

National Gang Violence Prevention Week. I'm asking Americans to address this profound problem, each of them in their hometowns, to save a generation of our children. Every parent, every teacher, every person who has the chance to influence children must force a change in the lives of our kids. We have to show them we love them, and we have to teach them discipline and responsibility. Robert Sandifer's grandmother despaired at his funeral because, she said, "I couldn't reach you." We must keep doing everything we can to reach those children. And we must help them respect the law and keep them safe.

Next week I'll sign into law the historic crime bill that will be a tough but smart tool in every community's fight for our children's safety. It'll punish hardened young criminals with stronger penalties, and it will expand boot camps, drug courts, and other sanctions to stop first-time offenders from beginning lives of crime. It bans 19 assault weapons and goes a long way toward keeping the guns out of the hands of our children. And with prevention programs, the crime law will take on the sickness of gangs and drugs and give our young people a chance at a new and better life.

Finally, we have to show our children before they enter gangs that they already belong to a community larger than themselves, in which they can feel important and serve a larger purpose. On Monday, here at the White House and at sites all across America, we'll kick off AmeriCorps, our national service effort.

AmeriCorps is America at its best, people rolling up their sleeves and assuming responsibility to make our country better. At a time when so many of our people feel alienated or alone, the 20,000 new members of AmeriCorps will work closely with neighbors and fellow citizens all across this country to make our communities places where children can grow up to realize their God-given potential. They'll help make schools safe in Los Angeles, tutor second graders from Kentucky, repair neighborhoods in Philadelphia. Instead of just talking about problems, they'll be solving them. AmeriCorps will call upon the best of a generation to reclaim what has always been best about America.

All these things will help us make this time a year and a season of renewal. It's a time in which I'll keep working to bring greater prosperity to our hard-working people. We already have over 4 million new jobs in this economy, but we've got a good ways to go. It's a time, with our new crime law, when we will send not just a legal but a moral message across America, that Americans have a right to be secure in their homes, on their streets, in their schools and places of work. And it's a time, with AmeriCorps, when we will renew the ethic of service that has always been a key to our greatness, offering first 20,000 and, in 2 years, 100,000 of our young people a chance to earn some credit against a college education in return for serving their country at the grassroots level.

In all these ways, we'll be helping to fulfill our obligations to our children, to our Nation, and to our future.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

## **Proclamation 6717—National Gang Violence Prevention Week, 1994**

*September 10, 1994*

*By the President of the United States  
of America*

### **A Proclamation**

Robert Sandifer was 8 years old the first time he was arrested by police. He was 11 years old when he died, a victim, police believe, of a gang-related killing. He was also suspected of killing Shavon Dean, an innocent victim of an earlier gang-related shooting. In Shavon and Robert's hometown, the number of gang homicides has nearly tripled since 1980. And in neighborhoods across America, too many mothers and fathers have experienced the anguish of losing a child to the meanness of the streets. For them and for all of us, it is past time to end the violence.

At younger and younger ages, boys and girls are turning to gangs. For a child without an involved family, a gang offers a feeling of belonging. For a young person without options for tomorrow, a gang offers a sense of

purpose. For all those born in a home cordoned off against danger, with bars on the windows and chains on the doors, life on the streets seems all too often a taste of freedom they have never known. But American freedom is better than that. We know this. We see freedom at work every day in the determined faces of parents striving to make a better life for themselves and their children. And we see it every day in big cities and small towns across the country as Americans come together to put the spirit of community to work.

Confronted with the horror of children planning their own funerals, our Nation has begun planning for the future. Our first, best hope is in the common cause of those around us. A community that shares life's experiences can be an important source of strength and understanding in a world that seems filled with growing violence and diminishing hope. Families and communities are coming together across the country to bring hope to even our most troubled youth. In Birmingham, Alabama, where police officers are sponsoring athletic teams and tutoring programs in 52 neighborhoods, youth crime has dropped by 30 percent. In Los Angeles, teachers and sheriffs are working in teams to show kids alternative methods of resolving conflicts, encouraging them to develop a sense of self-worth apart from gangs. The 1994 crime bill seeks to provide grassroots programs like these the resources they need to push forward in their efforts and to succeed in their fight.

In an invaluable victory for citizens across the country, the Congress passed, and I will soon sign, a crime bill that is designed to save the lives of children like Shavon and Robert. This path-breaking legislation will punish hardened young criminals by requiring stronger penalties, and it will expand the use of community boot camps, drug courts, and other alternative sanctions to stop first-time offenders from beginning a lifetime of crime. It bans 19 of the deadliest assault weapons, and it goes a long way toward keeping guns out of the hands of juveniles. With strong measures of discipline and training, drug treatment and education, this bill takes on the sickness of gangs and drugs and gives our young people a new chance at life. Ours

is important work: It is about trying to save a generation of children and to secure the future life of a country. It is a job we can surely do.

Ours remains the greatest Nation the world has ever known because we have not shied away from challenges. Rather, we have consistently sought to surmount them. The problem of gang violence is among the most profound we as a people have ever faced. We must respect our young people enough to give them a positive choice for the future. We must take responsibility for teaching them to choose what is right. The solutions are within our reach. The power to change America is within ourselves. Together, we must work to redeem the promise that every young life holds.

**Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton,** President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim the week of September 12 through September 16, 1994, as "National Gang Violence Prevention Week." I call upon the people of the United States to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

**In Witness Whereof,** I have hereunto set my hand this tenth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and nineteenth.

**William Jefferson Clinton**

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 11:41 a.m., September 12, 1994]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on September 13.

### **Remarks to AmeriCorps Volunteers in Aberdeen, Maryland**

*September 11, 1994*

Thank you very much. Chaplain, and General and Mrs. Tragemann, General Monroe, General Scott, Colonel Bosley, Senator and Mrs. Sarbanes, ladies and gentlemen.

I guess I'll start by saying happy birthday—*[laughter]*—and happy anniversary. A commitment of 43 years is something the rest