



This Is for the Mara Salvatrucha: Inside the MS-13, America's Most Violent Gang

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Like any American teenager, Brenda Paz spent much of her time with her friends. They would go to parties, listen to music, and show off their cars late into the night. But Brenda and her friends belonged to the Mara Salvatrucha--the MS-13--the most violent gang in America, and in addition to enjoying the things that all teenagers do, her friends were thieves, drug dealers, human traffickers, and murderers. A street gang that began in Los Angeles in the 1980s, the Mara Salvatrucha has spread across the United States and Central America with startling speed, boasting tens of thousands of members. They deal ruthlessly with competing gangs and any members who display disloyalty, often leaving a trail of dismembered corpses in their wake. They are poised to surpass the Mafia as the country's most organized criminal network. And by operating within the insular Central American immigrant communities, the Mara Salvatrucha has been able to easily elude law enforcement. All that changed when Brenda Paz turned informant for the FBI, exposing the incredible scope of the gang's operations. But Brenda's cooperation with the FBI was only the beginning. What followed is an extraordinary story of strength, intelligence, and incredible courage. *This Is for the Mara Salvatrucha* takes us into a dark and violent world that few people have seen, but is closer than you think.

This Is for the Mara Salvatrucha: Inside the MS-13, America's Most Violent Gang Details

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From Reader Review This Is for the Mara Salvatrucha: Inside the MS-13, America's Most Violent Gang for online ebook

george says

I was really looking forward to reading this book after hearing the author on a radio interview.

I wasn't so thrilled by the end.

It wasn't exactly what I thought it would be. I was happy to know that it revolved around Brenda, a teenage member of the gang, and her story. She grew tired of the gang life and became an informant. Then, of course, she was killed. But that's to be expected.

What I absolutely hated was the writing style. Logan writes the scenes in the book and instead of simply describing what happened, he makes up shit about what the people are thinking. The gang member fighting. The guy dying. Brenda. Her boyfriends. Those that suspect her of betraying the gang. Come on, this guy cannot know what Brenda is thinking as she goes down. Nor most of the other gang members because they're sure as hell not going to talk to him or the police. It was weird and I didn't like it.

Aside from that, it is a good overview of the gang and a glimpse inside the MS-13. Note that I wrote glimpse. There's not a ton of info on them, but enough to get an idea.

Julia Munoz says

I was very excited to read this book since I am into Gangs and violence , but In the book “This Is for The Mara Salvatrucha” by Samuel Logan, covers a lot of a violent, Hispanic gang found in the 1980’s in Los Angeles. The Mara Salvatrucha was formed in Los Angeles by Salvadoran immigrants fleeing after the civil war from El Salvador. But the book also is the sad story ,life and also violent death of Brenda paz, Who joined the MS-13 when she was 15 and was murdered by her own friends and also members of the MS, before she turned 17, because they suspected that she was a police informant .

In the first chapter of the book Brenda leads an innocent kid to his death, Javier Calzada he was a kid who never went out and he would tell everything to his mother. Javier was just giving Brenda and her friend, "Flaca" a ride to a party , but what he didn't know was that Brenda had a boyfriend, and he was going to get asked to pick him up on the way to the party. Veto , Brenda's boyfriend was the leader of the clique of her gang , he was always suspicious about everyone who wasn't part of the gang. outsiders. so when he went inside Javier's car he began texting all his homies to meet them at the spot , a river where they use to fish .Soon after they got to the river bank Javier started to get scared and soon after 4 different MS members including Veto started beating him up , but that beat that he would never stand up from. Brenda looking from inside the car couldn't do anything to save Javier, it was none of her business . Javier was thinking to himself why did he go out that night ? why did he befriend Brenda ? it was all a mistake that couldn't be fixed. when they finished beating him up, they started stabbing him over and over again, 13 times, Javier still alive tried defending himself but couldn't resist the pain, at last Veto shot him in his head . died instantly. Javier hadn't been home , and just wasn't him ,his parents grew worried and called the police to inform them of their child's disappearance. That's when everything started.

Investigations started , clues were found. Brenda and other people where suspects. Throughout the book Samuel Logan tells tells the unforgettable story of a Young girl name Brenda how she became involved in a horrible murder that she was involved in. He talks about how she became part of one of the most dangerous gang in the united states , and being the one of the most important people in the gang to becoming an informant. After becoming an informant and coming back into the gang after she had “Ratted” Out the gang. It was one of the best book I’ve ever read. It was very interesting how a Witness Protection Program wasn’t able to keep a young teenage girl who was trying to her life back around safe.

Nathan Hillyer says

This is going to be a quick review. If you are reading this to understand MS 13, you will be better off watching the History Channel's Gangland or reading a different book, which is not to say this is a bad book. It is just that it is actually more of a true crime book from the law enforcement perspective on the tragic killing of a valuable informant. The writer did not have access to the main subject of the book, for example, and could not get directly inside her head. It is mostly supposition.

And if you are reading this book because you support Donald Trump's immigration policies, note that a lot of MS 13 members are actually United States citizens, and keep in mind there are PLENTY of home grown gangs of all kinds.

Billy says

Highly misleading title. This nonfiction "expose" involves a teenage girl who joined MS-13 in Texas, witnessed a murder, fled to Virginia and eventually wanted out. This informant was girlfriend to several gang leaders, so was privy to some talk, but was never involved in the gang's decision making or was allowed to attend those sort of meetings.

The writing is a bit credulous as the author is blown away by the amazing information provided to law enforcement by the gangster-gone-straight such as...the gang is involved in selling drugs! Gasp! Also, the part about her decoding the gang's hand signals was a bit much. If Allied Forces could decrypt German Enigma traffic, I don't think gangster hand signals would be that big a problem.

As an aside, the author employs a very annoying stylistic trick. He turns all novelist on us and tells us what's going through the minds of several of the "characters" murdered as they're being killed. Since it's a non-fiction work, that's a big no-no as he has no way of knowing. From a fictional technique standpoint, it's very poorly done, leaving you thinking, "Is this some sort of cheesy novelization of a cheesy made-for-TV movie?"

The initial chapters are the best part of the book as you learn about the history of MS-13 and the societal pressures on illegal immigrants that cause such gangs to form. The later chapters are repetitive, an endless recitation of how useful Brenda's information was and how lonely she was away from her "homies". Sort of a tacit admission that Brenda didn't offer that much, especially considering that the only gangsters that got taken out of circulation by her was when they got caught for killing her.

If you're looking for information on how large MS-13 is, their base of operations, their structure, what they

traffic in, who their allies and enemies are, etc., look elsewhere. This book has none of that. If you're looking for a peek into what life is like for the individual gangster, it has some useful tidbits.

Ashley boteler Abreu says

this was a good book but not what I thought it would be. I thought it would be more on brenda and her whole life

Alisha Marie says

This is for the Mara Salvatrucha has one thing going for it. It's compulsively readable. Now, I for one adore non-fiction books, but I can see why some people would find them a bit dry to read. I don't think any of those people would have trouble with This is for the Mara Salvatrucha because it does go at a really fast pace and the way it's written is like that of a fiction book, which it makes really easy to get into. On top of that, it's one of those books that can't really put down. When I wasn't reading it, all I could think about was going back to it and finishing it. However, when it comes to This is for the Mara Salvatrucha, the fact that you can't put it down is the only thing it has going for it.

I mentioned that This is for the Mara Salvatrucha is written like a novel which is why it made it so readable. However, the fact that it's written like a novel is one of the reasons I had issues with it. Here's the thing, the author of this book, continually writes what the main players in this book are thinking...whether they're dead or not. Which means that he couldn't have possibly known what they were thinking at any one given time...which means that he made it up...which is a big NO-NO in non-fiction.

Another disappointing thing about This is for the Mara Salvatrucha was that it's a very surface-level book. It doesn't dig deep into the Mara Salvatrucha at all. It's dealings with drugs, prostitution, murders...all of that was pretty much glossed over. This book wasn't as much about the Mara Salvatrucha as much as it was about Brenda Paz, a girl who happened to be involved with the Mara Salvatrucha. This isn't a bad thing, perse, if the book wasn't subtitled as "Inside the MS-13, America's Most Violent Gang". The book doesn't go inside the gang as much as the subtitle alluded to.

So, overall, I found This is for the Mara Salvatrucha to be a disappointing read. While it was a page-turner, it doesn't go very deep into what the book is supposed to be about: the Mara Salvatrucha. Plus, while adding stylish flair to your writing is all great and good, but if you're adding things that you don't have concrete proof happened and don't mention that it's speculative, than you lose a bit of credibility. So, two stars.

John Devlin says

True story depicting a teenage girl's entry into the infamous Mara Salvatrusha gang, her turn to informant, and her perilous and foolhardy return to the gang's environs after she had been a "rat". Interesting subject matter, and if i was Amanda Huygens agent i'd buy the rights and give her this part for some serious acting cred., but awkwardly written, stilted in language, almost so much that it made me think it was translated from Spanish.

Cassidy says

This book was a lot better than I thought it was gonna be.

Jim says

Anyone doing research or teaching about gangs and delinquency will tell you how difficult it is to encounter relevant teaching material about Latino gangs in the Southwest. The language and cultural divide separates us from full access to the internal "narratives" and subcultural forces that operate within Latino gangs -- especially the most violent versions like the MS-13, the Mara Salvatrucha.

This is an ironic situation for academics, given that the fundamental roots of criminological and delinquent theories describing gangs are strongly rooted in Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin's analysis of gang subcultures in New York -- primarily Puerto Rican and Dominican.

And yet few know much about the Latino gangs concentrated along the southwest border of the USA. Many have a general understanding of MS-13 -- the ritualized elaborate tattoos especially on faces, their roots in Honduras and Guatemala, and a reputation for brutal violence etc.

Samuel Logan's book will fill the knowledge gap for anyone teaching delinquency or advanced courses about gangs and street crime. It will be especially useful for people interested in the role of women within violent gangs. The author is a veteran international reporter, and presents a detailed picture of a Mara Salvatrucha gang from the narrative of view of a female chivata -- (informer). Many sociological ideas are nicely illustrated here -- "sexing-in" vs. "jumping-in" etc. The best thing is that most students will love the book because it's tale of abandonment, alienation and teen angst will resonate on a personal level.

Logan's book is an excellent complements to the recent movie, "Sin Nombre" about Mara Salvatrucha gangs and their distorted internal code of "honor" and their relationship to women and family. That movie was written and directed by Cary Fukunaga who rode the rails with migrants from Central America. More information about this movie Sin Nombre [Theatrical Release:] at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1127715/>

Kelly says

Got this forever ago at a market. Almost didn't pick it up, (honestly) because I found the title and the cover a bit corny looking. (A mans chest with stab wounds and gang affiliated tattoos surrounding his nipples was not the most enticing cover).

The book is ok- better than the cheesy cover would imply, but not earth-shattering. This is a real-life story that reads a bit like a murder mystery from both the point of view of the gang members, and of the detectives working the cases.

The strange part about this book is the writing- the author writes dialogue and thoughts as if he were there during the actual events. But, he couldn't possibly have known those thoughts or dialogue. For instance, he

writes the thoughts and dialogue of a man while he was being murdered. Considering the man lost his life in those minutes, it comes across strange that the author writes as if he knew what he was thinking or saying in those final moments.

In this book, the author rehashes the somewhat famous and real life story of Brenda Paz. Her death at the hands of MS was widely publicized at the time, particularly because she was pregnant. Brenda is a member of MS-13, raised in California and Texas, and girlfriend of a brutal top leader in the gang. Brenda eventually has enough of the life and eventually becomes an informant in order to escape. According to sources, Brenda is the main reason authorities today have any sense of how the gang works, and how deeply organized and ruthless they are as a group, their connections, roles and which kinds of criminal activity they favor to make their money. But as we all know- becoming an informant to ANY gang, let alone MS, rarely ends well.....

This book gives some background and history to the gang; gives some insight as to why young kids might want to join the gang despite the notorious three-ways to end life as a an MS gang member: the hospital, prison or the grave. The book also tells that tragic story of Brenda Paz- how quickly a young girl can be swept into the life, and how quickly it ends.

Don says

I almost gave up on this book twice. I got through it, but only because I wanted to see what the conclusions the Author drew amounted to. This is worth reading, but read critically, there is as much the Author hides as what is revealed.

This is the story of Brenda Paz. Paz is a gang member and criminal who operated with a juvenile mind that failed to weigh consequences. The Author details how it was mostly loneliness, that drove outcomes. Paz was a spoiled kid who victimized many more people than this book dedicated time to. She ultimately became a victim of her own criminal actions. The Author was obviously trying to paint Paz as a crusader for goodness, a victim of a broken system, a delightful youth dealt a terrible hand. There is no way to hide the facts though, the Author had to admit that Paz had a great family, numerous opportunities, and lived on other people's money and goodwill without ever providing anything but more criminal behavior.

The Mara Salvatrucha is a very well organized street gang. Violent thieves, rapists, and dopers. Paz did provide information, but no more than many other informants. I just could not get past the failure of the Author to assign the responsibility of all of the criminal acts to Paz. None of her victims, or the victims of others in her presence, were given much notice. They were just names.

This is a great book to read if you believe that crime doesn't really affect you. The random vehicle thefts, the attacks on witnesses, the government's multiple resources for criminals, we all pay for bad guys everyday that we pay taxes.

Patrick O'Neil says

Okay, *This Is for the Mara Salvatrucha* is the title of the book, but the subtitle is: *Inside the MS-13, America's Most Violent Gang*, which led me to believe I was getting an insider's testimony, or at the very least, someone that was remotely associated with the Mara Salvatrucha, telling their all about the gang. However what I actually got was an entirely different story as journalist, turned author, Samuel Logan writes a "creative nonfiction" mish mash of a "true story" involving a very small segment of the actual gang. The random and senseless violence depicted, horrible as it was, barely makes the argument that the Mara

Salvatrucha is "America's Most Violent Gang." I read a book on the American Hare Krishna titled *Monkey On A Stick* that had more murders, mayhem, and violence, and those guys were a religious cult. Yet the lack of violence and/or the proving of the title's statement isn't the worst of the book's sins. What really bothered me was the author telling the story in such a way as to give the reader the impression he was privy to the information as it was happening. Yet as the book progresses it becomes obvious he wasn't and was writing it through second hand knowledge after the fact. Which hopefully he garnered either through interviews with the police officers and their various departments, lawyers, and agencies involved, and the families, victims, and/or associates of the gang members themselves – although I was never quite sure where Logan's information was coming from as he never outright states "so and so said this," or I interviewed this person, or police reports state, blah, blah, blah. Instead it reads like fiction. Logan is telling a story and the reader is privy to thoughts and reasoning of people who were dead long before the book was written. As if they were fictional characters and the author was fleshing them out. And it's this endless telling of their personal internal introspection that embodies all that can go wrong with creative nonfiction versions of true events. This heavy-handed use of artistic license turns it into the author's version of what happened – using his ideas and notions as to what the facts and motivations of the people involved were. However it just didn't sit well, left me flat, a tad confused, getting bored, and finally I stopped caring all together and put the book down for good.

Adéla says

Dost suché po?tení?ko. Popravd?, má se jednat o jeden z nejnebezpečnějších a nejkrutějších gangů v USA, ale z té knížky má ?lov?k pocit, že je to chab? organizovaná skupinka sígr?, kte?í ob?as n?koho brutáln? zmlátí nebo zavraždí. Chybí tam n?co, co ?lov?ka opravdu p?esvědčí, že s n?kým takovým by necht?l p?ijít do k?ížku. Asi to na m? nezap?sobilo tak, jak m?lo.

Tony says

I picked this up because MS-13 is very active in my area (DC/Maryland/Virginia) and I was curious to learn more about how they operated on a national and international level, what their history is, what their main rackets are, what the structure is, what the command and control is, and so forth. However, this is not a book that's going to give you very much of that. Rather, it is a detailed account of the sad story of Brenda Paz -- a teenage MS-13 member whose 2003 murder was a very high-profile news item in the region.

Investigative reporter Logan uses Brenda's story as a way of writing about MS-13, and the book follows her for about two years, starting roughly from the time she moved to Texas to live with her uncle's family until her murder. Her relatives apparently didn't give her a whole lot of nurturing or attention, and as a result, the otherwise extremely bright and bubbly Brenda drifted into gang life. She quickly made friends with a local MS-13 clique, became the girlfriend of their leader, and was jumped in as a member. She spent a little less than a year with the gang, mainly in Texas and Virginia, before she decided to cooperate with police rather than serve jail time. Her apparent photographic memory made her a treasure trove for the cops, and she gave countless interviews to law enforcement officials from all over the country, culminating in a lengthy video-taped session that was adapted into a training video for police on MS-13. Naturally, a number of MS-13 people began to suspect her of being an informant, and as a result of a series of farcical bureaucratic errors and her own hubris, she was killed.

While this picture from inside the gang is often very vivid and interesting, it's not particularly in-depth. Most of what you learn about MS-13 are the basics that have been covered in any number of magazine, television, and newspaper profiles over the last few years. I guess if you had never heard of MS-13, it provides a very solid overview, but it felt pretty skimpy to me. To be fair, writing about closed gangs is not exactly easy, and it's next to impossible to get a truly in-depth anthropological picture of one. Logan does good work with the material he has, spinning Brenda's story into a compelling tragedy and cautionary tale. Ultimately, however, she comes across as yet another teenager without strong family involvement in her life and exceedingly poor decision-making skills.

Logan uses one stylistic device that I didn't care for, and that's inventing what people are thinking when there is absolutely no way he could know. I understand that this is an established practice in some forms of narrative non-fiction, but it really bothered me when in the midst of his retelling of a murder, we are told what thoughts are running through the victim's mind as he's about to die. It's really unnecessary, and is the kind of sensationalistic device that undermines the credibility of the book.

Speaking of sensationalism, by the end of the book, it's still not clear to me why MS-13 is regarded as dramatically more violent than any other gang with cliques throughout the country (such as the Bloods and Crips). No data is provided in the book to make such a case, and the anecdotal examples, while horrific, don't strike me as dramatically different from those perpetrated by other gangs. On the flip side, I do think MS-13 represents a very different and more serious problem than classic American gangs, if only for their international networks. Details about this international dimension are severely lacking in this book -- such as the exact nature of their partnership with Mexican drug traffickers, a proper investigation of the rumor that they have assisted Al Qaeda, and their influence in Central America (in fact, their most infamous crime -- a mass killing in Honduras -- isn't mentioned in the book). Still, this is a nice narrative introduction to MS-13 in America that fills the need for those with an interest in street gangs.

Jane says

I was interested in reading this book when I heard about it on the radio I think. I'm from the northern Virginia area and my ears always perk up when I see books or shows set near by. So I was interested that the story was about a real person and that everything happened in areas I had a close proximity to.

I think the subject is important. I think it's important to get a grasp as to how someone can get into a gang and explain the culture of being in one. The journalist/author does a good job of portraying Brenda in a sympathetic light and explaining the decisions she made leading up to her demise.

Writing-wise... well there's a reason why it took me more than three years to finish this book... I know I started this book more than 5 years ago, put it down, and never really felt compelled to pick up and finish the last 40 pages. I thought the writing felt a bit choppy, wasn't as engaging as I wanted it to be, and the tone felt... theatrical? Like it was overacted. I can't explain that well. It just felt slightly cheesy.

It's a sad story. It's a real story. I just wish it was written better.
