

# Monster - the autobiography of an la gang member book review examples

[Literature](#), [Biography](#)



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## **Abstract:**

This is a review of the book Monster - The Autobiography of an LA Gang member in which the principal character Monster Cody relates his experiences as part of a gang in Los Angeles in the 1970's and 80's

## **Summary:**

The book is a classic firsthand account of a gang member called ' Monster Cody' who was active in of the notorious black gangs in Los Angeles. He was active in the gang from the tender age of 11 to 27 and some of the experiences he recounts are pretty harrowing. Naturally some of the narration is rather gruesome as Kody relates several instances when cold blooded murders and shootings, which occurred on a pretty regular basis.

The chapters are quite regularly strung out and have an orderly presentation. In the first one, Initiation, Kody describes the various facets of

the gang and how it functioned as well as his procedure of joining which was initially a pretty harrowing one. Kody was also very much attuned to the wanton violence which permeated his life at that age and was also quite abreast with the history of gangs in the area. He believed that he had a lot to live up to and that everything was quite matter of fact at the end of the day.

Kody obviously ended up in prison at some point but even here, he was not quiet and associated himself with an organization called ' Crips' inside jail where he also had the opportunity to socialize with older gang members and share experiences. He was also an effective arms and drug dealer so this was also part of his unique experience on all counts.

I found the book quite unique in the sense that it offered various first hand accounts of how gangs operated in the 1970's and 80's which is not always found in other facts. In fact the vast amount of detail, if occasionally overwhelming is pretty interesting and intriguing as it is rather crude, so to speak and that adds to the interest of the narrative.

## **Thesis and major themes**

Kody's thesis is a bit muddled but it seems to be the maxim that a life of violence does you no good in the end and one has to find solace away from that mad world. He is crudely matter of fact about the goings on inside the gangs especially when it comes to the wanton violence which the group perpetrated on a regular basis.

One major theme which runs through the book constantly is the one of redemption. Kody does seem to be sorry for his misgivings and wrongdoings

although he does, to a certain extent blame the rough culture into which he grew up. However he did seem to take some pride in his achievements which were not always of the highest standards although his reputation in gang culture was second to none.

Another theme which we found featured is the propensity of black people to take to violence as a means to drive them out of their misery and institutionalized racism which dominated society. Violence as such is a means to an end which is total domination of their respective neighbourhood. The constant battles with the LAPD and the sophisticated efforts the gang makes to escape capture are also very much prevalent although these can also take a terribly violent turn which is not for the faint hearted.

However one can argue that the withdrawal from gang culture was the most difficult part of Kody's eventual redemption and that is afforded quite some time and detail in the book. His daughter and the fact that he could not bring her up properly in those circumstances made him change his life and this poignant episode can really be seen as the crux of the whole book.

## **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The book's strengths are pretty obvious but mainly it provides a holistic and pretty detailed review of the gang culture in 1970's and 80's Los Angeles.

The fact that it is an autobiography and a very personal one at that helps it to impart certain important details which are not usually found in other books of the sort. Kody's descriptions of the relationships within the gangs as

well as the stark portrayal of arms dealing and drug dealing are extremely interesting and harrowing to read, apart from being extremely descriptive. Another strength which I found quite attractive is the matter of fact way in which Kody recounts his experiences, although there is a certain level of remorse, he is never fatalistic or black about them and looks at the whole picture as a positive one, up to a point.

The book is also beset with weaknesses however and these are not insignificant either. Mostly, these centre around the structure of the narrative which is not always clear or coherent. Most of Kody's experiences are narrated in rather matter of fact fashion so one can be reading about a particular subject at one time and then move on to a totally different one in a few lines.

Sometimes, the narrative also glosses over certain issues such as the drug dealing and this lends a certain inconsistency to proceedings. The episode where Kody starts moving out of the gang circle is also rather misty and we are left with a strong sense of something missing in this part. The ending is also a bit stale and leaves one wanting more although on the whole it is quite an interesting one.

## **Gang culture and personal experiences**

Gang culture is very much a spent force nowadays but during Kody's time, this was probably all the rage. It is important to note that this book is probably unique in the sense that it contains portrayals and descriptions which are almost impossible to find elsewhere. Naturally the points of

interest include the graphical narrations of violence, the descriptive drug dealing problems and the whole course of battles with the police to establish control of the neighbourhoods.

It is not always easy to take Kody's views as real as such is the sensationalism of events that occasionally this can seem to be pretty unreal. The same could be said for the way in which Kody scrambles out of the scene as it may appear to be a slightly stage managed procedure without much substance or scope.

The book teaches us a lot about gang culture and why this was so prevalent in the area at the time. Discriminated minorities turn to violence when faced with hopelessness, indignity and lack of work and Kody surely had this type of upbringing when he joined the gang at 11. It also teaches us a lot about peer influences and the fact that Kody was seen as the so called leader of the gang continues to emphasise the importance of his memoir.

Race relations in Los Angeles have always been an issue and although gang culture was on the wane in the 1990's, the police beating of Rodney King in 1992 ignited a whole powder keg of violence in the LA area which ruined all the work which had been done earlier to eradicate the culture of violence. Kody's memoir manages to play on those intrinsic feelings and also creates a certain sense of inevitability on why these cases of violence continue to occur.

The book touches on various themes which have been discussed extensively previously and which deserve greater profundity. The life in jails is

particularly important as here one can see that long terms of imprisonment have absolutely no influence on the eventual outcome of a person. He/she will not be made good after incarceration, actually it will be rather the opposite as the culture of drugs and vices inside jails is truly a harrowing one.

### **Conclusion:**

Kody's memoir is an important one as it continues to add to our knowledge of the intrinsic and violent nature of the LA street gangs of the 1970's and 80's. It is very graphic, matter of fact and highly descriptive. It is also the story of redemption which is always possible even in such blighted and terrible circumstances. Although it is inherently flawed by inconsistency and incoherence in some parts, it is still an essential read for anyone wishing to understand the gang culture in finer detail. It is surely one of the best reads around for that purpose.

### **References:**

Shakur S (2004); *Monster: The Autobiography of an L. A. Gang Member*;  
Grove Press