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DATE: 6/29/94

TO: CHR

FROM: POTUS

SUBJECT: N.Y. Times article — "Role Models, Bogus and Real"

ASSIGNED TO: J. Cerda

DATE: 6/30/94

ACTION REQUIRED: get more info. on program

DUE DATE: 7/8/94

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

July 8, 1994

MEMORANDUM FOR CAROL RASCO

JUL - 8 REC'D

FROM: JOSE CERDA
ELIZABETH HYMAN

SUBJECT: Omega Boys Club, San Francisco

file

In response to your request for more information on the Omega Boys Club, this memorandum provides a brief description of that program and its co-founders. Please let us know if you require additional information or follow-up on this matter.

The Omega Boys Club was founded in 1987 by Joseph E. Marshall and Jack Jacqua. The Club is dedicated to giving black male youths an alternative to guns, gangs and drugs (though there are some girls in the club). If members remain drug free and make passable school grades, the Omega Boys Club promises to pay for their college education. Presently there are over 400 members, with 108 currently in college. Eight were expected to graduate this past June. The Club has no requirements, rosters or dues. It's only club activity is a trip to many of the southern black colleges at the end of the year for high school seniors who have merited a college education.

The Club is located on Potrero Hill in San Francisco, which is next to Hunters Point, one of the poorest areas in the city. The Club is staffed mainly by volunteers and does **not** receive government assistance. Members meet once a week in San Francisco and also in Oakland, and such gatherings resemble a revival-meeting format in which Jacqua and Marshall exhort the youngsters to take responsibility for their lives and in which the members are encouraged to talk about their concerns and struggles. Jacqua and Marshall have instilled a sense of family among the members, a particularly important theme as most of the young black men are without a father figure at home (approximately 95% of black males in San Francisco have no father figures at home).

Jack Jacqua is a 51-year-old native of Los Angeles and the son of a Hollywood agent. He has been a teacher and an outreach worker in San Francisco for 18 years. Jacqua works extensively with juvenile officials and can be found most days at the Youth Guidance Center advocating solutions for juveniles or recruiting new members for the Boys Club by confronting gang members and drug users and challenging them to change their lives.

Jacqua is very much an anti-establishment figure. His appearance is that of an aged hippy, and his method of recruiting new members gives some in the juvenile justice system pause about the program. He once told a troubled young man:

"Your enemy isn't the guy in the cell next to you. It's the system of rich folks who put you here and put drugs in your community. The prison industry wants to destroy you. It's the plantation of the new age, and you're the slave... It's genocide ... I can't prove that the most intelligent ones are locked up, but it's true. The elimination of the black male is a plan which is part of the fabric of American society." Los Angeles Times Magazine, December 20, 1992, p.40.

Yet despite such sentiments, many in the juvenile system view the Club as a great success because of its emphasis on personal responsibility. Young members are often hired on as peer counselors to jailed youths and are sent out to speak to the media, schools and conferences. In so doing, they increase their stake in the success of the club and their own self worth.

Joe Marshall, is the executive director of the Omega Boys Club. Marshall is on leave from the San Francisco Unified School District, where he has taught and been an administrator for the past 25 years. Marshall does much of the fund raising and handles most of the speaking engagements and public appearances on behalf of the Club. In addition to those responsibilities, Marshall hosts a talk-radio program on one of the city's most popular radio stations.

The show, "Street Soldiers" (named after a song by Hammer, who hosted the first program), provides inner-city youth and victims of inner-city violence the opportunity to call in and be heard. Marshall, along with other volunteer staff from the club attempt to guide these calls so that there is a sense of dialogue and an effort to resolve some of the disputes people call in about. In a powerful demonstration of the positive value of talk radio, one senses that not only does the show open the lines of communication between perpetrators and victims, but also has a cathartic value as individuals are free to express themselves and have the faith that someone is actually listening. The program airs once-a-week from 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. on KMEL.

Marshall testified before the House Committee on Children, Youth and Families and the Senate Subcommittee on Children, Family, Drugs and Alcoholism in March, 1993 on how to develop programs and strategies to combat urban violence and degradation. In addition, for his work with the club and on the radio station, Marshall was recently awarded a \$290,000 MacArthur Fellowship grant. He plans to use the grant to pay for the college tuition of more Club members.

BOYS

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TO

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MEN



CLUB LEADERS JACK JACOUA, LEFT, AND JOE MARSHALL NEVER GIVE UP ON A MEMBER.

FROM POTRERO HILL, SAN FRANCISCO'S DOWNTOWN SKY-
line stretches like a glittering promise across the northern hor-
izon. On the south side of the hill, terraces of public housing
slope down toward Hunters Point, one of the poorest and
roughest neighborhoods in the city.

On the crest of the hill, in the wood-shingled Potrero Hill
Neighborhood House, the Omega Boys Club sits between the
two worlds. Early in the evening, black youths gather there for
the weekly meeting of the club, which promises a college education to any
of its members who stays off drugs and makes passable grades. The chances
of that happening for any of these kids would seem slim. Ali Satchell,
20, standing in the doorway, has served time for the attempted murder of
a police officer. Joe Collins, 17, in a wool hat pulled low over his eyes, has
been in and out of group homes and jails most of his life. Raymond Jack-
son's mother was raped and murdered when he was 5 and, at 18, he has
been living on his own the past few years.



ON TALK RADIO, MARSHALL REACHES OUT TO TROUBLED YOUTHS, JOE THOMAS, CENTER.



WE'VE GOT THESE KIDS FOR LIFE," MARSHALL SAYS. AT SAN FRANCISCO JUVENILE HALL, JACQUA'S RAP SESSIONS DRAW ON MALCOLM X, MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. AND JESUS.

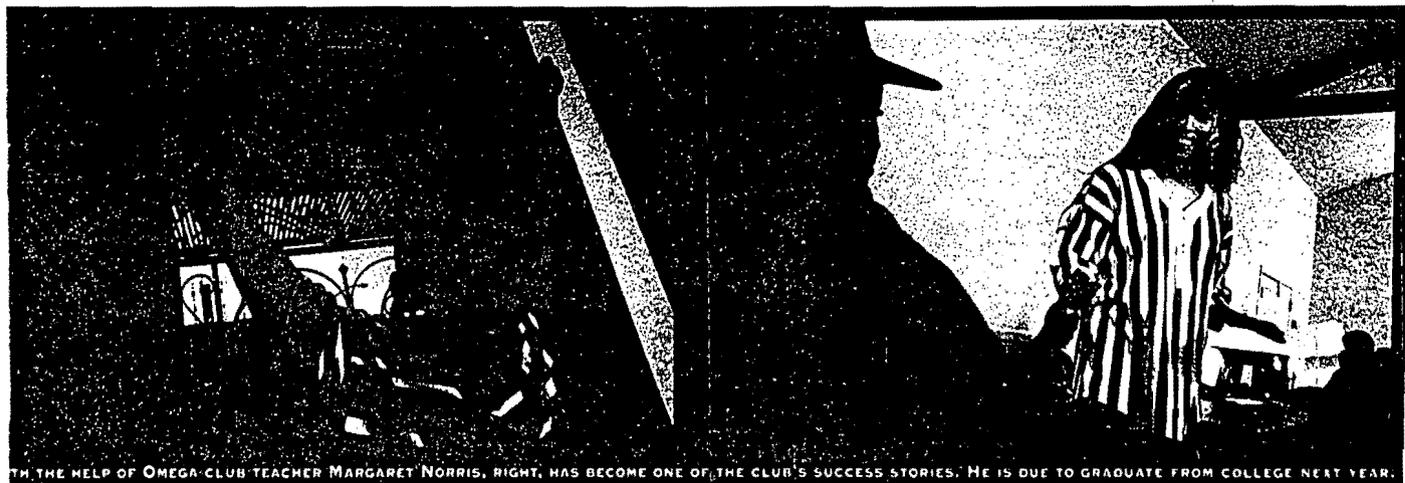
All these kids are members of a generation of African-American men that has been labeled an "endangered species." They are throwaway kids, the products of broken homes, deteriorating school systems and an over-taxed judicial system. Nationwide, nearly a quarter of college-age black men are in jail, on probation or parole; by some estimates, they have a better chance of being *killed* than graduating from college. Here in San Francisco, black children make up less than one-fifth of the youth population, but at the Youth Guidance Center, San Francisco's juvenile hall, they are a 70% majority.

Nevertheless, the Omega Boys Club has earned a reputation for working miracles with such boys. "They're the only community-based project in the nation that sends African-American youths from jail to college," says long-time San Francisco youth advocate Arnold Perkins. Staffed mainly by volunteers and without government assistance, the 5-year-old club has sent 118 of the Bay Area's least likely to succeed to college and has redirected the lives of countless others. "They don't give up on a child and they don't

turn anyone away," says Donald S. Mitchell, former presiding judge of the juvenile court in San Francisco. "If we had more of that kind of dedication and caring, we could save a lot of children."

The club's founders, Jack Jacqua and Joe Marshall, veterans of the San Francisco public schools, seem to be unlikely partners. The only white leader in the organization, Jacqua looks, by his own description, like "someone sleeping at Sixth and Market" in San Francisco's seedy Tenderloin district. His long gray hair flows into a bushy beard. His once-blue jeans have the gray tint of time and grease. His bottle-thick glasses are smudgy. In contrast, Marshall—or Mr. Marshall, as he is called—is athletic and, with his short-cropped hair and crisp shirts and ties, every bit the schoolteacher. Jacqua, 51, spends most of his time working with youths on the streets and in lock-up. Marshall, 45, keeps tabs on the club's college students and does most of its public speaking and fund raising.

At the meeting this evening, however, it is the qualities Jacqua and Marshall share that stand out. Their passion for saving boys, along with a flair



WITH THE HELP OF OMEGA CLUB TEACHER MARGARET NORRIS, RIGHT, HAS BECOME ONE OF THE CLUB'S SUCCESS STORIES. HE IS DUE TO GRADUATE FROM COLLEGE NEXT YEAR.

for theatrics, turns this and every Omega session into a revival camp. Driving home the point that the members must give up guns and drugs, Jacqua hobbles before them on a crutch, then hurls it out an open window. A little later, Marshall delivers an equally amped-up fire-and-brimstone speech, even falling to his knees. Their gospel is a mishmash of black nationalism, self-empowerment and Christianity. The club's holy trinity is Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesus.

A few dozen boys and a handful of girls sit on folding chairs around the room, sometimes in spellbound silence and sometimes throwing in comments. Boys who have shot at each other on the streets in turf rivalries now stand side by side to talk about their feelings or are called on to read essays they have composed. They speak falteringly, often eloquently, sometimes fighting back tears, and each is applauded at the end. When the club's college students give moving testimonies about their experiences, the mood is exhilarating. "That could be you," Jacqua tells the younger boys, "any of you."

The formal meeting breaks up about 9 p.m., but some of the boys hang around talking or cornering one of the adult leaders for advice. It is near midnight before the last boys leave, reluctant to return to that outside world where the downtown lights mark the distance that separates the world they inhabit from the one they aspire to.



IN JACQUA'S VIEW, A BOY ISN'T A GANGBANGER BUT "THE GUY WHO COULD FIND A CURE FOR AIDS."

ON A MONDAY MORNING, JACK JACQUA stands in the hallway outside the Youth Guidance Center, methodically stroking his beard. A probation officer, his face bulging above a tightly knotted tie, catches sight of him but pushes ahead.

"I got your message," the probation officer puffs, waving Jacqua off with a wad of papers. "It's being dealt with."

"That was last week," says Jacqua, stepping into the man's path. Now, he says, there is another problem. It seems that the night before, in the cells where the inmates are locked up awaiting hearings, a counselor "lost control." "He told Steven, on the anniversary of his mother's death, that he was there because no one wanted him," Jacqua sputters, his body pulsing with agitation.

The probation officer looks around and pulls Jacqua aside, finally listening and nodding. Before the morning is over, half the people in the building will have heard this story from Jacqua's lips, and maybe, he figures, someone will actually follow up on it, perhaps even put the counselor on notice.

A native of Los Angeles and the son of a Hollywood agent, Jacqua worked 18 years as a teacher and outreach worker in San Francisco until his "frustration with the entire social order" led him to join Marshall in starting the Omega Boys Club. For a meager salary from the club, he works day and night, spending little time in the Pottrero Hill apartment where he lives alone. When he isn't at juvenile hall or a club function, he answers the 30 letters he receives weekly from boys in group homes and jails. "Sometimes I pray I don't have any letters waiting for me," he says, "because every kid deserves a write-back even if I don't have my heart in it."

These hallways are Jacqua's office, his hip pocket his file cabinet. Having earned nearly unlimited access to court hearings and detention halls because of the club's successes, Jacqua not only recruits members and conducts meetings at the Youth Guidance Center, he is also a self-appointed voice for the kids who have landed here. Today, he bombards an attorney with information, lobbies a group home counselor on a boy's behalf, advises a judge, mediates family disputes in the hallways. In his purple Omega Boys jacket, Jacqua slips up and down stairs, all through the building, gathering boys to him like a magnet.

"Who is everyone afraid of?" Jacqua asks rhetorically, as we round a corner. "The black teen-ager. Not just whites—black folks are afraid of their own children. Society has given up on these kids."

Boys waiting for their hearings mill around with hard-jawed defiance in the regulation street uniform—hooded black jackets and low-slung pants, styles that originated to hide guns or drugs. Leaning against a dingy yellow wall, sipping coffee from a plastic foam cup, Jacqua rattles off the alleged offenses of some of them: armed robbery, attempted murder, rape. He admits he is

particularly bothered by the last crime, in which the boy and a friend, both drunk, raped another man. But the boy is remorseful and "the kind we like to work with," says Jacqua, "charming, smart, a throwaway kid. The harder a kid is, the easier it is for us to communicate." A few minutes later, I hear him through locked glass doors "communicating" with a boy who fought with another inmate. The boy's mother stands between them, hands folded, her eyes flying up and down with Jacqua's flapping arms. She seems relieved. "You ain't gonna make it in here or on the street if you keep going off like that," Jacqua shouts, punching a fist into his hand. "In fact, you're gonna end up in the crazy house."

"I was mad!" the boy yells.

"You're gonna get mad all the time!" Jacqua yells back. Then he backs off a bit. "Understand what's going on. You're gonna be set up every day in here."

Jacqua rarely loses an opportunity to expound on the setup. As probation officers, lawyers and court officers brush past us, he tells me what he tells the boys: "Your enemy isn't the guy in the cell next to you. It's the system of rich folks who put you here and put drugs in your community. The prison industry wants to destroy you. It's the plantation of the new age, and you're the slave." Suddenly this aging hippie is a fiery John Brown, daring to preach rebellion, and the ears around us prick up. A boy on a bench nearby rolls his eyes and turns his back, but he can't drown Jacqua out. "It's genocide," he

continues in the calm, even tones that only someone who is truly enraged can affect. "I can't prove the most intelligent ones are locked up, but it's true. The elimination of the black male is a plan which is part of the fabric of American society."

Yet to Jacqua, the usual alternatives to jail are not much better than locking kids up. He considers special-education classes and "treatment" programs fuzzy-headed, ineffective liberalism. After one hearing in which the judge sentences a boy to a substance-abuse program that it isn't clear he needs, Jacqua fumes. "Look at that waste of money. Conservatives would agree with me. They'd say put him in a home, make him pull himself up by the bootstraps, but give him a bowl of oatmeal in the morning. A conservative businessman would offer him a job, to give him a chance to prove himself."

A woman in a T-shirt that reads "World Freedom: Land, People, Blood" wanders up to Jacqua with her son in tow. The boy has just been released from the county's Log Cabin Ranch, a detention center, but he's not happy. "I never thought you were a jail-type person," Jacqua jokes with him, "not that I don't love jail-type people, because I do." But the boy is grim and Jacqua, who has known the family for years, takes him aside. The mother, a drug addict, has told him he can stay with her in her hotel room for three nights if he gives her \$10 a night. Jacqua gives him \$30 and goes off to talk to the boy's probation officer about sending him to live with relatives in New York.

Later that day, we wind through the maze of hallways to the detention cells, Jacqua carrying a big pink bakery box with a cake for one inmate's birthday. Mingled smells of canned soup and sweaty socks greet us at the community room, where a couple dozen boys sit in rows watching TV cartoons. Several of them saunter up to Jacqua. He hugs one boy, who pulls back, blushing, and punches Jacqua in the arm.

On a nearby counter, a phone rings, and a counselor picks it up. The voice asks for Jacqua. Incredibly, it's a boy on the run. "You're gonna have to face it," Jacqua tells him. "It's not gonna go away." A few minutes later the phone rings again. It's a boy from a unit across the courtyard who had spotted Jacqua coming in. "It's going to be OK," Jacqua soothes. "Now get a good night's sleep."

The youths sit down at the dinner tables, big pink and white hunks of cake poking up from the rest of the brownish mass on their trays. Jacqua usually eats with them, but tonight he is standing with me, eating soup from a tin bowl. He is expansive and gracious, as if he were hosting a dinner party. Surveying the scene, he does not see a dope dealer here or a gangbanger there, but the person "who might help us save the ozone layer, the guy who could find a cure for AIDS."

"Jack has a sense of commitment I've never seen in anyone," says Youth Guidance Center psychologist Marsha Goldberg. "These kids have a lot of

Camille Peri is a free-lance writer who has appeared in *Mother Jones* and *Hippocrates*. She has worked in the juvenile justice system and lives in San Francisco.

needs, and Jack can't meet them all, but he's doing a helluva job. He just doesn't give up."

"This is more than a cause for Jack," says Marynella Woods, a social worker in the public defender's office. "It's his life, his family. These are his kids."

A FEW NIGHTS LATER, JACQUA IS LECTURING THE BOYS AT THE POTRERO HILL Neighborhood House. "You can't be a daddy sellin' dope," he preaches. "There are too many of those daddies in the pen. Take your kid to the park—that's the best day you could have."

There are a few stifled laughs. "Nobody wants to be broke," mutters one boy.

Jacqua then yanks a \$20 bill out of his pocket, crushes it and hurls it on the floor, then another and another. He kicks the money as if it were trash. "That's the best day you could have," he repeats, his voice going soft, almost plaintive. "Most of you don't know that because you didn't have a daddy to do that or to throw a football with you after the 19ers game while mom—not grandma—was cookin' greens and weet potato pie." In some forums, his remark might bring protests of stereotyping, but here the room falls silent.

The "lost father" is a major theme of the Omega Boys Club—one that frequently comes up at club meetings. "Everyone else runs a program. We run a family," Joe Marshall says. "Ninety-five percent of these kids have no male in the home, so we become the fathers and in some cases, the mothers. If we don't, they're just going to reproduce more pain, because that's all they know. How are they going to know how to be a decent dad if they've never seen a decent dad?"

Although the club bills itself as an academic group, the only formal academic component is a reading and writing class taught before every meeting by Margaret Norris, a high school teacher and a single mother of three boys. The heart of the evening is the meeting between the men and the boys. Along with Jacqua and Marshall, there are two other dedicated Omega Boys leaders: Coach—who is never called by his real name, Wil Jiggets—a retired Army division command sergeant major and former city college basketball coach, and Preston Worthy, who lectures at high schools on motivation and self-esteem and draws on his own struggle to escape a troubled youth. Marshall likens his gatherings to African rites of passage, the men passing down the wisdom of generations, turning boys into men.

Academics might argue with the club's heavy focus on fathers. Johns Hopkins University sociologist Andrew J. Cherlin wrote that he was unconvinced that "the absence of a father [is] directly responsible for any of the supposed deficiencies of broken homes," adding that "lack of a male income" is the real deficiency. But Marshall and Jacqua do not have an academician's perspective on it. They see every day what love and guidance do in the lives of these boys.

Club member Jeremy Massey, an 18-year-old former gangbanger and drug dealer, traces his turnaround to a long talk one night in Jacqua's car. "Jack said, 'Jeremy, what made you so angry for you to be beatin' up on everybody, wantin' to shoot everybody, sellin' drugs? You gotta realize what made you angry.' He had my mind in his hand, and it relieved me 'cause I didn't know why I was angry and he told me. I could talk to my mom, but I needed a man to tell me the hard-core facts of life, and I could never spend enough time with my father to where I could cling onto anything."

Joe Collins, a club regular who was a crack dealer at the age of 10, recalls thinking that rival gangsters would kill him at his first meeting. "Jack said, 'That ain't gonna happen,'" he remembers. "So I went up there and this dude walks up and says, 'Wha's up, my brother?' soft, like that. Now when somebody walked up to me and said, 'Wha's up?' I was always ready to fight. But he reached out his hand, gave me a hug. My buddies in my own neighborhood never did that. And I thought, this is cool, this is what I need, a family."

In many cases, Jacqua says, the youths' own families seem to wish them away. "With few exceptions, no father has ever come to a meeting or to the airport to pick up a kid coming home from college," he says. "The mothers are almost as bad. No one—aunts, mothers, grandparents—sends those kids a nickel when they're in school. We have big celebrations for the college kids

and no parents show up."

Many of the correctional programs now in vogue such as boot camps, wilderness survival treks and "scared straight" prison field trips use a tough approach to shake juvenile offenders out of their ways. But the Omegas figure these boys have already suffered enough. Instead, they offer them support, tempering their toughness with love—and they stick with them for as long as it takes to turn their lives around. "We've got these kids for life," Marshall says.

Marshall estimates that there are about 300 current club members—a member being just about any boy who is at all responsive to the Omega message. Besides preaching and teaching, club leaders visit boys at home and in

detention, provide tutorial support or help find work, pay for books, food, shoes, bus fare, even car insurance. As a boy becomes more involved, he may be hired as a peer counselor to jailed youths and sent out to speak on television or radio and at schools and conferences. That may be the Omegas' most magical element: Infusing a young man with a sense of his responsibility as a role model and leader keeps him motivated as he inspires others. Every year the club sends several boys on a tour of Southern colleges, a particularly powerful experience for those who grew up with a constricted vision of their future. The historically black schools show them that the academic life can be theirs, too.

The support doesn't end when a youth goes to college. Most of the funds Marshall raises for the club—last year, \$450,000 from foundations and private donations—go to help pay tuition, transportation and living expenses for the college students. Marshall visits, calls and writes to them, and he and Norris often help them by phone with their course work.

Aside from the college students, most club members are actively struggling to give up street life, Marshall acknowledges, and there are plenty of setbacks, including arrests. That leads some critics of the club to question its methods, especially the unceasing devotion of Jacqua and Marshall. "It works for some," one social worker says flatly, "but kids can manipulate it." Others say that criticism misses the point. "Sometimes a boy *thinks* he's using them," says youth advocate Perkins, who runs a youth program for the San Francisco Foundation, a charitable organization and one of the club's longest supporters, "but they keep pumping him and pumping him until he gets infected with a belief in himself. He gets so pumped up he can't turn back."

Although the club has earned wide respect at juvenile hall, some officials are disturbed by parts of its message. "Because they are anti-Establishment and anti-system, some staff see them as anti-us," says former Log Cabin Ranch director Rosemary Finley. "But I don't see it that way. They're trying to empower kids, telling them, 'You can be in control or you can be a number.'"

Like it or not, the justice system has come to rely on the club. Last spring, Finley took the unprecedented step of allowing two inmates out of detention to go on the club's annual tour to Southern colleges. A year ago, a San Francisco judge used his discretionary sentencing power to grant probation to a club member so that he could attend Grambling University under Marshall's watchful eye. The alternative could have been time in San Quentin prison. And in San Mateo County, another judge decided that a club member should be allowed to go to Alabama State University instead of state prison. In both cases, the terms of probation require that the students stay out of trouble and in school.

"I hate to think that if they weren't around, all those children would have been lost," admits Mitchell of San Francisco's juvenile court, "lost in a system that doesn't always promote their best interests."

"We didn't see anyone else making that a priority," shrugs Marshall, "so we had to."

NEAR MIDNIGHT, OVER THE AIRWAVES FROM RAP STATION KMEL, A VOICE emerges from the darkness.

"This is a gangster," it hisses over the call-in phone lines. "Know why we do it? 'Cause it's fun."

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'mega Boys

Continued from Page 42

"What's fun about it?" Joe Marshall asks casually. "May-I'll want to do it, too."
 "Drinking. Being chased." Marshall starts scanning the gangster's weak spots. "You got a little brother?" he asks. "You want him to do it, too?"
 "If he's in my crew, why not?"
 "Your son, too?"
 The gangster laughs. "I think—well, I think I'll be of it by then."
 "Why? If it brings so much joy, that's the best thing you can pass on to your kid. You don't want the rest of your family to do it, too?"
 "They could die today, I don't care."
 "Who do you care about?"
 "Me."
 "Nobody else?"
 "Me and my crew."
 "Not your parents or other siblings?"
 "Uh-uh."
 "You must be pretty unhappy."
 There is a weak laugh.
 "Do you have a friend you

can talk to?"

"I don't trust nobody."
 "I feel sorry for you. You say it's fun but you know it's not, you're drinking, you're hurting. I feel for you, man."
 "I just don't feel it. I could take off someone right now with no remorse."
 "Don't underestimate yourself. Deep down inside, I don't care how much you try to bury it, there's still a human being. You can't get rid of that person—it's there and it's gnawing at you and that's why you're calling."

The gangster laughs. "I just called to say why are you sweating us?"
 "You know why we do it. Because of you."
 "You think I'm really gonna listen to you guys?"
 "Yeah."
 "Street Soldiers," as the radio show is called, from the Hammer song, is Marshall at his best. For four hours every week, he, Preston Worthy, Margaret Norris and various Omega youths turn the airwaves into a meeting hall for a community fragmented by fear and violence. They lend comfort, advice, encouragement and an ear for people

who have nowhere else to turn.

The day after the random shooting of a Samoan boy at a bus stop in Hunters Point, his father phones in, his voice broken with grief. He tries to talk but can't put the words together. "I'm all tied up," he says.

Angry voices come on the line, slashing the darkness. "I know who did it," says the boy's uncle. "I know the gang, somebody's gonna go down. Cut me off the air," he challenges the radio hosts.

But they have no intention of hanging up—they know he needs to talk. At the end the father comes back on with a plea: "My son had a daughter and I want her mother to bring her to see me. As long as I can see her, my son lives in this world."

The rest of the night, the station is jammed with calls. This is the antithesis of the anonymous drive-by shooting—no one can blot out the voice of the dead boy's father in the night. A member of the accused gang, who had no part in the shooting, starts off tough, but his voice reveals he's scared. By the time Mar-

shall and Joe Collins have finished with him, he's given a public apology, his voice choked with sorrow. The next caller says he wants to apologize, too, but Marshall pushes him further. "You guys have to stop this senselessness," he urges. "This is your opportunity to be a real leader."

Six hours later, on a drizzly morning, Marshall sits quietly recording grades in his office at J. Eugene McAteer High School. McAteer and the Youth Guidance Center face each other across Portola Drive, in the center of San Francisco, like matched monuments to the city's failure to reach its African-American children. Less than one-third of the black students who enter the freshman class at McAteer make it to their senior year. After a struggle with the administration, Marshall, who teaches math, last spring succeeded in launching an Omega-inspired program to teach study habits and survival skills to freshmen who had flunked their first semester. Marshall feels compelled to stay in the school system, but he detests its rigidity. "Look at this," he says, handing me a report card. "I've got to label people failures or academic successes, so I've got to label their growth. It's so stupid."

After school, Marshall volunteers evenings at the club, leaving near midnight to drive an hour to his home in Pittsburg, where he lives with his wife and three children. On talk-show nights, he heads home after 2 a.m. Sometimes he sleeps in his car. Yet, the strain doesn't seem to show.

"The more he does, the more energized he is," says Norris, who met him when they were students at the University of San Francisco, where Marshall founded the Black Student Union. "He has always been solution-oriented and an independent thinker, not controlled by anyone."

On the wall above Marshall's desk, a photo of Malcolm X scowls down at him, an appropriate image for a man who measures his accomplishments against those of the great civil-rights leaders. They are constantly with him, he says, urging him on. "When I talk at a meeting

about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X and Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, it's right in front of me," says Marshall, throwing his head back and closing his eyes. "I can see Jackie Robinson playing baseball and being called a nigger. I can see Malcolm X going down in a pool of blood—all those voices are in me, all of it drives me."

Marshall knows that whites who remember Malcolm X as a preacher of racial hatred are disturbed by his equal status in the club with Jesus and Martin Luther King. But the boys he sees are much more the children of Malcolm than of King. "When I talk about him, I'm talking about somebody who completely turned his life around—someone who went from calling himself a Satan to teaching himself to read and write."

If Malcolm X makes white observers skittish, a few blacks object to a white man like Jacqua acting as father figure to black boys. Marshall was once flagged down on the street by one community leader, who refused to support the club because of Jacqua's involvement. "I'm not often moved to fistcuffs, or even to that mind-set, but that day I nearly was," he recalls. "I said, 'What the hell are you doing?' He wasn't doing anything, of course."

Marshall sees his partnership with Jacqua as a simple given: "We look entirely different but we're the same. One black, one white. One hippie white guy," he laughs, with a smile that overtakes his face, "one suburban middle-class black guy."

The eldest of nine children, Marshall grew up in Los Angeles, where his mother was a nurse and his father dug ditches for Southern California Gas Co. His parents valued education, sending all nine children to Catholic school and eventually to college.

While Marshall was growing up, he was moved by the pain and anger of the boys around him, which they turned against themselves. "There was a lot of hatred, fighting, guys who didn't know you beating you up for nothing, just because you were alive. It's really a lack of respect for human life, including your own. You're ex-

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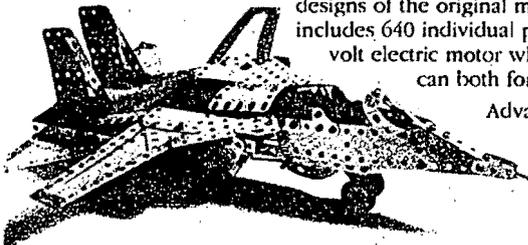
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orcising your pain and your misery on somebody else—you think you are, anyway. But I think you can get in touch with that and stop it."

Marshall believes that even the most hard-core troublemakers are looking for a way out. As evidence, he will tell you the tale of the kid he picked up one night, running from a carload of armed rivals. The boy turned out to be a high-stakes drug dealer, making upward of \$8,000 a day; a player in an organization that kidnaped people, murdered them and dumped their bodies in the bay. Now that boy is a psychology major at a Southern college and one of the club's most charismatic leaders.

No effort is too great for that kind of result, says Marshall: "Every time a kid seems to just turn himself around, discover himself, realize he doesn't have to go down the path of self-destruction—that moment is always exhilarating. That's my score card, I can put one up on our side."

MORRIS BROWN COLLEGE IS just minutes from the glassy corporate headquarters of downtown Atlanta, but it feels a decade away. Red brick buildings dot a grassy, meandering campus shaded by maple and magnolia trees. Founded 20 years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, Morris Brown was the first college in Georgia to be staffed and directed by blacks, and it has built a reputation for offering programs geared toward underprivileged youth. Most Omega club members choose predominantly black colleges like Morris Brown, whose attrition rates for African-American students are much lower than those at colleges where white students are in the majority.

Omega boys attending colleges in Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia are in the crowd tonight at the Morris Brown gym for an exhibition basketball game featuring celebrities such as "Boyz N the Hood" star Morris Chestnut, rapper Tone-Loc and Rocky Carroll from the television show "Roc." The proceeds of the game will benefit the club, and among the college players is Joe Thomas, at 24 the oldest Omega member

and a senior majoring in communications at Morris Brown.

Thomas rarely smiles. He is a good-looking young man, but his eyes are tired and his lips part only slightly when he smiles, as if it would take too much effort to do any more. When Thomas came to Morris Brown, other students said to him, "You been through Vietnam?"

Until then, his world had been a square block of bullet-scarred and boarded-up public housing in San Francisco. Lounging on the bed in his dormitory room after the game, Thomas' eyes have a far-off look. He is peering into a dark hallway 3,000 miles away. "I can just see myself right now, all in black," he says. "Some nights I might have a gun in my pocket. There are children right there in the hallway and I got about 30 rocks in my pocket, competing with about 30 guys to get to that one customer, and when the customer walks in, rushing up to him and saying, 'I got the fattest rocks, I got the fattest rocks.' He takes it, then somebody snatches my money and I gotta fight him to get it back. Older dealers rob the younger ones with guns. And when guys get out of jail, they don't care about no lives."

"A junkie came in one night and started shooting needles in his neck," he winces. "He didn't have any more veins. I saw a girl stab a guy and kill him for her boyfriend—stabbed him in the stomach, the back, all in his neck, just kept stabbing him, she wouldn't stop, and there were little kids walking around watching. They're out at 3 o'clock in the morning 'cause their mama's on crack."

Mothers offered him silverware, TV dinners, soap, \$80 worth of food stamps for one \$20 rock. Three generations in one family were on crack—a mother, her son and her pregnant daughter—he used to hear them up all night fighting over it. After he started dealing crack, one of his sisters started smoking it. She would steal from him, he recalls, and he would see her getting into cars with white men.

Guns and knives were as much a part of the scenery as the dog-sized rats. He has a scar on his back to show it, a

slash from a knife that just missed his spine. As if in a nightmare, Thomas recalls turf battles involving guns and bats. "Blood would be everywhere, all over my clothes. I didn't feel anything. I was going about my business." Thomas closes his eyes. "The boys you're with will look at you like you're a punk if you 'nut up,' you know, punk up. I didn't feel any remorse, but now I do. I always wonder what happened to the other guys. I can still feel the blood hitting me on the face."

Thomas was locked in juvenile hall at least a dozen times, county jail three times, group homes twice. College was something he saw on television. He barely knew what the inside of a high school looked like—he graduated with credits earned in juvenile hall. All of it—the fighting, being chased, money—was like an addiction. "I'd try anything to stop," he says. "I'd go to AA meetings and say I was addicted to selling drugs and they'd say, 'Hi, Joe,'" he waves, without a trace of a smile, "and I'd tell my life story."

Through a work furlough program, Thomas was working as a custodian at the Pottro Hill Neighborhood House when Marshall invited him to a club meeting. He went and was overwhelmed. "I didn't want to leave. I told my mother about it and she was excited. Finally there was something for me, something I could relate to. They were talking about positive images, telling me about myself and my people, who I was and where I came from—that's something I never heard."

But Thomas, who was one crime away from prison, says what saved his life was the idea that he could go to college. "I thought all I was made to do was sell drugs because everybody was telling me all my life I wasn't shit and I was never gonna be shit. Even my mother said, 'All you gonna be is a junkie out there someday dead on the street.' I said, well, I guess I ain't shit, so I'm gonna go out and sell drugs."

At first, he laughed at the other club youths who were aspiring to go to college. But after a while their enthusiasm inspired him. The club

helped him with SAT preparations and college applications and sent him on the college tour.

In his dorm room, Thomas pours a glass of milk from a carton in a tiny refrigerator and grabs a handful of chocolate chip cookies. In a T-shirt, overalls and a Giants cap, the muscular Thomas is far from the picture he paints of a skinny, dragged-out dooper. For a while after he came to Morris Brown, Thomas held on to his street clothes and street talk as armor against a world that was scarier to him than the one he knew on the streets. "I never saw blacks carrying briefcases, wearing suits and ties," he marvels, like a foreign exchange student in an exotic land. "I don't think I ever wore a suit and tie until I came out here."

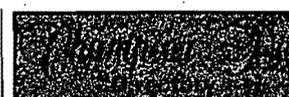
He recalls a conversation with another student about smoking marijuana as a teenager. "In my house, if they found a joint they would have a family discussion, try to figure out where the joint came from," the other boy told him. "I never knew there were Cosby families like that," says Thomas.

Thomas worries about his own 5-year-old daughter, Jazmin, who lives in the housing project with her mother. Recently Jazmin told him of a drive-by shooting, giggling as if it were a game. Although he encourages her mother to leave the neighborhood, he does not feel that he can take his daughter with him now. "I love my daughter," he says. "I don't want to be one of those black men who doesn't claim their kid because that goes against all that black men should stand for, and all the Omega Boys Club tries to teach us."

Still, glancing around his stark room, Thomas admits that there are temptations to return to the old life. A few summers ago, an old friend showed him more than \$50,000 in cash: "I think I had 50 cents in my pocket and a BART ticket. He said, 'Why don't you get back?' You don't think that was tempting? But the Omega Boys Club put all their trust in me to help lead the other young guys in the club."

The next chapter in the Omega Boys Club begins next year, when Joe Thomas leads the first four members out of college. Of the 118 Omegas who have gone to college, 10 have dropped out and are "in transition," says Marshall, and at least one of them, according to Thomas, is back to selling drugs. For Thomas, and for many club members, college has been a slow process. He took light loads and remedial courses, and spent five years working toward graduation. And it will be no easier after graduation, when he and the others will face a stagnant job market.

But the Omega Boys Club has already given Thomas something his world never had: a chance to steal back a piece of his youth, a chance to believe in himself and his future. "This has been the best four years of my life," he says with that little smile that says if I'm too happy, maybe it will all go away. "If it wasn't for the Omega Boys Club, I'd be dead, in jail or doped up somewhere. I look back on it now and I can't believe it. I'm here, I'm going to college, I'm a senior majoring in mass communications." He pauses, just to savor the sound of those words. "It's just overwhelming."



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LEVEL 2 - 2 OF 16 STORIES

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The San Francisco Chronicle

JUNE 14, 1994, TUESDAY, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. A1

LENGTH: 1133 words

HEADLINE: S.F. Anti-Violence Leader Wins MacArthur Fellowship

BYLINE: Clarence Johnson, Chronicle Staff Writer

BODY:

A onetime elementary school teacher, who grew tired of going to funerals of former students or seeing them strung out on dope, was awarded a MacArthur Foundation fellowship grant yesterday for his efforts at steering San Francisco youth away from violence, crime and drugs.

Joseph E. (Joe) Marshall, executive director of the Omega Boys Club, an organization that stresses academic excellence, was one of two Bay Area residents -- and among 20 people nationwide -- to receive the so-called "genius grants" that are typically given to honor individual creativity in arts and sciences.

Along with Marshall, this year's recipients include 65-year-old poet and essayist Adrienne Rich, who taught at Stanford University and resides in Santa Cruz, international jazz musician/composer Ornette Coleman and photographer Robert Adams.

Marshall will receive \$ 290,000 during a five-year period and may use the money for whatever purposes he chooses. He said some of it will be used to send inner-city youths to college.

"I don't do anything to win awards. I do it because there is a need that I want to do something about in my own way," said Marshall, 47, who is unaccustomed to having much money or widespread recognition for his work. "What makes this special is now other people believe that the work we always felt was important, they now believe is important, too. The grant helps us not to worry about how we are going to do this . . . not worry about how we are going to take care of our own families in the process."

Marshall, on leave from the San Francisco Unified School District where he has been a teacher and administrator for 25 years, co-founded the Omega Boys Club in 1987 to give African American youths options to inner-city lifestyles that often lead to prison, violence or premature death.

"Joe is extraordinarily committed and dedicated -- a professional who decided that he has got to do more than make a paycheck," said club co-founder Jack Jacqua. "He's got to walk the extra mile. He's putting into action what a lot of people just put into words."

The club, which includes boys and girls, started with 15 seemingly unremarkable youngsters and sent eight of them to college -- financing books, tuition, room and board -- the next year. The Club has since expanded to more

The San Francisco Chronicle, JUNE 14, 1994

than 400 members, including former gang members and several who are being tutored while in jail. But more important to Marshall, the club now has 108 members in college, eight of whom will graduate this month.

"When I first started teaching, I figured that if my kids could survive me they could make it anywhere," said Marshall, who is married and has three children. "But I found that my own students, who I knew were bright, would be writing me from prison or I'd go to the Tenderloin and a kid would come up to me and say I used to be his teacher, but I didn't know who the kid was because he was so cracked out on dope.

"That's when I knew I had to extend myself beyond the classroom. The vehicle for that was the Boys Club."

The club meets evenings Tuesday in San Francisco and Wednesday in Oakland. It stresses academics and social responsibility, offering tutoring in college prep courses and study programs for college entrance exams. There is no recreation. No basketball or field trips to the zoo. The only outing -- after yearlong fund raising -- is the annual trek to the nation's black colleges by senior club members.

After just seven years, the results have been dramatic.

"Not only do we have kids in college but we have kids who stopped doing destructive things," said Marshall. "They have stopped selling drugs and 'gangbanging'. They turned in their guns for jobs. They stopped destroying their community . . . which means we have one less kid to worry about. That may not seem like a lot, but it is."

In addition to running the club and helping raise his own family, Marshall also hosts the "Street Soldiers" radio show on KMEL-FM, a violence-prevention program that airs simultaneously in the Bay Area and Los Angeles, and will soon be broadcast in Detroit and Chicago.

Marshall gives motivational lectures nationwide, serves on the Advisory Board for the Community Violence Prevention Program at Harvard University and is a Ph.D. candidate at Wright Institute.

"He swims against the stream and bucks his peers," said Jacqua. "He's just a person doing what we all need to do and his strength comes from doing it."

Since 1981, the MacArthur Foundation, whose founder made his fortune in insurance, has given out more than \$ 120 million to 414 fellows. The recipients are nominated by anonymous talent scouts and chosen on the basis of skill, creativity and dedication.

The fellowships range from \$ 235,000 to \$ 375,000 over five years, or \$ 45,000 to \$ 75,000 annually, depending on the recipient's age.

THE MACARTHUR FELLOWS

These are the 20 recipients of the MacArthur fellowships:

The San Francisco Chronicle, JUNE 14, 1994

Robert Adams, 57, photographer, from Longmont, Colo.

Jeraldyn Blunden, 53, artistic director of the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, of Dayton, Ohio.

Anthony Braxton, 49, musician and composer, Wesleyan University.

Rogers Brubaker, 38, sociologist and political historian, associate professor, University of California, Los Angeles.

Ornette Coleman, 64, jazz musician and composer, New York City.

Israel Moiseevich Gelfand, 80, mathematician and biologist, distinguished professor, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.

Faye D. Ginsburg, 41, associate professor of anthropology, New York University.

Heidi Hartmann, 48, economist and co-founder of Institute for Women's Policy Research, in Washington.

Bill T. Jones, 42, co-founder, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane & Co., New York City.

Peter E. Kenmore, 41, entomologist with the Food and Agriculture Organization, working in Manila.

Joseph E. Marshall, 47, educator, executive director, Omega Boys Club, San Francisco.

Carolyn McKecuen, 54, executive director, Watermark Association of Artisans, Elizabeth City, N.C.

Donella Meadows, 53, environmental writer, adjunct professor, Dartmouth College, Plainfield, N.H.

Arthur Mitchell, 60, founder and artistic director, Dance Theater of Harlem, New York City.

Hugo Morales, 45, co-founder and executive director, Radio Bilingue, Fresno.

Janine Pease-Windy Boy, 44, president, Little Big Horn College, Crow Agency, Mont.

Willie Reale, 36, founder and artistic director, 52nd Street Project, New York City.

Adrienne Rich, 65, poet and essayist, Santa Cruz.

Sam-Ang Sam, 44, musician and scholar, director of the Cambodian Network Council, Washington.

Jack Wisdom, 41, physicist, professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mass.

The San Francisco Chronicle, JUNE 14, 1994

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, JOE MARSHALL , Omega Boys Club co-founder , BY JERRY TELFER,
THE CHRONICLE

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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BACKGROUND

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Role Models, Bogus and Real

O. J. Simpson Versus The Street Soldiers

America deludes itself about why its children behave as they do. In the suburbs we herd them into malls and let them grow up bereft of community under the impression that what you can buy is who you are. In the cities we raise them in devastated, parentless settings, where drug addiction and random gunfire rule the day.

After all that, when children behave badly we inexplicably lay the blame at the tarnished feet of America's sports gods: We blame Michael Jordan, for gambling. We blame Charles Barkley, for spitting on a fan. This week we're blaming O. J. Simpson, for battering his wife and for being accused of her murder.

The blame of which I speak is indirectly assigned, a consequence of that seemingly innocuous phrase "role model." The term entered the language 30 years ago. Initially a "role model" was someone whose successes other people — and especially children — might emulate. As the television age wore on, there came a subtle shift in meaning. A "role model" became someone who, by virtue of fame and money, was appointed surrogate parent to America's young.

These are peculiar "parents" indeed. They live behind television screens, never meet their "children" and are expected to inspire them by force of fame alone. Any failing on their part is regarded as a betrayal of the nation, and a tragedy for all those doe-eyed kids in television land. These days, the term "role model" is almost exclusively heard when some modern-day Icarus loses his wings and comes crashing back to earth, proved mortal, in the end.

In the days since O. J. Simpson's arrest for murder, there have probably been hundreds of stories lamenting the loss of a vital "role model" for America's young. This despite the fact that Mr. Simpson's glory years as a player ended 20 years ago. In popular culture, 20 years is an eternity. It's a safe bet that until Mr. Simpson's arrest, most kids had barely even heard of him.

Why then the constant "role model" morality play? Partly it's the archaic notion that athletes need to be paragons of virtue and temperance, exempt from mortal flaw. Beyond that, I think, lies a deeper and more unfortunate presumption: that only stars can affect children's lives for the better, that the mere mortals among us are powerless to guide, shape or enlighten. The sadness here is that the reverse is true. The only legitimate "role model" is the person whom children can see, feel and interact with in their daily lives.

Enter Joseph Marshall Jr., the recipient of a 1994 "genius" award from the MacArthur Foundation and co-founder of San Francisco's Omega Boys Club, a place where young people between the ages of 11 and 25 find friendship, surrogate parents, academic training — and college scholarships. Mr. Marshall says that inner-city kids are confused and violent because they've been "orphaned" — by family, community, government and the media. No athletes, grinning or otherwise, can reach them. His role is to recreate families for these children.

Mr. Marshall is also the host of "Street Soldiers," an extraordinary violence-intervention project. At a time when many radio talk shows have become little more than noise, Mr. Marshall's is the equivalent of a radio "parent," broadcast weekly on San Francisco's KMEL. He reaches an audience of 40,000 to 50,000 young people, many of whom he advises on such pressing matters as how not to shoot people and how to avoid being shot.

The results speak for themselves. "Street Soldiers" has a proven record of averting the reprisal shootings that often follow initial episodes of violence. And since the Omega Boys club opened in 1987, more than 100 young people who might well have gone to jail, or to graveyards, have gone to college instead.

That's what a role model is: someone who loves and works and encourages and lays on hands. All the rest is noise and empty air.

BRENT STAPLES

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, JUNE 24, 1994

Close

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