

Copyright 1994 The Oregonian
All Rights Reserved
The Oregonian (Portland, Oregon)
August 1, 1994 Monday
FOURTH Edition
SECTION: TELEVISION; Pg. C07

LENGTH: 418 words

HEADLINE: `GANG WAR' FASCINATING LOOK AT
ARKANSAS VIOLENCE

BYLINE: STEVEN COLE SMITH, Fort Worth Star-Telegram <

BODY:

Monday, August 1, 1994 `GANG WAR' FASCINATING LOOK
AT ARKANSAS VIOLENCE

It is possible, we are told -- even unavoidable, perhaps -- for the governor of Arkansas to sit on the back porch of his Little Rock mansion and hear regular gunfire at night.

Unfortunately, the governor's mansion is bounded by gang territory, staunchly defended by proud members of the Crips, the Bloods and a variety of other street gangs. So says ``**Gang War: Bangin' in Little Rock,**'' an often fascinating if slightly overlong documentary on Home Box Office.

Part of the typically gritty ``America Undercover'' series of documentaries, ``Gang War'' focuses on the unlikely city of Little Rock as a burgeoning gang mecca. Unlikely, that is, until you look at the statistics: In 1993, Little Rock's per capita murder rate exceeded those of New York City and Los Angeles. There are at least 50 gangs claiming parts of Little Rock, and the city is in turmoil.

Much of ``Gang War'' is spent with Steve Nawojczyk, the city's coroner since 1983. A few years after taking the job, he began to

notice that his clients were younger, often tattooed or literally branded with gang signs.

Since then, Nawojczyk has made it part of his job to try to stop the violence, often by carrying around dozens of photos of young gang victims to show to survivors. Noble, but his pleas appear to fall on deaf ears.

The producers of ``Gang War'' were granted surprising access to the gangs, and we hear from gang members why they consider the gang to be the only thing in their lives that matters. The most common response: My real family doesn't care about me, but this surrogate family does.

One of the most fascinating segments of the show deals with ``L.A. Moe," a young man credited with bringing the big-city gang mentality to Little Rock. Why? Because you could buy drugs in Los Angeles, and sell them in Little Rock for a big profit. It was easy for L.A. Moe to recruit young men tired of washing dishes for minimum wage who were eager for Moe's flashy lifestyle.

Unfortunately for Moe, he is interviewed in prison. But his second-in-command has kept the 23rd Street Crips healthy: He has a house, three cars ``and money in my pocket." He's also 17.

At first, it's a little amusing to hear these kids speak in gangsta-rap, tempered by a natural Arkansas twang. But ``Gang Wars'' isn't funny for long. The message: If gangs aren't already where you live, then they're coming.

After all, they already surround the Arkansas governor's mansion.

LOAD-DATE: April 5, 2006