



Cholo  
Writing:  
Latino  
Gang  
Graffiti  
in  
Los  
Angeles





56

DLX (PINK)	SWP	DLX (PINK)	DLX (PINK)
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(DLX STREET)				
GANG	GANG	GANG	GANG	GANG



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ART BY: [REDACTED]  
(MARI GALATEIA TRICE)  
(TIGHTEN STREET GANG)

**Norman  
Street No Penny  
Chat Rodriguez**

Los Angeles may have the largest history of street writing in the world. Some say that as early as 1911 LA graffiti guys had in the region where the Latino community have marked their names on the walls with markers to stake out their spot on the sidewalk.

Before the invention of the spray can, most LA graffiti was painted with paint and a brush, and the names were also found by the Los Angeles Times would air via its and paint with the hot coupling from the ground. These hot tags still exist today and trace our graffiti history back to the 1940s.

Los LA graffiti has its own unique format called *placas* or *signatures*, symbols of territorial control boundaries. Placas are graffiti painted boldly with the names of a gang and its members, mostly painted on the sides or edges of their communities. They are pledges of allegiance to their neighborhood. Placas are always gang strongly, create an aura of exclusivity, and are always painted in black letters. The typical writer would be a young boy, a lone street artist or a girl with Cholo. The signature, sometimes four and was called "Old English," a typeface meant to present a formal document to the public. All the names from a gang were written in lines that were flushed left and right, so names were stacked from one line and centered. Great care was taken to make them straight and clear. This format is found in hand on an ancient formula that demanded a headless, body copy, and a legs. These three major building blocks of corporate and public advertising can also describe the type layout from ancient hieroglyphs that survive in The Codex of the United States and the western legacy of the Los Angeles Times. The headline states the gang or street name, the body copy is your roll call list of everyone's gang names, and the legs refer to the person who wrote it by adding his tag to the end of the placas (page 104, 105, 111). The tradition of type, names and language has rarely changed essentially and has been handed down from generation to generation. This style of writing we now call "Cholo Graffiti." Cholo is much more than just graffiti, it's a lifestyle.

It exists only in the Southwest United States, but the best graffiti comes from East Los Angeles. This style of graffiti is written only by the neighborhood for the neighborhood. To quote Joseph Rodriguez (aka Bob Santos,

Gang 138) in East LA, From Prison Books, 1976, "the rule book on the street life, is what they call the hazing gang experience. This is a major difference between Cholo and New York wild style graffiti, in Los Angeles the graffiti is based on culture and class. In Cholo writing only one person writes for the whole gang and you tag only within your own territory. In New York graffiti, the emphasis is on being more of an individual and not about ethnic identity, where tagging is all-out or all-in with your tag is more important than the group."

Barrios and poverty created the gangs, we had to protect ourselves, and old time José Santos El Cholo from north was writing gang in the 1940s, in those times, Latin-Zoot Salsas were defining their *Aspiraciones*, Zooties were not accepted by the Anglo-Americans as true citizens of the language. Spanish and other color segregated into the bottom of society, by the 1920s there were illegal mass deportations to Mexico of Mexican American citizens who were trying to overcome their labor in Downtown Los Angeles, my mother witnessed the public beatings of Latin-Zooties by white US marine corps during World War II. The soldiers would follow the Latinos into their neighborhoods to attack them. To protect themselves, the Latinos formed gangs based on which neighborhood they lived in.

Gang names like *El Trece*, *West Coast*, *138*, *OG*, *138*, *OG*, *138* and others referred to social locations and areas that still exist today. Latin-Zooties were organizing to their own style, their hair done in big Pompadour and their bodies draped in pale suede suits with the spurs starting make the accents. They spoke with their own language, a kind mix of half English half Spanish dialects. The words applied loosely to the spoken slang of gestures and hand signs in Mexico and Spain used at that time.

Out of this 1940s Zoot culture experience came knowledge (a parallel can culture to the Anglo-Hot Rod scene of the 1950s) gangster culture (Zoot culture from the 1940s, followed by the 1960s Cholo and Vatos of the 1970s—yes, all these scenes are the same people, they just call them those things). The Zooties experience was given an tag name, and finally a unique style of East Los Angeles graffiti, called Cholo. The Mexican American gangs were the first and Original Gangsters, before the middle OG, in the region the Black gangsters adopted the dress code of the House Boys, even copying the style of hoodies cars. The only difference would be their choice of "Windows" wall.

typical for their own graffiti. The original Black gangs, the Bloods and Crips, were more styles of Cholo culture. Even today the Mexican gang members largely outnumber the different Black gangs in LA counts.

We must give credit to the gangs for their struggles as in keeping with the graffiti tradition. Cholo style is stronger today than ever before, and it has grown into an international influence. In the graffiti world, painting borders have taken place between important calligraphers and East LA writers. This unique typeface has taken a very long journey from a European prototype to its use as a symbol of pride for an American gangster culture. It has remained intact, it is formidable, and its future usage is in the hands of the next generation.



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• SELF • US • PEOPLE •  
• FEEL • FREE • 138 • OG •  
• INTEGRATION • 138 • OG •  
• SKILL • HARD •



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\* (GRAFFITI) DE (CANTO NEGRO)  
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NO (MURDOCH) (MURDOCH)