MONGRELISM AND MANA

THE RISE OF THE PATCHED STREET GANGS, 1960s–1970s

Around the same time that the Hells Angels were transitioning from milk bar cowboys into an outlaw motorcycle club, a group of bodgies created what became arguably New Zealand's most notorious street gang, the Mongrel Mob. The Mob began in the early 1960s as a small group of predominantly Pakeha youths from Wellington and Hawke's Bay who went on to establish the gang's name and some of its defining behaviours and symbols. But the Mob, like the gang scene generally, underwent an ethnic transformation as immigration and internal migration created a social environment conducive to the formation of Polynesian gangs. By the mid-1970s, all street gangs were patched and using the same organisational structures as the outlaw clubs. The Mongrel Mob spread rapidly throughout most of the country. But acting as a counterbalance was their greatest rival, a gang that attempted to forge a positive presence, and which also expanded at express pace: Black Power.

THE MONGRELS

Given the dearth of literature on New Zealand gangs, the legend of the Mongrel Mob's inception has been recorded surprisingly often – albeit in somewhat contradictory versions. The Mongrel Mob – or 'Mongrels' as they were known

until around 1970 – is widely reported to have formed in 1956,[1] when a group of youths are said to have appeared before the Hastings Magistrate's Court and been denounced as 'mongrels'.[2] It is the belief of many authors, and indeed Mongrel Mob members themselves, that the pejorative label appealed to the youths, who adopted it as their gang name.

None of the literature cites a reference for the year 1956, but its source may have been an article in the *New Zealand Truth* published in 1971 in which a Mongrel Mob member claimed that the gang was in existence at that time.[3] In 1956, however, the founding members of the Mongrels were only about ten years old and had not yet met, so the date is clearly incorrect. Exactly when the gang did form remains uncertain.

While all of the original members believe the Hastings Court story to be true, none I have spoken to – when pressed for details – can specifically remember the court incident in Hastings from which the gang's name is said to have derived, except one who says it happened in 1962 and occurred in either the Hutt Valley or Wellington.[4] Another founding member, while not dismissing the story, believes the name was first adopted after local police in Wellington habitually called the youths 'mongrels':

> It [the court case incident in Hastings] probably did [happen], but it happened in Wellington first and it was from the CIB it used to be in them days. You know as far as I can remember back, they [the police] just used to think we were a pack of mongrels [and would call us that].[5]

After speaking with many of the original and early members of the Mongrels, I am not convinced that the court incident occurred at all. The name was nevertheless adopted by the gang as they saw it as an apt description of themselves.

One long-time (but not original) Mongrel Mob member, Dennis Makalio, has become something akin to the gang's unofficial historian, but his efforts at detailing its early history have proven equally troubled. Even without exact data, Makalio has concluded, contrary to popular belief, that the gang's name first emerged in the Wellington region – not Hawke's Bay – in 1962. As such, he believes Wellington and not Hastings is the gang's 'Fatherland', the term used by Mongrel Mob members to recognise Hastings as the gang's birthplace.

One reason for the lack of clarity regarding the gang's precise origin is the transient early lives of many of its founding members. Prominent original Mongrels like Peter ('PD') Steffert, his brother Chappy, and Gary Gerbes met

in the early 1960s after being sent to welfare establishments in the Wellington region as adolescents. Following stints in state care, the youths remained in Wellington for a short time, where some were part of a group called the Petone Rebels, before following Gerbes back to Hawke's Bay where he had grown up. The youths' style at this point was a hangover from the fading bodgie movement: 'We had long hair . . . earrings, gloves – no leathers – P jackets, purple socks – that's what we were, man.'[6]

For several years, the young men, singly or collectively, split their time between Hawke's Bay and Wellington, making friends in each region. Apart from lags in borstal, they moved around often, motivated by a desire to seek adventure. The abundant employment market of the 1960s allowed a freedom to pick up jobs when required. Founding member Chappy Steffert recalls:

> We never stayed anywhere too long. Buying cars and lairing it up here and there. [We would get] out of Borstal and many of these guys would have nowhere to go so they'd go to Wellington because there was that much work . . . We were always coming backwards and forwards . . . we always used to come back to the Bay. There was shearing and all that.[7]

Although Makalio believes the Mongrels' name was first adopted in 1962, I have been unable to find references to it in the media until very late in the decade, and these are from Hawke's Bay and not Wellington. In 1967, four original members of the gang were arrested in Hastings for wilful damage, obscene language, assault and resisting arrest, but there is no mention of them being 'Mongrels', or members of a gang at all.[8] The first specific mention of the gang that I have found is in reports of the disturbances at the 1969 Hastings Blossom Festival.[9] After this time, the name becomes common in both Hawke's Bay and Wellington newspapers.[10]

The paucity of media references to the gang in the 1960s is noteworthy and suggests it came about later in the 1960s, perhaps as late as 1968, or that, without a common identifier like a patch, the gang existed but was not easily recognised by the police or media.[*] In addition, they were possibly too small and transient

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[*] Without firm evidence to the contrary, and based on numerous conversations with those within and surrounding the group in the 1960s, this date is as likely as any for the genuine inception of the gang. Nevertheless, it remains a distinct possibility, perhaps likely, that the name was used in a loose way before that time.

to become a matter of anyone's particular focus. By the late 1960s, however, there were loose groups calling themselves Mongrels in Hawke's Bay and in the Wellington region: '[There were] different pockets – there was nothing united. There were different Mobs.'[11]

In contrast to the growing number of outlaw motorcycle clubs with formal leadership and organisational structure, by the end of the 1960s the Mongrels were simply a loose-knit collection of rebellious youths and young men: 'When you look back on it nothing was planned, it just sort of happened . . . People drifted in and drifted out. It was like an unorganised family.'[12] In fact, it appears likely that different groups came and went in different places, but the name was kept alive by core members. One member of the gang in the late 1960s had previously been a member of a group called the Hastings Night Hawks in the middle of the decade, suggesting the name was not being used then or that there was a lull in the area for a short time.[13]

Despite their disorganised nature in the late 1960s, the Mongrels were nevertheless establishing many of the behaviours and rituals that became synonymous with the gang. Makalio may be correct to argue that the Mongrel Mob's 'Fatherland' label should be shifted to the Wellington region, but it was in Hawke's Bay that the gang early forged its reputation for violence, and it was to the standard of the Hawke's Bay Mongrels that other groups of Mongrels would aspire. As Gary Gerbes explained it:

> We would fight them [people wanting to join the gang] ourselves and see what they could do, or else we would send them in against terrible odds, wait a while, and then go in and smash them [the opposition]. It was all about muscle. We hated bikers and the only other gangs were the Hells Angels, no Niggers [Black Power], no nothing. We just developed utter strength. We built strength. Our other hate was boat people [seamen], overseas ships. And we specialised in going out and wiping pubs out. About eight of us. Tough cunts. And we established such a strong name. If anyone said anything wrong about the Mongrels I would just smash them.[14]

But the word 'mongrel' did not just offer the group of youths a name; it began to be used to actively define them. In what can be seen as a classic case of labelling, the gang started a process of secondary deviation by embarking on 'mongrel' behaviour.[15] The label that had been given and subsequently adopted due to petty acts of misbehaviour began to define the self-image and actions of

its members, which became more extreme. One story Gerbes related involved him and another member of the gang drinking at the Provincial Hotel in Napier, when a female associate made a snide insult about the group. In retaliation, Gerbes grabbed her by the legs and held her up by her ankles, ripping her underwear off with his teeth. After discovering she was menstruating, he pulled her tampon out with his mouth and shook his head smearing blood over his face. The other Mongrel then licked the blood off his face and they both tore at the tampon and ate it.[16]

With a certain degree of self-consciousness from a man who at the time of interview was approaching sixty years of age, Gerbes said such acts were a way to

> justify our standing. Class acts. Most people would go . . . like it was yuck . . . But those are the sort of stunts we used to pull. The sort of things we used to do because we were Mongrels. It was just a thing of class. Our law was our law. It was bad law, it was dumb law – ah – not bad law; it wasn't bad then. But it was just a law all of its own.

Without the impediment of adult supervision, the young men were unknowingly forging enduring subcultural elements. The 'law' Gerbes described would eventually be termed 'mongrelism' by the gang. The concept is somewhat difficult to define, but is basically any outrageous behaviour that distinguishes a Mongrel Mob member's actions from those that are socially acceptable. This creed became embedded in the gang's collective consciousness. Outlaw motorcycle clubs like the Hells Angels were also engaging in defiant antisocial activities, but the Mongrel Mob's undertakings appear more extreme. Indeed, the gang would later commit some of the most notorious crimes of physical and sexual violence in modern New Zealand history, and much of this behaviour is linked to the ideals fostered within the Mongrel Mob during this time.

In recent times, Bruno Isaac, a former Mongrel Mob member, described the gang's attitude in the 1980s:

> If it was considered evil, bad and lawless we embraced it as good; everything was backward or ironic. The "mystery" of the gang was that we were right even if we were wrong; we were good even if we were bad. We embraced a living contradiction. The Mob psyche may have made no sense to outsiders but everything made perfect sense to us. Being a Mongrel meant being able to do anything your mind

could conceive; any form of fantasy or debauchery you were able to dream up was acceptable.[17]

For Gerbes, the gang's antisocial outlook was an outcome of the treatment that many of the youths had received while in state care:

> A lot of those guys [early Mongrels] went through the same place – Levin Training Centre and Epuni Boys' Home . . . It was pretty sad and pretty demoralising – there was sexual abuse by the people that ran the place [and] absolutely shocking violence. I was just a kid and I ran away once. I was made to stand on a square at strict attention and talk to myself. If I stopped saying "legs, legs why did you run away" I would be beaten and thrown in a shed – locked in a shed . . . Those places destroyed our fuckin' heads, man. [So we said] fuck the system. If that was the way they were going to treat us, then we will treat them the same way. We were going to give them what they gave us – and [via the Mongrel Mob] they got it all right.[18]

While violent and antisocial acts became core elements within the Mongrels, the gang was also establishing powerful symbols. One media account from Hastings in 1966 reported that painted swastikas appeared around the town during the Blossom Festival of that year.[19] Although it was not known who was responsible for the vandalism, the Mongrels, like the early Hells Angels at that time, claimed the swastika for their gang, not to demonstrate any racist attitudes, but in symbolic defiance of social norms. To mainstream New Zealand, the swastika represented something terrible and despicable; thus, the Mongrels saw it as a perfect example of mongrelism. The Nazi cry of 'Sieg heil' also became an enduring and important part of the gang's lexicon.

The Mongrel Mob salute developed in the late 1960s too. Members extend the thumb and little finger of one hand while clenching the remaining three digits. The salute is now given with the back of the hand pointing away from the body and looks like the 'shaka' sign commonly used within surfer culture (and indeed by many people as a friendly acknowledgement or greeting). But old photos show that initially the signal was given with the palm of the hand facing outward. The exact origin of the Mob salute is unclear, but many within the gang suggest that the extended thumb and finger look like the ears of a dog, and thus the salute was intended to mimic the bulldog that the gang adopted as a symbol in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Around the same point,

the gang adopted a guttural bark used variously in greeting, celebration, or anger.

Another story about the salute says that PD Steffert, in a display of loyalty to the gang, cut off the three middle digits of one hand so that he would always give the Mongrels' salute. However, according to Gerbes, Steffert lost his fingers in an industrial accident while working in a factory in Petone in the early 1960s. Whenever Steffert waved or gave a Nazi salute, only his little finger and thumb were visible on his misshapen hand, and it is possible that the salute derived from that circumstance.

In numerous ways, then, by means of visual representation, attitudes, symbolic representations, and language, the group was creating more than just a gang. To become a Mongrel was to join a subculture with a collective way of defining its existence. The Mongrel label was embraced by members in a somewhat literal sense as well – mongrels being dogs of mixed breed – and gang members began to pride themselves on accepting anybody who could show true mongrelism, regardless of their ethnicity. While Pakeha youths had originally formed the group's core, by the end of the 1960s the gang had transformed to include a significant number of Maori members:

> To me that [ethnic background] doesn't mean jackshit. A Mongrel is just a Mongrel whether he's Maori, Chinese, Russian or Bob Turk down the fuckin' road. He's a mongrel.[20]

> There was all sorts, mate, Maoris, Coconuts [Polynesians] – anyone that was sort of that way, off the beaten track – they were always with us. We had all fuckin' sorts with us.[21]

The gang's willingness to accept members from a range of ethnicities proved significant as immigration from the Pacific and Maori internal migration grew rapidly in the 1960s. These processes transformed not just the Mongrels, but the entire New Zealand gang scene.

ETHNIC MIGRATIONS AND MULTIPLE MARGINALITY

Auckland gangs in the late 1950s were overwhelmingly Pakeha.[22] By the early 1970s, the city's gangs were dominated by Maori and to a lesser degree youths

from the Pacific Islands.[23] In a little more than ten years, the ethnic make-up of gangs had undergone a striking and rapid transformation; one which reflected demographic changes brought about by immigration and internal migration and the social problems that ensued from those movements.

Drawn by New Zealand's booming economy during the 1950s and 1960s, and encouraged by the government and businesses alike, migrants from the Pacific flocked to Auckland in particular.[24] In 1945, fewer than 2000 Pacific people lived in New Zealand. By 1956, the number had grown to over 8000; and by 1966, it was more than 26,000.[25] Many of these migrants, however, settled in just a few Auckland suburbs – like Grey Lynn and Ponsonby – giving them a significant presence in those areas. The influx of Pacific migrants did contribute to the development and growth of gangs, but in the 1960s and early 1970s it was the movement of Maori to New Zealand's towns and cities that proved more significant and immediate.

With improved immunity to disease, better housing conditions and advances in healthcare, Maori were living longer,[26] and with a birth rate that outpaced even that of Pakeha in the post-war baby boom, the Maori population grew from 99,000 in 1945 to more than 200,000 in 1966.[27] Beginning during World War II, Maori moved in increasing numbers from the country into New Zealand cities in search of work, money, and pleasure.[28] The proportion of Maori living in cities and boroughs grew from 17 per cent in 1945 to 44 per cent in 1966.[29] This growth was most obvious in Auckland where, by 1968, Maori numbered more than 30,000.[30] This process became known as 'urban drift', and it continued so that by the mid-1980s, 80 per cent of Maori lived in urban environs.[31] The term 'drift', however, tends to understate the rapidity and impact of the move from rural to urban living, particularly in the 1960s.

The problems associated with rapid urban change have been linked to gang formation in US studies since gang research first commenced.[32] William Bolitho (1930) and Emory Bogardus (1943) were two of the first researchers to specifically link cultural adjustment factors and gang membership within growing urban spaces. Bolitho believed the clash between immigrant parents and American culture led to a defection from cultural norms and consequently a repudiation of legal norms. Bogardus identified social pressures such as problems with language and school, conflicting methods of parental control, racial discrimination and low socioeconomic status as factors pushing Mexican boys toward gang activity in California. James D. Vigil (1988, 2002), however, has most thoroughly examined ethnic specificities and gang membership. Vigil's

simple but brilliant framework states that gang formation is not an inherent element of any given ethnicity, but that ethnic minorities are more likely to form gangs because of the specific social forces such groups face – a situation he calls 'multiple marginality'.

Multiple marginality is rooted in racism and cultural repression, as well as in migration patterns that produce enclave settlements within which a low socioeconomic status sees minority groups relegated to society's fringes.[33] The process of marginalisation continues with the breakdown of formal and informal social controls, leading to 'street socialisation'.[34] Families, under stress in poor jobs and in deficient housing, fail to provide adequate supervision. The problems are exacerbated by failure at school due to language difficulties and a 'culturally insensitive and ethnocentric curriculum'.[35] Youths facing similar circumstances cling together and have negative experiences with law enforcement, creating hostile attitudes and a rejection of mainstream social norms. At that point they commit to alternative street rules and identity, often by joining a gang.

Multiple marginality is also associated with a permanent underclass. In the New Zealand context, at least up until the mid-1970s, the urban economy easily absorbed new workers and unemployment rates remained negligible. Because they largely worked in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs, however, Maori males were on average earning 90 per cent the income of non-Maori males.[36] Although historian Michael King describes this as the creation of a 'brown proletariat',[37] his contemporary James Belich points out that Maori were not 'low-paid' and their situation represented 'a massive improvement' on what they had experienced thirty years earlier.[38] In strict economic terms, the 1960s certainly had better financial outcomes for Maori than the decades that followed.[39]

Nevertheless, Maori experienced significant difficulty with the transition from traditional tribal folkways to the expectations of urban Pakeha society. 'There were difficulties with managing salaried incomes for the first time, with budgeting, savings and investments, and with accommodation, hire purchase and door-to-door salesmen.'[40] Moreover, although it was 'rarely explicitly exposed in public', Maori often faced overt discrimination in employment, accommodation, and social activities.[41] And some young Maori made claims of police heavy-handedness; the police were described by one media witness as acting in a 'surly and intimidating fashion'.[42] This was not just Maori adjusting to urban life. Many Pakeha were also uneasy – or even hostile – in their first substantial dealings with Maori people. New Zealand trumpeted excellent

Maori–Pakeha relations, but US academic David Ausubel found that while race relations 'are generally much better than in the United States, they are not nearly as good as people think or claim they are'.[43]

The *Report on Department of Maori Affairs* (commonly known as the Hunn Report after its author, the acting Secretary of Maori Affairs, Jack Hunn) outlined and attempted to address the problems being created, or made more obvious, by the advent and speed of Maori urbanisation. The report was commissioned by Labour Prime Minister and Minister of Maori Affairs Walter Nash. With an election looming, however, Nash shelved the report, and it was the newly elected National government's Minister of Maori Affairs, Ralph Hanan, who made it publicly available in 1961. Hanan acknowledged in the report's foreword that some of its content was 'controversial' – perhaps the reason Nash was reluctant to release it – but he nevertheless believed 'that an informed public opinion is necessary to ensure that the reasons behind any subsequent policy measures are understood'.[44]

A number of issues raised in the report are relevant for an understanding of the formation of Polynesian gangs. Hunn found that Maori faced an acute housing shortage and that they were overrepresented in crime statistics. He also pointed to the 'statistical blackout' of Maori within post-primary and university education as well as concern that an 'employment problem, barely incipient at present, could easily become the major challenge for the future' and suggested, therefore, that Maori must be given the opportunity to become equipped to 'compete on equal terms for a much wider range of jobs'.[45]

To counter the problems of urbanisation, the Hunn Report advocated a policy of 'integration' to 'combine (not fuse) the Maori and pakeha elements to form one nation wherein Maori culture remains distinct'.[46] Nevertheless, little provision was made in the report, or by the government subsequently, to protect Maori identity and culture. Indeed, in the 1960s, Ralph Piddington, a Professor of Anthropology at Auckland University, supposed that for most Pakeha, 'Maori are envisaged as dark-skinned Pakeha, having no distinctive cultural characteristics of their own'.[47] It was a view increasingly resisted by urban Maori, many of whom strongly objected to policies of assimilation but who were yet to find an equally powerful voice of protest.[48] While a strong Maori protest movement emerged in the 1970s, its first tentative roots can be found in Maori cultural resistance a decade earlier.

In the early 1960s, some urban Maori were forming singing and arts and crafts groups, and in 1965 the first urban marae was constructed in South

Auckland.[49] In contrast, the government's efforts were focused on what appeared more pressing issues like housing, employment, education, and trade training – work which they assumed would not only assist Maori in practical ways, but also bring about racial merging. As Ralph Hanan noted in 1962: 'I have always advocated that emphasis should be placed on these measures as they are the ones best calculated to facilitate the integration of Maori and pakeha'.[50] Furthermore, Hanan felt such measures would slow the Maori crime rate, and as he held not only the Maori Affairs portfolio but Justice as well, this was also his concern.

In 1961, following recommendations from the Hunn Report, Parliament created the Maori Education Foundation, an independent trust established to 'foster post-primary, technical, and university education and trade and vocational training among Maori people'.[51] Further policy changes extended Maori trade training schemes, which were seen as a way of 'converting a sizable segment of Maori school leavers each year from potential unskilled workers to skilled and qualified tradesmen'.[52] In addition, pre-employment courses were initiated to instruct young Maori migrants in the ways of urban life in Wellington in 1966, Auckland in 1967, and by 1972 in Hamilton and Christchurch as well.[53]

Such measures proved insufficient. In 1965, some 85 per cent of Maori children were leaving school without achieving any qualifications.[54] In 1970, the Department of Education reported that 'many young Maori pupils [are] leaving school inadequately equipped academically, vocationally, and socially to take an effective part in the wider community'.[55] The following year, the National Advisory Committee on Maori Education said that English language difficulties and a curriculum unfamiliar to Maori meant '[t]oo many Maori children find themselves in a failure situation'.[56] In what was often a harsh peer environment, many young Maori found city schooling difficult and frustrating. Vigil has argued that problems of acculturation lead many children down a path of school failure, a failure that not only limits life chances but also contributes to a diminished commitment to societal norms.[57]

Also in response to the Hunn Report, the government intensified its Maori housing campaign. In 1968, Hanan told Parliament that over 10,500 houses had been built for Maori families and 25,000 young Maori had been accommodated in hostels since 1960.[58] The census data of 1971 suggest these actions achieved notable success in narrowing the gap between Maori and non-Maori housing standards, though the number of Maori per dwelling was 6.8 compared to

non-Maori at 5.5.[59] Less successful were efforts to 'pepper pot' Maori houses among those of Pakeha. Seen as desirable to 'promote closer integration',[60] the policy had to be scrapped when it became clear that Maori and Pakeha alike were opposed to it.[61] The abandonment of the policy proved significant.

By housing Maori together, a critical density prevailed in what were often new housing estates, particularly in Wellington and Auckland,[62] where, in an effort to curb costs, multi-unit high-density housing was now favoured.[63] Problems of delinquency had already been identified as stemming from state housing areas; and now places like Otara in South Auckland and Porirua in Wellington became minority 'enclaves' similar – though not as physically decayed – to those identified as problematic by Vigil in the US.[64]

Further problems stemmed from Maori themselves as they failed to adapt to their new urban locales. Maintaining habits of their rural environs, Maori children were allowed a considerable degree of time unsupervised by parents 'busy with other things', and as soon as they were past 'toddler stage' they were often on the street playing well into dusk.[65] Moreover, for many Maori, the infamous 'six o'clock swill' – described by historian Keith Sinclair as 'the most barbarous drinking custom in the world'[66] – was their introduction to drinking in the cities. Many Maori gang members who were children in the 1960s grew up in households of heavy drinking and weekend-long parties often leading to child neglect and abuse. Such problems were a result of, or at the least compounded by, the loss of Maori cultural identity in the city. The primary objective of 'integration' was to merge the cultures into one, and while this policy allowed for Maori to keep a distinct identity, little effort was made to ensure this occurred.[67] The effect was a generation of young urban Maori unconstrained by traditional Maori authority and poorly socialised in Pakeha ways. These Maori youth 'grew up in a cultural vacuum and felt directionless and detached from the society into which they emerged as adults. They formed a large proportion of those subsequently represented in crime statistics'.[68]

Youths weakly tethered to home and school have weak ties to social norms and consequently do not internalise the values of mainstream society.[69] This inevitably leads to non-conformist behaviour and interaction with the police and the criminal justice system. Not surprisingly, the 'alarming' increase in Maori criminality, most noticeable in youth offending, as identified by the Hunn Report, continued unabated through the 1960s.[70] In 1960, Maori youth represented 1269 or 23 per cent of the 'distinct cases' dealt with by the Children's Court.[71] By 1970, these figures had increased to 4866 and 42 per cent

respectively.[72] In the crashing wave of the urban migration, many young Maori were cast adrift, with one inevitable response: gang formation.

It is important, therefore, to understand how gang membership acts as – or is seen as – a solution to the problems confronting marginalised youth. It is clear from international research that there are numerous issues influencing gang membership,[73] and these can be usefully grouped as 'push' and 'pull' factors.[74] External forces within the wider community act to *push* youths toward forming or joining gangs. Those who seek gang membership, however, do so because of what they believe the gang can offer them – the *pull* of gang membership. The benefits, perceived or real, are such things as prestige, power, and belonging. In these ways, the gang can act as a substitute for important human social psychological factors of wellbeing that are otherwise scarce, absent, or seemingly out of reach. Rather than an anomalous manifestation in an otherwise healthy society, the gang is a symptom of certain social maladies that provides a number of important functions for its membership. Given the problems facing many young Maori during the 1960s, the climate was ripe for an explosion of Maori gang membership.

STORMTROOPERS IN PAPATOETOE: POLYNESIAN GANGS IN THE PUBLIC MIND

Gangs were not widely seen as a serious problem for most of the 1960s, during which delinquency generally, and, increasingly, Maori youth crime, were the focus of public and governmental concern. By the late 1960s, however, this perception was beginning to change.

In 1968 the Department of Justice published a detailed report (some 417 pages in length) titled *Crime in New Zealand* in which gangs rate merely a passing mention. 'New Zealand up to the present has been free . . . of serious gang violence, although groups of young people have occasionally shown aggressive tendencies.'[75] This situation, the report concluded, had encouraged two schools of thought: 'One takes the view that group violence exists and that it is serious and disturbing . . . . The other view is that there is no evidence of group activity, in the sense of gangs, operating in New Zealand cities.'[76] By 1970, however, the former view was gaining ascendancy, and at the forefront of concerns were the growing number of Maori- and Pacific-dominated gangs.

In April 1970, following a number of media reports surrounding gang activity, the Mayor of Auckland, Sir Dove-Myer Robinson, said he was no longer

prepared to walk alone in the city at night and vowed to stamp out gang violence.[77] And in May of that year the issue gained significant national attention when as many as 250 members of the 'Stormtroopers' went 'rampaging' through the South Auckland suburb of Papatoetoe.[78] Police Inspector P. J. Gaines said the gang consisted of Maori and Pacific Islanders with a minority – 'about 10 per cent' – of Pakeha youths: 'They have no respect for property or people. It is much worse than the Teddy Boys [of a decade ago].' Gaines also reported that the Stormtroopers had caused damage to property and, on orders from their 'command', had burgled a house. 'With a bit of incitement they can turn a crowd into a rabble. We are concerned at the danger to people and property before we can get there. We are taking firm measures to stop them getting out of hand.'[79]

Political activist Tim Shadbolt described the incident as New Zealand's first 'race riot', adding, 'there's going to be a lot more of it. People don't know how bad the situation is.'[80] Two months later, prominent Maori leader Sir Tui Carroll claimed that gangs were becoming a prominent problem in many places and that 'race relations are being endangered by the actions of young Maoris who leave school too early and face limited and frustrated lives'.[81] Further credence was given to these concerns when the chair of the Auckland District Maori Council, Dr Pat Hohepa, estimated the total number of gang members in Auckland at 2000.[82] The incident in Papatoetoe was not a race riot,[83] and the total number of gang members was almost certainly inflated, but such statements sowed in the public mind a sense that Maori and Pacific Island street gangs posed a new threat to the social fabric.

Responding to the controversy surrounding the Stormtroopers, Brian Edwards' *Gallery* current affairs television programme investigated, interviewing a number of young Polynesian gang members in Auckland. The intention was to highlight the racial unrest that Polynesian street gangs were believed to be fostering in certain parts of the city, but Edwards soon found that the youth gangs did not display 'any anti-Pakeha feeling or indeed any awareness of or interest in racial problems'.[84] Instead, gang members 'had only one topic of conversation, only one barrow to push, only one grudge – the police'.[85] Many complained of harassment and physical violence from the police – similar issues highlighted by the Hells Angels at the Kiokio incident. Edwards regarded the allegations as serious and credible enough to conclude: 'the end result was undeniably a serious indictment of the New Zealand police force. It was not what we had gone to get, but it was what we found.'[86]

On Tuesday 14 July 1970, the *Gallery* episode went to air. Although it gave a glimpse into the world of the embryonic Polynesian street gangs and the changing nature of the gang scene, its focus on the role of the police had a more immediate impact. The Police Commissioner, Angus Sharp, made a statement, published in the *Auckland Star* the next day, defending the police against the allegations and insinuating that the ideas expressed by the gang members had been prompted by the *Gallery* team.

> There is obviously a problem in Auckland, but . . . . It is obvious that the police are the only people trying to do anything at all with these young people who never know any discipline in their lives until they come up against the police and the courts. Obviously they would be hostile to the police and receptive to ideas put into their minds. The police, who are the only ones trying to do anything at all, are being bitterly criticised by people who are perhaps out of sympathy with us anyway, or have a completely erroneous idea of the role of the police.[87]

As a direct result of the public interest stirred up by the *Gallery* programme, the Minister of Police, David Thomson, requested a report on the problems of gangs in Auckland. Perhaps reflecting a desire to broaden the issue rather than focus solely on law and order, the Minister turned toward a committee made of up a wide range of representatives. The Joint Committee on Young Offenders established by Thomson was comprised of senior representatives of various government departments: Justice, Police, Maori and Island Affairs, Internal Affairs, Social Security, and Education.[88] It was to this committee – via the establishment of an 'Investigating Committee' – that the study of the youth gang problem in Auckland fell.

Like the Mazengarb Committee of 1954 and many that followed, the Investigating Committee was given a tight timeframe, in this instance just six weeks.[89] A political desire to be seen to act drove the pace. Despite relying on data from child welfare officers, which meant the demographic information 'may not be typical of gang members generally',[90] the report offers some insight into the changing gang scene, reporting that 75 per cent of gang members were Polynesian (60 per cent of whom were Maori) and 25 per cent Pakeha.[91] Moreover, these new Polynesian street gangs were large. Of the thirty gangs identified by the Investigating Committee, many were thought to have a membership of thirty or more. The largest, made up of Maori and Pacific youths, was the Stormtroopers with 66 members, a number that increased to 200 when