

CRIME BOARD TELLS HOW BOY GANGS RISE IN NEW YORK SLUMS

Brooklyn's 'Toughest' Section
Revealed as Scene of Alien
Congestion and Strife.

NO PLAY SPOT IN RED HOOK

Boys, Neglected, Steal While
Mothers Drudge and Fathers
Loaf Between Jobs.

BAD HOUSING A FACTOR

Social Survey Shows Delinquency
There Is Five Times as Great
as in Rest of Borough.

The Degraw Street gang, the Sackett Street gang, "the Harrisons," "the Cat's Alleys," the Bush Street gang and twenty-one other gangs of the Red Hook section of Brooklyn are the subjects of study by the New York State Crime Commission's Subcommittee on Causes, which made public yesterday its findings regarding the Red Hook section.

The Red Hook section was selected first for a painstaking social survey because the ratio of juvenile delinquency there is five times as great as in the rest of Brooklyn. The Red Hook section is bounded on the north by Atlantic Avenue and the Borough Hall business section, on the east by the Gowanus Canal, on the south by Erie Basin and on the west by New York Bay. The population of the section by the 1920 census was 41,220 foreign-born and 71,760 native-born. The native population, however, consists almost altogether of the children of foreign-born parents.

Steal to Pay for Amusement.

Most of the misdeeds of the children result from their search for play and amusement in an environment which affords very little normal, wholesome sport or entertainment for children. They steal largely to get the money for amusements or for materials for toys and games, according to the report. The ordinary checks on misbehavior are largely missing in the district, because of bad home life and bad environment, race conflicts, the confusion of many languages, bad housing and other factors.

Gang life still has its thrills. The initiation to one gang, for instance, is said to consist of "drinking twelve glasses of wine and having a revolver held over their heads while taking an oath." The members of Gang T are said to be pledged to avenge wrongs done to any of its members or their relatives. The pastimes of Gang S are reported to be "shooting pool, playing craps, playing cards and prizefighting," while its delinquencies are "robbery and getting revenge on enemies."

The study of the conditions causing the high percentage of juvenile delinquency, with its inevitable aftermath of adult crime, was carried on under the direction of the subcommittee consisting of William Lewis Butcher, Chairman; Jane M. Hoey and Joseph A. McGinnies. Their report is supported by statistics and records, but its interest is due largely to the sympathetic study of individuals and of the "gangs" in the section. Every generalization and abstraction is illustrated by detail glowing with fundamental human interest.

The report on Red Hook begins with the rapid changes in the character of the district as Old World populations have swept in, wave on wave.

"The race groups represented in this area," says the subcommittee, "are the result of successive infiltrations. Thirty years ago Red Hook was solidly Irish below Hamilton Avenue, and the section above Hamilton was mixed Irish and German. It was at that time the old Sixth Ward. Those were the days when the tollgate gang operated at the Penny Bridge and were regarded as ferocious brigands because they held up sailors, without guns, and took their loose change away from them.

Alien Groups Crowd Each Other.

"In 1890, when the Brooklyn docks began to be used for foreign shipping, Scandinavian longshoremen began to come in, and many of them settled down and reared their families here. When sewerage, and later subway, construction was begun, the Italians came in as laborers and settled down from 1895 on. The Italian group who originally moved in at that time still remain, the second generation and first generation Italians still living rather closely together. The Syrians form an alien group that is pretty much of an independent community, having its own stores and places of worship. The recent Porto Rican immigration is more scattered throughout part of the Italian section along the docks, and there is considerable mingling with the Italians, Porto Rican children attending the Italian schools. In general, however, there are few women and children in the Porto Rican group.

"There are evidences both of race friction and race fraternization. There is apparently racial friction between the Brazilians and Porto Ricans. Brazilians interviewed stated that they have a deep dislike for the Porto Rican. The Porto Ricans' antipathy, however, does not seem to be directed so much against Brazilians as against negroes, from whom they are very careful to distinguish themselves, here as in the Indies. Many of the Brazilians, on the other hand, are full-blooded negro, and the Brazilians as a group fraternize well with the negroes.

"The Italians, of course, form a group apart from the Irish, Germans and Norwegians, but since they dominate the community and have a well-established community life consisting of schools, churches, societies and stores, they are quite self-sustaining."

After detailing the bad housing and

Continued on Page Nine.

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CRIME BOARD TELLS OF BOY-GANG LIFE

Continued from Page 1, Column 1.

sanitary conditions of the district, the report continues:

"Since most heads of the families are longshoremen, their type of occupation is reflected to a great extent in their manner of life. Their job is an irregular one as the men must report for work whenever called upon by their leader, be it day or night. Their work requires much muscular strain and is monotonous, and, therefore, after a long, hard day's work rest is imperative and the men retire almost immediately upon returning home. The result is that the children are urged to play in the street so as not to disturb their father's sleep, and the father has very little actual contact with his children. As a result of these conditions the usual attitude is that the boys, at least, must take care of themselves.

Employment Is Irregular.

"Since stevedoring is irregular work, pay is also irregular, and as a result many families lead a most haphazard existence, being always on the ragged edge and not being able to plan ahead with any degree of certainty. It may not necessarily be so, but it would seem at least that among people living under these conditions of poverty plus uncertainty of income there would be greater temptation to steal things, or, at least, to wink at theft than among people who, even though poor, were regularly employed and could count on a definite income. The periods of unemployment create another social condition that is more or less peculiar to this section. It gives large numbers of men leisure periods. They usually have some money at the beginning of this leisure period, having just been paid off, and consequently they indulge freely in drinking, gambling and, all too frequently, in brawls, shooting and stabbing matches.

"The women, of course, have very little in common with their husbands so far as social life goes, so these activities are engaged in by the men alone.

"The men in this section clique together with their fellow-townpeople from Italy, and the Italian secret and benevolent societies continue here much as they have done in the home country.

Drudgery for Women.

"The mothers in this section, particularly among the Italians, lead a narrowly restricted life of drudgery. The mother is charged with the household duties, with rearing a large family and with the moral responsibility for the daughters. Aside from church attendance the mother receives no emotional outlets and has no healthy relaxation or recreation. The moving picture theatres, which are about the only form of recreation for adults in this section (outside of poolrooms), are filled almost entirely by adult men and children; rarely is a woman seen inside.

"The boys, as has been indicated, are usually left to shift for themselves. They are not encouraged to remain at school longer than is absolutely necessary, as their earnings, no matter how small, are always a welcome addition to the uncertain resources of these large families. Even before they have finished school they are already earning money as bootblacks and newsboys.

"The girls, on the other hand, are most carefully restricted and they do not go out at all, unless chaperoned by older relatives or older brothers and sisters. Girls do not go out alone visiting and to dances among the Italians as they do among other races. It is stated that girls do not expect to go out at all before becoming engaged.

"Among the Italians, old country traditions are kept alive. There is no desire to adopt our habits, customs, speech, food or amusements. Americanization work, such as the teaching of English, has been more or less of a failure where it has been attempted. This does not hold true, of course, of

the second generation, particularly among the boys, and the gap between the two generations is increasingly widened as the boys grow older."

No Parks or Playgrounds.

The major problem of the youth of Red Hook is that of finding some way to play, according to the report. There are no parks, playgrounds or athletic fields in the vicinity.

"Red Hook," the report continues, "has to figure out means of getting its pleasures directly, or by appropriation. A wooden stick, pointed at one end, is a sword. A small rock set on a milk can is a target, stones are weapons and the gutter is a rifle range. A ten-cent rubber ball is a football, the street is the gridiron and manholes are goal lines. Frequently, Red Hook tires of make-believe and wants something that works. An old soap box on roller skates will satisfy Red Hook, but its problem is to find or steal the box, to sneak out the hammer and saw unnoticed, to buy nails, to barter other objects of worth for the roller skates and to do a good job mechanically. Red Hook is torced in early life to work hard for its pleasures and to directly utilize its efforts.

"In his ceaseless search for materials with which to replenish his stock of playthings, Red Hook frequently succumbs to temptation. He discovers that money, if properly applied, provides a delightful short-cut to pleasure. And he turns his attention to getting money. He sells things, he steals things, he sells stolen things, he re-steals things and re-sells them. And he proudly sticks a grimy paw through the bars of the movie ticket booth."

875 Children in Court in Year.

In 1926 the total number of Red Hook children arraigned in the Children's Court or in the Welfare Division was 875. Juvenile delinquency was at its worst along the docks. Next was the section near Borough Hall. The diagnosis of the delinquency near Borough Hall is as follows:

"Here we have, not isolation, but congestion and great movement of population. This may suggest a reason for the disproportionate amount of delinquency here. In a commercial district, community interests are focused upon business and not upon children's needs. Children therefore, have opportunities to do things that the very size of the hurrying crowds surrounding them hides, and that are not stopped because none of the commercial interests in the district are residents of the same district."

The report gives the following close-up of the Sackett Street gang:

"This gang meets on Beach Place, a vacant section on the water front. They will not tell the exact location as it is against gang honor. They are quite an old gang and fairly large, consisting of between twenty and twenty-five members between the ages of 9 and 14 years. The members are Italian and Porto Rican. Its leader is a boy of 14. This gang ranges from lower Sackett Street, from about Hicks Street to the waterfront. Its members shoot craps, play chasing games and ball. Craps is indulged in only by the older members. Its delinquencies are mild, consisting usually of fights with other gangs. Ammunition consists of wood, rocks and bottles. This gang claims a special play beach, which is much coveted by the DeGraw and Union Street gangs and a number of its conflicts have been in defense of its property claim. One of its members has been in the Truant School, but none of them had been in any worse difficulties.

"They have no special rules, but try to quit cursing and do not smoke. They have a list of members and this is checked up at daily meetings. A boy is thrown out if he does not come to every meeting. They keep a constant guard over their beach place and the younger boys watch while the older boys play, and then the older boys watch while the younger boys play. This watch is directed against the interference of other gangs, but partly against police interference with crap games. One of the members of this gang showed the informant a large scar on the back of his head, received in gang warfare, and he was quite proud of this."