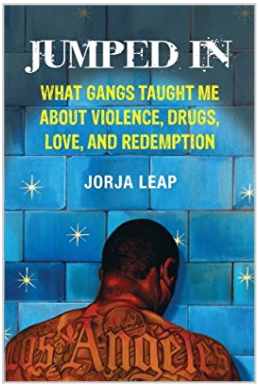

Jumped In: What Gangs Taught Me about Violence, Drugs, Love, and Redemption

By Jorja Leap

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Jumped In tells the story of the gangs of Los Angeles in the words of the gang members themselves as well as the people who interact with them on a daily basis--trying to arrest them, control them, and help them. There are priests and police officers, murderers and drug dealers, victims and grieving mothers, and other assorted characters, often partnering in unlikely ways. Jorja Leap's work draws upon intimate material, from interviews to eyewitness accounts, telling the deeply personal stories of current and former gang members who span three generations, as well as the dilemmas Leap herself faces as she struggles to adjust to marriage and motherhood--with a husband in the LAPD and a daughter in adolescence. *Jumped In* is a chronicle of the unexpected lessons gang members taught her when she was busily studying them. Ultimately, it is a book about attachments and commitments, loyalties and betrayals, drugs and guns, sex and devotion.

When Leap began studying Los Angeles gang violence in 2002, she set out not so much to provide a solution but to find out what was being done and who was doing it. The stakes couldn't have been higher: a child or teenager is killed by gunfire almost every three hours--nearly eight times a day--and homicide is the primary cause of death of African American males between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four. During her years of research, this petite white woman from UCLA gained the trust of gang interventionists and access to their inner world. She sat in the living rooms, stood at the crime scenes, and drove through the housing projects. Through the oral histories, personal interviews, and eyewitness accounts of current and former gang members, readers come to understand gangs and the forces that pull people into them.

First we get the lay of the land: the genealogy and geography of gangs and sub-gangs, territories within territories. But the centerpiece of the book is really the stories of those people who live "la vida loca," as well as the experiences of those trying to make things better. These stories are told in Leap's candid first-person voice, as she introduces us to gangland residents such as Tray, a young father trying to go straight who is nonetheless felled by a bullet, and Joanna, a third-generation gang member, who speaks of forbidding her mother to sell drugs

around her baby granddaughter. We also ride along with Leap and Big Mike, a former "original gangster" who now does street peace ministry. We see the successful "Jobs not Jails" program at Homeboy Industries and learn that former gangsters make good paramedics and firefighters, accustomed to dangerous situations as they are. With an anthropologist's eye and a compassionate heart, Leap offers not a prescription for solving the gang problem, but a gritty yet hopeful portrait of violence and redemption.

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Editorial Review

Review
"This is a bullet-train of a book. Jorja Leap writes about gang members with objectivity and compassion. Her descriptions of her private life are a fusion of dead-on honesty shot through with humor. A remarkable read."—Leon Bing, bestselling author of *Do or Die*

"*Jumped In*…sprints way past scholarly and educational, aiming for the outright transformational."—*UCLA Today*

"…Raw and engaging…must-read, an eye-opener and heart-expander."—*The San Francisco Book Review*

"Leap, a professor of social welfare at UCLA, crafts a fascinating if troubling ethnography of gang culture in Los Angeles… There is much to admire about Leap's study: its novelistic style, how well the dialogue conveys the inner lives of Leap's interviewees, the mosaic-like organization."—*Publishers Weekly*

"Why are nearly five thousand kids and young adults still shot to death each year in America—and what can be done about it? *Jumped In* is the haunting, funny, tragic and revelatory tale in which Jorja Leap takes us into the heart of these questions. Leap's frank and enthralling personal narrative introduces us to a parade of cops, gangsters, homegirls, drug dealers and unlikely heroes, each in possession of a fragment of the needed answers. We watch as Leap's own existence is fundamentally altered by these often deeply intimate encounters. And, in accompanying her, we too emerge humanized and wiser for the experience."—Celeste Fremon, author of *G-Dog and the Homeboys*, editor/founder of WitnessLA.com and The California Justice Report

"What makes Jorja Leap a gang expert is not just her years of experience and indefatigable research, but her heightened reverence for the enormous complexity of the gang dilemma. *Jumped In* gives us a window into a world of a sub-grouping of the poor who few understand and too many demonize. Her view is both "aerial" and "in the weeds" while always staying heartbreakingly compassionate and true. Her work gives me hope."—Gregory J. Boyle, S.J., Founder and Executive Director, Homeboy Industries

"Dr. Leap uncovers the good, the bad, and the ugly reality facing the Los Angeles Police Department, the thinly staffed county departments that provide social services, and the school districts that attempt to educate children who emerge from often dysfunctional families. The journey of *Jumped In* will put a reader on an emotional roller-coaster ride from indifference to sorrow to sympathy for this portion of society so many Angelenos comfortably drive past."—Lee Baca, sheriff, Los Angeles County

"Leap's strength is her comprehensive investigation into organic campaigns, community initiatives, research, and political maneuvering to decrease gang activity."—*VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)*

About the Author
Jorja Leap has been on the faculty of the University of California at Los Angeles Department of Social Welfare since 1992. A recognized expert in gangs, violence, and crisis intervention, she has worked nationally and internationally in violent and postwar settings. Dr. Leap is currently the senior policy advisor on Gangs and Youth Violence for the Los Angeles County Sheriff.

From Chapter 5

Big Mike

I love these children. Every last one of them. The badder they are, the more I love them. I was one of them.
—Reverend Mike Cummings

Mike Cummings is about six feet tall and, I am sure, easily tips the scales at three hundred pounds. His skin is so black it shimmers violet, and his neck is huge, muscular. I keep glancing over at his neck and arms while I ride shotgun, holding on for dear life in a white Chevy Suburban with *We Care Outreach Ministry* stenciled in gold calligraphy on either side. Big Mike is at the wheel, and it is safe to say he completely lives up to his gang moniker. Grinning, with a mega-watt smile to match his girth, he pilots this enormous SUV through the streets of South LA while talking, occasionally taking his hands off the wheel to emphasize a point. It's been two weeks since Khalid took me to meet him, and I'm spending the day in the hood with Big Mike.

"I'm just here tryin' to save the children, trying to keep them out of the life I lived. We're using our love and Scripture to do the job." He resembles an NFL blocker—huge, strong, and running for daylight. "I am at it 24/7, workin' with these children. Praise the Lord." Big Mike is part preacher without portfolio, part tow truck driver, and part savvy businessman. "I don't need much," he tells me, "just enough to buy gas, and every once in a while I gotta go buy my wife some Louis [Vuitton] or Gucci." We both laugh—he's a reformed gangbanger on a first-name basis with several European designers. But even with his grin and bonhomie, I still wouldn't want to meet him in a dark alley. I feel both thrilled and reassured to be under his protection.

Back in the day—the late 1980s and early '90s—Mike Cummings
was notorious in Watts. Before both the Lord and three years in county jail saved him, Big Mike was one of the scariest, baddest gangsters in South Los Angeles. On the street he is recognized as the real deal— an OG—Original Gangster. "I'm gonna school you in the neighborhoods," he tells me. "It's time for you to understand what's goin' on here. Because y'know, things are bad, really, really bad. We got innocent youngsters dyin' every day."

I ask him how things have gotten this bad. He doesn't hesitate before answering, and he is very clear.

"The biggest problem is guns, guns, guns."

National statistics back him up. A child or teenager is killed by gun- fire almost every three hours—nearly eight times a day. Homicide is the prime cause of death among African American males between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four. On top of this, black males between the ages of fifteen and nineteen are almost four times as likely as their white counterparts to die from a gun-inflicted injury; they are six times as likely to be homicide victims. While I am contemplating the problem of guns and gangs, Big Mike has stopped at a gas station.

"You gotta understand that it's like the Pentagon out there," he tells me while he fills the tank. "Only they got more guns than the Pentagon. They got more guns than the military. They kill more people than the military. This is where the war is, in our streets. You got kids, they got guns, pistols, automatic weapons, Uzis—you name it, they got it." Big Mike doesn't know how right he is. At the end of this year—2004—2,825 children and teenagers will die as a result of being shot by fire- arms, more than the number of

American combat deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan that will eventually be recorded through the end of 2006.

There are three men sitting on plastic chairs outside the gas station mini-mart. The smell of marijuana, or bud, is in the air. One of them calls me over and tells me I am standing on hallowed ground.

"You know where you standing—they filmed a scene for that movie starrin' the brother—whazzit called, whaz dat movie?"

"Yo, *Training Day*."

"*Training Day*, starring my man Denzel."

"They wanted it to be, what that word, realism . . . is" "No foo', *authentic*—"

"Yo muthafucka, aks me, they wanted real, you feel me—"

While the young men with pants slipping down their hips and black do-rags crowning their heads are playing the hood version of 365 Days to a Stronger Vocabulary, a small homie who couldn't be more than ten years old quietly walks up, a purple bandana covering his face from the eyes down. The color of his makeshift mask indicates that this little boy, who should be at school studying fractions, is associated with the Grape Street Crips. He is carrying an AK-47. The gun looks like it weighs more than he does. Big Mike is immediately on alert. "You gotta put that away, my little homie," he intones. "We have a lady here." What my sex or gentility has to do with this automatic weapon escapes me, but I am intrigued. Mike senses my curiosity. He puts his hand on my shoulder.

"Come on, these foo's playin' around a little too much for me. You there—take care of this little man," Mike commands, and the three stoned homies snap to order and take the weapon from the youngster. "Come on, Jorja Leap, you can talk with the homies another day. Let's go." *Where?* I wonder.

As if he can hear my question, he explains, "I need to drive you around so you can see what's goin' on in the neighborhoods. You been here at night. Now you gotta see what goes on in the daylight."

I agree with his plan wholeheartedly. One thing that has eluded me so far is the whole geography of black and brown gangs in Los Angeles. Aquil Basheer, the LA City firefighter, community activist, and leader who is a constant in my life, tells me, "Black gangs are based on territory and economics." This is all too accurate an assessment. Black gangs are rooted in a street-by-street mentality. Along with this, their gang activity occurs where they live, where they deal drugs, where they shoot one another, where they bring up their children. I knew that to truly understand black gangs in LA, it is essential to possess a street-level view. Latino gangs are different.

"The Latino gangs have changed. They used to operate out of the projects. But now they are commuter gangs," Father Greg Boyle, the beloved Jesuit priest who runs Homeboy Industries, a gang-intervention and reentry program, has explained. "They live out in Bell or Montebello or Hawaiian Gardens and drive in to commit their crimes." Not so the black gangs.

We climb back into the *We Care Outreach Ministry* mobile, with the air-conditioning blasting. It is 1:00 in the afternoon, with a blazing sun and temperatures in Watts approaching 90 degrees. Homies are hanging out on the street, just kicking it. Mike is in his element. He wags his left index finger at every mad-dogging gangster we pass.

“I am gonna take you where you can see just how many guns there are out there. Just how many of our young men are gettin’ ready to die.”

“Where are we going?”

“We’re goin’ to the projects,” Big Mike tells me. “Nickerson Gardens. Imperial Courts. Jordan Downs. You know what they say in City Hall. They call them the housing developments. This ain’t no developments, these here are the projects.”

Despite the doublespeak of every city politician and bureaucrat who rarely ventures out of their office, the cops and people who live here know better. “We are from the projects, don’t go changin’ that up,” Saint, who claims the Bounty Hunter Bloods as his “hood,” or gang, has told me. “We all wanna get out, nobody wants to live here. But y’know, we all grew up here. We proud of the projects inna strange way.”

The projects officially fall under the auspices of the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles. But for the past two decades, HACLA has barely controlled the hundreds of two-story family “units” with one to five bedrooms sprawling throughout this pocket of South LA. It is the architecture of despair, suburban cellblock—white buildings with black trim, every other window boarded up and no glass replacements. The sides of buildings have numbers instead of names. The “townhouses”— built facing courtyards and strips of grass—appear indistinguishable from one another. However, each of these public-housing projects possesses a personality all its own.

Despite its bucolic name, with its thousand-plus townhouses Nickerson Gardens is about as far from Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood as you can get. Since the Aliso Village housing projects of East Los Angeles were torn down in 2000, it has the twin distinction of being the largest public housing project west of the Mississippi and the birthplace of the Bounty Hunter Bloods. Opened in 1955, it is a hot spot for the gangs of South Los Angeles, anchored at the corner of Central Avenue and Imperial Highway, then spreading north and east, encompassing Watts and Compton. Only a few blocks away is Imperial Courts. Built in 1944, the Imperial Courts development is older and—with nearly five hundred townhouses—half the size of Nickerson Gardens. It is also headquarters for one of the Bloods’ major enemies—the P Jay Crips. Farther east and off by itself, Jordan Downs is actually the oldest of the three projects. It was originally built in the 1940s as hou...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kim McLoughlin:

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Sure, you can choose the suitable activity for spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time to take a walk, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book entitled Jumped In: What Gangs Taught Me about Violence, Drugs, Love, and Redemption? Maybe it is for being best activity for you. You recognize beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have various other opinion?

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Eli Gaddy:

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Harold Bunch:

In this age globalization it is important to someone to get information. The information will make a professional understand the condition of the world. The condition of the world makes the information better to share. You can find a lot of personal references to get information example: internet, magazine, book, and soon. You can view that now, a lot of publisher that will print many kinds of book. Often the book that recommended to your account is Jumped In: What Gangs Taught Me about Violence, Drugs, Love, and Redemption this reserve consist a lot of the information with the condition of this world now. That book was represented how do the world has grown up. The dialect styles that writer use for explain it is easy to understand. Typically the writer made some analysis when he makes this book. This is why this book suitable all of you.

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