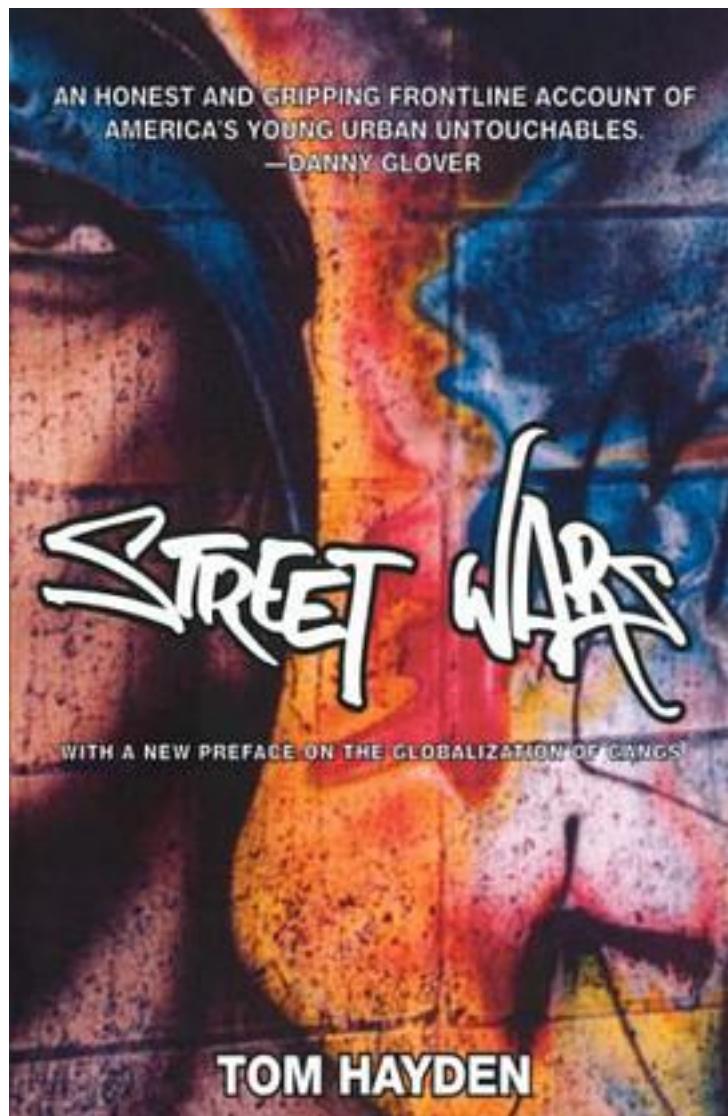


Street Wars



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Over 25,000 young people have died as a result of urban street violence over the past 20 years, writes Tom Hayden in Street Wars. As staggering as that number is, he still finds room for optimism, stressing that gang violence is preventable, not inevitable, and that former gang members are not necessarily incorrigible criminals. In making his point, he offers many examples of how one-time violent criminals made the unlikely transformation to peacemakers and community leaders. Specifically, he focuses on the early 1990s in which a concerted effort was made by gang members to stop the violence in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and other cities by formally declaring truces and working to provide alternatives to gangs for young people in their communities. After a strong start and a significant decrease in reported gang violence, progress began to stall. Why this effort has not achieved more is a central question in Street Wars. Hayden believes the answer lies in the myopic "tough on crime" approach that continues to be favored by most politicians. Citing his decade of first-hand experience with the subject, he maintains that relying solely on law-and-order solutions will not decrease, much less solve, the crisis of urban violence in America: "When it comes to the inner city, our country thrives politically on scapegoating rather than finding solutions." As proof, he cites the construction of new prisons over funding for programs that have proven to help young people stay off of the streets. He even goes further, calling for a New Deal approach to wiping out inner-city violence and replacing hopelessness with opportunity. Though this is certainly not the final word in the punitive versus preventative debate, Hayden's research and moving anecdotes add to the discussion of gang violence in America. --Shawn Carkonen

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