

## SIX

### *The Hustler and the Hustled*

Four years deep into my research, it came to my attention that I might get into a lot of trouble if I kept doing what I'd been doing.

During a casual conversation with a couple of my professors, in which I apprised them of how J.T.'s gang went about planning a drive-by shooting—they often sent a young woman to surreptitiously cozy up to the rival gang and learn enough information to prepare a surprise attack—my professors duly apprised *me* that I needed to consult a lawyer. Apparently the research I was doing lay a bit out of bounds of the typical academic research.

Bill Wilson told me to stop visiting the projects until I got some legal advice. I tried to convince Wilson to let me at least hang out around the Boys & Girls Club, but he shot me a look indicating that his position was not negotiable.

I did see a lawyer, and I learned a few important things.

First, if I became aware of a plan to physically harm somebody,

I was obliged to tell the police. Meaning I could no longer watch the gang plan a drive-by shooting, although I could speak with them about drive-bys in the abstract.

Second, there was no such thing as "researcher-client confidentiality," akin to the privilege conferred upon lawyers, doctors, or priests. This meant that if I were ever subpoenaed to testify against the gang, I would be legally obligated to participate. If I withheld information, I could be cited for contempt. While some states offer so-called shield laws that allow journalists to protect their confidential sources, no such protection exists for academic researchers.

It wasn't as if I had any intention of joining the gang in an actual drive-by shooting (nor would they ever invite me). But since I could get in trouble just for driving around with them while they *talked* about shooting somebody, I had to rethink my approach. I would especially have to be clearer with J.T. We had spoken several times about my involvement; when I was gang leader for a day, for instance, he knew my limits and I understood his. But now I would need to tell him, and perhaps a few others, about the fact that I was legally obligated to share my notes if I was ever subpoenaed.

This legal advice was ultimately helpful in that it led me to seriously take stock of my research. It was getting to be time for me to start thinking about the next stage: writing up my notes into a dissertation. I had become so involved in the daily drama of tagging along with Ms. Bailey and J.T. that I'd nearly abandoned my study of the broader underground economy my professors wanted to be the backbone of my research.

So I returned to Robert Taylor armed with two objectives: let people know about my legal issues and glean more details of the tenants' illegal economic activities.

I figured that most people would balk at revealing the economics of hustling, but when I presented the idea to J.T., Ms. Bailey, and