



Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago

By Laurence Ralph

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Every morning Chicagoans wake up to the same stark headlines that read like some macabre score: “13 shot, 4 dead overnight across the city,” and nearly every morning the same elision occurs: what of the nine other victims? As with war, much of our focus on inner-city violence is on the death toll, but the reality is that far more victims live to see another day and must cope with their injuries—both physical and psychological—for the rest of their lives. *Renegade Dreams* is their story. Walking the streets of one of Chicago’s most violent neighborhoods—where the local gang has been active for more than fifty years—Laurence Ralph talks with people whose lives are irrecoverably damaged, seeking to understand how they cope and how they can be better helped.

Going deep into a West Side neighborhood most Chicagoans only know from news reports—a place where children have been shot just for crossing the wrong street—Ralph unearths the fragile humanity that fights to stay alive there, to thrive, against all odds. He talks to mothers, grandmothers, and pastors, to activists and gang leaders, to the maimed and the hopeful, to aspiring rappers, athletes, or those who simply want safe passage to school or a steady job. Gangland Chicago, he shows, is as complicated as ever. It’s not just a warzone but a community, a place where people’s dreams are projected against the backdrop of unemployment, dilapidated housing, incarceration, addiction, and disease, the many hallmarks of urban poverty that harden like so many scars in their lives. Recounting their stories, he wrestles with what it means to be an outsider in a place like this, whether or not his attempt to understand, to help, might not in fact inflict its own damage. Ultimately he shows that the many injuries these people carry—like dreams—are a crucial form of resilience, and that we should all think about the ghetto differently, not as an abandoned island of unmitigated violence and its helpless victims but as a neighborhood, full of homes, as a part of the larger society in which we all live, together, among one another.

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Editorial Review

Review

“*Renegade Dreams* is a *tour de force*—extremely well written and engaging, and replete with original insights. Once I began reading Ralph’s book I had a difficult time putting it down. His field research is fascinating. And his explicit discussion of the interconnections of inner-city injury with government, community institutions, as well as how it is related to historical and social processes, is a major contribution.”

(William Julius Wilson, author of *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*)

“Although it lacks the easy narrative of many traditional ethnographies, this is precisely the book’s strength. There is no convenient valorisation of the ordinary extraordinariness of the lives portrayed here. Their dreams are shown to be chaotic, complex and contradictory. Just like life in ‘Eastwood.’”

(*Times Higher Education*)

“Too many scholarly and popular takes on African Americans’ lives and life chances are predicated on assumptions about cultural inadequacies or even genetic inferiorities, on the idea that black people all around the world are little more than damaged goods—to be pitied or punished.] Ralph’s thought-provoking book wonderfully demonstrates how and why human beings continue to survive—and even thrive—in the face of incessant injury and attack. His Chicago is peopled by characters we’ve seen before (gangstas and grandmas, old heads and youth workers, pastors and principals, activists and addicts), but they breathe and bounce throughout his pages like more than just rehashed stock figures in some ongoing morality play about urban black pathology. Thoroughly researched and powerfully told, *Renegade Dreams* is a paradigm-shifting anthropological rejoinder to popular stereotypes and scholarly cant about ‘inner-city violence,’ its causes, and its aftermath.”

(John L. Jackson Jr., author of *Thin Description: Ethnography and the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem*)

“Astounding in its clarity and groundbreaking in its power, *Renegade Dreams* is as miraculous as the efforts of its all-American characters to remake life and invent a future out of injury. The textures and rhythms of Ralph’s realist narrative are charged with critical insight and transcendental significance, making ethnography into a work of art.”

(João Biehl, author of *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*)

“In *Renegade Dreams*, Ralph has achieved what few ethnographers, investigative journalists, and drive-by sociologists ever do: a radical empathy for his subjects that refuses to impose a colonial worldview. At the heart of this book is a fierce utopian sensibility expressed by the dogged optimism of Chicago residents—felled by bullets and injured in a thousand ways—but who insist on participating in our aspiration society. Young men in wheelchairs, bodies half-dead, glide like rolling zombies in our mind’s eye and yet leap from these pages with life and vigor. Their dreams carry forth in politics, play, poetry, and prose. They live in defiance of statistical narratives of the violent isolated ghetto. Theoretically rich and superbly written, this book exposes what is hidden in plain sight: the full humanity of people whose lives are greater than the sum of their pain and peril and far more connected to ours than we’d like to believe.”

(Khalil Gibran Muhammad, author of *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of*

Modern Urban America)

About the Author

Laurence Ralph is assistant professor in the Departments of Anthropology and African and African American Studies at Harvard University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Owen Ray:

This Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago usually are reliable for you who want to become a successful person, why. The explanation of this Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago can be one of several great books you must have is usually giving you more than just simple examining food but feed a person with information that maybe will shock your previous knowledge. This book is usually handy, you can bring it everywhere and whenever your conditions at e-book and printed types. Beside that this Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago giving you an enormous of experience for instance rich vocabulary, giving you trial run of critical thinking that we know it useful in your day activity. So , let's have it and enjoy reading.

John Harrison:

A lot of people always spent their very own free time to vacation or go to the outside with them loved ones or their friend. Do you realize? Many a lot of people spent these people free time just watching TV, as well as playing video games all day long. If you want to try to find a new activity that's look different you can read a new book. It is really fun for yourself. If you enjoy the book which you read you can spent all day long to reading a publication. The book Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago it is very good to read. There are a lot of folks that recommended this book. These people were enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space to create this book you can buy the particular e-book. You can m0ore very easily to read this book through your smart phone. The price is not very costly but this book provides high quality.

Shirley Henderson:

This Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago is great e-book for you because the content that is full of information for you who always deal with world and have to make decision every minute. This particular book reveal it information accurately using great manage word or we can declare no rambling sentences inside it. So if you are read that hurriedly you can have whole details in it. Doesn't mean it only offers you straight forward sentences but tough core information with lovely delivering sentences. Having Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago in your hand like obtaining the world in your arm, facts in it is not ridiculous 1. We can say that no book that offer you world within ten or fifteen minute right but this guide already do that. So , this can be good reading book. Hey Mr. and Mrs. stressful do you still doubt that will?

Shirley Drago:

The book untitled Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago contain a lot of information on the item. The writer explains the woman idea with easy method. The language is very simple to implement all the people, so do not necessarily worry, you can easy to read the item. The book was written by famous author. The author provides you in the new era of literary works. You can actually read this book because you can read more your smart phone, or model, so you can read the book with anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can open up their official web-site and also order it. Have a nice study.

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