

Crips in Oregon?

by Larry Baker

The Eugene Register-Guard newspaper headline inflamed Black and white parents throughout the Willamette Valley: "CALIFORNIA STREET GANGS MOVING TO OREGON."

The article, written by Bob Keefer, R-G reporter, on April 12, 1987, reads "Southern California urban street gangs are beginning to invade the Portland and Eugene communities."

The most noted gang, named Crips, Keefer writes, are Black youths roaming and terrorizing the communities in south-central Los Angeles. They terrify Black neighborhoods by assaults, gun fire, and dealing cocaine.

Another Southern California gang of youths Keefer identifies in his article is named Latino. They originated in the barrio in and around east Los Angeles as Mexican immigrants from the early 1900's, and operate in the same manner as the Crips.

Officer Craig Ward of the Portland Police Bureau intelligence division was interviewed by Keefer as saying: "They are a very high profile kind of people. I don't know if they cognitantly deal in terror or not, but people in northeast Portland are just terrified of them." Ward continues, "We never had more than six genuine California Crips in town at any one time, but the impact they have is disproportionate to their numbers."

Keefer reports Ward saying, "The gang members, who are heavily armed—one Portland raid produced an AK-47 assault rifle—have been seen in Portland on and off since 1982, but first established an ongoing presence there last summer." Says Ward, whose normal assignment is monitoring outlaw motorcycle gangs, "For the last three months, I've been working solid Crips."

Keefer reportedly contacted Sgt. Wes McBride, operation sergeant for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's gang detail and the president of the California Gang Investigators Association. "They even have taken over some of our prison gangs down here. The hard core prison gangs fear them because they'll kill you—and they'll kill you right in front of the guards. They're not old enough to worry about it," says McBride.

Over the phone, McBride gave Keefer the gang's history; and law enforcement agencies in Southern California monitor more than 600 street gangs with a combined membership estimated at between 40,000 and 50,000 youths, mostly young men in their late teens and early 20's.

The crips, actually a group of at least 140 separate street gangs in Southern California, are the largest and most powerful of the Black gangs that grew up in and around the Black communities of Compton and Watts after the Watts riots of 1965. The Black gangs have tended to prey less on each other in formal territorial disputes and more on outsiders, Keefer wrote.

Ward, the Portland policeman, says, "The Crips have been flying to Portland with large sums of cash and have been trying to take over the drug market. They will blend into the Black community, then they muscle in on the existing crack distribution network. That's physically muscling in. They kick in the door and tell people they are working for them now. If you don't like that, we're going to beat the hell out of you or kill you," Keefer quoted Ward.

It was also cited in Keefer's article that the Southern California authorities cite the Crips as responsible for the deaths of 328 people in gang-related

murders in 1986 alone.

Ward was quoted by Keefer as saying, "Thus far no uninvolved victims have fallen prey to Crips' violence in Portland. We've come very close, and there's a maybe. But the victim is uncooperative. She says the bullet just came through the wall and hit her. Well, it was a brick wall."

Ward continued by stating, "We don't know how many of these crimes are occurring, but we keep hearing from multiple sources that these guys are involved at a much higher level than crime reports would indicate."

The Eugene Register-Guard's report highlights that the Southern California gangs have begun to show up in a number of other cities around the country as well. Police in Phoenix, Arizona; Shreveport, LA; and a small-town sheriff in rural Georgia has reported problems with the Crips, with these statements made by detective Norm Sorenson, who tracks Southern California gangs for the Long Beach police department.

"At first, I thought that one of my buddies was making a joke," Sorenson supposedly had said. "If you have any evidence of gang activity, it will likely grow and grow until something is done to stop it."

Sorenson adds, "You probably still have a chance to stop it there (Eugene and Portland) with real proactive police work. Anything we can do here now is putting a bandage on cancer."

McBride reportedly says, "You guys have a chance. You've obviously recognized there's a problem. Many jurisdictions hide at first. Next thing you have so many gang members you can't do anything about it. Now you have to identify the players."

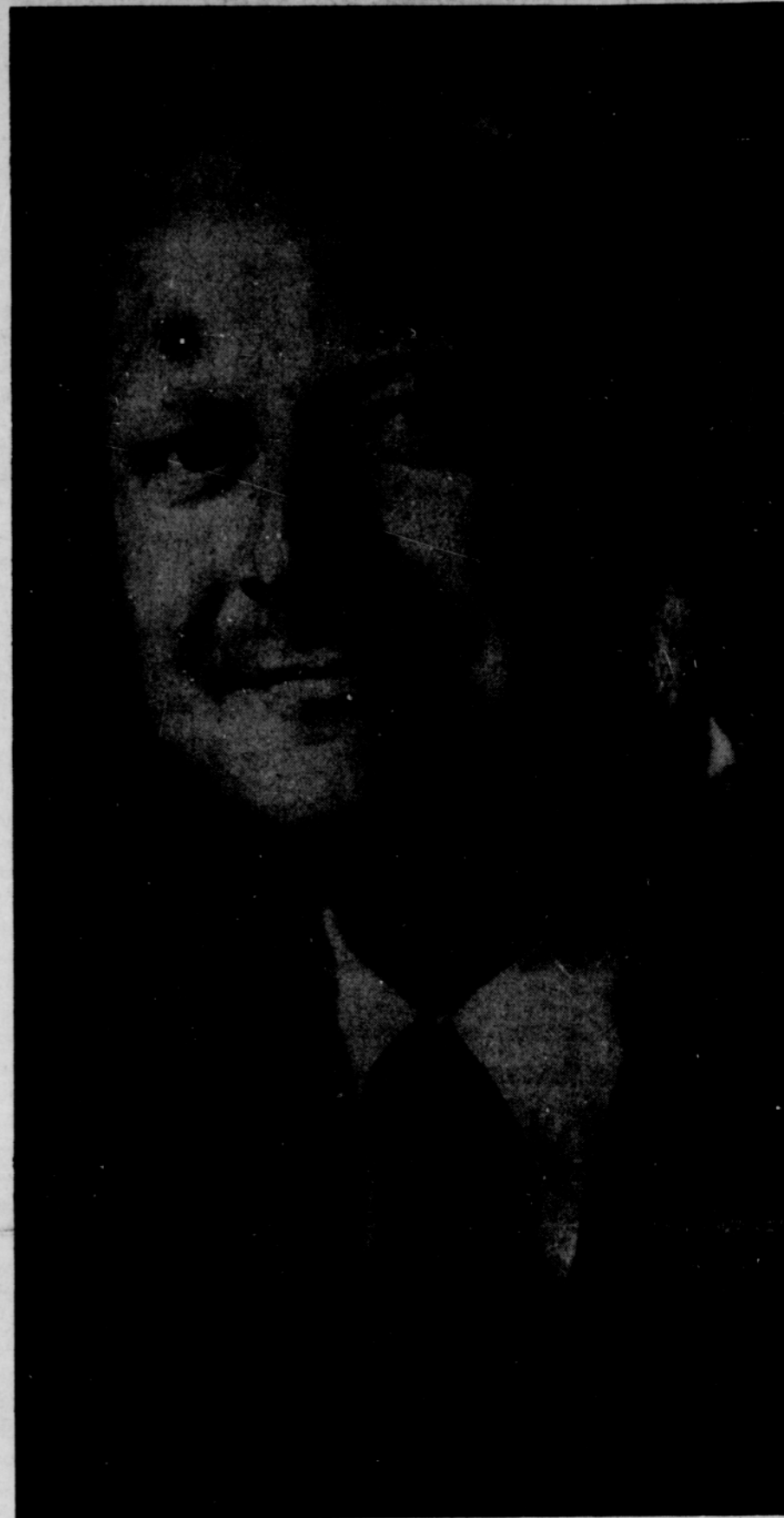
"Just because a guy says he's a Crip, you can't arrest him. You watch him. You can follow him around," stated McBride. "You can watch everything he does and make him so uncomfortable, he will go somewhere else to do it. They understand when they're not welcome."

On local level reporting, Keefer writes, "although the problem is not nearly as severe, Eugene does have a growing street gang problem, police say, and the influence of Southern California gangs is unmistakable, from the stylized graffiti appearing in downtown alleys to the manner of dress of some youth." (The word "Crips" was found written on a wall in the Eugene Mall.)

"Police have recently begun to recognize the signs of gang activity," says Officer Vern Hoyer of the Eugene police. Writes Keefer, "Eugene is real naive to a lot of things. People here are used to leaving the door open all night long and airing out the house while they sleep. We're real vulnerable. We're getting victimized."

Hoyer stated that while individual members of LA street gangs have appeared in Eugene—one member of the Crips, convicted of murder and now a fugitive, reportedly has been seen in town, and a number of other gang members are known to be living here—there is no sign that Southern California gangs have begun to move into this community in an organized fashion the way they have in Portland.

The Eugene R.G. reporter wrote, in addition, "Police, though, are aware of at least three local gangs—The Party Boys, a white gang; The Home Boys, or HBO's, a Black gang; and The Sanchez Brothers, a Latino gang—that are operating in Eugene and that show similarities to LA street gangs."



Doug Bates, Managing Editor, Eugene Register-Guard. "We goofed!" See Page 5 for story.

Fear and Strong Reactions Strike Blacks and Other Minorities in Eugene Area

by Larry Baker

Immediately, within days of the Register-Guard's headline and publication of the article, Black concerned parents assembled themselves in a fit of anger and frustration. It was quickly acknowledged, after speaking with their children, no such Black gang members were pressuring them within their circle of friends. But the parents were also beginning to hear problems of how members of the Eugene police were beginning to seek information from the Black children on who in the city belonged to the Crips, and if the gang named The Sanchez Brothers was part of the Latino gang which had been published in the RG.

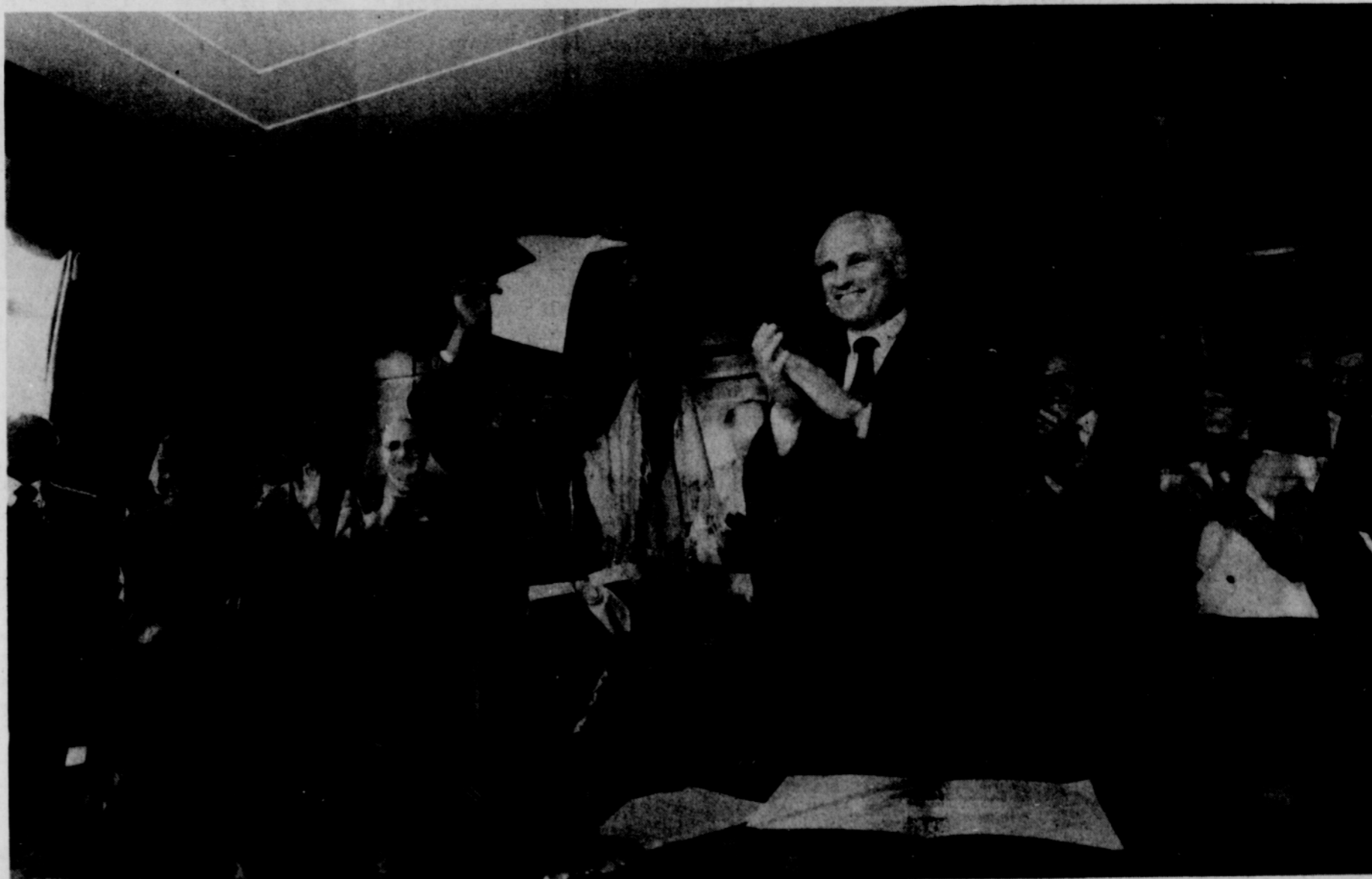
According to Jesse Oliver, the son of Jan Oliver, Director of the Council of Minority Education of the University of Oregon, "The Sanchez Brothers are a group of five friends who acquired their name in a Halloween gag last year." Says Oliver, "The gang was made up of three whites, one Iranian, and himself." He (Oliver) had no idea how the police had come to call his group a "gang."

"My son was even stopped and questioned by the police on his activities in the community," said Dr. Ed Coleman, Director of Ethnic Studies at the University of Oregon.

Suddenly it became very apparent how many other Blacks and minorities must have been going through the same type of racial harassment by the law enforcement authorities in the city of Eugene. A meeting of the minds was quickly brought together on what approach to take to question accuracy of the article and statements published.

The Black parents were allowed an audience with Police Department

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Gov. Signs Divestment Bill

A very happy Rep. Margaret Carter holds up House Bill 2001 following its signing by Gov. Neil Goldschmidt. The bill is one of the strongest in the country and is seen as giving the U.S. anti-apartheid movement a boost. HB 2001 requires the state

to sell about \$800 million worth of investments in U.S. companies doing business in So. Africa.

Photo by Richard J. Brown