



# Department of Justice

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## **TEN DEFENDANTS IN LARGEST-EVER FEDERAL GANG CASE FOUND GUILTY OF RACKETEERING, NARCOTICS CHARGES**

*Members of Florencia 13 Gang Staged Attacks against African-Americans  
in Bid to Control Drug Trafficking in South Los Angeles Neighborhoods*

Ten members and associates of Florencia 13 (F13), a street gang involved in narcotics distribution and shootings of African-Americans, were convicted today on a host of federal criminal charges, including racketeering and narcotics distribution.

The 10 defendants were found guilty today after a 3½-month trial. They are among 102 defendants named in four F13-related indictments that were returned by a federal grand jury in the fall of 2007. The investigation into F13, which was called Operation Joker's Wild, led to the largest gang takedown in American history, with 96 of the 102 defendants being taken into custody. Seventy-six of the defendants have now been convicted, either at trial or as the result of guilty pleas, with the remaining defendants pending trial.

The 10 defendants convicted today were among two dozen people charged in an indictment that alleged violations of the federal Racketeer Influence and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act. That indictment, and the evidence presented at trial, focused on the criminal activities of the gang's leaders and enforcers, crimes that included drug trafficking, attempted murder and murder, and extortion. The jury in United States District Court in Santa Ana heard evidence about F13's criminal enterprise and its control by an incarcerated member of the Mexican Mafia prison gang and Mexican Mafia members on the street. F13 controlled drug distribution in the unincorporated areas south of the city of Los Angeles and certain other areas such as Huntington Park. Leaders of F13 collected taxes or "rent" from gang members and others

who engaged in criminal conduct in F13 territory, in return for Mexican Mafia protection when they went to prison or jail. F13 operated a number of “drug spots” in the South Los Angeles area. The jury heard testimony that F13 members indiscriminately targeted African-Americans who were seen in their neighborhoods.

Those found guilty today are:

- Jesse Vasquez, 35, on charges of RICO, RICO conspiracy, drug conspiracy, substantive drug counts, and use of a firearm;
- Gilberto Oliva, 42, on charges of RICO (conspiracy to murder) and RICO conspiracy;
- Arturo Cruz, 33, on charges of RICO, RICO conspiracy, drug conspiracy, substantive drug counts, and use of a firearm;
- Jose Gonzalez, 35, on charges of RICO, RICO conspiracy, drug conspiracy, and substantive drug counts;
- Noe Gonzalez, 26, on charges of RICO (conspiracy to murder, attempted murder), RICO conspiracy, violent crime in aid of racketeering (VICAR), drug conspiracy, substantive drug counts, and use of a firearm;
- Alberto Hernandez, 27, on charges of RICO (conspiracy to murder, attempted murder), RICO conspiracy, VICAR, drug conspiracy, substantive drug counts, and use of a firearm;
- Francisco Flores, 23, on charges of RICO (conspiracy to murder, attempted murder), RICO conspiracy, VICAR, drug conspiracy, and use of a firearm;
- Cesar de la Cruz, 29, on charges of RICO, RICO conspiracy, and drug conspiracy;
- Luis Aguilar, 37, on charges of RICO, RICO conspiracy, and drug conspiracy; and
- Manuel Hernandez, 26, on charges of RICO (conspiracy to murder, attempted murder), RICO conspiracy, VICAR, drug conspiracy, use of a firearm.

United States District Judge David O. Carter is scheduled to sentence the 10 defendants on September 9. All of the defendants face potential prison terms of life without parole.

The jury was unable to reach a unanimous verdict against an eleventh defendant in the case, Alizandro Rincon.

“The investigation into Florencia 13 demonstrated the power of law enforcement coming together to combat organized street gangs,” said United States Attorney Thomas P. O’Brien. “This gang – which targeted African-Americans, whether or not they posed a threat to the gang’s

drug-trafficking operations – posed an imminent danger. As a result of this prosecution, the residents of South Los Angeles can live a little easier knowing that these dangerous gangsters have been taken off the street.”

John A. Torres, Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, stated: “We are very pleased with the verdicts today. This sends a clear message that the community will not tolerate the heinous activity perpetrated by Florencia 13. These convictions will go a long way toward reducing violence and returning peace to the neighborhoods.”

Operation Joker’s Wild was an investigation into F13 conducted by the Los Angeles High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force, which is comprised of agents and officers with the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department; the Drug Enforcement Administration; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); the Los Angeles Police Department; IRS-Criminal Investigation Division; the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Los Angeles County Probation Department. The Bell Gardens Police Department, the South Gate Police Department, the Long Beach Police Department, the Torrance Police Department, the Baldwin Park Police Department, the Azusa Police Department, the United States Marshals Service-led Regional Fugitive Task Force and California parole agents provide substantial assistance.

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