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HEADLINE: MORE TALES FROM CRIPS 2nd look at Ark.
gangs

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BODY:

BACK IN THE HOOD: GANG WAR 2. Tomorrow night at 10
HBO. 3 Stars.

A decade ago, filmmakers Marc Levin and Daphne Pinkerson went to Arkansas and documented a slice of life commonly associated with big cities: gang warfare between Crips and Bloods.

For a new HBO "America Undercover" special (tomorrow, 10 p.m.), they went back.

They ought to cut a deal to return every 10 years, cameras in hand.

In 1994, "Gang War: Bangin' in Little Rock" was like a wakeup call, warning that the gangster subculture was not limited to the East and West Coasts, but was represented just as passionately in the heartland.

"Back in the Hood: Gang War 2" returns to the same depressed and depressing neighborhoods of Little Rock, and to some of the same hardened faces.

Some faces, though, have softened. One major figure in "Back in the Hood" is Leifel Jackson, who was a leader of the Crips when the first

documentary was filmed. He's spent virtually all of the intervening years in prison, and has returned to the neighborhood to try and make a difference.

He runs a city-funded after-school program for young kids in which he tells his own stories and invites former Bloods to tell theirs in an effort to scare the kids straight, or at least away from joining gangs.

This is quite a change from the first time we met Jackson. Clips from the earlier documentary - one of his key teaching tools - show Jackson talking about recruiting a boy named Moran Ellis at age 9. In the first film, Ellis was 11, and talked tough. Now he's 21, and talks very differently.

So does Derrick Williams, another former member of Jackson's gang who ran under the name Big Blue. Now, he's not running at all. Shot 10 times by a fellow Crip in 1997, he's in the hospital with a colostomy bag, unable to move his legs and heavily medicated.

Jackson takes the camera into the hospital and gets Williams to talk about how he feels now, about himself and his old cronies, and about what they used to call "the glamour" of street life.

Then Jackson, with lots of compassion, asks his old friend, "What would you tell me if I was 15, and I thought that I was looking for the glamour? What would you tell me?"

Williams doesn't reply.

He looks like he's deep in thought, but he actually has faded into unconsciousness, overcome by his medication. The screen fades to black, then returns with a simple, chilling sentence: "Derrick died two weeks later."

"Back in the Hood" records the deaths of some people, the hopes of others. Most important, it records the voices of all, from former Blood Marvin Weathersby (who dreams of hip-hop stardom and razing a city block in Little Rock to build his mansion in the hood) to Jackson, who just wants to end the cycle of violence, but knows, and says, that he can't do it alone.

That's another reason "Back in the Hood" should be commended for going back - and, simply by being there, helping a little.

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GRAPHIC: SECOND THOUGHTS: Ex-Little Rock gangbangers Marvin Weatherby and Leifel Jackson

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