skeleton remains the same. Though most of my long-term friends and community members have moved out or been evicted over time, the air still retains the feeling of long summer days with games of tag in the nighttime. The same older man still owns the liquor store on the corner, and he still refuses to know anyone's name. The gap in the fence has survived gates being put up around the community; the flea market is now a car dealership. I see police sirens near the pool friends, and I used to sneak into. I'm yet to hear my name.
This project has, in many ways, been a eulogy to the community I come from. Through the process of this research, I have savored the memories that have walked back into my life. I have hoped to shed light on the relationship between death, masculinity, and time via a framework centered on melancholia. The men I grew up with have been too complex to capture on paper, but I hoped to provide a view into the affective processes that make sense of this ethos of masculinity centered on such concepts as "death before dishonor." More importantly, I've had the pleasure of writing alongside them and listening to hours of conversation with friends, family, and strangers, inspiring experimentation in methods.

Through this experiment, I've had the opportunity to understand that even a perception of time centered on loss can be beautiful, and that hope can be ugly. I've sought to gesture to time's variability across culture and how it can be used as a tool to understand dynamics that often elude us. In this, I've gained an appreciation for the time I grew up with. Ultimately, at the center of mourning is love, and melancholia is care so deep it transforms us. So, as I walk through apartments and never hear my name, a eulogy plays in my head, and the mourning never ends.
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