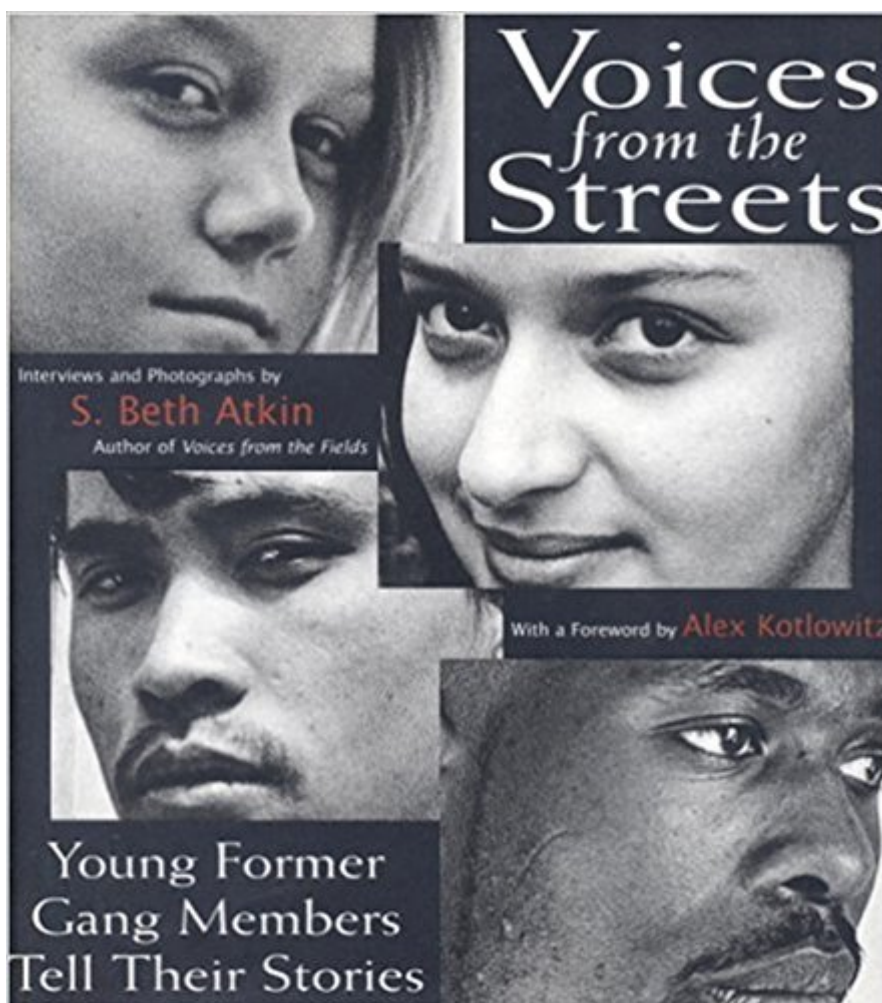




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Voices From The Streets: Young Gang Members Tell Their Stories



Synopsis

First-person interviews, photographs, poetry, journal entries, and scrapbooks provide a firsthand look at the lives of former gang members, who describe life in violent, poverty-stricken neighborhoods, why they became involved with gangs, and what led them to seek a better way of life.

Book Information

Age Range: 12 and up

Lexile Measure: 830L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 131 pages

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Customer Reviews

Grade 7 Up? In this revealing book, Atkin shares interviews with former gang members she met, photographed, and interviewed in a two-year odyssey to document why young people join gangs and how they terminate memberships and reenter society's mainstream. Brandy England, a white middle-class teen from Ohio, joined a gang to get her mother's attention. Saroeum Phoung joined the Boston Red Dragons with other Cambodian youths to gain a sense of cultural identity and to stave off racist physical attacks. Elena Rojas, a first-generation Cuban-American living in Miami, wanted to escape physical abuse from a former boyfriend. Patrick is an Irish-Puerto Rican who lives in a Massachusetts town where violence is simply accepted as a way of life. Following the first-person accounts of these four young people, Atkin additionally profiles former gang members and other concerned adults who spend their lives trying to save young people from the destructive effects of gangs. The book is liberally illustrated with the author's stark black-and-white photos. The young people's comments are largely unedited, which means there is plenty of street language in

the narratives. Nothing in them offends as much, however, as the horrors of their lives. All have witnessed the violent deaths of friends and family, and many have been forced to cope with dysfunctional parents. An extremely powerful and revealing book that deserves to be read by a much, much wider audience than it is unfortunately likely to receive. ?Jerry D. Flack, University of Colorado, Colorado SpringsCopyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Gr. 8[^]-12. Like Maria Hinojosa (Crews [1995]), Atkin leaves the street language and equally harsh sentiments intact in these first-person testimonies. But Atkin's focus is different, and her overall tone is much more positive: the young people here are rebuilding their lives after leaving a gang. Even so, there's no false comfort in their words as they frankly reveal bits of their personal history, talk about their reasons for joining a gang, and recall what they experienced as a member--the good as well as the bad. They also explain why they quit and what it's like trying to stay out. The mix of young people is excellent--girls as well as boys are here, as old as 20, as young as 13--and as with *Voices in the Fields* (1993), Atkin does a fine job of keeping the words flowing smoothly. A few poems are included, in the writer's native language and in translation, and the final segment is an insightful interview with father and son mentors, both adults, who reach out to gangbangers. The excellent black-and-white photographs capture the individuals behind the words, making each success all the more real. A good glossary is appended, as is an extensive reading list. In many ways this is a frightening book, but it is also a compelling and inspiring one. Stephanie Zvirin

This book consists of a series of chapters, one per "former gang member," with each individual telling his own story; brief biographical sketches and photographs are provided for each. There is a good balance of ethnicities here: Chicano, black, white, and Asian-Americans, male and female. Indeed, the mix extends to ages. One former gang member is only thirteen years old. The testimonies are chilling, the thirteen year old "Elena" (pseudonym) tells us "you can get guns given to you for free. They're stolen-- they'll just give them to you." The short narratives do not glamorize violence or "the life," nor are the youngsters indulging in hagiography. The testimonies are gritty, seem to be honest, and all the youngsters read as if they wanted out of life situations such as poverty, neglect, and violent homes very badly, thus gangs seemed a good alternative. I'd say this is a good resource for someone doing a report on gangs, especially if the writer needs a resource with testimony from former gang members. ken32

It was well written but provided only a glimpse into gang life and leaving it. Excellent photography

but a bit disappointing overall.

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