



Questioned Documents Section - 2012

J12 A Case Study of a Specialized Gang Alphabet and the Transfer of Characteristics From That Alphabet Into the Normal Daily Writing Habits of a Gang Member

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After attending this presentation, attendees will become familiar with a specialized alphabet used in the writings of a gang claiming affiliation with the Almighty Latin Kings. Attendees will gain some background information about the Almighty Latin Kings and see examples of a transfer of habits between the gang alphabet writing and a member's normal daily writing.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by raising awareness of forensic document examiners of a specialized alphabet and how remnants of the specialized alphabet can be displayed in the normal habitual writing of a person that often uses that alphabet.

In September 2002, three gunmen entered a Nebraska bank and, in a botched robbery attempt, shot and killed four bank employees and one customer. Four individuals were later apprehended, three suspected of being the gunmen and one suspected of being the lookout and planned getaway driver. What followed was a costly and extensive investigation and series of trials, resulting in three of the defendants being sentenced to death and the lookout receiving five life sentences.

During the investigation, it was discovered that the four individuals arrested all claimed affiliation to the Almighty Latin Kings gang. Over the course of a number of months, investigators seized numerous handwritten documents that were submitted to the Nebraska State Patrol Crime Laboratory. Among them were several that were written in an alphabet previously unseen by the document examiner working on the case. The complex letters of the alphabet were written fluidly and naturally and the writings were extensive. The alphabet was deciphered and the texts decoded; the documents were found to contain the bi-laws and various rules of the gang. Of additional interest, the document examiner observed within the extensive known writing of the lead gang member a number of natural, fluid embellishments resembling those seen in the specialized alphabet. Over the course of the investigation and trial preparation, a number of handwritten letters were sent to various witnesses, the media, and family and friends of the defendants, sent from various correctional facilities. Examination and comparison to known writing from the defendants identified many of the letters as having been written by three of the four defendants.

Although the bulk of the letters were written by three of the defendants, one letter that alluded to an additional murder taking place before the botched robbery was only partially written by one of the gunmen. That letter contained an insertion written by a different person. The insertion was the critical text about the previous murder.

This case contained a number of interesting elements including a specialized alphabet, transfer of characteristics between the specialized alphabet and the natural writing of one gang member, information about the culture and rules that controlled the gang, and a critical insertion in an incriminating letter. Some of these elements will be shared during the course of this presentation.

Specialized Alphabet, Gang Writing, Writing Characteristics