

## BOOK REVIEW

Victor M. Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*, New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011, 218 pages, ISBN 978-0-8147-7638-4, \$21.00 (Paperback).

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Victor M. Rios's *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* is a timely and worthy book for readers interested in gaining a multiple-layered understanding of the lives of policed young people in Oakland, California. It is also instrumental for readers examining issues relevant to the school-to-prison pipeline in the United States. But more importantly, *Punished* is a book that can be purposefully used in education courses as part of efforts to critically examine interactions between youth, schools, and their communities.

In *Punished*, Rios (2011) uses ethnographic research methods to study interrelated questions about the process of criminalization with a purposeful sample of forty Black and Latino boys (ages 14-18) in Oakland. All of the participants had been arrested, were on probation, or were socially linked with other young men who had been arrested. The purpose of the study was "to gain a deeper understanding of how surveillance, punishment, and criminal justice practices affected the lives of the participants; what patterns of punishment the participants encountered in their neighborhoods; what effects patterns of punishment had on their daily lives; and how punitive encounters with police, probation officers, teachers and administrators, and other authority figures shaped the meanings that the boys created about themselves and about their obstacles, opportunities and future aspirations" (pp. 7-8). To explore this line of inquiry, Rios collected data from 2002 to 2005 by conducting extensive participant observations, interviews, focus groups, and fieldwork across multiple settings, including schools, neighborhoods, community centers, businesses, and homes.

A notable contribution that Rios makes as a scholar is to utilize a strategic blend of critical criminology and urban ethnography to better understand complex, power-laden processes from the perspective of marginalized youth. From this lens, he illustrates the interactive and catalytic role of agency and structure in the lives of Black and Latino boys in Oakland. For instance, his findings speak to daily, institutionalized practices of "punitive social control" aimed at "regulating deviant behavior and maintaining social order" (p. 21). By examining the consequences of such hypercriminalization practices, Rios unveils several potentially transformative forms of defiance and resistance—a kind of resilience—that the youth enacted. That is, the boys engaged in resistance practices not only for coping with what is imposed on them, but also for reclaiming *dignidad* (dignity) within an inherently crooked, raced and gendered system. The possibility for alternative forms of social control, as Rios notes in his conclusion, lies in garnering the youth's resilience, and using it to cultivate a more positive landscape toward adulthood.

Cultivating a more positive landscape toward adulthood is where critical teacher education comes into play. In my position as a researcher and teacher educator, I have access to many resources and materials to use in the preparation of future teachers and the ongoing professional development of practicing teachers in schools. Just recently, I was previewing video clips of teachers that were included in a DVD about 'effective' reading instruction (PreK-4) in light of Common Core Learning Standards. To my dismay, the very first video clip that I previewed was that of a white female teacher encouraging African American students to use the term *juvenile delinquents*, rather than troublemakers, to describe the characters in a story they were reading. Although the authors position the video clip as a model of a text-based discussion which supports the development of strong reading comprehension skills in a third grade classroom, it is also important to consider how the teacher-student interactions in this video clip exemplify the phenomenon of criminalization. More specifically, how it supports one of the central problems that Victor M. Rios vividly surfaces in *Punished*, namely, the "labeling hype" (p. 45) that continuously surrounds the lives of Black and Latino boys in the era of mass incarceration.

Rios uses the term *labeling hype* to discuss how labels serve to hypercriminalize and marginalize the

youth. Thus, the bigger picture that needs to be interrogated is the ways that teachers and schools serve to reinforce the labeling hype problem and what Rios refers to as the *youth control complex* (systemic, ubiquitous punishment practices). In other words, how might labeling characters in a story as juvenile delinquents generate criminality and perpetuate criminalization, particularly in an inner-city school community? How might teacher-student interactions of this nature shape the decisions students will make, how they view themselves, their obstacles, opportunities and future aspirations?

Such questions point to the interplay between teacher education, schooling practices, and the school-to-prison pipeline. As critical educators, part of our responsibility is to develop teacher-conduits to what Rios calls a *youth support complex*. That is, teachers who find creative ways to educate “young people when they have made mistakes” (Rios, 162). Teachers that strive to connect with otherwise marginalized youth in meaningful and nurturing ways that support their reintegration and restore their dignity as young people.

One area that Rios could develop further is an analysis of the sociocultural and linguistic differences between the Black and Latino boys, particularly in relation to their understandings of masculinity, *dignidad*/dignity, and the production of hypermasculinity resulting from “heavily-gendered” (p.130) interactions between the boys and the youth control complex. Nevertheless, *Punished* represents a methodologically sound research text written in a narrative style and intimate tone that engages the reader from start to finish. For education courses examining the social context of teaching and learning, *Punished* is a welcome companion to Erica Meiner’s (2007) *Right to be Hostile: Schools, Prisons, and the Making of Public Enemies* or Sabrina Jones and Marc Mauer’s (2013) *Race to Incarcerate: A Graphic Retelling*.

To close, Victor M. Rios provides the reader with a formidable account of the patterns of punishment for Black and Latino youth in Oakland. In other words, Rios is what I call an “intellectual badass” scholar who knows how to effectively weave theory and research in a sophisticated, yet accessible manner that is provoking and memorable.

## References

Jones, S., & Mauer, M. (2013). *Race to incarcerate: A graphic retelling*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Meiners, E. (2007). *Right to be hostile: Schools, prisons, and the making of public enemies*. New York, NY: Routledge.