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## Globalization & Gangs: The Evolution of Central American Gangs

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Oral Presentation O13.1

**GLOBALIZATION & GANGS: THE EVOLUTION OF CENTRAL AMERICAN GANGS**

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Japanese anime, Hollywood films, Chinese food and vicious machete attacks by a deadly street gang in Washington DC are all examples of global cultural flows and the hybridization of culture around the world. Using the example of the evolution of Central American street gangs, I will examine how cultural ideas and practices travel and evolve within processes of globalization. The youth gang Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), originated out of El Salvadoran refugee communities in Los Angeles into the emerging LA gang scene in the late 1980s. By the 1990s, media attention, including Hollywood movies, MTV and gangsta' rap, had glorified the LA gang life and culture worldwide. This combined with strengthened deportation policies that sent many MS-13 members back to their home countries at the same time resulted in an evolution and explosion of gang culture in Central America to a scale of size and violence to unprecedented levels for anywhere in the world. The vicious gang and its ever-evolving culture has since spread back to the United States in over 32 states and is prevalent in at least five other countries, prompting the FBI to label it as one of the most dangerous threats to regional stability and security today.