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Another arrest in "Bloods" beatings Views mixed on whether it was genuine gang activity BY ESTHER BROWN

On May 3, Charlottesville police charged another 17-year-old boy with crimes stemming from the April 21 assault on Friendship Court, a low-income housing project near Garrett Street. The suspect was charged with robbery, aggravated wounding, malicious wounding and participation in a criminal street gang. The suspect allegedly beat one of the victims; his injuries required two metal plates to be implanted in his cheek. The other victim allegedly had a tooth knocked out. Another 17-year-old, who is also being held at the Blue Ridge Detention Center, was charged with obstruction of justice, threatening or intimidating a witness. Both these arrests follow the previous week's arrests of a 16-year-old and a 16-year-old Scott-Wilkins, in connection with the incident.

The beatings are being treated as gang activity. Charlottesville Police Captain Chip Harding says some of the young suspects, including Wilkins, "originally came from New York and were saying they were part of the Bloods." Still, Harding is unsure whether the suspects are actually "Bloods," as has been claimed, or if they're imposters: "I don't think the Bloods carry a card," Harding says. "All I can say is that they were saying that night that they were [Bloods], and in one of the searches they found materials, writings by one of the guys outlining [the Bloods'] signing."

At Friendship Court, however, a reporter finds more ambivalent views. Longtime Friendship Court resident Brenda Fountain is not convinced that the group is a well-organized gang: "I don't think [the suspects] know what Bloods and Crips are. They just say that and then they try to portray them," she says. "It's a shame that they're being labeled," Fountain adds. She expressed concern for her 10-year-old grandson, who is not in a gang, could be labeled as a troublemaker if he wears clothing she recently bought him: black jeans and a red shirt.

Fountain's nephew, Sean, agrees that the "gang" question has gotten undue attention: "They call Charlottesville a Boston, Chicago or New York. If a real Blood came to Charlottesville and went up to one of [the suspects] and they shook hands, he'd kill them." Fountain says she suspects "old G's," or "Retro Gangsters," could be involved, explaining that individuals could be Bloods recently released from prison or Bloods who have recently relocated to the area. "They're the ones where they left off and these young kids just think it's cool." Still, she adds, "It's not really the people that live in the area [that are involved], it's the people that come from elsewhere."—Esther Brown

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