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An old, rusty refrigerator had been knocked over on the side of Pelon’s garage. It was white and dented on the edges and looked like it had not been used in a decade. Its metal cooling rods faced the open sky. A twenty-four case of Corona beer filled with empty bottles sat on top of the rods. We had tagged the refrigerator at the height of our delinquent careers; finely scrawled on the side in black marker were nicknames for sixty-eight of our “homies.” I was with Pelon, a former fellow gang member. We turned the refrigerator over and read aloud to each other, “Dre, Moreno, Sleepy, Conejo,” each homely coming to life as we said his name. Eventually we couldn’t help but count. Out of sixty-eight members in the gang—we estimated, based on memory and after making a few phone calls—twelve were in prison serving three years to life, sixteen were in jail or prison serving sentences ranging from three months to three years, and the remaining forty had been incarcerated at one point in their lives. We knew this because we had spent years on the streets together, looking out for one another, protecting each other, and taking part of each other’s lives, like family. At this moment, on a cool spring evening in 2002, in front of this old refrigerator, it dawned on us
that by the time we reached our early twenties, none of the homies had avoided incarceration.

Most of us who were not currently locked up still fared miserably: seven murdered, six permanently injured from bullet wounds—one had been blinded, two paralyzed from the waist down, and three with permanent scars and debilitating injuries—and about a dozen were severe drug addicts, some of whom begged for money on the streets. From our estimate, out of sixty-eight homies, only two of us graduated from high school, and only I had made it to college. About a dozen had managed to evade major tragedies and, by the standards of the inner city, had become successful. Pelon had started a family and worked as a laborer for a moving company making twelve dollars an hour. He was the most stable homeboy I kept in touch with.

As we sat in front of Pelon’s old garage with splintering green paint chips scattered on the ground, we reminisced about “back in the day” when we first met Smiley. We were about fourteen years old and had just recently joined the gang. Smiley was a naïve kid our age who was physically abused by his parents. They often kicked him out of his house and onto the streets as a punishment for questioning them or telling them about his teachers’ treating him negatively. We called him Smiley because no matter how bad his circumstances were—he was homeless, victimized, or hungry—he always kept a radiant grin on his face. But his smile got him in trouble. When we gave him the nickname, he told us he thought it was appropriate because he remembered always smiling in class, and the teacher always thought he was laughing at her. When he didn’t understand what was going on in class, he would smile, and when the teacher yelled at him, he would smile. I remember one time when we were hanging out on one of our gang’s street corners, on International Boulevard, rival gang members drove by shooting at us, and, as I turned to tell him to run, I could see he was looking at them with a big smile.

Smiley was an innocent kid who I felt was growing up in the wrong place at the wrong time. Smiley told us stories that from a young age his teachers treated him punitively. He was seen as a problem kid in school and spent many of his school days in the detention room. On the street, police often stopped him as he walked home from school, even before he joined the gang, because from their perspective the baggy clothes he wore marked him as a gang member. I was there many times when this happened. I had already joined the gang, but Smiley was not involved. Yet police treated him like the rest of us. He was followed around, constantly searched, handcuffed, and harassed. Over time, I noticed Smiley increasingly turn to the gang because he believed it was his only source of support.

I joined the gang seeking the protection that I thought police and other authority figures in my community had failed to provide. Smiley, like many other homies, wanted to join for similar reasons. When he was fourteen, we offered to jump him into the gang; a group beating that was the standard initiation ritual. He agreed, and that same night we took him to the side of Pelon’s garage, where, next to the abandoned white refrigerator, a group of about eight of us punched him in the face, slammed him to the ground, and kicked him in the stomach. One of the homies grabbed a tall umbrella and hit him with it until the umbrella’s aluminum structure collapsed and the fabric ripped off. After a few minutes we picked him up, gave him hugs, and handed him an “8 ball,” a forty-ounce bottle of Old English Malt Liquor. He was officially one of us, part of our “famila,” or our “street family.”

Eventually, Smiley and I became best friends. We took care of each other. One day, when his parents permanently kicked him out of the house, I told him not to worry. “I’m going to find you a house,” I said. That night, I stole a 1980s Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme, breaking the steering column with a large, heavy-duty flat-head screwdriver to gain access to the ignition rod. I drove it to our neighborhood, walked up to Smiley, handed him a screwdriver, and told him, “Here’s your new two-bedroom apartment.” Referring to the front and rear bench seats, I joked, “I’ll sleep in the front room, and you sleep in the back room.”

A few days later, I was pulled over by police for driving this stolen car. When I stopped in the parking lot of a large drug store on the intersection of Fruitvale Avenue and Foothill Boulevard in East Oakland, the cops dragged me out of the car, kicked me on my back, and repeatedly kicked me in the stomach and legs. I remember yelling like a little boy: “Awww! Help! Awww! Help!” The officer kicking me shouted back, “Shut the fuck up! You want to be a criminal, then you’re going to get treated like one!” He stomped my face against the ground with his thick, black, military-grade rubber boots, his shoe’s sole leaving scrapes and gashes on
my upper lip and cheek bone. I was fourteen years old. After the beating, I was taken to “One-fifty,” the name we had given the juvenile justice facility in our county because it was located on 150th Avenue (in the city of San Leandro). Neither the beating nor the few days I was held at One-fifty taught me a positive lesson. Instead, while I was doing time, a boy I met by the name of Tony taught me how to sand down a 1988 Honda car key to convert it into a master key for all early-1988 Honda cars. The day after my release, I got a hold of a 1988 Honda key, scraped it on the cement over the course of a few hours, went to a BART (subway) station parking lot, and stole another car to pick up Smiley and “go cruising.”

A year later, after a few stints in juvenile hall and many experiences with violence, crime, drugs, and punishment, Smiley, Big Joe, and I visited some girls we had met. They lived in a neighborhood where many of our rival gang members lived. When we arrived, we spotted the girls sitting on their front porch. As we began talking with the girls, we noticed that a group of about eight rival gang members were walking down the street toward us. We were all about the same age, fourteen to seventeen years old, and all dressed the same: baggy, creased up, Ben Davis or Dickies brand work pants, with tucked in white T-shirts or baggy sports jerseys. The only difference is that we wore different colors to represent our affiliation. Apparently word had gotten out that we were intruding in their neighborhood. They recognized us from previous fights we had with them over the past few months. Trying to prove our toughness, we threw up our gang signs and called them out for a one-on-one fight. Their plan was different. They wanted to gang up on us and beat us down. Once they reached us, they surrounded us, and we began to fight. I fell down a few times, and the last time I got up, one of them pulled out a gun. I ran. Hearing gunshots, I leaped between two cars for protection. I turned back: our enemies faded away as they scattered behind apartment buildings. I checked my body for blood to see if I had been shot. I was fine. I found Big Joe lying on the ground. He stood up and told me he was fine. We looked for Smiley. He was nowhere in sight. I turned the corner on the car I hid behind. There he was, face flat on the ground. I ran over to him, kneeling over his body and grabbing him, trying to get him to stand up. Smiley had been shot. The bullet hit him in the head.

Fresh human blood painted a picture of death on my brand-new pair of white Nike Cortez tennis shoes. I stood on that dark street knowing that my best friend was dying. I thought, as the movies had taught me, he should have been dead the instant the bullet hit his skull, but he continued to twitch and shake as we drove him to the hospital. We’d decided not to call an ambulance; we knew from previous experience that it wouldn’t arrive in time. In the past we had been told by law enforcement that standard procedure dictated that the police had to clear a crime scene before EMTs could move in, and we had lost many friends and relatives to this policy. The ambulance often took over forty-five minutes to arrive when someone was shot in my neighborhood. A few hours later at the hospital, Smiley was declared dead.

The police told me that it was my fault that my homeboy had died and threatened to arrest me for being present at the shooting, with a charge of accessory to murder. I asked them if they were “going to catch the murderer.” “What for?” one of the officers replied. “We want you to kill each other off.” Smiley’s death, and my negative interactions with police, forced me to reflect on the larger picture of youth violence and criminalization in Oakland. Without knowing it at the time, I began to develop a sociological imagination. I began to realize that in order to understand my personal predicament, I needed to find out how youth and police violence became so prevalent in my community. Although I could not articulate it at the time, it was at that moment when I recognized, “Neither the life of an individual nor the history of society can be understood without understanding both.” It was at this critical juncture that I began to seek answers.

I made it “out the game” only because of the various support programs that I was fortunate enough to find. Before Smiley died, I had dropped out of high school for two semesters. After Smiley’s death, a teacher, Ms. Russ, found out about my troubles and reached out to me. She began to guide me. After ten years of schooling, I finally felt that a teacher cared about me. She contacted my probation officer, recruited university students to mentor me, and demonstrated a genuine commitment to my well-being.

One day, as I walked the line, deciding whether I would take my teacher’s support seriously and engage in my education, I had an encounter
with a police officer. His name was Officer Wilson. I had been drinking on a school day and provoked a fight with a rival gang member in front of Oakland High School. Officer Wilson arrived at the scene, breaking up the fight. He took me inside his patrol car and asked me if I was on probation; I told him that I was. Officer Wilson told my rival to go back to school. He put me in his patrol car, drove me to the police station, and dropped me off in an interrogation room. He told me, “You know I can arrest you and charge you with multiple infractions... Tell me, man, what is going on in your mind?” I poured my heart out. I told the officer my story, my perspective. For about an hour, he listened. He then told me, “I’m going to give you a chance... I’m going to let you go, but I want to see you make an effort to change your life around. Next time I catch you, I will make sure to lock you up.” This last chance, combined with the multiple opportunities offered by my teachers and mentors, motivated me to begin the transformation process. I was ready to change, and, at that very moment, I found key individuals who were ready to help me along the way. I returned to my teacher and told her that I was ready. She began the process of advocating for me and convincing administrators to give me a second chance. Ms. Russ and Officer Wilson shared an insight in working with troubled young people: if they were to make a change in gangs, youth violence, and negative police-community interactions, a pipeline of opportunities had to be provided for street-oriented youths.

By the time I was ready to graduate, I had brought up my grade-point average from 0.9 to 1.9. I was encouraged by college-student mentors to apply to college, and I did. A few months later, I received a letter of conditional acceptance to California State University, East Bay. The letter informed me that I was accepted under “probationary status.” I pictured myself being followed around campus by a probation officer. I told myself, “Probation! I’m already on probation, so it won’t matter.” I didn’t realize that probation in college meant I would be expelled if I received below a C average, not that I would have someone constantly watching over me.

I completed my B.A. degree in four years while I worked full-time to help support my siblings. I chose not to live in the university dorms, instead moving in with my mother, Resuel; my sister, Rosa, aged twelve; and my brother, Miguel, aged fourteen, who was in a gang, addicted to crack cocaine, and in and out of juvenile hall. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, my family had lived on 88th Avenue and D Street in “Deep” East Oakland, 33rd Avenue and East 15th in East Oakland, and the “Lower Bottom” of West Oakland—wherever my mother could find an affordable apartment. During my first two years of college, we lived in a small, dilapidated shack in West Oakland. It had a cracked foundation that made the termite-infested house rock any time we walked up the stairs. Crack dealers usually sat on our steps in the middle of the night. They were often loud, yelling, and beating up on their girlfriends or crack-addict customers.

Despite my making it into college, conflict continued. Again, I asked the police for help, and again, they ignored me. We were forced to move after my mother’s brother, my uncle Dario, was gunned down and killed while he stood between my mother and me on the corner of our street. It seemed that police were there selectively, to arrest my family and friends for petty acts but not to arrest the main drug dealers and victimizers who continued to prey on my community. As a researcher in the making, I wanted to understand why and how these officers would ignore certain major crimes and at the same time arrest so many residents for such minor infractions.

These experiences made me hanker for an understanding of urban violence and the government’s treatment of the poor. In my college courses, I read books that discussed the government’s neglect of the poor. While insightful, these books missed a key process that I had personally experienced: the state had not abandoned the poor; it had reorganized itself, placing priority on its punitive institutions, such as police, and embedding crime-control discourses and practices into welfare institutions, such as schools. In my perspective, the state, in my community, had punitively asserted itself into civil society. However, I could not be certain that the ideas I developed from my personal experience applied to anyone else. I needed to see if these experiences applied more broadly to the youth growing up in the flatlands of Oakland during a different time period. I applied to graduate school to pursue this study. In 2000, I was accepted as a Ph.D. student at the University of California, Berkeley. Given the opportunity to study race, inequality, and crime with some of the leading intellectuals in the country, I decided to try to understand the
social forces that impacted the community where I was raised. To begin to understand this process, I befriended, mentored, observed, and interviewed Black and Latino boys in Oakland for over three years. As I spent more time in the field, I realized that while violence was very prevalent in the community, criminalization was also a “fabric of everyday life” for the youths I studied. As my research unfolded, it became clear that in this community there existed a powerful culture of punishment, which shaped the ways in which young people organized themselves and created meanings of their social world.

The insights I gained by observing and interviewing these young men, as well as participating in the environment they navigated daily, helped me expose the role that criminalization played in their lives. I define criminalization as the process by which styles and behaviors are rendered deviant and are treated with shame, exclusion, punishment, and incarceration. In this study, criminalization occurred beyond the law; it crossed social contexts and followed young people across an array of social institutions, including school, the neighborhood, the community center, the media, and the family. The young men in this study found themselves in situations in which their everyday behaviors and styles were constantly treated as deviant, threatening, risky, and criminal by adults in the various social contexts they navigated. I define this ubiquitous criminalization as the youth control complex, a system in which schools, police, probation officers, families, community centers, the media, businesses, and other institutions systematically treat young people’s everyday behaviors as criminal activity. The youth control complex was fueled by the micro-power of repeated negative judgments and interactions in which the boys were defined as criminal for almost any form of transgression or disrespect of authority. Young people, who become pinballs within this youth control complex, experience what I refer to as hypercriminalization, the process by which an individual’s everyday behaviors and styles become ubiquitously treated as deviant, risky, threatening, or criminal, across social contexts. This hypercriminalization, in turn, has a profound impact on young people’s perceptions, worldviews, and life outcomes. The youth control complex creates an overarching system of regulating the lives of marginalized young people, what I refer to as punitive social control. Hypercriminalization involves constant punishment. Punishment, in this study, is understood as the process by which individuals come to feel stigmatized, outcast, shamed, defeated, or hopeless as a result of negative interactions and sanctions imposed by individuals who represent institutions of social control.

Although I began this project from the perspective of my own life experience, I rescribed with a systematic and empirical examination of the lives of the youths in this study. Life stories and voices of youths teach us about the mechanisms of criminalization that are a part of their daily lives. Observations allowed me to uncover the contradictions between what was being said and what actually occurred and to corroborate or confute what young people told me. From this point forward, the generalizations that I make come from the empirical data, unless otherwise noted.

My central argument is that criminalization was a central, pervasive, and ubiquitous phenomenon that impacted the everyday lives of the young people I studied in Oakland. By the time they formally entered the penal system, many of these young men were already caught in a spiral of hypercriminalization and punishment. This cycle began before their first arrest—it began as they were harassed, profiled, watched, and disciplined at young ages, before they had committed any crimes. Eventually, that kind of attention led many of them to fulfill the destiny expected of them. Criminalization left these marginalized young people very few choices, crime and violence being some of the few resources for feeling dignity and empowerment. Previous theorization has stopped here, describing this entrapment, blocked opportunity, and victimization. I move beyond these ideas and demonstrate that agency is very prevalent among these youths. A paradox existed among the youths in my study: criminalization became a vehicle by which they developed political consciousness and resistant identities. Unjust interactions with the youth control complex created blocked opportunities, but they also ignited the boys’ social consciousness and developed worldviews and identities diametrically opposed to the youth control complex and mass incarceration. Some boys even developed a more formal political identity that called for a change in the system which so oppressed them.

My hope is that the first-person account and evidence I provide of the overarching reach of criminalization and punitive social control in
Preface

the lives of young people will inspire policymakers to create alternative, more reintegrative approaches to law and order; that education, criminal justice, and community practitioners will change punitive practices and establish genuine caring relationships with these youngsters; that researchers will shift their levels of analysis so that we can account for other processes in the inner city beyond violence, pathology, or fixed typologies; and that by reading this book, young people will become further inspired to succeed despite the obstacles they might find in common with the boys in this book.

There is a way to transform punishment, to generate creative means of social control, which provides viable rehabilitation for delinquent youths and which does not spill over and affect young people who have yet to commit crime. It will take imagination and the courage to adopt successful models that attempt to transform the punitive way in which young people are treated in marginalized communities. There are a few individuals, such as my teacher, Ms. Russ, and Officer Wilson, who have broken away from punitive social control and aim to change the way young people are treated, and they can serve as examples. Maybe then a new generation of former gang members and delinquents will read names from an old refrigerator and celebrate multiple high school graduations and college degrees, instead of mourn the incarcerated and excluded lives of their friends and family.

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The Coupling of Criminal Justice and Community Institutions

No public safety officer shall be prohibited from seeking election to, or serving as a member of, the governing board of a school district.


In its function, the power to punish is not essentially different from that of curing or educating.

—Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 1977

I drove to Spider’s house late one afternoon after a long day of discussing inequality with urban sociologists at the University of California, Berkeley. Some claimed to have found answers to the problematic questions they asked: “Why do African Americans commit disproportionate crime?” “Why does the inner city produce a culture of violence?” and “Why do immigrants become involved in gangs?” As these, primarily White, male, and middle-class, graduate students and faculty continued to dissect the ghettos from the comfort of the university, it dawned on me that I had to hit the streets and catch up with Spider, who had recently been stabbed. While I would be asking Spider about violence and gangs, an equally pressing topic, in his mind, was that of criminalization and police misconduct. I knew I had a short window before Spider decided to leave his house. I grabbed my backpack, ran to my car, and drove to his house. As I left Berkeley, majestic oak and redwood trees faded from my rearview mirror, replaced by old cars, dilapidated Victorians, and track houses that had been turned into multiple apartments by slumlords.

So far, from youth accounts and my observations, I had discovered that school personnel, police officers, and other adults in the community had created an environment that made young people feel criminalized from a young age. Although I had encountered a few racist cops and even a few racist teachers, I knew that most people in the community were well intentioned and had a genuine interest in the well-being of boys. How was it possible that all the young men whom I followed believed wholeheartedly that most adults in the community worked to ubiquitously punish them? In the minds of these young men, the community had conspired to impose detrimental sanctions on them. My observations led me to uncover a complex process by which even well-intentioned adults participated in the criminalization of the boys. Some people in the community did believe that the boys were irreparable criminals and needed to be locked away. But others, those who cared dearly for these boys, did not conspire to criminalize them. Instead, these caring adults were caught up in a system of imposing punitive social control, which influenced their actions despite their having a genuine interest in the well-being of the boys.

Criminologist David Garland reminds us that “punishment does not just restrain or discipline ‘society’—punishment helps create it.” He contends that punishment is one of the many institutions which helps construct and support the social world by producing the shared categories and authoritative classifications through which individuals understand each other and themselves. I use Garland’s analysis of punishment as an institution to understand the role that criminalization, as a form of punishment, plays in the lives of the boys in this study. Garland argues, “Like all social institutions, punishment interacts with its environment, forming part of the mutually constructing configuration of elements which make up the social world.” If Garland is correct, the workings of punitive social control set the stage for the development of specific meaning-making and cultural practices among youths who encounter criminalization. Their subjectivities are partially constructed by punishment. But young
people also have agency and develop systems of interaction and resistance to cope with these patterns of punishment and to create an alternative world, an escape from their punitive reality.

Labor historian Robin Kelley argues that young people become involved in "play"—the seeking of personal enjoyment despite their detrimental circumstances. Social scientists, according to Kelley, have confused this "play" for a form of social disorder: "The growing numbers of young brown bodies engaged in 'play' rather than work (from street-corner bantering to 'mailing' [hanging out at shopping malls], to basketball) have contributed to popular constructions of the 'underclass' as a threat and shaped urban police practices. The invention of terms such as wilding, as Houston Baker points out, reveal a discourse of black male youth out of control, rampaging teenagers free of the disciplinary structures of school, work, and prison." In 2010, groups of Black youths in Philadelphia were placed in the national media spotlight when the city called in the FBI, made student transportation passes invalid after 4 p.m., and implemented a policy to cite parents when their children broke curfew laws. This crackdown occurred in response to "flash mobs," large numbers of people who gather after being organized through text messaging. Although the majority of these gatherings did not involve delinquency, a few events, where violence and vandalism took place, led to the criminalization of young Black people gathering in groups in downtown Philadelphia. These flash mobs can be analyzed as creative responses to social isolation and a lack of recreation spaces. According to Kelley and consistent with my findings, marginalized young people's "play" has become criminalized.

Criminalizing the Victim

I pulled up to Spider's house, a two-story Victorian. The house looked as if it had not been maintained since it was first built in the early 1900s. Bare, splintered wood protruded through the flaking khaki paint. The gutterless roof had allowed rainwater to seep through the wooden paneling on the house, creating warps and cracks on the surface as if an earthquake had shaken the house from its foundation and dragged it from its original location. His mother rented a one-bedroom apartment conversion in the rear of the house. The side of the house had a driveway that had been fenced off. This is where Spider kept two dogs he owned, a red-nose pit bull and a small mutt. Both dogs looked malnourished, with their ribs visibly showing and their stomachs tucked deep into their hind legs. I knocked on Slick's metal gate door. After a few knocks, Slick answered the door. "Wassup, Vic?" "Wassup, Slick?" I replied. I had not seen him in two weeks, and the last time I saw him he was in a hospital bed.

Spider was fifteen years young when he was brutally attacked by gang members on a night when he sat on his front door steps talking with friends.

I was kicking it in front of my house with some homies and stuff, and then a few of them were wearing red. And they thought we were claiming [members of a gang]. And they rolled by and passed once and came a second time. And we was fighting. And I was running by myself, and my brother went that way [pointing to the right]. Then I came down this way [pointing to the left], and they caught me. And they just shanked [stabbed] me. They shanked me four in the stomach, one in the chest, and eight in the leg. They were like twenty-five years old. ... You don't feel nothing, but then, after, I just blacked out and woke up at the hospital. My mom came, and I told her I was OK and blacked out.

Spider nearly died. He was hospitalized for three weeks. The detectives who investigated his case paid him a visit a few hours after the incident:

When I woke up, that's when they came, the detectives I mean. Molina [the detective investigating his case] and shit came to the hospital. And they tried to see if it was Sureños that stabbed me and tried to label me as a Norteno [rival gang to Sureños]. No! But I am not Norteno, I don't gang bang, but when I was there, they tried to make me say that I was Norteno and stuff. I couldn't remember who stabbed me. I just know it was Sureños 'cause they kept yelling MS [Mara Salvatrucha, the name of another gang]. Yeah, and, you know, you gotta make a police report and shit. But they arrested a juvenile, and then they tried to make me testify, but I didn't want to go to court. I already knew they didn't got the dudes that got me 'cause those dudes were grown men and stuff. And I wanted to be left alone. And then that's why we dropped the charges, and all that. And then the DA wanted me to go to court.
After this near-death experience, Spider was registered by the Oakland police as an active gang member. Prior to this event, he had never been arrested or registered by police as a gang member. During his stay at the hospital, one of the gang detectives asked his mother for his personal information and asked her how long he had been in the gang. His mother insisted that he was not in the gang. The officer told her, “That’s the reason your son got stabbed. You’re ignoring his gang involvement.”

During my time in the field, I verified that Spider was not in the gang. It was not difficult to find out who was actively gang involved. There were many indicators: whom the young person hung out with, who they identified as a gang member, and how the young person interacted with known gang members. Community workers were also good sources. Most gang members were honest, because if their homies found out that they had neglected the gang, the consequences could be devastating. I had found no signs that indicated that Spider was involved in the gang. However, the gang detective came to a different conclusion and placed him in the gang database.

The rampant use of the gang database was an additional factor which accentuated the criminalization process. Police officers constantly placed young men in this database, allowing any other officer who came into contact with the boys to have detailed information about what “turf” they belonged to or where they were last stopped or when they were last questioned. It appeared that the police classified young people as gang members in order to benefit from the ability to keep track of them and impose harsher restrictions and policing on them. This categorization later affected Spider during a criminal case, in which he was charged with assault with a deadly weapon, for the benefit of the gang, after he got into a fight with a guy who was making fun of him for getting stabbed. The gang enhancement carried an added five-year sentence.

When the police classified Spider as a gang member, school staff, community workers, and other adults in the community also adopted this categorization. The punishment that Spider encountered, after being viciously attacked, was not an isolated case of individual rogue gang detectives: there was a recurring pattern of criminalizing the victim in the lives of these young men. Meanwhile, police officers, school personnel, probation officers, and even community workers supported the labeling of Spider as a culprit, despite his being the victim who had been stabbed.
tended to use more drugs than they were really using. Julio was always at school, and rarely on the streets, during the times I conducted my observations. He was headed for graduation and never displayed any signs of major drug use such as being on the streets, not attending school, or being distracted in the classroom. I believe Julio was pretending to use various drugs in order to appear "crazy" around the other boys and possibly to gain their respect. The school later suspended Julio and reported him to the local police officer for asking other students if they had drugs to offer.

The teacher finally walked into the classroom. He was a substitute. The school had trouble finding permanent teachers. One possible reason was the school's notoriety: recently a student had placed a chokehold on the principal. As the substitute, a fifty-year-old, light-skinned Black male, walked in, a seventeen-year-old Black male, Deandre, said to him, "Hey, bra [bro], what's up with it, bra." The substitute ignored him and turned to the girl who was using her cell phone: "Hang that up." She told her friend, "I'll call you back, bitch. My teacher wants me." The teacher told the students to open their Earth Science books to page 223. "Today's lesson is about rocks," he told the students. Deandre grunted, "I don't care 'bout no rock." The substitute responded, "You will when it starts shaking!" Deandre replied, "That's when niggas start running!" The teacher dropped the book and scolded the students, "You know where you are headed? . . . Narcissism is gonna lead you to prison." The students all looked down. At this point, I turned to Spider. He gave me a look, raising his right eyebrow, as if to tell me, "I told you so." I looked down. The teacher finally convinced another student to read to the class.

A few minutes later the bell rang. I asked the substitute about his narcissism remark. He replied, "You know, these students have some internalized nihilism [sic]. They are just here out of the rain from the streets. They come here wanting you to bring them up-to-date. What causes unconformity? That is what we have a lot of here." Spider walked into the classroom to check on me and overheard the last part of the teacher's remarks. "You saying I'm slow?" he asked. "No, I'm saying that if you keep acting slow and continue gang banging, you going to prison," the teacher replied. Spider insisted, "I ain't no gang member. You trippin', cuz." The school had a high turnover rate with teachers and substitutes. When new teachers arrived, they attempted to use their unique pedagogical approaches to connect with students; some of them were really nice, others really mean, and many in-between. But all the teachers had one practice in common: whenever any student misbehaved, the teachers would threaten either to call the police, to send them to jail, or to call a probation officer (sometimes, even for those students who were not on probation). In the school's attempt to maintain order, it used the full force of criminal justice institutions to regulate students' behavior. Although this school was for students already labeled delinquents, these boys reported receiving the same treatment at the "regular" schools they attended as well.

Later on in the day, Spider and I walked outside the school gate. As we walked past the security guard, I heard a walkie-talkie buzz, and the guard said, "Officer Miles, we have a few of them walking your way." We walked a few blocks to International Boulevard, and an all-black patrol car, with no police markings—what the kids referred to as a "Narc"—turned the corner. The officer stared us down. He drove down the street, made a U-turn, and drove slowly right behind us. "Shit! That's the motherfucker that beat down Marquill the other day in front of McDonald's, remember?" I remembered: two weeks before, a Black male student walked into the school at the end of the lunch period, his extra-long white T-shirt soiled with black tar and his lip busted open, with red flesh showing. One of his friends asked him, "What happened?" "The Narc, they beat my ass." He replied in monotone, with little emotion as he walked, head bowed, to the boys' bathroom. Slick had witnessed the beating. According to Slick, Marquill had talked back to the police officer. The officer got out of the car, grabbed Marquill by his T-shirt, and slammed him onto the grunge-covered cement parking lot of the McDonald's. The White officer stood over Marquill for a few minutes. Then Marquill was released and returned to school.

I had never seen Slick display so much fear, even when he recounted his stabbing story. I turned to Slick and told him, "Let's just keep walking. We'll be fine." The officer continued to follow us, driving slowly behind us. Slick became paranoid, turned around, and gave the officer a dirty look. I turned to look. The officer, a White man with a shaved head in his late thirties, looked at us, grinned, and drove off. Police officers played a crafty cat-and-mouse game in which the boys remained in constant fear of being humiliated, brutalized, or arrested.
This officer often stationed himself at the McDonald’s parking lot. Most of his work appeared to revolve around looking for traffic violations or waiting for the school to call when a student misbehaved. The school had impeccable communication between the security officer, the administrators, and this police officer. I witnessed eight events when police were called by the security officer for students talking back, cursing, or other minor school-rule transgressions. At EOCS, stigma, labeling, detention, harassment, and humiliation were just about the only consistent experiences that young people could count on as they entered the school. If students attempted to resist this criminalization by acting up, a violent police officer lurked.

For the boys, the school represented just another space where they were criminalized for their style and culture. The school, in the eyes of the boys, was indistinguishable from the police officer stationed at McDonald’s, the adults in the community who called the police on them, or the community-center staff who ousted them. Jose, who also attended the school, put it into perspective: “Man, it’s like every day, teachers gotta sweat me, police gotta pocket-check me, mom’s gotta trip me on, and my PO’s gotta stress me. It’s like having a zookeeper watching us at all times. We walk home, and we see them [probation officers and police]; we shoot some hoops, and we see them; we take a shit at school, and we see them.”

After school, Jose would take a two-hour bus ride to Berkeley to visit his cousins and attend a court-mandated community-center program facilitated by his probation officer. Since Jose lived in Berkeley at the time of his last court hearing, he was assigned a probation officer stationed at a Berkeley community center. Jose was required to check in with him once a week.

Parents

The young people I interviewed also perceived themselves to be criminalized by parents. School personnel, police, and probation officers provided the boys’ parents with “courtesy stigmas.” A “courtesy stigma” is a stigma that develops as a result of being related to a person with a stigma. The conversations that school personnel, police, and probation officers had with one another about troubled youths almost always followed the same trajectory: “These parents need to learn how to discipline these kids”; “It’s their parents’ fault for letting them do whatever they want”; “It’s no surprise that they’re this way—look at their parents.” These are just a few examples of countless depictions of parents as deviants, like their children. Authority figures often attempted to intervene and teach parents the “right way” to parent. For instance, a probation officer periodically visited Jose’s mother in Oakland and attempted to influence how she parented. Jose’s mother, Rosario, explained, “The [probation officer], he frightens me. He comes over and tells me, ‘Why don’t you learn to be a mother? Take away all this gangster stuff from Jose. You are at fault for what he does.’ This process sometimes changed the relationship that youths had with their parents. Some parents came to have similar perspectives as police and probation officers. Fourteen of the boys reported not having trusting relationships with their parents and believed that their parents would turn them in to authorities for arguing with them. Parents felt compelled to obey the discourse provided by the youth control complex: “Your child is a deviant, your child needs to be scrutinized and policed, and when your child acts negatively in any kind of way, such as dressing like a ‘thug,’ you need to call probation and police.”

For Jose and most of the other boys, their perceptions of being watched, managed, and treated as criminals began at a young age and became exacerbated after their first offense, in most cases, a misdemeanor. Their minor transgressions branded them with a mark that would make their one-time criminal act into a permanent criminal identity. Part of the process of making Jose feel that he was constructed as a criminal was his mother’s participation in his criminalization. He believed that she was forced to listen to school and criminal justice authorities’ agendas on how to parent, especially after his first arrest. According to Jose and his mother, he was first arrested for carrying a ten-dollar bag of marijuana. They found that everyone in the community treated Jose differently after his first arrest. Jose began to feel watched, police began to randomly stop and search him, and his teachers would threaten him with calling his probation officer if he disobeyed at school. And, despite his mother’s empathizing with the negative treatment he was now receiving, she constantly reminded him that he would end up in jail if he misbehaved, and she used these threats as a means to discipline him.
Probation

According to the boys I interviewed, probation officers served the purpose of punishing them by branding them criminals in front of the rest of the community and by marking their territory in the settings through which the boys navigated. Community centers made office space available for probation officers. Parents were constantly interacting with probation officers and were often being chastised and influenced by them. Teachers had direct contact with probation officers, in order to inform them when boys misbehaved. Schools also provided office space for police and probation officers to check in with trouble students.

The probation experience varied for the boys. Some of the boys had probation officers that required them to check in once a week. Others knocked on doors at 7:45 in the morning once a week to make sure the youngster was getting ready and planning to go to school. Most, however, had high and unrealistic expectations of the boys but did not play a role in aiding them in meeting these expectations. For example, Deandre’s probation officer, Ms. Moore, wrote a contract for him, full of unreachable goals, which he showed me soon after meeting with her: “Find a job. Pass all your classes. Do not get caught hanging out with your old friends.” Weeks went by, and Ms. Moore did not check in with Deandre. Although he attempted to “stay legit,” he found no work. I watched and helped him apply to twelve jobs. After a few weeks, he had not received one call. Meanwhile, he did not pass all his classes because the two weeks he spent in juvenile hall led to a failed semester at school, and he could not stay away from his old friends because they all lived in the same apartment complex and went to the same school he attended.

While Deandre seemed like a victim of his circumstances, I also noticed that he developed creative ways to walk the tightrope between the contradictory expectations of the streets and those of his probation officer. I observed Deandre’s crafty strategy to avoid trouble around his friends. After being placed on probation, Deandre took a passive role in his “crew.” He shied away from partaking in visible activities, such as walking in a large group or playing dice on the sidewalk. Instead, he “chilled,” mostly on his front steps, and avoided joining the crew when they talked about fighting. Despite strategic attempts to stay out of trouble, the system caught up with him, as it does with the majority of youths on probation. No matter how crafty a young person was at attempting to stay away from trouble, his probation officer found a way to “violate” him, arrest him again for the smallest of infractions. While probation generated a desire to change in many young people’s minds, the resources to produce outcomes in their attempts to change were not provided. Probation was successful at forcing young people to discuss personal responsibility and reflect on their own actions, but it completely failed at providing young men the resources necessary for desisting from crime. The criminalization process was already in motion, leading probation officers to overlook this desire to change and instead to focus on minor transgressions, such as violating curfew or hanging out with known gang members, many of whom were family or next-door neighbors.

It would have taken consistent case-management work to help Deandre meet Ms. Moore’s requirements; however, she did not meet with Deandre again until three months after his release. When she finally met with him, she arrested him because he had violated his probation: a police officer had caught him hanging out with his friends, and he had failed all his classes. After being released, Deandre believed that his probation officer was teaching him a lesson. “She be doing too much, man. She don’t help a nigga out, but then she lock a nigga up for stupid shit, yada yada mean [you know what I mean]?”

Probation meetings are one-on-one meetings, often mandated at least once per month, in which a young person is asked by his or her probation officer a series of questions centered on desisting or “staying straight.” According to the boys, a good probation officer could provide access and connections to programs and jobs. Out of thirty boys on probation, only five believed that their probation officers were helpful. The other twenty-five boys reported having probation officers who spent less than twenty minutes talking to them and who were obsessed with hearing a confession of the boy’s violation of probation. I rode the bus to downtown Oakland with three of the boys on three different occasions. All three of the boys were in and out of their appointments within fifteen minutes. “What did he tell you?” I asked. “Nothing,” they responded and proceeded to describe the probation officer’s lecturing them about doing well in school. At community centers, this also seemed to be the case.
While probation officers did not give good advice or connect youths to programs, they did maintain close contact with police and community workers. The overpolicing-underpolicing paradox existed here: probation officers were rarely around to help young men through the process of staying free but were consistently there to chastise or arrest them when they were purported to have violated the law.

At the end of the boys' initial arrest, all of them were placed on probation and required to report to their probation officers. The meetings would sometimes take place at neighborhood community centers located near the youngsters' homes. The boys did not like the community-center arrangement because everyone knew when they were checking in with their probation officer. Although at one point, some of the boys believed this to be "cool," after a while, boys such as Deandre became frustrated and felt stigmatized by the reality of having to walk into a community center to check in with a probation officer in front of the entire community. Theoretically, this kind of shame might help someone like Deandre "reintegrate" into the community, by feeling ashamed to have committed a crime due to the public shaming, which held him accountable to the entire community for his misdeeds. However, the community seemed to respond to Deandre and the other boys not through an "I will help you learn your lesson," "tough love" perspective but through an "I hope you get arrested again" punitive perspective.

From the perspective of juvenile probation and many school personnel, the point of the probation officer's being present at community centers and schools was to make sure that youths who were on probation did not commit another crime. Often, the probation officer served as a coercive force, which constantly reminded youngsters that a pair of handcuffs was waiting for them as soon as they committed their first infraction. Fourteen of the boys were released from probation during the three-year study. Twelve of the boys were arrested soon after. Their violations, all minor, included being drunk in public, violating curfew, being suspended at school, and hanging out with old friends. Despite being off of probation, the boys continued to be tracked.

Probation officer–youth relations were overwhelmingly negative and punitive, with probation officers being a disruptive control force in the boys' lives, waiting for them to, as Jose put it, "fuck up." By being present in all aspects of the youths' lives, probation officers could potentially have a positive impact on the boys' rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Often, the boys did follow the strict orders of the probation officer, but only in the direct presence of the officer. Probation officers' punitive approach failed to teach young people how to desist on their own, through self-control instead of through external threat. This threat often developed resentment in the boys and led to resistance, which was sometimes articulated through deviance and criminality.

While direct punitive control kept many of the young men from committing crime, many of them ended up being arrested anyway, for the most minor of infractions, which were no longer independent crimes but "crimes" of violating a probation contract. This occurred because the young men resisted many of the unrealistic expectations which probation imposed, including being home by 8 p.m. and checking in with the probation officer at the local community center, where peers would see them interacting with law enforcement and sometimes ask them if they were "snitches." Probation placed the boys between a rock and a hard place; if they followed their probation program, they ran the risk of being victimized by others who saw them as snitches. This, in turn, led many of the boys to be rearrested for simple infractions. Probation created a magnifying-glass effect for the boys, which led them deeper into the criminal justice system for the most minor of infractions, violations which were often outside of criminal code and fell under the purview of school or community rules and norms, such as being suspended, having an argument with parents, or cursing at a store clerk.

Slick's probation officer, Mr. Johnson, a Black man in his forties, always wore a cowboy hat and cowboy boots. He was about six feet tall. His demeanor was gruff. He reminded me of characters that actor Clint Eastwood played in vigilante Wild West movies. When I first introduced myself to him, he asked me what I was going to do to keep Slick off the street. "Either you are helping him, or you are in his way," he told me. On another occasion, I was at Slick's home talking with him and his mother. Mr. Johnson paid a surprise visit, pounding Slick's metal door gate. Slick knew it was Mr. Johnson by the way he knocked. As he heard the pounding he turned to his mom and said, "Ese cabron ya llego a cagar el palo. Me va querer llevar a la carcel!" [That asshole is here to harass me. He is
going to want to take me to jail.] Slick had been scared into following his probation program by Mr. Johnson. However, fear tactics generally did not work with the boys, since the effects of such tactics were short-lived. Sure, Slick was afraid of being arrested the first few times that Mr. Johnson yelled at him. But after a while, Slick began to resist this punitive treatment, sometimes even purposely breaking probation rules.

Philosopher Michel Foucault argues that the practices and architecture of constant surveillance, what he calls “panopticism,” makes individuals internalize their punishment and become self-disciplined, docile bodies. But in Oakland, young men were not being taught this self-discipline. Instead, the criminalization which existed in this context led the boys to manipulate the system, by agreeing to obey under coercion and, at the same time, resisting this coercion by breaking the rules which they had agreed to follow. In Foucault’s formulation, the disciplined subject sits at the periphery of the panopticon, with the disciplinary power at the center, keeping a constant gaze on the subject. This soft surveillance is intended to reform the soul and produce an obedient subject. The ultimate goal of the panopticon, according to Foucault, is to create self-discipline in the prisoner. This process is scientific, neat, and controlled. The kind of discipline I found in the streets of Oakland differs drastically. The boys in Oakland were placed at the center of the panopticon. Punitive treatment surrounded them, beaming itself in high intensity, from multiple directions. Different from Foucault’s panopticon, the punishment I found in Oakland was aimed at controlling and containing the young men who were seen as risks, threats, and culprits. The boys in Oakland were not seen as souls that needed to be disciplined but as irreparable risks and threats that needed to be controlled and ultimately contained. The discipline imposed on the boys in Oakland did not do much to reform the soul. Instead it incapacitated them as social subjects; it stripped them of their dignity and humanity by systematically marking them and denying them the ability to function in school, in the labor market, and as law-abiding citizens. The boys did not learn to self-discipline; instead, they resisted, became incapacitated, or both. The boys knew they were being watched, and so they resisted; they created a spectacle of the system, exposing its flaws and contradictions, which in turn led to an altered sense of having recovered some dignity. In a secu-

ritized Oakland, Foucault’s panopticon had been flipped on its head: it had become inverted, placing the boys at the center of the complex, with forces of punitive social control surrounding them, delivering them constant ubiquitous punishment and criminalization, leading many to resist.

Although direct threat and coercion from probation officers worked well in changing youth behaviors, it was only a temporary fix. As soon as the boys were taken off the intensive probation program of electronic monitoring, weekly meetings, and home arrest, they began to commit acts which further criminalized them and which often led to a second arrest. They often expressed that being contained, monitored, and threatened for so long made them unable to control themselves when the direct authoritative treatment was removed. They had been trained to live under forceful supervision and sanctions from the state, and, now, there was no other mechanism by which to regulate their behavior or to teach them how to function as healthy young adults.

The boys had not been able to find positive, informal social control based on nurturing, guidance, and support; instead, they had encountered a system of control which disciplined them through punitive force. The system may have been fooled by the fact that the boys followed orders when they were under direct supervision. In Slick’s case, the immediate threat of violence and incarceration led to short-term desistance. However, once the threat was removed, Slick was left with no guidance to continue to avoid crime. This punitive approach did not work, because the boys did not develop navigational skills necessary for becoming productive citizens. The boys needed to learn how to become independent agents, to function on their own behalf, through internal controls, so that a punitive and highly expensive system of control would no longer be necessary. Criminologists John Hagan and Bill McCarthy explain the difference between debilitating social control and rehabilitative social control: "Normal shame and shaming produce social solidarity, whereas pathological shame and shaming produce alienation." Normal shame is the process by which a community member is held accountable for his or her transgressions by way of shaming, so that he or she learns, makes amends, and becomes reintegrated into the group or society. Pathological shaming is the process by which the transgressor is permanently stigmatized, shamed into feeling like a permanent outsider, and perpetually humili-
ated for his or her negative behavior. This in turn leads the transgressor to become disintegrated from the group or society. When young people are integrated back into society and "taught a lesson" through self-reflection and the development of internal controls, they see themselves as part of the community and hence hold themselves accountable. When they are shamed through criminalization, young people resist and lose hope, often leading to more crime or criminalization.

Eighteen of the youths in this study had probation officers who placed the burden on them to immediately change their social worlds by avoiding their friends or to face further punishment and criminalization. They all felt that their probation officers had given them advice which did not work on the streets with their peers. And many of the youths did attempt to use the threat of probation or juvenile hall as an excuse to stay away from some of their old peers, in order to avoid being stigmatized for attempting to improve in school, avoid drugs and alcohol, and avoid committing violence. However, because many of their friends had already been to jail, they knew the storyline: probation officers exaggerated their threats, and youths who began to hang out again with old friends did not immediately go back to jail. Probation officers had minimal credibility with the boys. Peers who had been to jail would simply explain to their friends that the probation officer was exaggerating and that most of the time they would not get caught if they broke probation. “Come on, fool, just kick it with us,” I heard Slick’s friends tell him one day at the park, “That busta ain’t gonna arrest you. They just tell you that to scare you.” Because probation officers often tested the boys for marijuana use through a urine test, some of the boys became cocaine users after they were placed on probation. “Cocaine,” as Slick described, “stays in your system for two days. Dank [marijuana] stays in your system for thirty days.” This obsession with finding marijuana use in young people is indicative of how cracking down on less harmful offenses often led young people to “graduate” into more harmful yet less targeted offenses.

Police and probation officers often communicated with shopkeepers and community members about the “criminals” whom they should look out for. Ronny, a Black youth who moved back and forth between Oakland and Berkeley, began to realize a few weeks after being placed on probation that everyone in the community knew about his arrest and probation program. “I walked into the liquor store, and the Arab told me, ‘I know the police are after you, so if you do anything, I’m gonna call them.’ I asked him, ‘Did you steal anything? Had you ever stolen anything there?’ ‘No. I just talk shit to him because he won’t front me a soda when I’m broke.’

Community Centers

Eight of the boys who had been previously arrested and four of the boys who had not been arrested were enrolled in community-center programs. Two were enrolled in a community center in Berkeley, because they had previously lived there. The rest of the youths were enrolled in two different organizations in Oakland. Each center claimed to serve between two hundred and seven hundred youths per year. Community workers estimated that over ten thousand young people lived in the neighborhoods which their centers serviced. The lack of community programs for young people, in all the neighborhoods where the boys lived, was observable. When the boys were asked, “Would you join a program that took you on field trips or where you could play sports or talk to a mentor or get a job?” all of them responded, “Yes.” However, only four of them were able to enroll in community programs without any strings attached. The other eight enrolled because they were mandated by probation. This was a common pattern: criminal justice institutions sometimes held a stake in youth programs. During the three years of this study, I noticed that funding for case workers from foundations and non-criminal-justice government agencies declined, and funding from criminal justice entities became available. At one point, a former gang member turned community worker, Joey, had been funded through various grants to provide mentoring for gang youths in the community. As the money for this position expired, the community center turned to the county probation department to continue to fund the position. The county agreed but wanted direct oversight of Joey. Over time, youths who had grown to trust Joey and respect him came to see him as a “snitch” for the probation department and the police. Eventually, Joey lost the boys’ respect, became ineffective in the community, and was laid off by the community center.
Although these organizations claimed to serve “at-risk” youths, very few of the boys in this study were accepted or invited to enroll in programs. Instead, the community centers focused on youths who they thought would respond to their programming. This made sense, because their funding was dependent on their “numbers.” Angelo, a youth-programs director at Communities Organizing Youth (COY), explained:

ANGELO: You see, I try to help the at-risk ones, you know, the ones that are on the street. But they [his boss] tell me, ‘If you help them, we won’t get funded.’ Because, as you know, when you put time into the crazy youth, they take up a lot of time.

VR: So, are you able to give programming to any of the street youth?

ANGELO: The one, two programs we have for them come from probation. One is anger management, and the other is life skills.

VR: What do they do?

ANGELO: They learn about controlling their anger and about living a healthy lifestyle.

VR: Who runs the programs? Counselors? Community members?

ANGELO: PCs [probation officers] mostly.

Although the community centers hired some charismatic individuals with transformational skills, people who in the past had helped to transform the lives of some of the toughest youths in the community, their hard work and youth-development approach was rarely institutionalized. Charismatic individuals were given a large caseload and were burdened with high expectations from many people in the community. This led many of them to burn out. Nene, another former gang member turned charismatic youth worker, explained, “Man! I like working with the youngsters, but this red-tape bullshit of having to feel like a snitch for probation is getting to me. … The other day I caught myself threatening one of the boys to call the police if they kept talking in my workshop.”

Although many youth workers did not use this approach—to contact a police officer or to report an incident to a probation officer—many of the boys reported having this experience when the community center called probation or police for non-criminal activity.

In recent years, an influential program known as Cease-Fire has been implemented in communities across the country, including in Oakland. The Cease-Fire project calls for identifying hard-core community members who may potentially commit violence, calling them in for a meeting with law enforcement and community workers, threatening the potential transgressors that they will be watched and punished if they commit a crime, and offering programs to them if they choose to “go legit.” Although this study did not document Cease-Fire because it started after I left the field, a program such as this may pose the risk of entangling law enforcement with community workers even further. Dire consequences result from this process. Community centers sometimes seemed like criminal justice centers to some of the boys, places where programming was provided by law-enforcement officials, instead of youth-development workers. However, if police stick to their terrain to protect the community, and programs are created to help young people who have expressed an interest in change, then a program like Cease-Fire may prove promising. The key is to invest enough resources in social programs which are independent from, and set clear parameters between, themselves and criminal justice institutions. Otherwise, young people perceive the various institutions in the community as accomplices in a plot to criminalize them. The young men in this study compared encounters with police, probation officers, and prosecutors with interactions they had with school administrators and teachers who placed them in detention rooms; community centers that attempted to exercise their criminality, and even parents, who felt ashamed or dishonored and relinquished their relationship with their own children altogether. It seemed, in the accounts of the boys, that various institutions were collaborating to form a system that degraded them on an everyday basis. As such, these young men's understanding of their environment as a punitive one, where they were not given a second chance, led them to believe that they had no choice but to resist.

These institutions, though independently operated with their own practices, policies, and logics, intersected with one another to provide a consistent flow of criminalization. The consequences of this formation were often brutal. Young Ronny explained,
The Coupling of Criminal Justice and Community Institutions

We are not trusted. Even if we try to change, it's us against the world. It's almost like they don't want us to change. They rather we stay crazy than to try to pick ourselves up. Why they gotta send us to the ghetto alternative high school? We don't deserve to go to the same school down the street? ... And when we try to apply for a job, we just get looked at like we crazy. If we do get an interview, the first question is, "Have you been arrested before?" ... We got little choice.

Romy understood his actions as responses to this system of punishment, which restricted his ability to survive, work, play, and learn. As such, he developed coping skills that were often seen as deviant and criminal by the system. Sociologist Elijah Anderson reminds us that young men, in these kinds of situations, react by demonstrating mistrust of the system: "Highly alienated and embittered, they exude generalized contempt for the wider scheme of things, and for a system they are sure has nothing but contempt for them." 59 Spider's experiences with policing not protecting him and instead marking him as a gang member solidified his mistrust and contempt for the police. In addition, his experiences in a school where teachers warned him about his inevitable entry into the criminal justice system and where security guards reported students to police for minimal transgressions led Spider to believe that he was caught in the center of a web of punishment, which consistently and ubiquitously constrained him. This web of punishment, the youth control complex, added to the boys' blocked opportunities but also generated creative responses, which allowed the boys to feel dignified. Sometimes these responses even led to informal and formal political resistance.
“Dummy Smart”

Misrecognition, Acting Out, and “Going Dumb”

In attempting to maintain the existing order, the powerful commit crimes of control. . . . At the same time, oppressed people engage in . . . crimes of resistance.


It’s a war going on
The ghetto is a cage
They only give you two choices
Be a rebel or a slave

—Dead Prez, “Turn off the Radio,” 2002

Ronny was called in for a job interview at Carrows, a chain restaurant that served $9.99 sirloin steak and shrimp. He called me up, asking for help. I lent him a crisp white dress shirt, which I had purchased at a discount store when I worked as a server at a steak house during my undergraduate years. I convinced Ronny to wear fitted khakis, rather than his customary baggy jeans. He agreed, with the condition that he would wear his white Nike Air Force Ones, a popular basketball shoe at the time. These shoes had been in and out of style in the urban setting since the early 1980s. By 2002, a famous
rapper, Nelly, created a popular song named "Air Force Ones." Around this time, famous basketball players such as Kobe Bryant wore these shoes during games and advertised for Nike. Black and Latino youths in Oakland gravitated to these shoes, sometimes even wearing them to more formal events such as high school proms, quinceañeras (coming-of-age parties for girls turning fifteen, celebrated in many Latino cultures), and weddings. I asked Ronny why he insisted on wearing these shoes in a professional setting. He replied, "Because professionals wear them."

Many of the boys believed that they had a clear sense of what courteous, professional, and "good" behavior was. Despite their attempts to present themselves with good manners and good morals, their idea of professional behavior did not match mainstream ideas of professional behavior. This in turn created what I refer to as misrecognition. When the boys displayed a genuine interest in "going legit," getting a job or doing well in school, adults often could not recognize their positive attempts and sometimes interpreted them as rude or malicious acts and therefore criminalized them.

The boys had grown up in an environment which had deprived them of the social and cultural capital that they needed to progress in school and the labor market. Therefore, they developed their own alternative social and cultural capital, which they used to survive poverty, persist in a violent and punitive social ecology, prevent violence, avoid incarceration, and attempt to fit into mainstream institutions. Borrowing from philosopher Antonio Gramsci's notion of "organic intellectuals"—those individuals who come from the marginalized conditions that they write about and study—I call the creative social and cultural capital that the boys developed in response to being prevented from acquiring capital to succeed in mainstream institutions organic capital. This organic capital was often misunderstood and misrecognized by mainstream institutions and was, in turn, criminalized. On the other hand, young people often used organic capital as a resilience strategy that allowed them to persist through neglect and exclusionary experiences. Education scholar Tara Yosso develops a framework for understanding and using the capital that marginalized communities develop, what she calls "community cultural wealth." She argues that marginalized communities have always generated certain kinds of capital that have allowed them to survive and resist. Sociologist Martín Sánchez-Jankowski has recently discussed poor people's ability to organize their social world and maintain social order as "persistance." According to Sánchez-Jankowski, contrary to the popular academic belief that poor people live in a disorganized world where they have a limited capacity to generate "collective efficacy"—the ability of a community to solve its own social problems—the urban poor shape their behaviors around making sense of and creating social order within a marginal context. Organic capital is the creative response that the boys in this study developed in the midst of blocked opportunity and criminalization. However, these creative responses, despite being well intentioned, were often not well received by mainstream institutions.

The paradox that these marginalized young people faced was that the organic capital that they developed to negotiate conflict and organize their survival on the streets often did not translate well in a school or labor-market setting. Criminologist Yasser Payne argues that some marginalized Black youths, who have been excluded from mainstream institutions, find affirmation, fulfillment, and resilience in practices associated with street life. These practices, according to Payne, provide young men with "sites of resilience," spaces where they feel empowered and affirmed. Some boys in this study wholeheartedly believed that they were making a formidable attempt to tap into mainstream institutions, using every possible resource to do so, but, in return, they would often receive negative responses.

The boys attempted to use the resilience skills they had learned on the streets, their organic capital, in spaces that could not value the respectability and morals that they brought to the table. These morals and values were often rendered deviant, and the boys were excluded or criminalized. One of their responses was to manifest a resistance to this perceived exclusion and criminalization, a stance that could place value on their self-developed survival skills. This resistance developed in the form of deviance, "irrational behavior," breaking rules, or committing crime. The resistance became more methodical for some of the boys, as they turned to more formal ways of organizing and resisting punitive social control.

Ronny's story is indicative of how many of the boys attempted to tap into mainstream institutions but failed. As they encountered rejection, they returned to the resilience and survival strategies that they had
developed in their neighborhoods. I continued to prepare Ronny for his interview, to help him develop "acceptable" cultural capital. We prepared for the interview with some mock questions. "Why do you want to work for us?" I asked him. He responded, "I am a hard worker." "That's a good start," I said. "How about expanding that and telling them that you're also a team player and that you enjoy the restaurant atmosphere?" Ronny nodded. The day of the interview, I walked into the restaurant separately from Ronny. To calm his nerves I told him, "You look great, man. This job is yours!" He looked sharp: a professionally dressed, athletically built, charismatic, tall, African American young man with a charming dimple on his face every time he smiled. I was certain he would get the job. I sat down for lunch at a booth, in an attempt to observe Ronny being interviewed. I looked at the menu and, with a knot in my gut, nervous for Ronny, ordered what I knew would eventually give me a stomachache: a Mile-High Chipotle Southwest Burger. I sat about twenty feet away from the table where Ronny had been asked to wait. A manager appeared and sat with him.

Ronny tried to use his charisma to connect with the manager, but she kept her distance and did not look at Ronny the entire time he answered questions, seemingly uninterested in what he had to say. At the end of the interview, Ronny abruptly stood up and walked away from the manager, with no handshake or smile. He went outside. I ordered my burger to go, paid my bill, and met him in the parking lot. As I headed to the door, I turned to look in the manager's direction, and she was greeting a White male youth. She smiled, gave him her hand, and offered him a place to sit down. Ronny's first contact with her was not this friendly. I walked outside to meet Ronny, who sat on the hood of my car.

I asked Ronny to give me a debriefing. He told me that he had a good feeling and that the manager had seemed to like him. I asked him to walk me through the interview. He had followed the plan flawlessly. I was proud of him. "You followed the plan. You did a great job," I told him. "Why didn't you shake her hand when you left?" I asked. "'Cause," Ronny replied. "Why not?" I scolded. "Because it was a White lady. You not supposed to shake a White lady's hand. They be scared of a nigga. They think I'ma try to take their shit or fuck 'em. I just said thanks and walked out." Ronny did not get the job.

Ronny had been socialized from a young age, according to him, by his White female teachers to overcompensate around White women and to go the extra mile to show that he was not attempting to harm or disrespect them. This behavior may have been a result of the stereotyped expectations of Black men as criminals and sexual aggressors, which is deeply rooted in American culture and which Ronny had to contend with as a young Black man. The history of lynching and hate crimes against Black men in the United States has often been the result of accusations of attacks by Black men on White women, a fact well documented by historians. It seemed that the longue-durée idea that Black males are a threat to White females had become embedded in the socialization of Black boys in Oakland.

Ronny did all he could to land the job, but the limited resources that he had at his disposal for showing respect may have kept him from getting the position. In this case, he believed that not shaking the manager's hand would show respect; instead, Ronny may have been perceived as a rude kid not able to hold employment in a restaurant environment. I asked Ronny to tell me how he learned about not shaking White women's hands. He told me that White teachers and White women in public had always been intimidated by him. His White female teachers had asked him to keep his distance from them, White women on the street would clasp their purses when they saw him walking by, and White female store clerks would nervously watch him when he walked into an establishment.

Anthropologist Philippe Bourgois found that poor Puerto Rican young men living in New York had a difficult time making it in the labor market because of the cultural collision that took place. He showed that corporate culture was organized around humiliating low-skilled workers and that these workers were supposed to tolerate this hazing process until they were able to move up the corporate ladder. The boys in his study came from a world where they gave and expected respect and honor. This conflict led young men to become isolated and forced them out of work. Similarly, I found that the boys in my study organized their worlds around dignity, respect, and empathic treatment (among friends and homies). Tyrell's comment is representative: "My little Gs [friends] all respect me, watch my back, and give me love. They's all I got." The boys often found themselves fighting for dignity. They constantly worked at feeling worthy of honor and respect from the institutions they interacted with. This dig-
nity work often led them to fall further into criminalization and, in turn, impacted their ability to effectuate social mobility or to remain free.

Ronny applied for multiple jobs. After about a dozen applications and three failed interviews, he became discouraged. He reported being asked by other managers about his “drug habits” and “criminal background.” Ronny decided to abandon the job-search process and instead invested twenty dollars in pirated DVDs; a few hours later, he made fifty dollars from the illegally copied movies. He reinvested the fifty dollars in a backpack full of pirated DVDs. After a few weeks, Ronny made enough to buy a few new pairs of glossy Nike Air Force One tennis shoes. However, the six to ten hours that he spent in front of Albertson’s grocery store, waiting for customers for his DVDs, made him a measly twenty to thirty dollars a day—certainly not worth the risk of getting arrested for a federal offense, the classification that DVD pirating receives in the United States.

Still, Ronny preferred to take on the risk of incarceration and the low wages that this underground entrepreneurship granted him, in order to avoid the stigma, shame, and feeling of failure that the job-application process produced for him. This feeling the young men had of being racially stigmatized and being punished for their well-intended actions made some of them reject the mainstream job-application process and develop their own underground economies. Misrecognition of genuine attempts to do well in school, the labor market, or their probation program led many of the boys to grow frustrated and to produce alternatives in which their organic capital could be put to productive use.

Resistance Identities

Resistance identities, according to sociologist Manuel Castells, are those identities created by subordinated populations in response to oppression. These identities operate by “excluding the excluder.” In feeling excluded from a network of positive credentials, education, and employment opportunities, young people develop creative responses that provide them with the necessary tools to survive in an environment where they have been left behind and where they are consistently criminalized. They develop practices that seem to embrace criminality as a means of contesting a system that sees them as criminals. Sociologist Richard Quinney argues that poor people engage in crimes such as stealing, robbing, and pirating as “acts of survival,” in an economic system where they have been left behind and where their well-being is not fulfilled by other collective means. He further argues that some poor and working-class people engage in “crimes of resistance,” such as sabotaging workplace equipment and destroying public property, as a form of protest against their economic conditions. Sociologist John Hagedorn argues that one promising avenue for transforming the lives of marginalized young people is to embrace their resistance: “Encouraging cultural resistance identities and linking them to social movements, like those in the United States opposing gentrification, police brutality, or deportations, may present the best opportunity to reach out to our alienated youth.” Sociologist Felix Padilla finds that gang-involved youths hold a “conscious understanding of the workings of social institutions.” Padilla quotes education scholar Henry Giroux to frame his analysis of the critical consciousness developed by marginalized young people:

In some cases...youngsters may not be fully aware of the political grounds of the position toward the conventional society, except for a general awareness of its dominating nature and the need to somehow escape from it without re-allocating themselves to a future they do not want. Even this vague understanding and its attendant behavior portend a politically progressive logic.

I build on this work by demonstrating how the young men in this study engaged in acts of survival and crimes of resistance. Further, I argue that some of their non-serious offenses were committed as acts of resistance to being criminalized. The boys in this study were clearly aware of, recognized, and had an analysis of the system that criminalized them. Consequently, youth labeled as deviants participated in everyday practices of resistance. This approach is different from the one adopted by Philippe Bourgois, described in the preceding section, in that young men commit crime not just in search of respect and honor but also as a conscious revolt against a system of exclusion and punitive control that they clearly understand. Sociologist Howard Becker finds that labeled youths resist by internalizing their label and committing more crime. My study finds a missing link in this analysis: the internalization of criminality is only one outcome in the labeling process; another outcome that young
people who are labeled partake in resistance: they internalize criminalization, flip it on its head, and generate action that seeks to change the very system that oppresses them.

The young men in this study constantly participated in everyday acts of resistance that did not make sense to adults. Teachers, police officers, and community center workers were often baffled by the deviant acts committed by the boys. From the perspective of adults, these transgressions and small crimes were ridiculous and irrational because the risk of being caught was high and the benefit derived from committing the deviant act was minuscule. This frustration led adults to abandon empathy for the boys and to apply the toughest sanctions on them. “If they’re going to act like idiots, I am going to have to give them the axe,” explained one of the gang task force officers.

Many of the adults I interviewed believed that the boys’ defiance was, as some called it, “stupid.” Sarcastic remarks such as “that was smart” often followed when a youth purposely broke a simple rule, leading him to be ostracized, kicked out of class, or even arrested. Why would the boys break the simplest of rules knowing that there would be grave consequences? From the perspective of the boys, they were breaking the rules in order to resist a system that seemed stacked against them. In many ways, breaking the rules was one of the few resources that the boys could use in response to criminalization.

Why would these boys steal a twenty-five-cent bag of chips when they had money in their pocket? Curse out a police officer who was trying to befriend them? Act indifferent to a potential employer? Or purposely not answer their probation officer’s call during curfew time, even though they were sitting next to the phone? These seemingly irrational transgressions often created meaning that gave these youngsters dignity in an environment that already saw them as criminal prior to their committing the act. But working for dignity does not necessarily translate to working for freedom. In other words, when the boys sought out dignity, they were often at risk of losing their freedom; when they worked for freedom, they were making an attempt to stay out of jail or prison but often felt that they had lost their dignity in the process.

Patterns of behavior that are often misrecognized as ignorant, stupid, and self-defeating by authority figures, policymakers, and scholars are often young people’s attempt to use the resources provided by their environment to transform their social conditions. Sociologist Ann Swidler’s concept of “culture as repertoire” contends that individuals deploy different, often contradicting actions in the social world based on the needs demanded by specific social situations. For Swidler, culture influences action by providing a tool kit of actions to choose from. This notion of culture is important in the study of working-class populations, because it provides a space for scholars to study culture and poverty without blaming the victim.

The boys used the resources around them to develop a response to what they perceived as punitive treatment. Their responses where often misinterpreted by authority figures. Ronny, for example, responded to his potential employer’s cold gestures by using the tools he had learned from others in the community: to avoid being perceived as aggressive toward White women. Whereas the protocols of mainstream culture would have provided him with the understanding that he should shake a potential employer’s hand, his racialization had conditioned him to remain passive and avoid physical contact of any kind, even a seemingly innocuous handshake. The youths in this study demonstrated a yearning for being accepted by mainstream society and used the resources available to them in an attempt to do so. However, their actions were misinterpreted as acts of deviance, and at times even their phenotypes were seen as indicating deviance. This in turn led the system to further criminalize them. The boys had utilized the resources available to them to show the system that they were worthy of being treated as young people with promise, as potential good students, and as hardworking, honest employees. However, the misrecognition of these actions not only denied the boys access; it interpreted their well-intended acts as deviant and even criminal activity.

The Stolen Bag of Chips

One fall afternoon, I met with fifteen-year-old Flaco, a Latino gang-associated young man from east Oakland. We joined three of his friends as they walked to their usual afterschool hang out, Walnut Park. They decided to make a stop at Sam’s Liquor Store. I walked in with them, noticing a sign on the outside that read, “Only two kids allowed in store at one time.” I
realized that they were breaking the store rule by entering in a group of four. I pretended to walk in separately from the group to see how the store clerk would respond to their transgression. I stood in the back of the store next to the soft-drink and beer refrigerators. Flaco walked up to the candy-bar aisle—keeping a good distance between himself and the Snickers, Twix, and Skittles, to show the clerk, who was already staring him down, that he was not attempting to steal. He grabbed a candy bar, held it far away from his body, walked a few steps, and placed it on the counter. Many of the boys in this study often maintained their distance in the candy or soda aisles at stores. This may have been a way for them to show the store that they were not attempting to steal. Store clerks in the neighborhoods I studied were always apprehensive of customers. They watched people from the moment they walked in and had surveillance cameras set up; one clerk had taped on his counter personal pictures of himself holding an AK-47 rifle to indicate to customers that he was prepared. This particular clerk may have been concerned that too many kids in his store meant that he could not keep an eye on all of them at the same time.

The store clerk, a balding, middle-aged, Asian American male, pointed to the door and yelled, "Only two kids allowed in the store at a time!" The three youths who were in line to pay for their items looked at the store clerk and at each other. I could see in their faces the look of despair as their most pleasurable moment of the day, to bite into a delicious candy bar, fell apart. Mike, who stood closest to the entrance of the door, responded, "We ain't doing shit." The store clerk looked at him and replied, "I am going to call the police!" Mike grabbed a twenty-five-cent bag of Fritos Flamin' Hot chips, lifted it up in front of the clerk's face, and said, "You see this? I was gonna pay for it, but now I ain't paying for shit, stupid motherfucker." He rushed out of the store with the bag of chips. The clerk picked up the phone and called the police. The rest of the youngsters dropped the snacks they were in line to purchase and ran out of the store. I walked up to the store clerk and gave him a quarter for Mike, who had stolen the chips. With an infuriated look, the clerk responded, "It's too late. The police are on their way to get the robbers."

When I walked out of the store, the boys had all disappeared. I was not able to track them down until a few days later. When I ran into Flaco, he informed me that the police had arrested Mike that day for stealing the twenty-five-cent bag of chips. After interviewing the boys and observing the store clerk's interactions with them soon after this event, I found that Mike's "irrational" behavior had changed the way the store clerk interacted with the boys. The boys believed that the store clerk had begun to treat them with more respect. The store clerk avoided provoking negative interactions with the boys, even if it meant allowing a few more boys into the store than his store policy demanded. While even Mike's peers believed that his actions were "crazy," they also acknowledged that something significant had changed in their interactions with the store clerk.

For example, Flaco thought that Mike had overreacted, but he also rationalized Mike's actions. Because of Mike, Flaco felt respected by the store clerk the next time he went in the store: "Mike fucked up. He was acting hyphy [crazy] that day. He should have paid the guy. . . . But because of what he did, me and my dogs go into the store, and the guy don't say shit. We all go in like five deep—like 'what?'—and dude [the store clerk] don't say shit no more." When I asked Mike why he had stolen the bag of chips, he responded, "That fool was trippin. He should've come correct. I was gonna pay him. You saw, I had the money in my hand. . . . That fool knows not to fuck with us anymore. . . . I did get taken in for that, but it don't matter. They gave me probation and shit. I'll just keep it cool now since that fool will keep it cool now too." In Mike's worldview, his strategy of fighting for dignity at the cost of giving up his freedom had paid off. Mike's actions resulted in his commitment to the criminal justice system. According to him, he was very aware of this risk when he stole the bag of chips. He had grown frustrated at the treatment he had received at school, by police, and then culminating at the store. This frustration, and a deep desire to feel respected, led Mike to willfully expose himself to incarceration. In the end, Mike lost his freedom, becoming supervised by the criminal justice system. Nonetheless, Mike gained a sense of dignity for himself and his peers, which, in his mind, made it worth exchanging his freedom. This scenario is representative of many of the crimes that the other boys committed. Demanding dignity from the system generated a paradox for the boys: they all indicated wanting to be free of incarceration, policing, and surveillance, while, at the same time, punitive surveillance, policing, and discipline led many of them to consciously seek their dignity and act in a way that pipelined them into the criminal justice sys-
‘Dummy Smart’

stem. Nonetheless, striving for dignity led some of the boys deeper into the system.

The boys took control of their criminalization by using the few resources they had at hand. In this example, Mike and his friends changed the interactional dynamic between themselves and the store clerk. The store clerk would no longer yell or enforce the rule of no more than two boys in the store at a time, which the youths perceived as ridiculous. Instead, he adjusted his practices by allowing the boys into the store, as long as they did not steal. However, the price that Mike paid was steep. This arrest later led him deeper into the criminal justice system.

I asked Mike, “Why didn’t you steal something more expensive?” He told me that he thought about it, but, in the moment, he didn’t care what he took. He wanted to prove a point to the clerk: “not to fuck with me.” For Mike, stealing the bag of chips wasn’t about saving the quarter he had to pay for the chips; it wasn’t about accumulating the most valuable commodity he could get his hands on; it wasn’t about stealing because he was poor and wanted to eat a bag of chips. Although he may have had a desire for all of the above, the purpose of stealing the bag of chips was to redeem himself for being shamed and feeling disrespected. In the end, despite facing further punishment, Mike and his friends felt that their actions were not in vain; they had won a small battle in a war they were so tired of losing. While authority figures expected the boys to desist and follow the rules, and while the boys expressed a deep desire “to be left alone” and remain free, one of the only resources they had to feel respected within the system was to actively engage in behaviors that defied the rules of the game. This in turn led to further misrecognition and criminalization.

The Probation Officer

Like Mike’s store incident, other youths often broke rules that they could have easily followed. Examples of this rule breaking were taunting and cursing at police officers when they were simply trying to say hello, purposely breaking a rule in front of a teacher or principal, and breaking an 8 p.m. curfew with the probation officer by not walking inside the house to answer the officer’s phone call at 8:01 p.m. Flaco’s and Spider’s probation officer, Ms. Lawrence, discussed this nonsense rule breaking with me.

V.R.: Ms. Lawrence, why do these young men continue to get violated [arrested for violating their probation agreement]? Ms. Lawrence: I don’t know what is wrong with these kids. It's simple. Do your program, do good, and act right. Eighty percent of my kids recidivate, and it's for the dumbest things. They spit on a teacher and get kicked out of school, or they won't cooperate when a cop pulls them over. The other day one of the boys was arrested for talking back to the principal. He told her that the police could not go into his house without a warrant, after the principal threatened to call the cops on him. The principal dialed the school officer, and he arrested him for threatening his teacher. Why did he have to talk back to the principal? They act like they want to go back to the hall [juvenile hall].

Ms. Lawrence spoke of many more youths who did not follow simple directions. She could not figure out why these young men were risking so much by disobeying basic rules. It seemed that no matter what repercussion was placed in front of them—loss of educational or employment opportunities, loss of freedom, or six months in jail—they continued to break the rules. I asked her if she knew why the boys acted this way if they knew the repercussions. She replied,

I could see them not wanting to do something, but we all have to follow the rules in society. If we all were to break even the smallest of rules, the world would be chaotic. There would be crime everywhere. We [probation officers] aren’t assigned to them because the kids are good. They did the crime, and they have to prove to society that they can stop committing crimes.... They have to learn to follow basic rules at some point in life,... even if they have to learn the hard way.

Sociologist Thomas Scheff argues that the combination of alienation (being an outcast at school and shamed on the street) with the repression of emotions (in this case, the boys’ need to hide their feelings and put up a tough front to prove themselves on the street) leads to violence. The boys consistently expressed feeling emotional alienation. In addition, expectations of manhood on the street, and in other institutional settings,
dictated to the boys that their emotions be repressed. This combination of emotional alienation and repression of emotions may have led some of the boys to commit "crimes of resistance." When probation officers attempted to "teach" the boys by using punitive measures, the boys felt alienated. They then normalized this negative treatment, believing that it might be treatment they deserved and that this treatment might help them to rehabilitate. When the boys realized that the punitive treatment failed as a reform tool, they rejected it, pushing back, often through the only means they had, crimes of resistance.

Slick and the Policeman

In the middle of a warm, spring school day, I drove up to the boys' hang-out, "Wino Park," to look for Slick. They had named the park after all the drug addicts and alcoholics who practically lived there. On regular occasions, I spotted men sleeping on the lawn, homeless women with shopping carts full of trinkets they had collected in an attempt to sell them, and half a dozen or so middle-aged crack- or heroin-addicted men sitting on the old and splintered wood tables, which sat adjacent to solid metal, rusted-out barbeque grills. Some of the grills had a fire burning, but never any food. A group of about eight teenage boys stood in a circle talking with one another. Some of them were leaning on a tree, others were sitting on a bench, and one of them was squatting on the ground in the classic cholo (gangster) pose, sitting on one leg with the other leg extended, foot pointing straight ahead. They talked about common topics: girls, enemies, and police. They told stories about being brutalized by the police. A common practice, as had been experienced by Ronny with his probation officer, had to do with being taken to the ground by the collarbone. One of the boys, who did not want me to mention his personal information or name or even to assign him a pseudonym, explained the process: "That fool stuck his fingers inside my neck [points to the collarbone area] and slammed me to the ground. Then he made me get up and [pulled] me for half a block, with one hand inside my fucking neck!" Many other stories of brutality followed from the rest of the boys. "You member the time Russ got knocked the fuck out by the task force for talking shit? We were standing in front of KFC [Kentucky Fried Chicken], and task [force] was looking at us crazy, so Russ said, 'Was-sup?' And the cop ran up and scraped his ass." This officer, Officer Sweeney, a White man in his forties with a shaved bald head, was infamous for beating down young Black and Latino boys.

I asked them, "Why do you keep getting attacked by cops?" "We make them get mad. We like it when they get mad. It makes us know that we did our part." "Even if you get beat up and go to jail?" I asked. The response, and agreement, from the rest of the group was, "Don't matter what happens to us, as long as we make them respect us the next time they see us." Slick explained: "One of the cops almost broke my leg the other day. He slammed the door on my foot, and he knew my foot was sticking out. That shit still hurts, but I know that he won't fuck with me like that next time, 'cause I gave him a hard time for fucking with me." I asked him what made him certain that the police officer would give him respect the next time he saw him. Slick responded, "Because I saw him again, a week later, and he just looked at me crazy, and I looked at him crazy, but he didn't stop me anymore like he used to." Slick took the risk of undergoing immediate physical punishment, rather than suffer ongoing systematic harassment. His gamble paid off. The officer no longer harassed him. Slick felt good about being able to gain respect from the police officer, since this was the same officer who had beat him when he was still a child. In Slick's perspective, more defiance could lead to less harassment. Although I witnessed police officers "back down" when young men defied them, I also witnessed the strategy backfire on the boys, as, eventually, this resistance led officers to call in backup, and then a group of officers would suppress the entire group. On two encounters I observed, a police officer called in backup: a group of officers arrived, assault rifles in hands, and handcuffed and searched all the boys. Some of the boys, who had not been placed into the gang database, were placed into it on these occasions. Others were arrested for the smallest of infractions.

Defiance as Resistance

It seemed that defiance constituted a temporary success to the boys. Watching interactions between the boys and authority figures was often like watching a life-sized game of chess in action, with a rook strategically
moving in response to a queen’s movement. A police officer would get out of his car, the boys would posture, an officer would grab a young man, his friends would prepare to run, an officer would humiliate one of the boys, and the boy would respond by not cooperating or by cursing back. As one side moved its pieces to repress, another moved its pieces to resist. The boys were almost always captured and eliminated from the chess board, but not before they had encroached into the opponent’s territory, throwing the system off and influencing the rules and movements of the game.

Returning to the stolen bag of chips, we can see how adults and the boys perceived specific acts of defiance in completely different terms. I mentioned the incident to Ms. Stanley, the probation officer, and she responded, “Any normal person would have paid the cashier. This kid must be crazy. . . . Shoo, it gets me mad just thinking about it. Let’s not talk about it.” It is this “craziness”—as understood by the dominant group, adults attempting to enact social control—which the boys found productive to their resistance. For Mike, it was more important to claim his dignity than to follow the rules and pay for the chips. He was convinced that three days in juvenile hall, the stigma he received in the community, the trouble he got into with his parents, and the year of probation he received were all worth making a statement to the store clerk.

Mike and Ronny were searching for something beyond immediate gratification. They did not want to follow the rules in order to gain the social rewards—a good grade, a legitimate bag of chips, completing a probation program, and becoming a “normal” citizen—for being rule followers. Instead, the boys chose a road that at first seemed futile and ignorant, a self-defeating path that led them into more trouble but eventually provided them with a sense of agency and dignity against criminalization.

“Dummy Smart” and “Going Dumb”

Darius was a sixteen-year-old African American young man. He understood his social world to be a place in which he was a suspect. His strategy was to devise actions for fooling the system into believing what it expected of him, to break the law. In school, for example, he acted out, even though he was one of the smartest students in the class, what he called “dummy smart”:

Darius: ‘Cause, it’s like—you feel me [you understand]? It’s like, I still hung out with good people, but, like, there was, you know, like, that kid in class that was hecka bad, but he is dummy smart, feel me? That’s how my partners and me is. We was the kids that the teacher be like, “Oh, what’s the answer to this?” She try to play us like we don’t know what we talking about, but we’ll still be able to answer, without hearing nothing she say.

V.R.: Did this get you into trouble?

Darius: I got suspended [in ninth grade].

Darius’s suspension made him vulnerable to further sanctions, both in school and in the community.

V.R.: How did you do after you started getting suspended, and, like, how did you do in school?

Darius: After I got suspended, I came back to school and told the teacher I wanted to do good, or else . . . She thought I was threatening her, but what I meant was that I wanted to change, or else I would be very upset at myself. She sent me out [of school] again. I got angry. I ran into this dude [on the street] that I did not like, but I had kept it cool. I got mad, so I fought him. After that fight, uh, I went to juvenile, cause it was a one-on-one fight with me and him. And then, like, my family, I told them to let me fight him on my own, but they thought I wanted them to help me. So we all came together and whooped his ass. Dude came home with a black eye and busted lips, pressed charges. I went to jail the next day. And that’s how my juvenile-hall life started, and just kept on going. . . . It started with a suspension, and then I ended up getting out of juvenile hall. . . . And then me just looking like a suspicious person, and then somebody book me again, just for being out there.

V.R.: So tell me that story. So you had gone to juvy, you got on probation, and then you got out, and someone thought you looked suspicious. Tell me that story.
DARIUS: Actually, I was on my way to school last year, around September, and... this dude, right here on my alley, was looking for somebody who looked like the person who robbed him the other day, broke his glasses, and took his phone, his backpack, and his school supplies. I was on my way to school on one-four East 14th Avenue, and a dude try to hit me with his car. I started running 'cause I was scared. He was [a police] undercover. He thought I was guilty 'cause I was running, but I was running 'cause I was scared. I kept moving. This nigga comes hella fast, like he was trying to hit me. Next thing I know, he gets out of his car and arrests me for robbing this kid, even though I wasn’t even there.

Darius played out deviant politics by performing the role that he believed teachers expected of a young Black man, defiance and ignorance. However, when it was time to turn in his work or to answer a sophisticated question, Darius was prepared, shocking the teacher and throwing her off. This also played out on the streets. In two encounters with police that I observed, Darius put up a tough front and defied their authority. However, when police officers were ready to handcuff him and throw him in the patrol car, Darius’s code switched, he began to be cordial and respectful to the officers, and began to recite his legal rights. This also threw off the officers and led them to release him.

Darius had been arrested twice for violating probation: once for talking back to his probation officer and another time for intimidating a clerk at a Foot Locker shoe store. Darius believed that he was criminalized from a young age. His reaction was to mock the system, to make it seem that he was up to no good, despite his innocence. Doing this, in turn, made him feel empowered. However, Darius did not realize that his performance would lead police to accuse him of a crime he did not commit. Darius had mocked and played the teachers and police to a point that led them to impose a criminal label on him. In the end, as Darius described, “If it walk like a duck, talk like a duck, it must be a duck.” In mocking the system, young people gained a sense of empowerment. However, these same strategies added more fuel to the criminalization fire. Many of them realized that they were actively involved in adding fuel to the fire. However, they believed that it was worth the negative consequences. Maintaining a sense of dignity—feeling accepted and feeling that their human rights were respected—was a central struggle. The boys consciously chose to fight for their dignity, even if it meant risking their freedom. Striving for “dignity” is a more accurate way to describe the actions of the boys in this study. “Respect” or “honor,” which some ethnographers have used to describe a similar process, 22 may, to a mainstream audience, connote a more antagonistic and fatalistic process, in which young men demand acceptance from the world for any and all of their behavior, often through a rogue approach and a negative attitude. Striving for dignity is a more basic struggle, often overlooked, in which boys are demanding the right to be seen as “normal,” to be treated as fellow human beings, to have a sense of positive rites, and not to feel criminalized.

Crimes of Resistance

Many of the young men self-consciously “acted stupid” as a strategy to discredit the significance of a system which had excluded and punished them. These deviant politics garnered attention from the youth control complex, frustrating its agents: the police, school personnel, and others. This frustration led to more punishment, which in turn led to a deeper crisis of control in the community. In the end, it was this crisis of control, when institutions were not able to provide a sufficient amount of social order, which the young men consciously perceived to be a successful result of their defiance. As Flaco put it, “They trying to regulate me, right? So if they can’t regulate me, then that means they not doing their job. So my job is to not—what’s that word?—conform [conform].” 23

One of the classic ethnographies on working-class youth resistance is sociologist Paul Willis’s book *Learning to Labour*. Willis argues that working-class youths are reproduced as working-class adults, because of their own resistance to the dominant middle-class culture. For Willis, in practicing an “oppositional working class culture,” youth contribute to the “maintenance and reproduction of the social order”:
It is their own culture which most effectively prepares some working class lads for the manual giving of their labour power; we may say that there is an element of self-damnation in the taking on of subordinate roles in Western Capitalism. However, the damnation is experienced, paradoxically, as true learning, affirmation, appropriation, and as a form of resistance.24

Willis complicates agency by explaining that resistance is often futile and self-damaging but that, paradoxically, this resistance brings about a sense of liberation.25 Among the boys I observed, even though their resistance to criminalization often led them to become more criminalized, they often developed identities of resistance that allowed them to go beyond self-damnation. Karl Marx’s classic statement that people make history but not out of circumstances of their own choosing applies well in this case.26 As the boys created a dignifying identity, despite punitive consequences, they changed the way in which they perceived themselves, determining modes of interaction and influencing the way in which the system “dealt” with them. Their resistance resulted in harsher punishment, more brutality, and longer incarceration terms, yet they also exposed the massive contradictions and failures of social control dominant in their experience with education, law enforcement, and community institutions.

Infapolitics

Anthropologist James Scott sees marginalized people’s oppositional culture, or “everyday acts of resistance,” as a massive and effective, yet scattered and unorganized, social movement.27 He defines “infapolitics” as invisible, “tactical” subjectivities among oppressed groups, which seem to follow the status quo but in reality are evading power relations. Although this resistance may seem futile or meaningless, Scott maintains that it has historically made possible huge strides in contesting inequality.28 Labor historian Robin Kelley applies Scott’s theories to today’s inner city by applying “infapolitics” to the cultural practices of the Black working class of the twentieth century.29 For Kelley, marginalized groups in the United States also practice infapolitics on an everyday basis. These tactical politics are part of “a dissident political culture that manifests itself in daily conversations, folklore, jokes, songs, and other cultural practices” deployed by oppressed groups, which at first glance seem to maintain an appearance of deviance or absurdity.30 According to Kelley, even though this infrapolitical mask worn by the Black working class has, on the surface, affirmed the dominant group’s myth that the Black working class is passive-aggressive, lazy, criminal, or conniving, at a deeper level, this strategy has managed to transform power relations by providing agency, empowerment, and a voice to those with few resources. It is a strategy that exists outside of “established organizations or organized social movements.” Yet, according to Kelley, it is the foundation for what forms social movements of the masses. Kelley provides Malcolm X as an example; Malcolm X’s contribution to the civil rights movement could not have been possible without his participation in infrapolitics as a youth. Even though Malcolm X himself, in his autobiography, dismisses his own youthful experience of performing the zoot-suit as a useless negative past of wearing “ghetto adornments,” his “participation in the underground subculture of Black working-class youth during the war was a detour on the road to political consciousness, but rather an essential element of his radicalization.”31 Malcolm X’s “ghetto adornments” and culture were an essential building block for his development as a political activist. In the same vein, the “irrational” acts of defiance that the boys in this study deployed may have, at the very least, provided them a sense of dignity and empowerment, and, at best, these acts could become seeds that sprouted into a more critical political and intellectual analysis of the system that criminalized them.

Making the System Believe Its Own Hype

The boys consistently chose to act “bad” in circumstances in which adults expected them to act “good.” Almost all the acts that led to an arrest for violating probation were committed as conscious acts of resistance; in the boys’ account, they knew they were facing very severe consequences but decided to break the rules in order to make a point. This may have been their way of resisting what they perceived to be unfair treatment and punishment. These transgressions served as a resource for feeling empowered and for gaining redress for the humiliation, stigma, and punishment that they encountered. Because they reported that they committed their transgressions as a way of “getting back at the system,” as Ronny
explained, I am calling these acts deviant politics, by which I mean the political actions—the resistance—that youth labeled by society as deviant use to respond to punishment that they ubiquitously encounter.

At a cultural level, these deviant politics played out through music, dance, and dress. A youth cultural formation, the “Hyphy Movement,” became prevalent among the boys. The Hyphy Movement was a subcultural, hip-hop movement started by youth in the San Francisco Bay Area around the year 2000. Underground artists from the Bay Area had rapped about “being hyphy” for years. Eventually, a few of their songs became popular in the national hip-hop scene. Beyond being a discourse used in rap music to indicate a new kind of “cool,” hyphy also became a youth cultural practice. Hyphy was defined by young people in many ways, and the youths provided the following definitions: acting out, defying authority, breaking rules, being antagonistic, and embracing disreputable behavior as everyday practice. For young people, this was a style that gave meaning to their experiences of marginalization, of being seen by society as “dumb,” “stupid,” and “hyphy” (hyperactive, crazy, out of control). Some of these practices included dancing in the most ridiculous manner possible, standing on top of a car as the car drove off with no driver to control it, known as “ghost riding,” and acting “retarded” in class or on the street in the presence of authority figures who expected otherwise. In a sense, these young people had consciously internalized this disrepute and had made it pleasurable, aesthetic, meaningful, and a form of resilience. As Darius explained, “If you gonna pretend I am dumb, then I'm pretend I'm dumb. Then you gonna get tricked. Then you gonna—you feel me?—get confused. Then I'ma pull a hustle on you, and you not gonna know what hit you.” Darius's understanding of himself as being “dummy smart” came from his subcultural style: hyphy. He was attempting to negotiate the negative aspects of hyphy and give them a positive twist: that you can “act dumb” and still “be smart.”

Hyphy was also a hip-hop dance style that involved spontaneous, sporadic, and “dumb” dance moves. Young people danced as if they had no inhibitions; moves were meant to appear ridiculous. Youths used the following language to describe it: “get dumb,” “go stupid,” “ride the yellow bus.” “Riding the yellow bus” referred to the students who were in special education and were picked up from home on a yellow bus. One famous Oakland rapper, Mistah F.A.B, wore a helmet and drove around in a yellow bus so as to appear what he called “retarded.” The boys would spontaneously “act retarded” in various contexts, including in the classroom, in stores, and on the street. This would throw off authority figures and make them believe that the youths were ready to commit a crime or destroy property. When police were called in, the boys toned it down and acted “normal.” This process of acting up and “going dumb” was a way for young people to resist punitive social control and to play on the fears and expectations that authority figures had. Doing this, in turn, developed a sense of agency, empowerment, and accomplishment in the boys.

This subculture was also deeply embedded in school practices. Some of the boys would spontaneously “act ridiculous” or “go dumb” in the middle of class or in the middle of the school yard. Students would “go dumb” in front of teachers or administrators who had treated them as such. In other words, they played a game and flipped on its head the very stigma which had been imposed on them from a very young age. Eight of the boys in this study reported having been placed in special education classes from a young age. All of them believed that they were not special education students and that the system was using special education classes as a form of control, to discipline them for acting up in the “regular” classroom. This subculture may have been borne from the frustration with society's demand for young Black and Latino males to succeed in the mainstream, despite the many structural and punitive barriers that prohibit them from doing so. It may very well be that the Hyphy Movement began as a cultural response to systemic structural processes of neglect, pathologization, and criminalization of an entire community of poor young people in the Bay Area. The Hyphy Movement, and many of the “crimes of resistance” that accompanied it, can be understood as a form of resistance that consciously made the system believe its own hype, when young people acted “dumb” and “criminal” as a means to an end, to feel a sense of freedom and dignity. This process is similar to postcolonial theorist and psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon’s explanation of the social-psychological condition which colonized subjects found themselves to be in: “I had rationalized the world and the world had rejected me on the basis of color prejudice. Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back toward unreason.” Moreover, the boys
developed a dissident culture that provided self-generated escapes from punishment. Education scholar Jannelle Dance argues in her book *Tough Fronts*, "The mainstream bias of schooling can change temporary, survivalistic attitudes into firm political convictions." She shows that African American male youths develop "tough fronts," performances of being mean and man enough, not because they are pathological or because they resist receiving an education but rather because they have tried and tried to succeed in the system but have been systematically excluded. Some of the boys in this study also described the streets and the subcultures developed on the streets as self-empowering. For some of the boys, these practices became political convictions.

Youth Mobilization against Punitive Social Control

As the youths in this study experienced firsthand the punitive grip of the state, they fought back with the few tools they could find in their social settings, often with only "weapons of the weak," like crimes of resistance, at their disposal. Instead of remaining passive and allowing the system to shame, criminalize, and exclude them, the boys continued to produce scattered acts of resistance. From stealing at the store to cursing out police officers who had once brutalized them, the boys engaged themselves in deviant politics.

While these political convictions can be read as a potential solution for the dire conditions of criminalization that many marginalized people face, we should not romanticize the petty crimes or rebellious acts committed by the boys in this study. Boys who resisted often suffered real and drastic consequences. Sometimes, they did not even realize that they were resisting. Often, they were simply, as they called it, "getting stupid," meaning that they acted "bad" for the sake of being "bad." Moreover, deviant politics were often messy—one example is the perpetuation of misogyny discussed in the following chapter. These kinds of practices had few long-term positive outcomes for any of the boys in the study.

However, these deviant politics may have been a means to an end, the development of oppositional consciousness and political activism which, in turn, empowered some boys to become agents who fought to dismantle punitive social control and transform other forms of oppression. This is what happened to nine of the boys in this study, who became involved in an organization that protested police brutality and what they called, using feminist scholar Angela Davis’s term, "the prison industrial complex," a system of private and government agencies that economically benefit from the incarceration of marginalized populations. These boys had joined grassroots organizations in Oakland after meeting community organizers who had recruited them because of their status as what the community organizers called "survivors of the juvenile justice system." The boys related to and recognized this analysis of the system, which compelled them to join the community organizers in meetings and marches that protested police brutality and the building of incarceration facilities.

During a revisit in 2009, I found that all nine of these young men, four Black and five Latino, continued to participate in formal dissent. They took part in marches, vigils, and meetings that demanded justice for the killing of Oscar Grant by a police officer. Grant was unarmed and handcuffed when the officer shot him in the back. The incident was caught on video and became national headline news. Although none of the boys knew Oscar Grant, all nine boys described Oscar Grant as "one of us." Kobe described a rally that he attended after the killing:

The march for my boy Oscar Grant, man, was downtown on Wednesday, that Wednesday when we was riding it [marching] or whatever, and we gave up. We was in, like, a little part of, like, an alley street, so the crew I was with, we gave in. We was gonna lay down, and they [police] came up to us and was hitting us in the head with the guns and pinned their knees to our backs and twisted my arm. I thought he was gonna break it.

The fact that Kobe continued to be brutalized by police, now as a protestor, bolstered his worldview that all police are part of a system of criminalization and brutality. Prior to Grant’s killing, many of these boys had been brutalized or had witnessed friends or family brutalized or killed by police. Eleven of the boys claimed to know a friend or family member who had been severely injured or killed by police. Smoky Man reflected on why he became politically active:
I fight 'cause all the stuff they been doing. They [the police] took [killed] two of my cousins in 2004, for no reason. They came out of a store, and they thought they had some drugs or some guns on them, and they shot both of them. One of them died at the scene. One of them dies like a week later in the hospital. They had no right to do that, so this is payback, man. Anything I saw and been through with the cops, you can't tell me it's a good cop.

Fourteen of the Latino and nine of the Black boys in the study commented on the racial implications of criminalization. They all believed that, despite having differences on the streets with the other racial group, there existed a social order in which interracial conflict was rare, but so too was racial solidarity. The majority of the time the boys in this study found ways to avoid negative interactions with the other racial group, by following certain rules of avoidance and respect. Despite their close living and recreational proximity to one another, Black and Latino boys operated under a "give and take" social order and rarely had conflict with one another.55

Whenever the boys in this study talked about racial solidarity, it was often linked to the struggle against criminalization and police brutality. Jordan's perspective is representative of the perspective held by the nine boys who became politically active: "I'm speaking towards the Black perspective, but I understand they treat the Mexicans the same way! They treat the Mexicans the same way, the same way: they all affiliated with gangs. They feel any Mexicans are in gangs—you know what I'm saying? They mess with Mexicans all the same ways they discriminate Black people." Although each racial group may have experienced criminalization in unique ways, what I found with the boys in this study is that they believed that their experiences were very similar. This belief, in turn, generated a racial solidarity among boys who had been criminalized. They held a worldview that informed them that "Mexicans and Blacks are treated in the same way." This feeling of collective criminalization facilitated the process by which nine out of the forty boys in this study participated in formal political action against police brutality.59 Meetings and marches that the boys participated in were multiracial, including Blacks, Latinos, and Whites.

The process of being criminalized developed oppositional identities in all the boys in this study. Some enacted this opposition by committing "irrational" transgressions, such as "going dumb" or disobeying their probation officers. A few boys developed a deeper sense of dissent by participating in marches, protests, and meetings aimed at ending police brutality. While criminalization had many detrimental consequences for the boys, for many it also sparked a deep desire to know why they were targeted, and some developed a keen sense of dissent, often informal and occasionally more formal.

Prominent social-movement scholar Pamela Oliver reminds us that, in the context of mass incarceration generated by the repression of the social movements of the mid-twentieth century, we have to pay attention to the new and unique forms of resistance and mobilization taking place among marginalized populations. She argues that among these populations dissent may also be expressed in crime:

There is individual dissent and collective crime, and both are common. The more repressive a system, the more dissent takes the form of individual, often anonymous, acts of resistance... We need to ask how oppressed people can gain redress under conditions of extreme repression, and to understand the forms that resistance can take when the possibility of direct resistance is blocked.57

In an environment where there were few formal avenues for expressing dissent toward a system, which the boys believed to be extremely repressive, they developed forms of resistance that they believed could change, even if only temporarily, the outcome of their treatment. The boys believed they had gained redress for the punitive social control they had encountered by adopting a subculture of resistance based on fooling the system and by committing crimes of resistance, which made no sense to the system but were fully recognizable to those who had been misrecognized and criminalized. The paradox of punitive social control is that it socially incapacitates too many marginalized populations; at the same time, this system of repression may just be the catalyst for the next wave of massive social movements from below.
Notes to Chapter 4

5. The school name is a pseudonym.
6. For an understanding on how the family is penetrated by the state's project to regulate its population, see Donzelot (1979).


8. Alice Goffman (2009) finds that family members of Black male felons in Philadelphia use the criminal justice system in an attempt to regulate their behavior.

9. During my time in the field, and according to community members, for many years past, as public and private funding for community programs diminished, community organizations applied for grants and partnerships with law-enforcement agencies, whose budgets continued to increase.

10. Historian Carl Nightingale (1993) argues that the harsh and corporal punishment of children is a central theme in American culture. "For both parents and children, the tradition itself, the respectability of its Christian and mainstream origins, and the official sanction it received from the law-and-order policies of America's police, courts, and prisons, all help to make the forceful child-rearing approach an important source of legitimacy for values of violence in the inner city" (8). The youth control complex has very deep historical roots in a three-hundred-year-old legacy of racialized social control and an equally old American idea of harsh discipline for children. Also see Greven (1993).


12. The decline of the welfare state and deindustrialization taking place from the 1960s to the 1990s (see Parenti 2000 and Wilson 1987) broke down the "old" form of social control that often worked in marginalized communities. The "old school" form of social control included when grandparents, neighbors, caring business people, and other community members took on an "it takes a village to raise a child" approach and took discipline into their own hands to teach young people a lesson that in the end helped them become productive citizens. At a larger scale, social control has shifted from informal social control and collective efficacy in poor communities to social control through state violence and mass incarceration. This state violence influences other institutions to become equally punitive at the material and symbolic level as well.


Notes to Chapter 5

1. As a commitment to helping the youths in this study, I had given them my phone number and told them to call me if they ever needed help with school- or employment-related matters.

6. Devah Pager (2007) has found that young Black men without a criminal record have less of a chance of obtaining a job than White men with a criminal record.

7. See Takaki (1993) and Apel (2004) for a detailed discussion of this history.

8. This racialized sexual control is reinforced by close scrutinization of Black and Latino boys when they interact with White female teachers, students, or community members. Although it may be important to discuss the differences between African American and Latino youth, I have decided to focus here on commonalities. Lamont and Small (2008) have argued that "the idea that races have a culture—for example that there is an Anglo-American culture that differs from Asian culture or Afro-American culture—is unhelpful to the study of racial differences in poverty" (78). This conception has failed in the study of urban poverty because often it has created fixed understandings of specific populations. Lamont and Small argue that "instead of imputing a shared culture to groups, we [should] study empirically how people make sense of their lives" (78). The approach, then, is to make sense of the resources available to urban young for them to engage in social action and the meanings they make as they deploy these resources. Punishment, at least in the lives of the youths in Oakland, had what I call a collective racialization effect. In other words, poor Black and Latino youths experienced similar forms of punishment when it came to crime control and made sense of their experience with punishment in similar ways. It is time for scholars to move beyond the "four fold groups of racialization" and examine how some social phenomena, such as punishment, might be experienced collectively.


13. It is important to point out that this resistance contradicts the idea that young Black and Latino men reject mainstream values and prefer to embrace the streets (Anderson 1999).
Notes to Chapter 5

17. Quoted in Fadilla (1992:5).
25. Urban ethnographers such as Elijah Anderson (1999), Mercer Sullivan (1990), and Sudhir Venkatesh (2006) have found a similar paradox among marginalized urban Black youths.
26. “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances of their own choosing, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.” Marx (1963:13).
28. Scott contends that the “imperial inspirations of many a monarch [were] ... undone by the social avalanche of petty acts of insubordination carried out by an unlikely coalition ... with no name, no organization, no leadership, and certainly no Leninist conspiracy behind it” (quoted in Duncombe 2002:90).
32. Fanon (2008:102).
33. Dance (2005:7). Payne (2008) discusses how these kinds of acts are forms of resilience in a context where there are no other opportunities.
34. Kelley reminds us that the forces of punishment also become a basis for controlling resistance: daily acts of resistance have had consequences for existing power relations, and the powerful have deployed immense resources in order to avoid those consequences or to punish transgressors. Knowing how those in power interpret, redefine, and respond to the thoughts and actions of the oppressed is just as important as identifying and analyzing resistance (1994:9).
35. For a more in-depth discussion, see Martinez and Rios (forthcoming).
36. This is a different process from that described by Fadilla (1992), who finds that Puerto Rican gang members gripped onto their ethnic culture as a form of resistance. While the boys in my study were proud of being Black or Latino, their analysis of resistance to criminalization was not based on “cultural superiority” but on a consciousness of “collective racialization,” as a sense of solidarity and formal and informal resistance.

Notes to Chapter 6

1. From the album Ronald Dregan, Dreganomics (2004). Mac Dre is considered the “godfather” of the hyphy subculture that many of the youths in this study ascribed to.
2. Martín Sánchez-Jankowski (2008) describes a similar process, whereby some of the urban poor will sometimes make a sacrifice in the present in order to avoid future suffering. I believe that some of these young men understood that their preemptive verbal attacks on police and other authority figures served as a way of attempting to structure the relationship, to tell the officer, “Don’t mess with me because I will give you a hard time,” in order to prevent future harassment and brutality. Sometimes this strategy worked, but often it backfired. The boys were aware of the high failure rate of this strategy. However, many of them believed that it was worth the gamble.
3. Homophobic language was a common bonding and exclusionary practice for these boys. Chauvinism and homophobia went hand in hand and served as a basis for the development of masculinity. It is important to note that homophobia and chauvinism were not only a street creation but were also created and perpetuated in other institutions, by authority figures.
7. For policing and gender, see Brunson and Miller (2006); for mistrust, see Fine and Weiss (1993); for negative credentials, see Pager (2007).
10. Ferguson (2006) has demonstrated that schools participate in the making of Black masculinity in children as young as ten years old.
13. Anderson (1999); see also Dance (2005) and Duneier (1999).
22. See Brunson and Miller (2006); and Ferguson (2006).