

**Rupture the Pipeline!**  
**Law, political economy, and information systems in the school-prison nexus**

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THESIS

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## SUMMARY

This thesis complicates the idea of a school-prison pipeline and expands traditional conceptions of what counts as education policy studies in two ways. First, through a theoretical reframing of the school-prison nexus, and second, by conducting a qualitative empirical study, both of which informed the other. This two-pronged project asks to what extent non-educational and even non-juvenile justice institutions are involved in the school-prison nexus. Specifically explored are the institutional realms of the law and law enforcement, the political economy, and public representations through media as well as the racist, classist, and gendered structures of each.

The methodology of the ethnographic study focuses on interactions of different actors, stakeholders, and gatekeepers in order to provide insight as to how such complex phenomena as the school-prison nexus develop across institutional lines today, and over time serve larger projects. Informed by an understanding of two overarching frameworks: neoliberal globalization and the Prison Industrial Complex, this thesis focuses on the interactions of institutions, rather than individuals. Both of these constructs acknowledge deep institutional racism, sexism, and class oppression, which are engaged at every possible juncture in this work.

The ethnographic data in combination with the convergent lens developed and applied, suggest that a system of repressive social control connects schools and prisons through the actions of the police and the criminal legal system, but also through other arms of the state, including housing, urban development policy, public aid, and child family services.

## SUMMARY (continued)

Such repressive apparatuses are, in turn, legitimated in the public imagination through the circulation of public identities or representations of people, communities, and community institutions constructed in media.



## I. INTRODUCTION

What we seeing is!  
The streets, the cops, the system, harassment (uh-huh)  
The options, get shot, go to jail, or getcha ass kicked (aight)  
The lawyers, the part, they are, of the puzzle (uh-huh)  
The release, the warning, "Try not, to get in trouble" (damn!)  
The snitches, the odds (uhh), probation, parole (what?!)  
The new charge, the bail, the warrant, the hole (damn!)  
The cell, the bus, the ride, up North (uh-huh)  
The greens, the boots, the yard, these hearts (uhh!)  
The fightin, the stabbin, the pullin, the grabbin (what?!)  
The riot squad with the captain, nobody knows what happened (what?!)  
The two years in a box, revenge, the plots (uhh!)  
The twenty-three hours that's locked, the one hour that's not (uhh!)  
The silence, the dark, the mind, so fragile (aight!)  
The wish, that the streets, would have took you, when they had you (damn)  
The days, the months, the years, despair  
One night on my knees, here it comes, the prayer  
-DMX "Who We Be" 2001

The phenomenon I am studying is variously referred to as the "school-to-prison pipeline," (Wald and Losen, 2003; Skiba, 2003), the "schoolhouse to jailhouse track," (Browne, 2003), or, as Erica Meiners (2007) points out in an effort to demonstrate the non-linear complexity of the relationship, a web or nexus of schools and prisons. One might expect a study of the school-prison pipeline to focus on either end of the pipe: schools or youth in prisons, or perhaps even the intervening institution of our juvenile justice system. While, very generally, schools are where youth start, there are a multitude of paths and intervening institutions that divert them in one way or the other from mainstream educational institutions and achievements: disciplinary exclusion, dropout, pushout, pregnancy, alternative schools, military service, job corps, etc. In short, the school and juvenile justice institutions can only tell the most obvious portion of a story that is, as DMX raps, a "puzzle" that includes society's larger legal system, political economy, and the forms of media that create the discourse around all these institutions. This research asks to what extent non-educational and even non-juvenile justice institutions are involved in the school-prison nexus.

A phenomenon such as the school-prison nexus does not emerge suddenly, it spreads wide across dimensions of society today and also has a deep, rooted genealogy spanning back to slavery, colonialism, struggles for women's rights, and on and on. As such, it is a hard thing to pin down, to define, to outline, however, there is a growing body of research by scholars who attempt to do just this in various thoughtful ways. What follows is an outline of research that seeks to pin down and examine this amorphous moving target of the school-prison nexus.

### Discipline in Context- Bias and Change Over Time

Perhaps the most common place to begin to explore connections between schools and prisons is at the entry point to the “pipeline”—schools. Within schools, the disciplinary policy or system faced by any student who commits an infraction significantly depends upon the institutional agents in the school, the discourses available to them, their biases and understandings, the pressures on them to have a “safe” school, as well as the historical contexts of racism, poverty, violence, and popular understandings of danger in and around schools. Some scholars doing work focusing on the way connections between schools and prisons are established or fortified *within* schools examine the historical changes in definitions of infractions and severity of sanctions (Advancement Project et al., 2005). In efforts to unpack the origin of these changes, others have examined principals' attitudes toward discipline, students, and parents (Skiba et al., 2003) and how these attitudes shape school disciplinary policy and the general handling of discipline among teachers and others (Browne, 2001). Along these lines, Casella (2003) found that staff definitions or perceptions of students as dangerous is sometimes related to medical or psychological diagnoses, but just as often had to do with factors such as student race, language, culture, and sexuality. Still others have argued that definitions of disciplinary or behavioral problems are actually wrapped up in raced, gendered, and classed ideologies of normalcy (Reid and Knight, 2006). When “normalcy” is conflated with other identity factors, schools serve to situate minority youth as academically and behaviorally deficient, placing them at risk for special education placement (O'Connor and Fernandez, 2006).

Casella (2003) adds that in response to these biased perceptions of students as dangerous by school faculty and administrators, a model of preventative detention has emerged. Preventative detention promotes a system of social control, relying on the labeling of youths as dangerous when they violate simple codes of conduct, preemptively assuming that basic rule infractions will likely lead to later dangerous acts. Preventative detention also marks the normalized involvement of law enforcement officials and criminal legal models in schools. Students are determined to be dangerous or potentially dangerous to themselves or others based on conflicts and arguments with other students or school personnel. The descriptions of students as dangerous vary: “Some of these descriptions were medical and psychological diagnoses, but many were judgments about students’ character...their friends, their way of dressing and walking, their ‘baggage,’ their attitudes, and their backgrounds” (ibid, 59). A punitive, pre-emptive system of preventative detention applied to youth already implies a shifting definition of certain youth as inherently bad or trouble; add to this biased or questionable definitions of the “dangers” such policies are meant to prevent, and students face more and more exclusionary school environments.

### The Impacts of School Removal

Proceeding from this literature on the shifting and subjective definitions of dangerousness and discipline, other scholars have explored beyond the school walls, moving into the pipeline, so to speak. Such scholarship follows the impacts of sanctions that have accompanied moving and subjective definitions of dangerousness. Raffaele Mendez (2003) argues that models of preventive detention in fact fail at their stated goal of making schools safer. On the contrary, once youth are identified as potentially dangerous, a self-fulfilling prophecy may unfold if sanctions such as detention, suspension, expulsion, assignment to alternative programs, or even arrest are imposed. All of these disciplinary measures have been shown to have an association with more future suspensions, poor academic performance, failure to

graduate on time, accelerated movement to outplacements outside of mainstream school settings,<sup>1</sup> referral to courts, arrests for breach of peace, and finally imprisonment, even for students who had committed neither violent nor actionable criminal acts (Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Skiba et al., 2003; Casella 2003).

Once disciplinary sanctions have been imposed and the punishment is “served,” especially any that involves removal from school, it becomes increasingly difficult for students to re-enter mainstream school environments. Casella’s (2003) ethnographic work in two East Coast schools and one prison indicated that this difficulty with school re-entry had to do with inflated fears of youth crime, expectations that spaces in outplacement institutions should be filled, and pressure not to count “undesirable” students among rolls for academic and safety reputations. Inability to rejoin mainstream educational environments results in a highly unstable educational experience, a common sentiment expressed by prisoners when referring to their formal education. Casella captures this in the words of one of his participants: ““School was one big blur from one place to the next place”” (66).

Further, this removal of “problem” students from schools to outplacements places the students in the greatest need of services and support in institutions that “do not meet their social and academic needs and that have clear institutional links to the criminal justice system” (Casella, 2003, 55). The harmfulness of these facilities is only compounded once it is noted that only half of public juvenile justice facilities in this nation are estimated to comply with minimum national standards of care (Schwartz and Rieser, 2001).

Disciplinary policies that mandate student removal from schools also affect the overall mood of schools for teachers and even those students who never come into contact with disciplinary policies. This may create a sort of self-fulfilling cycle, where students are upset about a disciplinary action or policy that is perceived as unfair, feel disconnected from their teachers or administrators, and therefore act out, attain lower levels of academic achievement, and become frustrated (Wald and Kurlaender,

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<sup>1</sup> Outplacements can include special ed., self-contained classrooms, alternative programs or schools, vocational schools,

2003). At the emotional-psychological level, the frequent removal, or even the looming threat to remove students, lowers their morale and harms learning environments, as student communities are shifted and regulated without their input or any measure of control (Browne, 2003). To make matters worse, as schools increase their law enforcement personnel and criminal justice style policies, teachers experience a loss of professional discretion that devalues their training and capabilities, inevitably affecting their motivation and morale (Dohrn, 2001). A casualty of these two assaults on the psyches of students and teachers is the “central, critical relationship between teacher and student” (Ayers et al., 2001). In short, criminalizing disciplinary policies that rely heavily on isolation and school removal harm the entire educational relationship, all of its actors, and overall environment.

This erosion of the quality of educational environments and provision of services for young people in trouble, combined with the effects of school accountability measures leads to yet another possible outcome that is connected with contact with the law: pushout or dropout. According to the 2006 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s (OJJDP) National Report on Juvenile Offenders and Victims, “juveniles who were neither in school nor working had a significantly greater risk of engaging in a wide range of problem behaviors—using marijuana and hard drugs, running away from home, belonging to a gang, committing a major theft or a serious assault, selling drugs, and carrying a handgun” (Snyder and Sickmund, 2006). While the ultimate disengagement with an educational institution-- dropping out, or being pushed out--is clearly associated with negative outcomes, it may seem to some students to be a logical and viable decision within the stunted range of choices afforded them by educational environments that have been rendered harmful by the systems in which they are imbedded.

### Turning Toward the Phenomenon

The literature on school-prison connections largely focuses on school-level interactions or the detrimental impacts of any entanglement with the juvenile justice system. The findings of the bulk of

this literature clearly points to the ways that the outcomes are racialized, gendered, classed, and otherwise fit neatly into broader inequities that run throughout US society and its institutions. My research begins with the findings of the important scholars outlined above, but then turns away from interactions between individuals or stakeholders and uses the school only as one institutional vantage point on other institutions.

Victor Rios (2011) described the diffuse, yet “synchronized...web of institutions, schools, families, businesses, residents, media, community centers, and the criminal justice system” as a “youth control complex” that collectively punishes, stigmatizes, monitors, and criminalizes youth (40). Rather than attempt to precisely define or fix the concept of the school-prison nexus, I follow scholars such as Rios (2011) and Meiners (2007) who explore the amorphous character of such a large concept as the school-prison nexus as many things in many locations. In this thesis, I propose a framework for analysis that proceeds from and informs my ethnographic research. My methodology focuses on interactions of different actors, stakeholders and gatekeepers in order to provide insight as to how such complex phenomena as the school-prison nexus develop across institutional lines today, and over time serve larger projects. My focus on the interactions of institutions rather than individuals, emerged out of my understanding of two overarching frameworks: neoliberal globalization and the Prison Industrial Complex. Both of these constructs acknowledge deep institutional racism, sexism, and class oppression, which will be discussed at every possible juncture in this work. I will begin by defining concepts and unpacking assumptions upon which my research is based.

#### Neoliberal Ideology and its Key Urban Manifestation, Gentrification

“[Incapacitation is] the theory that undergirds the most ambitious prison-building project in the history of the world. Incapacitation doesn’t pretend to change anything about people except where they are. It is in a simple-minded way, then, a geographical solution that purports to solve social problems by extensively and repeatedly removing people from disordered, deindustrialized milieus and depositing them somewhere else” (Gilmore, 2007, 14).

As Ruth Gilmore explains, the concepts of retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation, and incapacitation have existed together in a dance to justify and explain why and how societies should “lock people out by

locking them in” (13). Yet the concept that has beat all the rest in terms of its unprecedented impact on millions of people is incapacitation, and its spatial implications, especially on urban spaces are staggering. As Erica Meiners (2007) echoes, “the prison industrial complex (PIC) constitutes a geographic and economic solution to socioeconomic problems while maintaining the state’s commitment to white supremacy” (61). Put perhaps over-simply, neoliberalism is the application of free-market ideology to all aspects of existence, including the social realm, such that what is best for markets dictates all policy, economic or social. The smooth and unfettered movement of capital across borders has led to another term, globalization, being used in similar ways to neoliberalism, as markets across the globe join together in unprecedented ways. However, anti-imperialist or anti-capitalist activists<sup>2</sup> attempting to organize across national borders and with internationalist mindsets are also “doing” globalization, so neoliberal globalization is but one kind of globalization.

Neil Smith’s (1996) work on gentrification in New York City demonstrates the underlying market drive behind city policies: “In its housing policies, drug crackdowns, and...in its parks strategy, the City devoted its efforts not toward providing basic services and living opportunities for existing residents but toward routing many of the locals and subsidizing opportunities for real estate development” (24). In this way I realized that under the neoliberal logic that began to pervade cities in the 1980s, housing policies as well as law enforcement and other, seemingly unrelated city policies worked in tandem to fracture and displace communities of color and criminalize bodies of color.

Smith goes on to explore the ideological underpinnings that legitimated such brutal social policies. In particular, he identifies the frontier myth as a tool used by real estate developers and media to decouple the violence and displacement of gentrification both from its historical and its geographical context, such that it becomes a sort of charming, if occasionally painful necessity: “As with the Old West, the frontier is idyllic yet also dangerous, romantic but also ruthless (Smith, 1996, 13). In this framework, Smith continues, “the frontier ideology rationalizes social differentiation and exclusion as

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<sup>2</sup> The Occupy movement comes to mind as the most visible current instantiation of such organizing

natural, inevitable. The poor and working class are all too easily defined as ‘uncivil,’ on the wrong side of a heroic dividing line, as savages and communists” (17). The ideological work that the frontier myth achieved allowed for the institution of draconian cuts to social services and repressive new policies that neatly suited the needs of capital in “global cities” and the drive for profit in real estate markets. In short, the frontier myth is part of the discursive underpinning of neoliberal policies in cities.

Smith characterizes the process of neoliberal gentrification as the emergence of a revanchist city that structures policy based on a spirit of revenge on the poor and people of color who are given individual, cultural, or community blame for their own conditions, but also for the state of many public institutions. His work demonstrated the need to look beyond laws or policies on the books to the discourse that provides the climate necessary to provide sufficient public support. Some concrete corollaries of the mood of revanchism that Smith outlines were “Tough on-” and “War on-” laws and policies that included harsher laws and punishments, more brutal enforcement, and fewer intervening non-punitive social services; all fueling the intense growth of the prison industry.

### Prison Expansion and the Prison Industrial Complex

The term Prison-Industrial Complex (PIC)<sup>3</sup> is described as a “recession proof” economic base of prison building and maintenance “during the downsizing, layoffs, and corporate relocations” associated with post-Cold War industrial shifts and globalization (Sudbury, 2005, xvi-xvii). Prison building and the population of people incarcerated in the United States have both been on a booming growth curve since the 1970s. At over 2.3 million as of 2009,<sup>4</sup> the United States incarcerates more people numerically and by percentage than any other nation in the world. The problem has proceeded to the point that, as of year-end 2009, over 7.2 million people, --3.1% of all U.S. adult residents or 1 in every 32 adults-- were on probation, parole, in jail or prison.<sup>5</sup> Recent data also reveal the magnitude of the problem of racism in our prison system: as of 2008, in the United States, 1 in 15 Black men over 18, compared to 1 in 34

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<sup>3</sup> The term was coined by Mike Davis (1995) in reference to the prison building boom in California (cited in Sudbury, 2005, xxvii).

<sup>4</sup> <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=11>

<sup>5</sup> <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=11>



Hispanic men and 1 in 106 White men are behind bars (PEW Center on the States, 2008). If the age range of 20-34 is isolated for Black men, the figure jumps to 1 in 9 (ibid). These figures do not include adults under other forms of criminal justice supervision, such as probation or parole. For instance, as of 2009, one in 11 black people are under criminal justice supervision in the community, in prison, or in jail (PEW Center on the States, 2009). But even as of 1995, the end of the period of this study, nearly one in three (32%) black males in the age group 20-29 was in prison, jail, or under some other form of supervision (Mauer and Huling, 1995). Things have only continued apace since 1995; in Illinois as of 2009, of the total 77,084 people in prison or on parole, 45,722 were Black, representing about 60% of the prison/parole population, while only 15% of the state population is Black (IDOC, 2009; Cottrell, 2011).

Does prison growth alone make an Industrial Complex? Meiners (2007) addresses the “industrial” portion of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) by explaining the ways that that prison boom responded to post-Fordist deindustrialization by simultaneously supplying captive, slave-like labor within prisons<sup>6</sup>, isolating troublesome racialized un- or under-employed groups and removing them from the urban landscape, and providing much-needed prison and prison-related jobs to devastated rural areas. Goldberg (2000) also relates the prison boom to the military downscaling that came from the end of the Cold War combined with the shift from a “primarily manpowered military to one technologically driven” (211) beginning in the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> This “squeeze” of the Military Industrial Complex, which President Eisenhower had famously warned against, also coincided with an economic recession, prompting some creative repurposing. In 1989, President George Bush, Sr. formed a commission to identify any closed or closing bases appropriate for prison usage, prompting a conversation between the Federal Bureau of Prisons and this commission regarding the economic benefits to local economies (Goldberg, 2000, 214). Prison building exploded, most notably in California and other areas impacted by

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<sup>6</sup> Meiners (2007) makes the important point that such slavery-like working conditions are made perfectly legal by the 13th Amendment, which states that “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction”

military base closures, and, in tough economic times, growth in one sector is inevitably accompanied by shrinkage in others. Goldberg (2000) supports this argument by stating that “between 1987 and 1995 state prison expenditure increased by 30 percent while spending on higher education decreased by 18 percent” (213), demonstrating diminishing educational investments during this same period.

Apart from the explanations for prison growth based on lack of sufficient employment, fewer military positions, and shrinking educational opportunities, the rapid growth in the prison industry also proved to be “an electorally appealing response” to the racialized panics about crime that abounded in big cities, particularly in the wake of the “crack epidemic” (Goldberg, 2000). In short, there are many factors leading to the increased role of prisons and imprisonment in US society, hence the utility of the concept of an entire complex organized around the prison industry. This research uses the literature and data around the Prison Industrial Complex to provide context for understanding how urban public schools negotiate larger mechanisms of state control, asking how various institutions— media, federal and local law, and urban economies—structure or deconstruct the nexus between schools and prisons.

### Outline of the Project

Beginning from the frameworks of neoliberal ideology and the Prison Industrial Complex, my work does two things. It both posits a theoretical reframing and conducts a qualitative empirical study based on and informing this broadened framework. As such, Chapter Two begins by outlining useful approaches to youth and violence that refute mainstream assumptions about the criminality of youth and foreground the systemic violence committed against youth in our society. The literature on systemic violence along with my own experiences led to a research design focused on the level of institutions rather than on individual histories. I make use of radical feminist theories to structure an institutional ethnography that bridges the macro-level and specific texts, such as media documents and interview data. This chapter concludes by detailing the specific research procedures that emerged from my

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<sup>7</sup> Goldberg provides the hardest hit, California, as an example, where between 1988 and 1993, 105,000 military and civilian positions were lost in seventeen facilities due to base closures (2000, 212).

experience and were informed by theoretical frameworks such as radical feminist methodologies and Critical Race Theory.

Chapter Three makes a theoretical argument for a reframed approach to analyzing multi-dimensional educational issues. In following Anyon's (2005) call for an "expanded education policy paradigm" (13), I put into conversation realms otherwise considered separate from educational policy, including three key institutional contexts that converge to interact with and act upon schools. Specifically, I explore the institutional realms of the law and law enforcement, the political economy, and public representations as well as the racist, classist, and gendered structures of each. First, I provide the legal and law enforcement context that undergirds and codifies the school-prison nexus. Next I situate the connections between schools and prisons within broader changes in the urban political economy. Finally, no repressive laws, policies, enforcement techniques, or economic conditions described could have come about in their present form without historical antecedents or ideological legitimization performed, at least in part, by the media. The theoretical reframing of the school-prison nexus proposed in this chapter is both grounded in the ethnographic study outlined in Chapter Four, but simultaneously helped to shape the type of data collected and its analysis.

Chapters Four and Five analyze the data that emerged from the document analysis and interviews that made up my institutional ethnography. The theme that emerged from this data positioned the school-prison nexus as part of broader surveilling and policing of communities of color. Here I apply the convergent model proposed in Chapter Three to examine the school-prison nexus as one space in which state surveillance, institutional racism, and the narratives that serve to legitimate and undergird repressive policies, collide. I argue in Chapter Four that a system of repressive social control connects schools and prisons through the actions of the police and the criminal legal system, but also by other arms of the state, including housing and urban development policy and public aid. Finally, this chapter concludes with an examination of how such repressive apparatuses are legitimated in the public imagination. I argue that the public identities or representations of people, communities, and community

institutions constructed in media play a key role in this legitimization. Chapter Five uses ethnographic data to explore the gendered intersections between the issues discussed in Chapter Four relating to housing and public aid are how they are compounded by the power of children protective services to single out and discipline black mothers.

My final chapter summarizes what this research project can add to our understanding of the role of education in what Victor Rios (2011) calls our current historical moment: “the era punitive social control” (171). Rios argues that the youth control complex must be supplanted by a “youth support complex” that involves a different kind of framing for “at promise” (10) youth and a “pipeline of opportunities” (xii) rather than a prison pipeline. In conclusion, I suggest relevant areas of future research and, what Erica Meiners (2007) calls “horizons of abolition,” including current struggles to dismantle repressive connections between our society’s institutions and build a broad youth and social support complex.

## II. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE SCHOOL-PRISON NEXUS

While the complex and particular stories of the students I taught were very significant in terms of their life paths and my interactions with them, focusing my study exclusively on them as individuals would tend to make the relationship between education and incarceration seem as though it was based on the attributes of individuals. A focus on individual actors would obfuscate the role that structural factors play in the movement of youth from schools into contact with the criminal legal system. Such awareness led me to consciously focus my research away from individuals and toward institutions that work in tandem to ultimately link schools with prisons. I begin by reframing youth violence as a systemic, rather than an individual issue.

### Youth and Violence

No matter what one sees as the cause, it is increasingly apparent that violence characterizes and envelopes the lives of many young people today in a way that is much more sensational, and therefore newsworthy, than in the past. Scholars, journalists, and activists have begun to link the problems of schools with the perceived climate of violence perpetrated both by and against youth (Davis, 1999). There are at least two polarities of thought on youth and violence, with a continuum stretching between them: one extreme understands youth increasingly as “impulsive” and “remorseless” agents of violence (cf DiIulio, 1995); the opposite frames youth as innocent victims of violence at the hands of society, not guilty perpetrators. I will argue here that an examination of the messy volley between these two poles can yield a more nuanced understanding of young people’s circumstances than a focus on either of the two extremes.

A significant and interconnected variety of factors affect young people’s lives outside of or beyond schools. Some of the struggles surrounding young people are theorized as a form of “systemic violence” (Polakow, 2000) and include: concentrated poverty (Children’s Defense Fund, 2005), endemic

and systemic racism (Skiba et al., 2003), under-funded, overcrowded schools (School to Prison Pipeline Initiative, ND), substandard, disappearing, or completely unavailable affordable housing, transience, abusive home lives, self-medication through drugs or alcohol, environmental hazards such as pollutants and unavailable fresh foods (Books, 2000), untreated mental and physical illnesses, and learning or behavioral disabilities (Reid and Knight, 2006; O'Connor and Fernandez, 2006).<sup>8</sup>

Any number of the above environmental factors can combine with teenage experimentation, poor decision-making, and a host of other individual factors to cause a young person to commit some sort of disciplinary or behavioral infraction in school, thereby activating the school's disciplinary apparatus, whatever form it may take. As Laurie Schaffner (1999) points out in her study of teenaged runaways, in the face of such incredible life challenges, youth respond to their sense of powerlessness, anger, resentment, and disappointment with various forms of rebellion that need to be understood as political and social phenomenon. My analysis points, in turn, to the necessity of going beyond the individual to the social and institutional context, especially in an effort to search for broader social solutions.

Clearly, some young people do indeed commit horrible and tragic crimes; however, as I argue throughout this study, instead of serving as proof of some qualitative change in the intrinsic moral makeup of youth, individual crimes are, at least in part, also a response to the current historical context, in which young people's lives are regulated by multiple processes of violence *against* them. Indeed, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, teens and young adults (aged 12-24) experience the highest rates of violent crime of any age group; rates disproportionate to their percentage of the overall population ([http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/cvict\\_v.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/cvict_v.htm)).<sup>9</sup>

For those who argue, as I do here, that youth are *in* crisis, not *the* crisis (Davis, 1999), violence is defined more broadly than the physical. A "systemic" view of violence expands the most concrete

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<sup>8</sup> While these, among other factors, play an essential role in young people's trajectories into, out of, and through schools, for the purpose of this research, I focus on these issues only inasmuch as they shape the institutional contexts that systemically move youth toward or away from eventual incarceration.

<sup>9</sup> Some of these crimes were disproportionately committed by adults, including sex offenses, while others tended to be committed by other juveniles. See <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/crimoff.htm#child> and <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/ascii/jvo03.txt>

understanding of violence as “exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse”<sup>10</sup> to include actions that may not, on the surface, appear aggressive or even physical, but still have the effect of injury or abuse. An expanded perspective on violence includes environmental violence such as environmental pollutants that particularly harm the health of young people (Books, 2000). Poverty has been described as economic violence that, in addition to correlating to a variety of physical risk factors, “represents a psychological assault against self-esteem and identity” and as such, in and of itself, is what Mahatma Ghandi called “the ultimate form of violence” (Vorrasi and Garbarino, 2000, 69-70).

Other scholars have argued that the media commits a form of violence against young people by treating youth’s crimes as they would adults’ despite the fact that children are not afforded the same constitutional protections as adults and are not “emotionally equipped to wield their own power within the legal system and the press” (Hancock, 2000, 95). In addition, the media fosters public fear of Black and Brown children and, through its distorted coverage of juvenile crime, helps shape policy that disproportionately affect these youth of color (Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001). Akom, (2001) argues that racist profiling and tracking in schools constitutes a form of violence against young people, harming their academic, and therefore, life chances. Legal violence is perpetuated against youth in schools through differential treatment, disparate impact, and denial of education as a human right (Losen and Edley, Jr., 2001). Finally, Fine and Smith (2001) explain that schools are funded, neglected, supported, disciplined, or awarded in a manner that is disproportionate by race and class. These authors characterize racially disparate treatment of schools as a form of violence against youth that is perpetrated by our public education system.

Studies of school-prison connections generally find that simplified and unidimensional definitions of youth violence help forge institutional linkages between schools and our criminal legal system. This study in part seeks to expose one function of schools that is generally masked in official and popular discourse. The body of work around the violence in young people’s lives outlined above

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/violence>

points to factors external to the youth themselves and that lead them to crime and/or contact with the juvenile justice system. A systemic approach is a useful perspective because it does not address the innocence or guilt of a young person once s/he has been accused of a crime, which is, in fact, not the subject of the current project. Instead, insofar as my study aims to focus on and understand the role that institutional contexts play in the movement of youth from schools into contact with the criminal legal system, what infraction they may or may not have individually committed, specifically, like the veracity or falsity of accusations and the justice of adjudications, is inconsequential to my pursuit.

In turning to institutions and policies, I examine the ways that the violence of the criminal legal system, like the violence in schools, come into relationship as part of the Prison Industrial Complex in the US. Specifically, my study seeks to explore the institutional contexts of one Chicago public high school that framed the paths of certain youth who ended up in eventual contact with the criminal legal system. By institutional contexts, I mean to focus on the official spaces, practices, and policies relevant to urban youth in such schools. More specifically, the institutional contexts I am interested in cluster around distinct realms. One institutional realm that surfaces when dissecting complex interconnections between schools and the criminal legal system is that of that of law and enforcement. Many scholars implicate legal and law enforcement trends at the national, state and city levels and their role in building and fortifying the relationship between schools and prisons (cf. Meiners, 2007; Schwartz and Reiser, 2001; Ayers et al. (eds.), 2001). A second institutional realm can be framed as the politico-economic, whereby neoliberal economic policies and processes militarize, criminalize, and hyper-incarcerate certain urban spaces. Isolation and disinvestment in impoverished and racialized communities create imperatives that supply ideological justifications binding schools to prisons. A third realm, information systems such as the media, interacts with the law and political economy, both by reporting events, and by structuring public opinion about them.

Indeed, as the above suggests, rethinking the roots of violence by and against youth disrupts the neat pipeline image, and reveals a diversity of institutions involved in the school-prison nexus leading to



growing research attention on the impact of external forces and the efficacy of disciplinary strategies.

In this study, even among a small group of eight stakeholders at one urban public high school, the gamut of perspectives surfaced. In an effort to establish my own positioning and approach to the debates on youth and violence through my study of the school-prison nexus, the remainder of this chapter provides the background and rationale for my research, followed by a discussion of my methodological approach and procedures during my fieldwork.

### Background to this Study

The decision to focus on the institutional context rather than on the individual youths is not fortuitous. From 2005 to 2009, I worked in a high school for formerly incarcerated adults in a historically disinvested area of Chicago. Based on my experience at this school and its affiliated half-way houses for men and women, I became aware that a notable majority of the students had attended a relatively small handful of Chicago's public high schools prior to their incarceration. As I learned more about individual students, it occurred to me that their stories were somehow each very unique and yet also alarmingly related. Despite the diversity of experiences revealed to me by my students, poverty and health issues were a common denominator. Poverty created a general dearth of healthy food and so-called alternative health options, as well as poor or absent health care, sometimes resulting in self-medication with addictive illegal substances. Such self-medication is criminalized for some while it is sanctioned for others: a huge portion of society is prescribed medication and/or self-medicates with legal, "socially acceptable" prescription medications. Due to a lack of resources and connections related to my students' race and class positions, quiet, "under-the-radar" procurement of prescription medications was almost never a viable option. Therefore, judgment against people addicted to illegal substances is a hypocrisy given the naturalized consumption of drugs by mainstream society.

Such poverty-related factors establish a cyclical pattern wherein poverty deteriorates health, causing illness that remains professionally untreated, leaving desperate self-medication as one of the few viable options. In turn, the illegality of these options lead to negative attention from the law, while

addictions further harm mental and physical health and drive people to repeated and ever-increasing legal risks to feed the addiction. While learning of students' diverse challenges and struggles and seeing the ways they triumphed, failed, retried, and survived, I realized that beneath the wide array of personalities and individual factors, there were underlying structural forces that seemed to be woven into every story. The structures and institutions of the PIC seemed to organize most if not all of the commonalities that I saw, thus driving me to shift the focus off of personal responsibility and blame to other narratives that could question the very systems that structured and severely limited people's own autonomous choices.

The project of reframing such issues structured by race and poverty is informed by concepts from Critical Race Theory including the acknowledgement of master narratives and the subsequent privileging of and construction of counternarratives. Yamamoto argues that there is a master, or prevailing narrative through which people see and interpret events, actions, (1997, 887), and, I would add, people. This is similar to the "common sense" and the "TINA thesis" (There Is No Alternative) associated with neoliberal policies (particularly of Margaret Thatcher) that many scholars work diligently to expose and question (Kumashiro, 2004). Often these master narratives are legally phrased and seemingly neutral claims that are actually "social construct[s] which order 'facts' and invoke 'norms' in particular ways—ways that reflect the personal interest or values of the describer" (Mather and Yngvesson quoted in Yamamoto, 1997, 887). The master narrative that relates to schools is characterized by assumptions about the culpability and moral character of young, poor, urban people of color, their educability, their trustworthiness, and their potential for success. These narratives are then circulated and reified in the media and through popular culture.

A counternarrative is a challenge to a dominant set of assumptions and the vantage point from which they stem. According to Yamamoto (1997), a counternarrative stretches or changes "accepted frameworks for organizing reality. It thereby undermines the clarity and strength of the master narrative by infusing complexity and providing a competing perspective" (887-8). For this research, students,

families, teachers, and the public at large, are fed narratives that communities of color are criminal, women of color are to blame for this situation, youth of color need more discipline and control, etc. This awareness of master narratives and counter-narratives led me to include an analysis of media representations and discursive and ideological work that legitimated the application of repressive policies and structures on the most vulnerable young people in our nation.

Our nation's Prison Industrial Complex incarcerates people at a rate that not only cripples communities and shames our nation, but also belies a gross racial disproportion. The type of data outlined in the introduction, combined with my increasing awareness of underlying structural factors at play led me to purposefully "break open" or "trouble" the common sense (Giroux, 2010, 25; Kumashiro, 2004) about the individual or his/her infraction, and instead focus "critical and reflective sense" on the institutional (Giroux, 2010). In so doing, my study's research delves into the institutions that ultimately link schools with prisons, as well as the broader institutional "common sense" that has developed around youth, discipline, safety, and delinquency in schools (Kumashiro, 2004).

Indeed, the questions that motivated the research for this study centered on the way that some urban public schools interfaced with the larger mechanisms of state control, including the Prison Industrial Complex. I wanted to explore the ways that various institutions— media, federal and local law, and urban political economies—structure the nexus between schools and prisons. I began with the assumption that schools generally, and certainly the people within them, had contradictory roles in relation to the school-prison nexus, at once reifying and contesting the very institutional connections that push or pull some students toward prisons.

Two approaches to social analysis were particularly apt in terms of addressing my research questions and the concerns I have discussed thus far in this chapter: Critical Race Theory and a radical feminist "queered" approach to ethnography. I turn to these now, in an effort to provide a methodological rationale for my research questions and to theoretically ground my approach to both the data collection and its analysis.

## Methodological Implications of Critical Race Theory

In an effort to privilege the unofficial and seek a social purpose in research, this study draws on the literature from Critical Race Theory (CRT)<sup>11</sup> as one theoretical framework guiding my methodology. A Critical Race Theory lens made particular sense given the organizing tenet of CRT that foregrounds the central, endemic, fundamental role of race and racism in U.S. society, and its intersectionality with other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexuality, etc. (Solórzano cited in Yosso, 2005). The unmistakable racial differentials in both urban public schools and US prisons (Wald and Losen, 2003) suggest that race must not be underestimated as at least one factor organizing the connections between schools and prisons. For instance, in a nation that was still 72.4% white in 2010<sup>12</sup>, and a city that is split approximately in thirds between Black, White, and Latino populations<sup>13</sup>, the Chicago Public Schools are currently 45% Black, 41% Latino, and only 9% White<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, as of 2007, the largest area of growth in the criminal justice system, probation and parole, plus prisons and jails claimed one in every 11 people in the Black population (9.2%) in the U.S. compared to 1 in 31 of the overall population (Pew Center on the States, 2009). My research thus emphasizes the centrality of race in any US institution, but also exposes the places where race intersects and interacts with other axes of oppression. As such, I shaped interviews assuming that people's actions were necessarily, although most-often unconsciously, structured by racism and its intersection especially with gender issues. During interviews I sought to pose questions in neutral terms that allowed participants to frame their responses more naturally, using their own discourse on matters of race and gender so that underlying assumptions could emerge more freely. Only in follow-up questions after their original responses did I explicitly probe about issues of discrimination based on race or gender. In addition, Chapter Five explores an unexpected instance of intersectionality that emerged in my interviews.

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<sup>11</sup> On CRT see Delgado and Stefancic (2001), Delgado and Stefancic (2000), and Crenshaw et. al., (1995).

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-05.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts?\\_event=&geo\\_id=16000US1714000&\\_geoContext=01000US%7C04000US17%7C16000US1714000&\\_street=&\\_county=Chicago&\\_cityTown=Chicago&\\_state=&\\_zip=&\\_lang=en&\\_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=&\\_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=160&\\_submenuId=factsheet\\_1&ds\\_name=null&\\_ci\\_nbr=null&qr\\_name=null&reg=null%3Anull&\\_keyword=&\\_industry=](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts?_event=&geo_id=16000US1714000&_geoContext=01000US%7C04000US17%7C16000US1714000&_street=&_county=Chicago&_cityTown=Chicago&_state=&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=&_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=160&_submenuId=factsheet_1&ds_name=null&_ci_nbr=null&qr_name=null&reg=null%3Anull&_keyword=&_industry=)

Methodologically, CRT “recognizes multiple consciousness, experience as tools of inquiry...it identifies experiences and narratives of those traditionally on society’s margins—not because [they] are ‘more true’ or ‘more worthy,’ but because in mainstream...discourse they tend to be ignored or minimized” (Yamamoto, 1997, 876; Zinn, 2005). As such, the voices of activists, practitioners, and those living the daily experiences upon which theories are based, are increasingly being privileged by scholars interested in the idea of critical thought and praxis (Sudbury, 2005). These voices are being combined with the work of scholars from a variety of disciplines who realize that such counterstories are necessary to “challenge the existing narratives...about the ‘backwardness’ of...children [of color] and youth [that] inform the subjective and objective dimensions of their experiences in schools in ways that undermine their capacities” (Duncan, 2005). This multidisciplinary reemphasizes the importance of various frames of analysis, but particularly foregrounds the search for historical continuities and context.

The influence of CRT on my research pointed me toward a historical look at the school-prison nexus for several reasons. The first is that, in confronting racism as an endemic system, we acknowledge the fact that it is historically rooted. In fact, CRT scholars often engage in actively deconstructing ahistorical perspectives of race (cf Perea, et al., 2007). This also includes dominant ideologies of color-blindness, race neutrality, or meritocracy that would “explain away” racial disparities by making use of the ostensibly neutral language such as accountability, thereby promoting higher stakes, zero-tolerance, and tough on crime measures. Second, the multidisciplinary emphasis in CRT reinforces the importance of history into disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and economics and vice versa. Third, counterstories generally respond to entrenched dominant narratives that have been understood differently in distinct periods and have evolved over time. This, in turn, raises again the importance of situating narratives within their historical contexts. The location of discourses in particular historical milieu is described by Foucault (1991) as “extradiscursive dependencies” (58) or the ways that societies

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.cps.edu/About\\_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/Stats\\_and\\_facts.aspx](http://www.cps.edu/About_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/Stats_and_facts.aspx)

at different times define the “limits and the forms of the sayable,” the memorable, and the accessible within discourse (59-60). Finally, CRT includes commitment to a liberatory and transformative response to various forms of oppression.

As mentioned above, a key aspect of a historically grounded project in today’s context of neoliberal discourse is the need to contest the idea that there are no other alternatives (the TINA thesis). Foucault’s method of “genealogy” examines institutions as “regimes of practices”—showing how a particular historical way of doing things “was capable of being accepted at a certain moment ...thus coming to seem altogether natural, self-evident, and indispensable...” (1991, 75). Looking at an institution such as a school through such a “genealogical” lens serves to simultaneously acknowledge its historicity and “shak[e] this false self-evidence...demonstrating its precariousness...making visible not its arbitrariness, but its complex interconnection with a multiplicity of historical processes” (ibid). A “genealogical” approach opens space for alternative possibilities by shattering any sense of inevitability and replacing it with a purposive understanding of why things are as they are and therefore why they could be another way, thus allowing research to become a transformative tool for social justice. I have situated this study in a historical period partially in the hopes that it can help expose a questionable lineage and help build a contextualized vocabulary with which to deconstruct today’s educational policies.

According to Yosso (2005), CRT in education is a “theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices and discourses (4).” CRT is an important, although not the only, theoretical tool required in my exploration of the school-prison nexus. I grappled with a tension between privileging experiential knowledge of the actors who themselves face systemic pressures toward contact with the criminal legal system, and my attempt to focus analysis on institutional and not individual factors. There is a basic need for human narratives to capture institutional forces, for what are institutions if not human forces that are created by and act upon

individuals. As Victor Rios (2011) states, “Everyday people serve as prisms through which we can grasp the reality of structural processes” (172).

One mechanism I used to explore such tension between individual narratives and structural processes is the combination of a critical analysis of media portrayals with interview data to complicate official media portrayals or delinquency literature with experiential knowledge. In addition, I adopted the “queering” of ethnography by radical feminists to reiterate CRT’s push to engage experiential knowledge toward a structural analysis. By engaging radical feminist institutional ethnography, I built on CRT’s attention to intersectionalities between various axes of oppression, including race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and others, to move from infinitely complex individual experience to a focus on entrenched systems of raced/gendered/othered oppression.

#### Ethnography “queered” by Radical Feminists

In an effort to have a social, research, and policy impact, my work analyzes how the coordination and intersection of knowledge, experience, discourse, and institutions at various sites and levels translate into relations of power (Wright, 2003). Scholars have argued that definitions of disciplinary or behavioral problems are actually wrapped up in raced, gendered, and classed ideologies of normalcy (Reid and Knight, 2006). In addition, the literature I cite on the political-economic context of schools provides perspective on structures of oppression, from economic, to racial, to gender-based, that also impact my methodology. As such, my design, as much as my content, must seek to unveil oppressive structures, pointing me toward the organizing framework of institutional ethnography for my methodology. Dorothy Smith (1987) describes institutional ethnography as “something comparable to consciousness-raising...aiming to find the objective correlates of what had seemed a private experience of oppression” (154).

Dorothy Roberts’ (1997) book, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, both places individual experiences of oppression in their broader systemic contexts and also highlights the importance of the historical conjuncture in understanding racist or gendered or classed

structures. Roberts project is intersectional, in that it foregrounds gendered racism to show how individual women have different definitions of reproductive rights over the course of history and based on other categories of identity. She complicates the notion of reproductive rights with the idea that racism is endemic to all aspects of our society, making it clear that the concept of reproductive rights, from slavery through to today's welfare policy, is, for women of color, much more concerned with the affirmative right to have children on their own terms, rather than with the right to avoid or terminate pregnancies.

The argument that Roberts makes illustrates the necessity of intersecting various aspects of identity with one another and with our assumptions about social justice. A raced analysis alone, for instance, does not explain the historical continuity of the demonization of black mothers that Roberts outlines. Instead, it is clear that misogyny and white supremacy are not just layers of oppression added onto one another, but instead they are mutually constitutive. The concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), which is foregrounded by CRT, queer, and radical theorists, serves as a backbone of my research and indeed informed the theoretical reframing I propose in the next chapter, which converges disparate realms in order to fully understand educational policy imperatives.

In the same way that the frame of racism alters the meaning of reproductive rights, it likewise reveals a great deal about the panoptic gaze<sup>15</sup> (Foucault, 1995[1977]) of the state and its differential impact on communities of color. Systemic racism and sexism intersect with state surveillance to bring problematic tropes into stark relief: the demonization of mothers of color, accused of having babies to suck state resources or “anchor” themselves in the United States (Mendoza, 2011); the subtractive (Valenzuela, 1999) assumptions of schools that frame youth of color as risks or as being predisposed to corruption (Rios, 2011); the tendency to “segregate or quarantine” races “liable to be a source of contamination and social danger” (Roberts, 1997, 10), and the exclusion of men and women of color from categorization in the “moral realm” of humanity that equated punishment with rehabilitation



(Davis, 2002, 64). This study takes as its point of departure that racism and sexism are pervasive in all institutions, and are implicated in “macroeconomic policies like those regulating the minimum wage, job availability, tax rates, federal transportation and affordable housing, creat[ing] conditions in cities that no existing educational policy or school reform can transcend” (Anyon, 2005, 2). Indeed, no study of educational policy can proceed without acknowledgement and engagement with these macro-level forces.

Interestingly, institutional ethnography focuses on the macro- and system-level through specific texts: “documents (any kind of document on paper, electronic file, artistic representation, law, academia, policy) or representations that have the ability to be reproduced, copied, transferred, disseminated by different users at different times” (Wright, 2003). The goal of an institutional ethnography is not to develop a universal understanding of the human experience but to “focus on the ways in which context, gender, race, and other factors vary the effects of a particular policy” with special attention to uncovering the ideologies and assumptions embedded in policy documents (Shaw, 2004). As Amanda Lewis (2003) contends, “everyday race-making” socializes us into the dominant racial schema of our society through the (re)construction of racial boundaries in daily interactions (283). An institutional ethnography containing documentary discourse analysis and interviews will provide key data and frameworks to expose the ways our everyday division-makings are shaped by institutional forces beyond and around us. In the following section, in light of the framework of CRT and the perspective of queer and radical feminist theorists, I will outline my understanding of my own position relative to this study’s development, as well as the specific research procedures used both during my fieldwork and in the process of analyzing the discourse in the interviews and documents I collected.

### My Position as Researcher

To the detriment of human knowledge, quantitative researchers have always placed themselves objectively outside and “above” the research they have conducted. Therefore much of our knowledge

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<sup>15</sup> As Foucault writes, the panopticon is an innovation in prison design that placed all cells around a central, all-watching

base in social science obscures the bias, power position, and unique perspectives of the researcher. To recognize the “I” in research demystifies the process of and acknowledges that research is not after The Perspective, but rather your perspective (Trouillot, 1997). This situates the lens/perspective that a researcher brings, and therefore the contribution that one’s research can make. The strengths of qualitative research depend heavily upon the dual focus on reflexivity—constant awareness and inquisition into the fact that researcher’s own subjectivities and positionality are implicated and involved in the work—and a keen awareness that participants in research engage in and are capable of nuanced reflection on their own lives and worlds (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Victor Rios (2011) defines reflexivity as “the process by which a researcher understands how personal experience shapes his or her ideas and the way he or she attributes meaning, interprets action, and conducts dialogues with informants” (170). In regards to my own subjectivities, I take as my starting point for research my own life-long involvement in the public schools of Chicago: as a student, as a graduate, as a teacher, and finally, as an activist, doctoral candidate, and researcher. Additionally, I have been involved with a high school completion program for formerly incarcerated adults for over five years. Thus, both by my personal involvement in Chicago public schools, and my sample led me to my research site: Urban Prep High School<sup>16</sup> one of the schools most frequently attended by the students I met at the adult high school completion program, prior to their incarceration.

“For qualitative research, the researcher is the data collection instrument in the collection of much of the data.” Thus, Mertens (2009) goes on to argue, “the researchers must describe themselves in terms of closeness to the topic, values, and the like” (454). Following Mertens’ advice, I interrogated my role as a teacher at a high school for formerly incarcerated adults, particularly as opposed to a public high school teacher, or administrator for that matter. In this respect, students at the adult high school where I taught are carefully selected from eligible applicants based on their records during incarceration and other such factors as measures of stability and motivation. Therefore one obvious difference is that

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guard-tower, thereby creating a situation of real or perceived total surveillance.

students in the adult high school do not represent a broad cross section of a neighborhood or a city, as public high school students more often do. It is important to note that both the school where I worked and the majority of public high schools are actually quite race and class segregated<sup>17</sup>; as such, in pointing out the selective enrollment of students in the adult high school, I am referring primarily to other aspects of students' demographics and personalities that are less varied, such as mental illness leading to aggression. In short, as a privately accredited school, there is a filtering mechanism for students into the adult high school in this study that does not exist in public high schools. Because it omits from the purview of this study the experiences of various formerly incarcerated groups—including those who are young enough to still qualify for services from the public school system, and those who have committed extremely violent crimes or have extreme mental illnesses—such a “filter” surely shapes my work and my perspective on students differently than it would someone who worked at a public high school.

In approaching my research, my values are also not neutral. I am an advocate and service provider for formerly incarcerated adults. I am also an anti-prison activist. I am interested in exploring what, if any, relationship there might be between the role of schools and other institutions in people's trajectories from school to prison. To that end, breaking open unexamined commonsensical ideas of young people's culpability and punishment becomes essential, for:

“Common sense does not often tell us that the status quo is quite oppressive. It does not often tell us that schools are already contributing to oppression. And it rarely tells us that schools need to place a priority on challenging oppression. Instead, common sense often makes it easy to continue teaching and learning in ways that allow the oppressions already in play to continue to play out unchallenged in our schools and society...Insisting that we use our common sense when reforming schools is really insisting that we continue to privilege only certain perspectives, practices, values, and groups of people. Common sense is not what should shape educational reform or curriculum design; it is what needs to be examined and challenged” (Kumashiro, 2004, xxiv).

I, as any researcher, have to constantly interrogate my own assumptions in my analysis to surface the ways that my range of experiences and perspectives on the world shape what I see or fail to see,

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<sup>16</sup> This school name and all participants' names are pseudonyms

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.cps.k12.il.us/AtAGlance.html>

what questions I ask or omit. Drawing from the lens of Critical Race Theory and radical feminist or queer methodologies, I can consciously and continually foreground white supremacy, gender/sexual oppression, class politics, and their intersections in the ideas I might hold, the subjects I research, and in the products of my research. In order to strengthen my research I acknowledge my own self, my skin, my body, my history, asking how these all might shape interviews, interactions, access, and my assumptions. To this end, during the course of my research and writing, I attempt to (re)surface the questions: Who am I in relation to the people and phenomena I am discussing? What does it mean to be studying a phenomenon from which my own life path has been individually and structurally protected?

#### Research Procedures: Selecting a Site

The first task was to determine which school would be studied. Primarily due to issues of access, I chose to use the histories of the adult students at the adult high school where I work as a starting point for my research. While I am determined not to make individuals the focal point of my analysis, I based the choice of my sample high school primarily on where the greatest percentage of students at the adult high school attended school prior to their incarceration. This approach allows me to choose a manageable sample from a relatively compact region of the city, and also leaves open the possibility that my findings might be particularly useful to the faculty, staff, and administrators of the adult high school that I am involved with.

I began by examining application documents of graduates from a high school for formerly incarcerated adults in Chicago. From these application files I ranked the Chicago Public Schools that were most frequently attended prior to incarceration by the population of graduates. After mapping these schools onto a map of the city,<sup>18</sup> I chose as my focus Urban Tech High School, a school which a significant percentage of the adult high school students had attended, prior to their incarceration. Urban Tech also shared some commonalities with other schools attended by students who later came to be confined in the prison system. Such similarities included geographical proximity, location in shared,

contiguous, or comparable neighborhoods and CPS regions, and location in areas with shared or related histories. Of the various schools that most of these students came from, Urban Tech is the one that remains open and has not been dramatically reconstituted under subsequent reforms.

While not allowing for larger generalized claims, qualitative research methods allow the researcher to paint a picture of the meaning actors make in life situations. As such, with a sample of only one school, the goals of this research are modest, and not about generalizability. While quantifiable research can provide significant information and an overview of some of the broader issues involved, qualitative research undoubtedly offers greater opportunities to investigate the ways that specific institutions and policies are understood and interpreted by people on the ground. Ultimately, qualitative research can reveal new ways of seeing, for it can speak in more detail about the underlying causes or different interpretations of otherwise quantifiable or well-known phenomena. In this way, this thesis attempts a rich exploration of details of individual interpretations of structural issues as they manifest in one space during one key period.

#### Research Procedures: Selecting a Period—1985-1995

I chose the decade from 1985-1995 as a focus (cf Chapter Three) because it was a period that highlighted the aftermath of the 1983 publication of the influential report, “A Nation at Risk,” that reverberated throughout education policy circles, also impacting the two major local school reforms in Chicago during the decade. In addition, 1985-1995 was a period of massive gentrification in many large urban centers of the country, and Chicago was no exception. Finally, during this period, the ongoing “crack epidemic” centered in urban areas in the mid-1980s to early 90s, led to a series of laws and penalties around the nation that fall loosely under the umbrellas of War on Drugs and Tough on Crime. These include: Three Strikes and You’re Out laws, mandatory minimum sentences, trying juveniles as adults, Guns Free Schools Act, Zero Tolerance policies, and the 1986 Anti-drug Abuse Act.

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<sup>18</sup> I have omitted this map to maintain the anonymity of the school in this study and to avoid further negative attention on schools that are already demonized.

My choice to conduct a historical study, even if it is a not terribly distant history, forces me to address the problem of memory. How can I guarantee that participants are not mis-remembering things or shifting them based on subsequent events in their lives? The short answer is that I cannot. Michel Trouillot (1995), in his influential book on power and the production of history, described time as “not mere chronological continuity” but rather as “the range of disjointed moments, practices, and symbols that thread the historical relations between events and narrative” (146). In effect, many things bounce around in between what happened, and how we recall and talk about what happened--not least of which is memory. Acknowledging this relationship acknowledges the myth that “The Past” or “Knowledge” have fixed realities and content (ibid, 147). Empirical accuracy is a necessary, but insufficient component to define historical knowledge; a historical text of any sort must also establish some authentic relation to the knowledge produced (ibid). In short, that is, in large part, why this is structured as a qualitative study, because it seeks to represent a historical period with accuracy, but also to explore the authentic relations between past events and the meanings and narratives that people carry forth about those events.

#### Research Procedures: Document Analysis

In order to understand the social-historical and discursive background for my fieldwork data, I analyzed legal, cultural, media, and academic texts or documents that provided the discourse representing actors in and around the school-prison nexus (Botelho, 2011). As “a space for the creation of representations as they emerge from what is said and silenced,” discourse produces not only a text, but also a “subtext” (Botelho, 2011) that, in part, facilitates and legitimates the institutional interconnections this research interrogates. The need for discursive data points to the tools of discourse analysis to explore the ways our understandings and actions in the world are defined and limited by the way that we can or cannot talk, write, or read about things (Foucault, 1982). Some of the tools of discourse analysis applied to a sample of media during the period of study were useful in establishing a social-historical context to shed light on the popular representations of the school, its students and

community at the time. An examination of discursive representations is important, because an investigation of institutional contexts of the school-prison nexus can miss the ways these connections are legitimated and obscured in the popular imagination. As such, the exploration of discursive representations, asks, “What master narratives are at work in framing issues involving youth criminality and punishment?” and “What sorts of ideological work undergirds the institutional systems and interconnections I am exploring?” To this end, I will draw from scholars who argue that schools play a role in the “representation” of neighborhoods and cities beyond their concrete purpose of educating the children of neighborhood residents.

Moreover, because the data surrounding the school-prison nexus is generally disproportionate in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality, discourse analysis is also an important methodological tool for unveiling seemingly neutral language in, and about, policies, thus revealing varied and disparate effect. Christopher Mele (2000) emphasizes the important role of representations in creating and perpetuating stereotypical identities that buttress the status quo:

“representations collapse multiplicity and diversity into simplified sets of assumptions that tend to reinforce, rather than contradict, prevailing ideologies that explain away social inequalities and legitimate the political and economic processes that create them” (Mele, 2000).

Framing representations as “historical articulations of social power that shape public awareness of cities and neighborhoods” (Mele, 2000) helps reveal the ways “colorblind” representations can be used to perpetuate racist structures in urban contexts. Using the tools of discourse analysis, this research seeks to unpack representations and public identities that collapse people into negative, expedient sound bytes.

In order to address the legitimizing capacity of representation, the first phase of research involved a discourse analysis of research, reports, articles, and policy documents pertaining to my study site during the period of 1985-1995. In addition to exploring public representations of the school, the documents involved helped to construct a social history of the school and its region/neighborhoods,

providing both a more specific context of the schools and their communities, and necessary literature and documents relevant to the broader research question.<sup>19</sup>

Specifically, I compiled documents for analysis from two types of sources. The first is school publications, policy statements, and archives (see table 1). The second types of documents came from non-CPS, local media sources. Within local media sources I found an assortment of articles through bibliographies and internet searches that related to Urban Tech specifically, but also Chicago school discipline more generally. Such pieces were culled from a variety of local sources such as *The Chicago Reader*, a local free entertainment weekly with some local media and political coverage, *The Chicago Reporter*, an investigative bi-monthly magazine that reports on the social, economic and political issues in the city, and *Catalyst Chicago*, a publication reporting on urban education in Chicago since the 1990s. In addition to individual relevant pieces from these sources, I conducted a systematic search of the two major newspapers in the city, the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* from 1985-1995 for the school name as well as for key terms, including school discipline, corporal punishment, police and juvenile justice (See table 1). This search yielded a total of 42 news articles, 33 from the *Sun-Times* and 9 from the *Tribune*. These articles were then coded as described below in the Analysis section of this chapter.

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to note here that most of the documents analyzed capture only the official history of what occurred, hence the importance of interviewing is discussed in the next section.



<b>CPS Sources from Urban Tech Media Center Archives</b>	<b>Non-CPS Sources</b>
Yearbooks 1985-1995	The Chicago Reader
School Improvement Plan 1994-1995	The Chicago Reporter
School Improvement Plan 1992-1995	Catalyst Chicago
The Youth Division of the Chicago Police Department School Administrators of the Chicago Board of Education: Project We Care, Positive Role Model and Motivational Program, ND	<b>Non-CPS Sources systematically searched and coded for the entire 1985-1995 period</b>
Urban Tech Today School Newsletter, June 1983	Chicago Sun-Times
Urban Tech Today School Newsletter, December 1987	Chicago Tribune
Demonstration of Compliance with the Chicago Board of Education Guidelines for Establishing and Operating a School-Based Clinic at Urban Tech High School, April 1987	

Table 1: Documentary Sources

Research Procedures: Interviews

The second data set I used to address my research question involves the ways that institutional agents in schools interpret and enact discipline on the ground. In an extension of the definition of the school-prison nexus as a social (rather than individual) problem, requiring broader social solutions, I drew on the work of Paul Thompson (2000), who argues that, “all history depends ultimately upon its social purpose” (1). In particular, Thompson notes that oral history, achieved through interviews, “can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of inquiry” (3). Thompson’s emphasis on the power of oral histories and interviews demonstrate that if I were to stop at document analysis, this project would have been weakened by the fact that the documentary raw materials of history are also socially constructed. Decisions about what gets kept, organized, or destroyed are generally influenced by people who have mainstream or dominant perspectives. As Thompson writes, [t]he more personal, local, and unofficial a document, the less likely it was to survive...the very power structure worked as a great recording machine shaping the past in its own image” (4). Therefore, in

order to make history more democratic, as Thompson advocates, I used interviews to try to reintegrate the “person, local, and unofficial” into the story I tell.

The eight semi-structured interviews consisted of one to one and a half hour sessions conducted at neutral locations convenient to the participants. The interviews were digital audio recorded when the participants granted their permission to do so. Detailed descriptive field notes were written after the interviews to capture the interviewer’s initial impressions and form “a comprehensible account of whatever has been observed” (LeCompte, et al. 1993). The interview schedule (see Appendix A) included questions about the individual’s history at the school. The protocol covers such general themes as discipline, control, surveillance, rules and regulations, and law enforcement, as well as resistance, outlets for student, teacher, administrator, and community expressions, and perceptions of city and federal policies.

#### Research Procedures: Selecting a Sample

Interviewees were chosen initially based on their role in the schools through a convenience sample related to their availability (i.e.: were people locatable, living in the city, well, willing, alive?), and then by snowball sampling, as informants mentioned other actors present in the period of discussion, and relevant to my study. In particular, I sought interviews with informants who held the following types of positions at the schools in my sample during the period under study: principals, vice principals, disciplinarians, teachers, school-affiliated law enforcement agents, truancy officers, security employees, ancillary staff, and parents. During the 2010 school year, I interviewed five women and three men who had been present at my site during the 1985-1995 period of my study.

#### Analysis

While it is clearly important to approach an interview transcript or document for analysis with certain guiding themes in mind, my research is designed to surface “patterns, themes, and categories of analysis [that]... emerge out of the data rather than being decided prior to data collection and analysis” (Quinn Patton, 1987, 150). This strategy of analysis aligned well with my desire during data collection

to allow participants' meanings to come through with the least influence from my questioning as possible based on my assumption that ideologies of colorblindness, meritocracy and racism, sexism, and other -isms are ubiquitous and will surface organically in most fields and narratives (see CRT section at the beginning of this chapter).

Modes of analysis that derive from the data can be either in forms articulated by the interviewees or authors themselves (emic), or they may be themes that I note and elaborate for which the interviewees or documents did not have any explicit label or term (etic) (ibid). In either case, this study was designed with the specific intent of allowing the data generated in the interviews and surfacing in the documents to inform and shape the subsequent focused coding—careful line by line read of the text with the guidance of a set of predetermined ideas or topics (Emerson et al., 1995: 143, Lofland and Lofland, 1995). The methodological decision to mine for themes from the data once it was collected, rather than predefining them employs a key strength of qualitative work—its ability to evolve apace with the meanings of everyday life, and allow the researchers to absorb changes and new interpretations throughout their study (Wolcott, 1988).

Interviews were transcribed and, along with field notes and documents compiled for analysis, were first scanned for themes and striking aspects of the data (LeCompte et al, 1993, 236). Scanning was informed by my own position and outlook as researcher, the theoretical framework of this study, and “constructs” introduced by the participants of the study or the authors of documents analyzed (ibid, 236). Based on the scanning, I asked questions of the data that helped me to begin “organizing, abstracting, integrating and synthesizing” (ibid, 236). Through scanning, I developed a basic set of themes which I then used to code the data in a more systematic manner. Among the themes that emerged from scanning the interviews were, definitions of discipline, discipline procedures, contact with the criminal justice system, surveillance, race, gender, class, resistance, gentrification, school reform, drugs, and gangs. The transcripts were then coded using a color system corresponding to each of the themes.

Documents from all sources were coded for such themes as: connections between schools and juvenile justice system, housing issues, special education and criminalized youth, linguistic crossover between education and enforcement discourses, and common tropes characterizing Urban Tech, students, and families of students of color. A final unexpected theme emerged for which I then coded: athletic futures for inner city youth. The document coding helped to shape my interview questions, providing me with a preliminary understanding of the social historical context, and enabling me to create a timeline of key events of the period under study.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the research on the school-prison nexus points to the contexts of racism, sexism, classism and the ways that they play out on the backs of students and those adults charged with educating them. The scholarship on school-prison connections acknowledges that schools do not exist in a vacuum, noting the interplay between the broader violence of society's other institutions and what happens in schools. Such research led me to seek both individual accounts of the way institutions and policies impacted schools, as well as to analyze some of the popular representations in media that helped to ideologically justify policies and events. As Giroux (2010) explains, public perceptions are wrangled such that punitive state institutions combine to shape all spaces available to youth:

“Youth marginalized by class and color can no longer inhabit public spheres that allow them to take refuge behind their status as developing children worthy of adult protection and compassion. Whether it be school, the community center, the street corner, or their place of residence, the most powerful and influential forces shaping their lives emanate from the security state and the criminal justice system” (18).

The compendium that Victor Rios (2007) has called a “youth control complex” (17), includes institutional actors and policy makers responding to popular images that pathologize whole communities, as well as to broader city and national policy moves toward more punitive laws and enforcement. In the next chapter, I will propose a convergent framework that brings together these realms of law/enforcement, urban political economy, and information systems in the media to expand

the idea of educational policy to include the constant dialog between actors within a school and the larger contexts in which they are embedded.

### III. CONVERGENCE OF LAW/POLICY, POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS

The relationship between our criminal legal and educational systems, particularly in terms of youth and violence, has been approached in a variety of ways through studies of schools as entry points to the so-called school-to-prison pipeline (Meiners, 2007; Lipman, 2004; Casella, 2003; ACLU, 2006; Advancement Project et al, 2005; Browne, 2003; Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Skiba et al, 2003; Wald and Losen, 2003). Part of the imperative to “rupture the pipeline!” of this thesis is to dismantle the connection between schools and prisons in order to create what Victor Rios (2011) calls “pipelines of opportunity.” But the other meaning follows Erica Meiners’ (2007) assertion that the school-prison pipeline is too linear of a metaphor to capture the diffuse network of connections that make up what she calls the school-prison nexus. In this chapter, I demonstrate the diffuse nature of this phenomenon and propose a convergent framework to analyze complex and multi-faceted educational issues, such as the school-prison nexus, in the context of other institutional forces. Using the literature on the school-prison nexus as a starting point, I will argue for a framework of analysis of educational issues in the context of non-educational structural factors, specifically, the law, the political economy, and media representations. In so doing, this thesis also proposes a theoretical reframing of the school-prison nexus, which is grounded in the ethnographic study outlined in the next chapter, but also, in turn, helped to shape the analysis of the data collected.

#### Toward a Convergent Analysis of Educational Issues

“The incarceration of youth of color...is *not* viewed as connected to the vast structural changes produced by deregulation, privatization, by the devaluation of the public good, and by the deterioration of community. Because there is no public vocabulary which allows us to place these developments within a historical context, individual deviancy is the overarching explanation for the grotesque rise in the numbers of people who are relegated to the country’s and the world’s prisons” (Davis, 2008).

In her Vice Chancellor's Oration in Australia in 2008, Angela Davis decried the lack of a "public vocabulary" that allows us to look beyond "individual deviancy" to larger historical and systemic factors. A convergent approach to analyzing educational issues is one attempt to build our "public vocabulary" so that overlapping systems of oppression are foregrounded over individual factors, thereby allowing for a similar vocabulary of structural, not individual solutions. As Davis notes, part of the gap in our understanding of the way systemic forces have played out in any given community has to do with a lack of historical perspective, leaving the blame with the obvious, the immediate: the individual involved. Historical context includes broader national or international movements, but also deeply rooted local histories. The dialectical tension between a systemic analysis that is applicable in many places and rooted social histories emphasizes both the macro order shaping daily realities over time and the internal inconsistencies that exist within such structures. This tension is paralleled in the methodological concerns posed by CRT and radical feminist ethnographers of privileging experiential knowledge while building a larger story of embedded structural issues. Furthermore the local level is also a key part of the landscape for resistance, thus, to ignore the specific historical contexts would obscure possibilities for struggle against larger, structural forces. As such, the framework or vocabulary suggested here also acknowledges the local, situated history of structural forces, as well as the popular imagery that cements and normalizes these conditions.

On the topic of situated histories, it is important to note that the framework that I propose is not new, but rather stands on the shoulders of other scholars and activists, and is probably on some level abundantly clear to many people who physically inhabit the spaces that bear the brunt of the convergence I describe. As LeCompte and Schensul (2010) outline, critical theorists have been exposing the ways that the "history and political economy of a nation, state, or other system exerts direct or indirect domination over political, economic, social, and cultural expressions of citizens or residents, including ethnic minority groups and others who are marginalized or without power" (63). There have been strong additions to the field made by legal scholars exposing the racialized nature of our

“colorblind” justice system and its disparate outcomes (cf. Haney López, 1996; Browne et al., 2003). Further, many scholars (cf. Meiners, 2007; Anyon, 2005; Lipman, 2004; Saltman, 2003; Gabbard, 2003) have connected the political economy and specifically neoliberal globalization to the field of education. Finally, other scholars argue that the media and popular culture distort coverage or portrayals in ways that help criminalize youth (Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001; Meiners, 2007). Mine is an attempt to continue in the spirit of Anyon’s (2005) call for an “expanded education policy paradigm” (13) and coalesce the realms of the laws/enforcement with the macroeconomic analyses and the legitimizing power of the public representations, including in the popular media.<sup>20</sup> While I acknowledge that there are surely other pieces of the story that this framework might miss, it is my contention that without such a convergent analysis, only a misleadingly small portion of the picture comes into focus.

In the following section, in an effort to contribute to a convergent public vocabulary, I put into conversation realms otherwise considered separate from educational policy including three key institutional contexts that converge to interact with and act upon schools. First, I provide the legal and law enforcement context that undergirds and codifies the school-prison nexus. Next I situate the connections between schools and prisons within broader changes in the economy. Finally, it is my contention that none of the repressive laws, policies, enforcement techniques, or economic conditions described could have come about in their present form without historical antecedents or ideological legitimization. I will unpack the basic assumptions about youth and violence upon which criminalization of youth is often based by exploring the underlying racialized and gendered fears and “common sense” assumptions about youth and violence that are often exploited in harsh disciplinary shifts. While I structure my proposed framework around the issue of the school-prison nexus, such a convergent analysis can provide insight into other multi-dimensional educational issues that interweave various institutional realms and the racist, classist, and gendered structures of each.

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<sup>20</sup> This research is most clearly indebted to Erica Meiners’ (2007) *Right to Be Hostile: Schools, Prisons, and the Making of Public Enemies* for its incorporation of pop culture portrayals, economic, and public policy into her analysis of the school-prison nexus.



### Legal and Law Enforcement Contexts of the School-Prison Nexus

Undoubtedly, higher-stakes sanctions in schools, Zero Tolerance policies, and increased policing in schools developed as mainstream media outlets and some academics put forth the child super-predator<sup>21</sup> myth in the wake of highly publicized school shootings (Dohrn, 2001; Schwartz and Rieser, 2001; Browne, 2003; Advancement Project et al., 2005; Hancock, 2000; DiIulio, 1995). As a result, and originally as part of the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act, school policy began to turn toward Zero Tolerance policies—or the mandating of the strongest sanctions for infractions, regardless of any specificities or circumstances—as a uniform way to keep guns out of schools. The Act stated that, in order to receive federal education funds, each state must have a disciplinary policy that allows for the expulsion of a student for one year for possession of a firearm. While the 1994 Act did not strictly mandate Zero Tolerance *per se*, allowing local school officials to modify expulsions on a case-by-case basis, it became the basis for mandatory expulsion policies across the country (Gordon et al., 2001). Zero Tolerance policies were ostensibly efforts to make schools uncompromisingly safe from gun violence; however, as early as 1995, state and city-level governments had expanded the definition of weapons from firearms to include such things as martial arts devices and studded bracelets (ibid, 169). In 1997, the Gun-Free Schools Act was amended to include weapons other than firearms as well as drugs (DeMarco, 2001).

The horror and fear provoked by school shootings such as that at Columbine High School in Littleton, CO in 1999 were palpable, and understandably frightened parents, youth, lawmakers, and school officials. However, Zero Tolerance, as a response, is not based on research as to the causes of school violence. Scholars (Skiba, 2000; Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001) argue instead that it is reactive, in that it punishes youth in violation of its rules uniformly, in a one-size-fits-all, generic disciplinarity (Akom, 2001), without consideration of intervening circumstances or extent of involvement (Johnson, 2001). The mandatory punishment mandated by Zero Tolerance policies, furthermore, amounts to school exclusion (Skiba et al., 2003), and, as such, is associated with future law-breaking, and not

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<sup>21</sup> The term child superpredator is attributed to DiIulio (1995).

healing, rehabilitation, or reparations for harm (Dohrn, 2001). In addition, there are some consequences that tend to go unnoticed about Zero Tolerance policies, such as the fact that, in their universality, they incorporate none of the traditional criminal law standards of intent, assumptions of innocence, or procedures of due process (ACLU, 2006; Ayers et al., 2001). Bernardine Dohrn (2001) characterizes this omission as a “question of the civic will to invest in our common future by seeing other people’s children as our own” (107) and asks us to consider what we would do if it were *our own* child in trouble. Would a blanket punitive policy seem acceptable to us then?

In other words, a prototypical teenager can commit an infraction whose very definition as a disciplinable offense, as described above, is very relative, based on current school policy and attitudes of institutional actors within the school. This infraction is now filtered through disciplinary systems that are further informed by preventative detention (see Chapter 2) and Zero Tolerance models. How does this development affect the range of possible outcomes for this student? Given that Zero Tolerance and preventative detention policies require more security personnel in schools, greater connections between schools and police, and increased surveillance of students, at the very least, this student can begin to develop a disciplinary record or reputation at his/her school (Casella, 2003). In addition to this beginning of a disciplinary label for this student, s/he may face sanctions ranging from detention, in- or out-of-school suspension, or expulsion, all the way up to arrest and/or incarceration. Moreover, any official, documented initiation of contact with police (which now often occurs within schools) can lead to future attention, suspicion, or increased penalties (Browne, 2003), thereby creating a cycle of negative disciplinary contact and increased sanctions.

Multiplying the effects of more criminalizing policies within schools are the institutional and surveillance means of interpenetration between schools and outside agencies such as police and courts. Gang databases, instituted in at least 10 states beginning in the late 1980s, were one example of information compiled by and potentially shared between police, courts, and other institutions. Police collected “intelligence,” for such databases, including photos and personal information of individuals

suspected of gang involvement, whether they committed a crime or not, that could be used to trigger later gang-related sentence enhancements (Pintado-Vertner, 2000). In addition, at least 10% of an annual \$4 million provided to schools in the Safe Schools Act of 1994 were allocated for mandatory partnership-building between school districts and local law enforcement agencies (Heiner and Mangual, 2000). Bernardine Dohrn (2001) further highlights the way extensive “permeability” between schools and the criminal justice system was codified in the Illinois School Student Records Act of 2000:

No school student records or information contained therein may be released, transferred, disclosed or otherwise disseminated, *except* as follows:

(6.5) To juvenile authorities when necessary for the discharge of their official duties who request information prior to adjudication of the student and who certify in writing that the information will not be disclosed to any other party except as provided under law or order of court. For purposes of this Section "juvenile authorities" means: ... a judge of the circuit court and members of the staff of the court ... parties to the proceedings ... and their attorneys; probation officers and court appointed advocates... any individual, public or private agency having custody of the child ...any individual, public or private agency providing education, medical or mental health service to the child ... any potential placement provider when such release is authorized by the court ...law enforcement officers and prosecutors...adult and juvenile prisoner review boards...authorized military personnel... individuals authorized by court<sup>22</sup> (my emphasis).

In the context of the ‘80s and ‘90s legal and ideological attacks on welfare and social safety net structures, and the simultaneous explosion of the prison population, such extensive information gathering and sharing provided fodder that was increasingly used to penalize youth harshly for infractions, rather than for providing social services.<sup>23</sup>

The criminal laws and penalties proposed and passed during these decades, outside of the realm of schools and under the umbrellas of “War on Drugs” and “Tough on Crime” only increased the criminalizing effects of draconian school policies. Some of these “tough on” and “war on” laws and policies include:

- Doubling of the US police force between 1980 and 1990

<sup>22</sup> (105 ILCS 10/6) (from Ch. 122, par. 50□6) Sec. 6. (a); (<http://www.ibataforschoolboard.com/pdf/ISSRA.pdf>; retrieved 12/06/2006)

<sup>23</sup> As Parenti (2002) astutely details, the repressive policies of the ‘80s and ‘90s picked up on the earlier trajectory of “law and order” policies that had begun in response to the destabilizing activism of the ‘60s, but experienced a lull after Watergate, COINTELPRO, and similar scandals revealing the oversteps of government surveillance and repression. This earlier wave included Johnson’s Omnibus Crime and Safe Streets Act of 1968 and the establishment of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) that put local police forces into “new interagency forms of cooperation,” providing military weaponry and communications technologies such as helicopters, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams, body armor, computers, and shoulder radios.

- Reagan-era doubling of FBI funding, loosening of wiretap laws, installation of right-wing federal judges
- The Federal Crime Bill of 1984, which allowed for assets forfeiture by police of seized “drug tainted” property
- The 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which imposed 29 new mandatory minimum sentences, including the racially disparate crack/cocaine penalties, and broadened the focus of enforcement from “king pins” to also include “users”
- The 1988 Crime Bill instituting the cabinet-level position of “drug czar,” introducing a “one strike” drug policy in public housing, and again increasing federal funding to police and prison construction.
- The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, providing another \$30.2 billion dollar boost in funding to prison building, SWAT teams, and enforcement agencies such as police, FBI, DEA, and INS, (during a time of falling crime rates). This bill also terminated Pell grants to prisoners for college tuition and books, expanded federal crimes eligible for the death penalty, introduced the Three Strikes and You’re Out proposal mandating life sentences for repeat “violent” felonies, removed protections from capital punishment for mentally incapacitated defendants, allowed children as young as 13 to be tried as adults, and allowed deportation of non-citizens alleged to be engaged in terrorism based on secret evidence (Parenti, 2002; Meiners, 2007, 103; Marable, 2002). Finally, funds that had been earmarked for a Racial Justice Act that would allow defendants to use racial statistics to challenge death sentences as discriminatory were removed before the bill was finally approved (Evolution of a Crime Bill, 1994).
- The 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, expanding the use of the death penalty
- The 1996 Prison Litigation Reform Act, which made prisoners’ access to civil courts more difficult, contributed to the elimination of prison law libraries, and limited penalties on abusive prison administrators (Parenti, 2002).
- The 1996 Housing Opportunity Program Extension Act, which permits discrimination based on drug convictions by local housing authorities (Meiners, 2007, 100).
- The 1996 Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), which included a default lifetime ban on individuals convicted of a state or federal drug-related felony.
- The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act “end[ing] welfare as we know it.”
- The defunding and closure of mental health facilities that had been required, but never really delivered, by the 1963 Community Mental Health Center Act, such that the Bureau of Justice Statistics was forced to acknowledge that the three largest *de facto* mental health providers are now Rikers Island, Cook County, and LA County Jails (Meiners citing Elsner, 2007, 102)

Such policies and legislation served to criminalize populations that the War on Poverty had framed as needing state resources and assistance, such as the mentally ill, the poor, the homeless, and drug addicts. However, given the fact that the beneficent state represented by War on Poverty rhetoric belied the ongoing racial repression of the 1950s and ‘60s, it is unclear to what extent such policies were meant to apply directly to impoverished communities of color. Much as Bentham’s panopticon sought to make a technological intervention into the rehabilitation of prisoners in a time that still overlapped with

slavery (Davis, 2002), War on Poverty legislation provided government assistance to the poor while still in the era of Jim Crow segregation. Given this mismatch between the rhetoric and the realities, it is unsurprising that the repressive laws enacted during the period of this study only made worse the historical problems of racially disproportionate state punishment. The unprecedented criminalization and racialization of drug use and related crimes was exemplified by the increase of drug arrests from 471,000 in 1980 to 1,237,000 in 1989, with Blacks accounting for just 12% of the overall population in 1980 and 1990, but 24% of drug arrests in 1980 compared to 39% by 1993 (Mauer citing Bureau of Justice Statistics and FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 2002, 77; Parenti, 2002). In addition, laws enacted during this period allowed for prosecutorial discretion deeming some drug offenses to be considered federal and others state, with Black defendants disproportionately facing stiffer federal mandatory penalties in some cases (Mauer, 2002, 78-9).

Zero Tolerance and related preventative detention measures developed in an ostensible effort to make schools uncompromisingly safe, at the same time as War on Drugs and Tough on Crime legislation were passing using the same rhetoric of safety. However, the underlying concept of safety can have varying subjects, objects, and degrees. Which students are safe, which are threats to safety? How is this racialized? Gendered? Enforced? In short: is it in fact the students who require safety the most, or the reputations and competitiveness of the surrounding neighborhood and city? (Hannigan, 1998; Smith, 1996).

Stated in different terms, to what extent were disciplinary moves in schools related to maintaining the image of a safe and appealing city with a disciplined workforce ready to serve global business leaders (Smith, 1996)? After all, with the replacement of industry by globally competitive high tech and specialized service industries as the primary economic engine(s) of large US cities (Lipman, 2003; 2004), those who deviate from the rules of the market and big business will be severely punished. As I show in the next section, the relationship between schools and prisons also developed as part of the larger context of an increasingly penal society that results from the current structures of global capital.

### The Political Economic Context for the School-Prison Nexus

Many scholars (Smith, 1996; Lipman, 2004; Duncan, 2000; Saltman and Gabbard, 2003; Chomsky, 2003; Gabbard, 2003) connect the situation in schools to broader global trends. Erica Meiners (2007) asks, “What are the larger economic changes that impact these very local practices and that have corresponding social and cultural consequences?” (67). This connection between macro-level economic changes and local social and cultural institutions is where education, as it is structured in market societies, is intertwined with the economic project of capitalism. In order to understand the city’s ascension as a “global city” and the ways this impacts schools, a brief history of Chicago’s attempts to establish itself as a national hub of manufacturing and industry during the previous century is instructive as context. This is particularly important to understand the economic devastation and racial segregation of the part of the city that is home to Urban Tech High School.

Although Chicago was only incorporated in 1835, areas of the city with stockyards helped establish the city as a manufacturing center as early as 1846. Despite this, some parts of the city that included stockyards, such as a broad swathe that includes Urban Tech’s current location, were still not annexed until the late 1860s. While the population of such areas had been doubling repeatedly within the preceding two decades, after the 1871 Chicago Fire, the population of such areas outside of the central city jumped from 160,000 to 214,000 in one year, and Madison Street was temporarily the most important business district until the downtown business district was rebuilt. Despite this booming growth, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the population of such areas declined as of 1920 and shifted from the first Irish, German, and Scandinavian residents to later Italians, Poles, Russian Jews and Greeks, and finally to the Black migration that had begun around WWI and accounted for the only post-1920 increase in the population of the area in the 1940s. Residential construction in one such area centered predominantly on six public housing projects from the 1920s through the 1960s. The riots of the late ‘60s played a role in the loss of many residential buildings and businesses in the area, such that such quadrants of the city are described in the ‘80s as “scattered with acres of vacant lots and broken

sidewalks; overgrown with high summer grass and covered with winter rubble, creating optimum conditions for rodent and vermin growth” (School Improvement Plan, 1992, “The Community”).

By the 1970s and ‘80s, poverty was highly concentrated in these formerly vital stockyard areas. According to the 1980 census, of the total population of Urban Tech’s area, 14.1% were working poor, 51.9% lived below the poverty level, and 27.5% of the households in the area received public aid (Demonstration of Compliance, 1987, Executive Summary). In addition, the area was continuing to become more dominantly Black as Whites moved out rapidly. In 1980 the community was 74.1% Black, 12.8% White, 10% Hispanic and 2.2% Asian, but by the 1990 Census, 90% of families in Urban Tech’s attendance area were Black (Demonstration of Compliance, 1987, Executive Summary; School Improvement Plan, 1992).

The devastation experienced in the 1970s and ‘80s in such areas was not anomalous. As Meiners (2007, 68) describes, Fordist modes of production gave way, beginning in the 1970s, to decentralized, often global and more flexible modes, such that major metropolitan regions deindustrialized and industries moved to other, cheaper, less regulated zones and nations, thus removing any promise of stable, albeit racially differentiated, working class jobs paying living wages. Christian Parenti (2002) characterizes this era as one of establishing mechanisms of control and discipline for the laboring classes, where “reaganomics” policies sought to reinvigorate the economy, boosting profits by disciplining labor, partially by enlarging the reserve army of labor in order to extract more work for less pay and benefits. He summarizes, “Simply stated, capitalism always needs poverty and creates poverty, but is simultaneously always threatened by poverty” (307). This is a threat that requires a whole new array of disciplining mechanisms that are provided by the multifaceted tendrils of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC).

As deindustrialization proceeded, and the global economy superseded local industry and transportation, the vitality of national hubs such as Chicago was threatened. Scholars such as Pauline Lipman (2004) and Saskia Sassen (2006) apply the theory of neoliberal globalization, focused down to

the level of cities, because of the renewed importance of cities such as Chicago as nodes of control and innovation for the globalizing economy. Global cities, as part of the neoliberal agenda, these scholars argue, serve as marketplaces, sites for production and innovation in the informational economy (rather than for big industries), and centers of organization and management of globally dispersed systems. As such, these cities require highly trained professionals to conduct the business of world economic markets. In addition, such cities also require low-wage workers for the various support services and leisure needs of this highly paid professional class (Sassen, 2006). The latter workers were concentrated in impoverished areas of Chicago such as the broad area surrounding Urban Tech.

Maintaining the image of a safe and appealing city with a disciplined workforce ready to serve global business leaders thus becomes a motivating force to cities that are struggling for or maintaining global status (Smith, 1996). In this way, global cities (or those aspiring to become global) provide “concentrated expression[s] of the contradictions of wealth and poverty, centrality and marginality” that result from neoliberal globalization (Lipman, 2004, 3). The spatial concentration in cities of wealth, social services, new schools, and populations with high rates of imprisonment have to be strictly regulated in cities that are positioning themselves as nodes of control and innovation in the global economy. The contradictory need for two extremes: flexible, highly trained professionals and disciplined, unskilled laborers highlights the fact that education is now integral in the development of global cities, and thus involved with the maintenance of capitalism (Smith, 1996; Lipman, 2004; Duncan, 2000; and Gabbard, 2003; Chomsky, 2003).

In the case of the Chicago Public Schools, they are situated within a city with a history of both stinging criticism and emulating praise of everything from the conditions of its schools, to the innovations of its school reforms, to its social conditions and “urban renewal.” Much as the schools discipline students, the city disciplines its schools through accountability reforms. Analyzing public education in this light, it is increasingly unclear in what way public schools serve their purported



purpose<sup>24</sup> of developing a critical, educated democratic populace. If we look at schools not as broken and in need of reform, but as performing another, hidden function quite well,<sup>25</sup> we are forced to radically redefine the problems with schools such that the disciplinary moves in schools and neighborhoods have to do with maintaining the image of a safe and appealing city with a disciplined workforce ready to serve global business leaders (Smith, 1996).

A corollary of the bifurcated need for business leaders and a disciplined workforce to serve them is displacement and repression for groups that are seen as superfluous to the global economy—specifically, people of color, especially African Americans, and the extremely poor.<sup>26</sup> As Goldberg (2002) describes, those falling outside of this rubric are contained, isolated, and disciplined by city policies:

“Now resource availability determines educational opportunity, hence jobs, and so by extension quality of housing. Where one lives largely determines where one goes to school, the quality of education one receives, and so the quality of housing one can afford. Segregation accordingly is a totalizing condition: For segregation to be sustained in any one dimension, there has to be segregation in every dimension.”

Further, the “totalizing” nature of segregation in all dimensions allows for rather neat spatial isolation of oppression across a city-scape that concentrates crime, and most of its victims, in the confines of certain neighborhoods:

The city's top 15 zip codes for prison releases are very nearly (and in nearly the same exact order) identical to the top 15 zip codes for prison population origin. The top 15 zip codes for prison releases contain 10 of the city's top 15 zip codes for poverty, 11 of the top 15 zip codes for unemployment, 10 of the lowest 15 zip codes for median income, and 10 of the lowest zip codes for possession of a high school degree (Street, 2003).

The concentration of poverty, incarceration, un- and under-employment, and under-education in a few neighborhoods means that the city can contain populations that they identify as superfluous (or “disposable” --cf. Giroux 2010). Such neighborhoods can then be rendered invisible in the city-scape,

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<sup>24</sup> The purpose of education in the US throughout history is definitely contested. Joel Spring (2005) has argued that schools have always, and often overtly, been intended to play a role in ideological management and cultural domination. I wish to point here only to one positive purpose that is frequently associated in the public realm with mandatory public education.

<sup>25</sup> This is borrowed from Foucault's look at prisons (1977).

<sup>26</sup> It is this interaction of the political economy and structures of racism that points to the need for an analysis that engages both. Parker and Stovall (2004) convincingly argue that race and class-based lenses such as Critical Race Theory and Critical Pedagogy must necessarily trouble one another to approach a truer analysis and a more effective anti-oppressive praxis.

and yet, simultaneously, can house and shape workforce for temporary service-industry labor that is below the minimum wage.

Neighborhoods that concentrate and isolate poverty and recidivism are directly connected to the PIC, because they simultaneously feed into and receive people from the prison system. Thus, they need to be actively managed and erased in the constructed imaginations and images of the global city. David Theo Goldberg (2002) argues that such management and erasure is achieved by welfare work requirements and prisons, the “cornerstones of the New Segregation, locking poor people of color spatially as much as economically into lives of severe limitation” (211). People in these communities bear the burden of our society’s unemployment, with rates among young Black men in cities ranging from 25-50%, and underemployment around 33% for Black people between 16 and 35 (ibid, 216). Those with few legitimate earning options—further fueled by decreased funding for education—are concentrated in communities with conditions that “not only dispose persons so confined to committing crimes but to being caught and to larger and longer sentences” (ibid, 216). Finally, they also lack resources for a solid defense if arrested. As Goldberg (ibid) summarizes, these spaces, “home to the ‘fabricated savage’ the late modern state has made its own by perpetuating, have been *primarily* about keeping the projection of ‘savagery’ contained—locked *in* to the inner city or locked *up* in prison houses” (218). Since released prisoners are largely returning to the same communities from which they came prior to incarceration, these contained, highly policed, underserved neighborhoods act as an extension of the punishing powers of prisons outside of their walls.

In order to achieve the lofty goals of gentrification and reshaping an entire city to fit the imperatives of global markets, American cities require the compliance of all compartments of city government. Any efforts to improve public schools were compelled to fall in line with the plans of Chicago’s then-Mayor Richard M. Daley and big developers. It is increasingly obvious that contemporary reforms in public education are being deployed as tools in the city’s attempts to reconstitute its resident base. Government defendants of quality education for the poor seem to have

largely disappeared. Meanwhile, today's government-subsidized investment in gentrifying neighborhoods is leading to the continued destabilization of educational opportunities for many public school students. As such, schools have a role to play in gentrification, while gentrification shapes school reform toward the sorting of students according to their intended place in the globalizing world economy, privileging the market above all else

Schools find themselves in complicated and contradictory situations in gentrifying neighborhoods, as a passage from an Urban Tech School Improvement Plan from 1992 indicates: "This development of the area holds great potential for a new kind of development at Urban Tech and the redefining of its role [in the neighborhood]" (School Improvement Plan, 1992). During the 1990s, the community around Urban Tech experienced "emerging growth and technical development," as the School Improvement Plan, 1992, "The Community," noted, adding that "the neighborhood is being integrated by middle-class housing units and medical research facilities." The term "integrated" here belies the distinctly racialized nature of gentrification that amounts to displacement, rather than integration. Schools are expected to prove that they are organized and effective in order to appeal to new residents; however, since gentrifiers seldom send their children to local public schools, school-age populations can change dramatically as wealthier residents with fewer school-age children displace lower-income residents (with more school-age children) (Weissmann 2002b).

In short, neighborhoods characterized as gentrifying, or, more palatably, rejuvenated or revitalized, experience very segmented growth and contractions along race and class lines. For instance, the Near South area of Chicago is one apt example of the growth that is typical of gentrification. From 1990 to 2000, the number of housing units in the area increased by 64%, while the population grew only 33%. At the same time, the African American population in the area dropped by 6%, while the number of children decreased by 5% (Voorhees, <http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/voorheesctr/publications.html>).

As a result of gentrification, instead of adapting and serving as important community stabilizers, schools in the fastest developing neighborhoods experienced substantial attendance drops in the late

1990s. Particularly sharp were the drops in attendance rates from these schools' local area. For instance, in the community areas surveyed by Catalyst, data show that while the White population grew by 14%, White public school enrollment dropped by 24% (Weisman 2002b). This trend is exemplified at Urban Tech by the enrollment drop from 1409 in 1987-88 to a low of 840 in 1990-91, and the school's subsequent recruitment efforts of the early '90s (School Improvement Plan, 1992). So far, I have demonstrated that an analysis of the school-prison nexus implicates our legal and politico-economic systems just as much as our schools by examining historical continuities and the underlying assumptions implicit in urban economic and criminal legal policies and practices toward youth, schools, and youth crime. In the next section, I will discuss how the complicated socio-economic shifts of neoliberal gentrification described here structure popular representations of communities, and the people and institutions within them. Such representations are then used as the basis for policy and legal shifts that can drastically impact said communities.

### Schools and the Popular Representations of Communities and Youth

An understanding of schools as part of the symbolic representation of a neighborhood implies that the state of a community's schools can seep into the popular image of a neighborhood, particularly through racist stereotyping. If the buildings in a neighborhood are decrepit and if the schools are failing, the implication is that it is because the existing community is somehow deficient and to blame. This is the intersection of poor political and economic conditions with representations and popular understandings of those conditions. In the context of Chicago's historic officially enforced segregation, communities such as Urban Tech's became home to large proportions of the city's working class and poor Black population, as school data clearly demonstrate: as of 1990, 90% of the families in Urban Tech's attendance area were Black, the school served over 99% Black students, over 75.5% of whom came from nearby public housing projects, and over 83% of whom qualified for free/reduced lunch

programs<sup>27</sup> (School Improvement Plan, 1992). When such concentrations of under-resourced, underserved poverty go unchecked, the community is vulnerable to constructions of an unwanted, unworthy, or unsalvageable population that has to be reformed or removed (Lipman, 2004). Thus, schools and the students who attend them are significant image-making institutions in communities, and therefore, they can play an important role in restructuring neighborhoods and cities, more broadly.

Given the interrelated changes to the geography and demographics of Chicago's housing and public schools described in the previous sections, a curious contradiction emerges. Because it is not at all clear that gentrifying populations do now or will ever make extensive use of Chicago's public schools, the question arises as to the symbolic allure of "good schools." In other words, why do schools make any difference in gentrification when the more newly arrived residents do not tend to send their children to schools in their neighborhood? In short, changes in schools coincide with the demands of gentrification in globally competitive cities for institutions that do not appear dangerous or substandard. This means that schools are playing a role in the "representation" of neighborhoods beyond their concrete purpose of educating the children of neighborhood residents. Representations, in this case, point to how the shaping of public perceptions of city spaces, institutions, and communities through gentrification, school reform, and tough-on-crime policies have served to legitimate the disciplining of specific populations in cities.

The processes of representation and establishing a presence or identity is played out on various levels: 1) the outward, public face of schools, 2) policies and practices within the school walls, 3) between the actors that surround the institution of a school, and 4) popular perceptions of the school constructed, contested, or maintained, by those not directly involved in schools or the community<sup>28</sup>. In terms of the first—the public presence of a school—the school building itself, its grounds, its visible programs, its links to the community (or lack thereof) all establish a degree of visibility (or invisibility) in a community. Schools "mark the presence" of the population that attends them (Oboler, DATE). Even

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<sup>27</sup> The percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch programs jumped to 97.6% by the 1992-93 school year (School

when schools are “deterritorialized” and the traditional linkage between where one lives and where one goes to school is broken (Betancur, 2005), the presence of whatever student body exists has to be considered, for better or for worse, by its surrounding neighborhood. The issue of ownership and trust that is involved in the processes of community development and change is determined at least in part by whether communities have the opportunity to define and name themselves, or are labeled from outside. When an institution such as a school enters or exists in a community, it is incorporated in one way or another into the latter’s self-image, and thus becomes part of its projected image to the outside world.

The second space for constructing the representation of a school includes internal policy concerns as varied as uniforms, test scores, facilities maintenance, discipline, security, police presence, and program offerings. A veritable obsession about these issues has been encouraged by national and local reports and school reforms such as *A Nation at Risk*, the 1995 Chicago School Reform Bill, and, later, Renaissance 2010 and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The products of many of the requirements can be seen in state school report cards available online (Illinois School Report Card, 2004).

The third level where representations of schools are constructed is the interpersonal realm of actors within schools. Self-representations to and about one another *within* schools, whether by students, teachers, administrators, and disciplinarians, security personnel, or police, involve issues of crime, criminalization, discipline, and control. In particular, young men’s constructions of masculinity often revolve around behaviors that are framed as deviant or troublesome in schools. To whatever extent more crime or “disruption” is perpetrated by males, African American and Latino youth are certainly disproportionately constructed as “dangerous,” if not simply superfluous, particularly, as Lipman (2003) points out, in a city designed to attract tourism and the high-paid managers, technical workers, and professionals essential to the work of economic globalization (335).

The fourth level of representation--broader popular perceptions from outside of the specific school and community--blurs with the previous three spaces of representation I have briefly outlined

above. The construction of African American and Latino youth as dangerous is based on entrenched racist systems. In addition, this perception of dangerousness is increased by the fact that gang members, constructed as the most dangerous youth of all, are generally disaffected youth that have already fallen out of the purview of mainstream institutions, such as public schools, through drop out or push out. The popular understanding that youth, particularly male youth of color, are dangerous, marks the intersection of the politics of representation with crime and criminalization in schools as well as their surrounding neighborhoods (Rios, 2007). It is important to note that the three “levels of representation” discussed above are not mutually exclusive and are *in fact* mutually constitutive. In the next section, I will explore the role of harmful representations of youth, schools, and communities, particularly in popular media, which are in turn used to justify draconian and punitive policies.

### The Role of Legitimizing Public Identities

Kids with guns  
Kids with guns  
Taking over  
They won't be long  
They're mesmerized  
Skeletons...  
And they're turning us into monsters  
Turning us into fire...  
Easy does it, easy does it  
Think of something to say no to..

-Gorillaz from Demon Days album (2006)

The school-prison nexus is often framed around the idea of youth violence. As Erica Meiners argues (2007), portrayals of increasingly deviant or violent youth are not only simplistic and false, but they also perform important ideological work in the imaginations of US residents that legitimate the expansion of the Prison Industrial Complex. This, in large part, is why such representations are so desperately in need of troubling. The nexus, while glaringly obvious through race, class, and gender lenses, is largely obscured in everyday life, by race-neutral language, the “pull yourself up by your

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<sup>28</sup> This fourth level will be explored in-depth in the later section of this chapter and the media section of chapter 4

bootstraps” doctrine of meritocracy, the new accountability language of mainstream school reform, and even apocalyptic accusations of moral bankruptcy:

“We’re not just talking about teenagers... We’re talking about boys whose voices have yet to change. We’re talking about elementary school youngsters who pack guns instead of lunches. We’re talking about kids who have absolutely no respect for human life and no sense of the future. In short, we’re talking big trouble that hasn’t yet begun to crest... And make no mistake. While the trouble will be greatest in black inner-city neighborhoods, other places are also certain to have burgeoning youth-crime problems that will spill over into upscale central-city districts, inner-ring suburbs, and even the rural heartland... All of the research indicates that Americans are sitting atop a demographic crime bomb. And all of those who are closest to the problem hear the bomb ticking.”

-John J. DiIulio, November 27, 1995

Arguments such as DiIulio’s, which gained considerable notoriety in the 1990s, serve to veil the pervasive violence in young people’s lives with discourses of meritocracy, individual responsibility, and accountability, positioning youth as perpetrators, rather than victims of societal violence. In other words, following DiIulio’s logic, young people, starting particularly with poor youth of color, are *refusing* to adopt the old model of working hard to get ahead. Instead, they are individually *choosing* a violent route that devalues human life and disregards the possibilities of the future. As Browne, et al. (2003) summarize,

“the image of black youth in particular underwent an extraordinary transformation: the brave little girl walking up to the schoolhouse door in the face of jeering white crowds was replaced by fearsome young black men coming down the street ready to take your wallet or your life. The cultural transformation of black youth from victims of injustice to remorseless predators was mirrored in public policies...” (132)

In the face of such a threat, young people and the adults in charge of them must be held accountable for their poor, and dangerous, decisions.

While youth violence has declined since 1995 (Cooper, 1999; Portner, 2000), there has been a peculiar silence about the failure of the youth crime explosion, predicted in the 1990s. Nevertheless, fear-based discourse has proven particularly durable and pervasive, resurfacing when expedient, even while largely discredited. This discourse is particularly slippery and hard to nail down in the modern era of colorblindness, where racial and other forms of discrimination are treated as mere vestiges of past abuses that used to be written into laws and codes such as Jim Crow and redlining, but now, have been at least officially written out of our laws (Alexander, 2010; Haney López, 1996), if not our practices.



The issue of the caricature-like public identities constructed in the media and other spaces elicits a personal reaction from me based on my own subjectivity and history in public schools, which I discussed in the previous chapter. In fact, as I conducted the discourse analysis in this project I was shaken out of any false sense of academic omniscience or distance when I came across a news article documenting the shooting death not even a year after we graduated of a boy with whom I attended elementary school. The article in the *Chicago Sun-Times*<sup>29</sup> describes his shooting as gang related and gives no details about my classmate other than his age, name, and the circumstances, streetcorner, and hospital that surrounded his murder. A school discipline official remarked that if a few bad elements were removed from the school it would be as good as an ivy league institution. Furthermore, the principal stated that the shooting was nearly inevitable. I realized that, while immersing myself in article after article about students facing violence in schools for the purpose of this research, I began to feel these stories shake loose from reality and become numbers, fodder, proof of my point. Although my use of these stories is intended for a radical, not a repressive purpose, this jarring moment threw me back into the “data.” It reminded me again of my position as researcher and the power of collapsing actual lives—with faces, stories, peers, families—into simplistic representations. These representations can be the media’s gangbanger who (somewhat sadly) came to an “inevitable” end, the “bad element,” or also the researcher’s victimized youth, the “oppressed.” The surfacing of this article reasserted my positionality, forcing me to reflect my own analysis of constructed representations back onto myself.

Ange-Marie Hancock (2004) argues that people’s experiences and history condition what they accept as norms (4). She goes on to say, “a developed democracy usually turns its attention to issues about which there is a genuine debate, but the underlying assumptions—the unquestioned consensus about certain topics—influence democratic deliberation before, during and after a specific policy or issue debate” (3). Moreover, these assumptions or “political facts” that are relied upon as background of democratic deliberation, are “continually reinforced by existing government policy” (5). Hancock finds

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<sup>29</sup> I have omitted direct citation and quotations and his name to protect his and his family’s privacy.

that public identities disseminated by the news media, among other sources, “include both stereotypes and moral judgments in a coherent construct” (75). Another scholar (Fields, 2005) supported the idea that “ideological codes,” such as public identities, “both perform the possibilities people imagine and define the stakes in community debates,” such that arguments on both sides are circumscribed by the limits of the codes themselves (551). In other words, once these identities or “ideological codes” are solidly established in the popular imagination, the scope of imaginable reforms or policies is limited by deeply rooted ideas about “how *those* people are.”

For example, Brown et al. (2003) cite a body of research that indicates that at all levels, from policing to the courts and sentencing, young black men are understood to be lacking the “stabilizing social bonds” of family and steady employment. They are therefore perceived to be “more dangerous to public safety, less reformable, and less likely to have suffered mitigating victimization of their own, like being coerced into crime...or suffering from some psychological disorder” (146). Brown et al. contest those scholars who argue that overrepresentation of people of color at later stages of the criminal justice system (arrests, court referrals, incarceration, and harsh sentencing) are negligibly racially biased when controlled for seriousness of offense (see overview of “wave 2 research” in Brown et al., 2003, 135-8). They argue instead that their subsequent overrepresentation is a product of increased surveillance and police contact at the very earliest stages:

“A legacy of adverse structural conditions causes blacks to have higher rates of offenses to begin with. The higher rates of offenses are then used to justify decisions by police to monitor blacks more intensively and by courts to sentence them more severely. Their greater levels of incarceration contribute to difficulties in getting steady jobs and maintaining stable families, which increases the risks of offending, which.... And so on, in a tragic downward spiral” (Brown et al., 2003, 152).

Two key themes emerge here. One is the idea of a “legacy of adverse structural conditions,” pointing once again to the central tenet of Critical Race Theory that forces us to consider the impact of the society’s genealogy of systemic racism on all its institutions (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000; 2001). Another related theme is that public conceptions of the criminality of communities<sup>30</sup> impact the way

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<sup>30</sup> Hancock nuances this idea in her concept of public identities

institutions relate to said communities and the policies that are put in place to handle issues such as crime and overrepresentation. Brown et al. (2003) chronicle this “legacy” with studies ranging as far back as the 1960s through to recent works that show that even police forces that are thought to be the most professional and fair target their force based on “actuarial” data like departmental statistics showing higher rates of offenses, especially on the streets, among youth of color. In what is described as a “tautological use of statistics to tacitly validate pre-existing stereotypes” the public identity of youth of color, particularly males, as the “gun-toting gangster or drug dealer” is constantly reiterated and further entrenched into the culture of police forces (New Jersey attorney general’s report cited in Brown et al., 2003, 151).

There are other public identities that perform similar work in shaping and legitimating state hyper-scrutiny and associated sanctions for groups other than poor young men of color. For instance, some scholars have chronicled the role of the “welfare queen” in shaping welfare and reproductive policies toward women of color (Hancock, 2004; Roberts, 1997; Meiners, 2007). Others have explored the intersections of youth, poverty, race, gender and legal status that produce the looming threat of the pregnant teen and the opposite, chaste “good girl” identities (Lopez, 2003). There are also narratives such as “babies having babies” (Fields, 2005) and “crack baby” that are part of the discourse that undergirds such public identities as the welfare queen, the pregnant teen, etc. As Lubiano explains, these “are not simply social taxonomies, they are recognized by the national public as stories that describe the world in particular and politically loaded ways—and that is exactly why they are constructed, reconstructed, manipulated, and contested” (quoted in Meiners, 2007, 65). Such narratives and identities surfaced in my interviews, particularly those relating to youth and schools: pregnant teens, gang-bangers, drug dealers, lazy mothers (reminiscent of welfare queen mythology), babies having babies, and crack babies. Despite repeated mentions of these individual tropes, they seemed to coalesce under the umbrella of the public identity of the school and the types of characters (gang-bangers, pregnant teens, good girls, irresponsible parents, etc.) that it served.

### Applying Criminal Legal Discourse to Educational Environments

Once people are dehumanized and labeled with certain negative public identities, it becomes easier to accept that they deserve to be controlled, reprimanded, paternalistically guided, or punished, in less and less humane ways. Lipman (2003: 345) outlines the militarization and criminalization of schools, with Zero Tolerance accountability policies that label schools, their teachers, administrators, and students with the prison language of probation. She goes on to argue that probation and the associated sanctions that are dictated by recent local and national school reforms “demonstrates to the whole school community that it is deficient and powerless...signaling the delinquency of schools in African American and some Latino communities, and by implication, the delinquency of students and families as well” (Lipman, 2003, 344-5).

The criminal legal and carceral concepts of isolation, detention, and punishment are also pervasive in school reforms, policies, and day-to-day language. For instance, hallway sweeps, with stiff penalties such as suspension, mimic punitive sweeps by housing police in public housing. One participant in this study, Mr. Mason, produced prison discourse, metaphors, and comparisons no fewer than ten times in the course of an approximately 40 minute interview. These references included comparing failed disciplinary policies to “the inmates running the institution,” comparing in-school suspension to solitary confinement, the looming threat of prison as an inevitability when education fails, applying “broken windows theory” of policing to schools, and the viability of staying “in jail a day or two” as a punishment for violating an out-of-school suspension and returning to school early. While Mr. Mason produced a transcript particularly saturated with prison and enforcement discourse, he demonstrates the ease with which the language of punishment and enforcement of our criminal legal system is applied to schools and the people within them. This linguistic crossover is one way that the representations of certain urban public schools and their students are associated with criminality.

### Conclusion: The Impact of Representations on Policy-making

Dynamics of conflicting representations in schools filter up to the larger neighborhood image, which can then be used to drive policy, especially in the context of “neighborhood improvement” or “revitalization,” common codes for gentrification. Public schools and low-income neighborhoods as well as their inhabitants in cities such as Chicago have been systematically neglected, creating a logic for their destruction or “reconstitution.” Within this logic, crime and gang activity are measures of failing schools and neighborhoods, not greater failures of social support and assistance:

“With economic and material decline, the projects became sites of violence and permanent police occupation and terror. They also became *ideological sites* for the demonization of African Americans. Dehumanizing conditions created by the state were ascribed to the people living there, who were defined by the media as ‘criminal’ and ‘savage.’ Having established the logic for the dispersal of residents, the city and federal authorities who demolished the buildings are now construed as humanitarian” (Lipman, 2004, 73, emphasis mine).

Framing housing projects and schools as ideological sites for demonization speaks to communities and their institutions being represented as criminal, as Giroux (2010) has pointed out:

“Youth have also become collateral damage for conservatives and neoliberal advocates who want to dismantle the social state and in so doing justify themselves by pointing to an alleged rise of a generation of disorderly and dangerous youth dependent upon government entitlements. Within this discourse, government support for young people is both undermined and inappropriately blamed for creating a generation of kids labeled as psychologically damaged, narcissistic, violent, and out of control” (20).

Such representations, then, are used to structure and legitimate harsh laws and policies that cut back services, rendering populations all the more vulnerable. One example of negative representations being used to dismantle democratic institutions is Mayor Daley’s 1995 School Reform<sup>31</sup>. The assumption of failure and ineptitude of minority and low-income communities and schools had initiated the gutting of the Local School Council (LSC) system wherever possible. LSCs were later revoked in schools as a punitive measure for perceived failure based on state standards under Renaissance 2010, enacted after 2004, thereby removing one, albeit frail and struggling, institutional pathway for community involvement and empowerment in schools. In this way, the school community is subjected to the punishing power of spectacle that Foucault (1977) describes, wherein the school’s “failure,”

measured by standardized tests, is put into public view and visible sanctions are placed upon the school. These sanctions both set an example of what could happen to other schools and place the blame and impetus for improvement squarely on the very victims of school failure, the students and community.

In fact there is much evidence of the stripping of rights and “privileges” of schools perceived as “failing,” irrespective of contextual struggles relating to such issues as poverty, historical discrimination, disinvestment. Implementation of school uniform policies, reversal of off-campus lunch practices, metal detectors, strict dress codes, Zero Tolerance policies, hall pass requirements, ID requirements, and anti-loitering policies have all been used punitively in response to perceived disciplinary problems school-wide and among specific targeted groups. Combined, these create a spectacle of control. In addition, the implementation of some of these disciplinary policies has been found to correlate with the socioeconomic position of students and their expected class position upon entry into the economy (Anyon, 1980).

Together with the presence of cameras, school security, private security firms, and police, these forms of discipline combine what Foucault (1977) describes as the two polarities of discipline: the discipline-blockade and the discipline-mechanism. On the one hand, some disciplinary problems are blocked by limiting contact between students or by removing some of the causes of fights, etc. This is the discipline-blockade. On the other hand, a discipline-mechanism promotes a sense constant surveillance that encourages those subjected to this monitoring to limit their own actions under the assumed ever-watching eye of an authority. As Anyon (1980) points out, such “self-discipline” mimics the demands of low-level jobs that require a docile and unorganized labor force.

In this situation, controls are imposed on students without their input or consent, much as educational policies are implemented to close or sanction failing schools with little to no community debate. Neither individuals nor communities are empowered and given resources to take ownership of

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<sup>31</sup> In many ways a precursor to Chicago’s Renaissance 2010 Plan, which was itself a local addition to the national No Child

their own problems around crime, poverty and education. Instead, resolutions are passed from without and complete community implementation and adherence is expected. Indeed, these disciplinary measures on students and whole communities are often framed in the popular imagination as humanitarian, or as being in the best interests of communities due to the cycles of violence, poverty, and failure that they purportedly address.

In this chapter I argued for a framework of analysis that combines such structural factors as the law, the political economy, and public representations in an attempt to build a “public vocabulary” of overlapping systems of oppression. Both the methodology of this project and the convergent framework that I propose in this chapter foreground systemic over individual factors, although CRT also privileges more local stories and individual narratives. CRT’s emphasis on the weight of counternarratives is also key to resisting the popular representations and public identities that legitimate and normalize endemic racism and socioeconomic stratification. This chapter has proposed a framework that enters into the contradictory space between the polarities of the structural and the local in order to provide a fuller understanding of the institutional problem of the school-prison nexus. This effort seeks not only expands the realm of what counts as educational policy to include the law, enforcement, political economy, and media (Anyon, 2005; Meiners, 2007), but also troubles the divide between structural and localized understandings. In the following chapter, I will apply the convergent lens described here to the case of Urban Tech High School, its community and the complex web of state institutions that interface with and monitor both.

#### **IV. SURVEILLING AND POLICING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR: THE CASE OF THE SCHOOL-PRISON NEXUS**

In the preceding chapters I have traced the literature documenting the school-prison nexus and argued for an analysis that situates this nexus at the intersection of laws and policies, the political economy, and popular media representations of schools and youth. Federal laws and state or city policies, as described in the last chapter, disproportionately impact communities of color. The political economy renders the same populations particularly vulnerable through un- or under-employment, relegation to low-pay or low-status jobs, and the destabilizing impacts of gentrification on individual homes and communities. Meanwhile, the media constructs a legitimating narrative that justifies and normalizes the repressive laws and conditions faced by communities of color. These various realms converge in a manner that make the communities, homes, families, lives, and even bodies of low-income people of color open wide to state surveillance, intervention, and regulation.

In this chapter I will apply the convergent model proposed in the previous chapter to discuss the reach of state surveillance into poor communities of color through various institutions and the way that media is used to support such state interventions. I will use the narratives of my interview participants (see table 2) to illustrate the meanings they made around the realms of law/enforcement, political economy, and media.



THE PARTICIPANTS					
pseudonym	race	Approx age	Current Position	Position during period of study	other
Mr. Harrison	White	60s	scheduler	special education teacher	also taught computer, social studies, science, occupations, drafting and in an elementary school; worked as Assistant Budget Manager and created a cut/tardy program
JP	Black	40s	security	Security since 1985	
Mr. Manning	Black	late 60s	history teacher	history teacher since 1989	attended a large local high school similar to Urban Tech and grew up in Chicago in a housing project
Ms. Casey	Black	36	worked at Urban Tech for 14 years in truancy (1996-98), a teen-parent support group 1998-2000 and as an Administrative Assistant since 2007	student 1988-1992	daughter of Ms. Smith, another participant. Also worked in a GED program in nearby housing projects.
Ms. Smith	Black	50s or early 60s	security hall monitor	parent, volunteer	mother of Ms. Casey
Ms. Stinson	Black	50s or early 60s	main office/ hall monitor	parent, volunteer	
Ms. Sullivan	Black	50s or early 60s	chair of the Local School Council (LSC)	foster/adoptive parent	worked at local public university before quitting to care for children. Has raised 30 foster children and adopted 11.
Ms. Grey	Black	50s or early 60s	teacher	teacher	taught at another nearby public high school until it was closed

Table 2: The Participants

### The Panoptic Gaze and State Interventions into Communities of Color

I examine the school-prison nexus as one space in which state surveillance, institutional racism, and the narratives that serve to legitimate and undergird repressive policies, collide. This chapter explores the ways that communities of color are “policed,” through laws and policies reinforced most literally by the actions of the police and the criminal legal system, but also by other arms of the state,

including housing and public aid. In addition, laws and policies that police communities of color are legitimated by mythologies that serve to ideologically “surveil” and repress communities, collapsing them into very few racist and gendered scripts, such as the welfare queen, the gangbanger/drug dealer, the crack baby, the pregnant teen, the “good girl,” babies having babies.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately I argue that such tropes serve to establish and strengthen connections between schools and the criminal legal system, such that the school-prison nexus is one instantiation of the negative impact of the racist, gendered, panoptic surveillance of low-income communities of color.

### The Criminal Justice System and Youth of Color

The racially disproportionate figures, outlined in my Introduction, regarding those who are ultimately found guilty and punished by our criminal legal system are completely consistent with data regarding juvenile justice and all the points of intervention by police and courts that precede secure detention. For instance, as of late 1990s, Black youth were only 15% of the general population under age eighteen, but made up 26% of juvenile arrests, 31% of referrals to juvenile court, 44% of referred juveniles detained in custody, 32% of youth judged delinquent, 40% of youth in residential placement, 46% of juveniles waived to adult criminal court, and 58% of youth admitted to adult state prisons (Brown, et al., 2003). This indicates that Black youth come into increased contact with the punitive arm of the state at all levels, including within schools. For example, according to the Chicago Police Department, in 2003, 8,539 youths were arrested in Chicago’s public schools. Only 15% of these offenses involved weapons or drugs, the majority of the rest involved minor fights and threats, resulting in assault and battery charges (Advancement Project et al., 2005). When children *are* arrested on weapon or drug charges, there is also reason to believe that there is disproportion as city schools that serve largely Black and Latino populations are patrolled by special Chicago Police units that conduct

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<sup>32</sup> The majority of these scripts police women’s sexuality and the reproduction of women of color, which is unsurprising, given that women have typically been underrepresented in our society’s criminal justice system, a trend that’s being reversed as women have become one of the fastest growing populations in our nation’s prisons (<http://www.wpaonline.org/institute/hardhit/index.htm>).

surprise screenings for drugs and weapons, a level of scrutiny by police from which suburban students are largely exempt (Nelson, 3/27/1992).

Despite the popular belief that racism has been written out of our laws (Alexander, 2010; Haney López, 1996), there are policies and systems that buttress this disproportionate surveillance and criminalization of youth of color. One such policy was enacted in Chicago in the form of the 1992 Gang Congregation Ordinance, a form of legalized profiling that allowed officers to arrest anyone reasonably believed to be a gang member loitering in a public place with one or more persons, should they refuse to disperse after being asked. The police department targeted not only individuals, but also criminalized whole communities with designated, but publicly undisclosed, enforcement areas. The US Supreme Court found the ordinance unconstitutional in 1999 in *City of Chicago v. Morales*<sup>33</sup> (527 U.S. 41) on the grounds that it was vague, did not adequately guide police discretion, therefore allowing for arbitrary and discriminatory police enforcement, and infringed upon a constitutional right to innocent loitering. By the time it was found unconstitutional, the ordinance had already accounted for the arrests of more than 42,000 people over a 3-year period (Schofield, 1999). In an effort to address the unconstitutional aspects of the 1992 ordinance, a revised version of the ordinance was passed in 2000, but it still includes “hot spots” designated by police as “areas in which the ordinance may be enforced,”<sup>34</sup> once again reinforcing the differential focus of the punitive arm of the state.

Communities of color are also monitored via complex databases accumulating information that frames them as suspect. For example, in 1987, in California, CAL/GANG, a statewide database of gang suspects was developed that collected “intelligence,” like photos and personal information, even in the absence of a crime. According to the National Gang Center, there are similar databases used in at least 9 other states, including Arizona, Illinois, Florida, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.<sup>35</sup> Collecting “gang data” gives police officers justification for accosting,

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<sup>33</sup> <http://supreme.justia.com/us/527/41/case.html> Accessed 4/1/11

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.crfc.org/gangs.html> Accessed 2/17/11

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/HTML/Legislation/gang\\_databases.htm](http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/HTML/Legislation/gang_databases.htm) Accessed 2/17/11

detaining, or arresting thousands of youth, and, if documented, such contacts could be used in subsequent trials to trigger gang-related sentence enhancements (Pintado-Vertner, 2000).

In addition, police crackdowns have been targeted to coordinate with city policies to isolate or displace “problem” communities, as with Operation Pressure Point, instituted in 1984 in New York City in conjunction with the subsidized transfer of city-owned or abandoned land and buildings to artists and private developers. In the 18 months after the Operation was launched, an estimated 14,000 drug busts were made in the Lower East Side, the ground zero for the contentious, but aggressive gentrification during the 1980s in New York. Through “operations” such as this, rates and degrees of enforcement are tailored to city and market imperatives.

Research indicates that any official, documented initiation of contact with police can lead to future attention, suspicion, or increased penalties (Browne, 2003). During the period of my study, a School Improvement Plan included increased police involvement at Urban Tech. Police were asked for additional patrols at arrival and dismissal hours, but also at nine designated “hot spots” delineated within the School Improvement Plan. While the additional police presence at “hot spots” was said to “provide a safe and secure ‘right of passage’ for...youngsters,” (School Improvement Plan, 1994) it also mimicked the language and strategies of police gang enforcement within schools. This is one way that slippery systems are set up to purportedly protect youth from violence, but end up criminalizing larger groups of youth of color and collapsing them into public identity categories such as dangerous gang banger<sup>36</sup>. As mentioned above, increased contact between law enforcement and students, while it may provide some protection or a sense of safety, too often has the corollary result of initiating documented contact with police that increases chances of later trouble in school and with law enforcement. This effect is only increased when school-police partnerships implement criminal street gang strategies for enforcement within schools, creating an overarching ideological conflation of youth and gangs. While some of the more overt functions of surveillance of law enforcement are glaring, there are more subtle ways that

communities of color are “policed” that need not involve law enforcement officials. In the following section I will also explore the gendered nature of whether discipline is administered primarily through enforcement or through bureaucratic sanctions and stigmas.

### Other Punitive Arms of the State: Public Housing and Gentrification

Public housing systems in large cities such as Chicago also serve to monitor and discipline poor communities of color. The rapid disappearance of the vast majority of public housing units has been the chief manner of disciplining populations dependent on such housing. The people most directly dependent on public housing have been women who head households. For example, one of the largest projects in Chicago in the ‘90s had 40 percent of households that were single-parent, female-headed households earning less than \$5,000 per year.<sup>37</sup> The extreme erasure of destroying public housing units is also part of a continuity of surveillance and punishment within what remains of large urban public housing systems. For instance, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) specifies in its Minimum Tenant Selection Plan (MTSP) various rules excluding applicants with household members, including children, who have a variety of characteristics, including criminal histories, history of drug conviction, drug use, sex offenses, “irresponsible alcohol use,” etc. It is also specified that, as public housing has been farmed out to private developers, these firms can also “supplement the criteria set forth in the MTSP in their leases, tenant selection plans (TSP), and/or site-specific criteria to include more rigorous screening requirements.”<sup>38</sup>

In addition, after the destruction of thousands of units of public housing, tenants are only guaranteed to get spaces in the new scattered units if they meet a mandatory 30-hours-per-week work requirement (regardless of childcare and family obligations or inability to obtain a job with minimal education and work experience), submit to mandatory drug testing, have no record of rent and utility delinquency, have a good housekeeping record determined by inspections, and adhere to rules against

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<sup>36</sup> The label of gang-banger or dangerous youth also ignores the premise that, in fact, all children need protection from violence, even those who are gang affiliated, and instead relegates such labeled youth to an outsider criminal status, stripping them of any protections from the state afforded to children.

<sup>37</sup> [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0GER/is\\_1999\\_Summer/ai\\_55127438/?tag=content:coll](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0GER/is_1999_Summer/ai_55127438/?tag=content:coll) Accessed 11/14/11

taking in friends and relatives (Venkatesh and Celimli, 2004). Additionally, as one research participant informed me, there are institutional linkages that pose threats, whether real or perceived, to public housing tenants' ability to maintain their leases. The example she gave was a school truancy officer threatening to use knowledge of parents' dependence on public aid to get them to force their children to attend school: "we would threaten to notify the public aid office that their student wasn't coming to school, and they don't like you messing with their money, so they would make the students come" (Ms. Smith). All of these regulations and practices amount to stringent state intervention in and monitoring of the private lives of poor families of color in a way that provides data and fosters punitive connections between state institutions like schools and public housing or public aid systems. Such data sharing and connections are the architecture of the nexus between schools and prisons.

Another instance of state intervention into the lives and homes of poor families of color came in the form of Operation Clean Sweep, an initiative implemented by the CHA in the late 1980s. Operation Clean Sweep made its first raid on September 20, 1988 and by 1990 had made thirty raids. It was lauded as the savior of the beleaguered housing system and rewarded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which made the operation a national model, sending housing project personnel from around the country to the CHA for instruction (Juffer, 1990). Despite this official support, and although residents sometimes praised the decrease in violence, they protested the associated lockdowns; and as early as 1990, prominent city papers were asking questions such as: "When does such an operation become less of an effort to make public housing safe for its tenants and more of a convenient way to control a whole community of people, people with every reason to be angry at the system and people for whom eviction could easily mean homelessness?" (Juffer, 1990). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed suits on behalf of residents, and, in 1994, the Federal District Court declared the CHA's search policy in violation of the fourth amendment.

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.thecha.org/pages/housing/19.php> Accessed 2/17/11

The interventions of the CHA into poor families of color were not restricted to bureaucratic exclusions or sanctions on largely female-headed households, or even limitations of free movement for all, as the aggressive arm of the law combined with law enforcement and public housing authorities in a state law from 1990 that required 15 and 16-year old juveniles to be tried as adults if they were charged with selling drugs on or within 1000 feet of CHA property (Nelson, 1/23/1993). There was also a related gun provision to this law that targeted young men of color with the harshest penalties, based on where they lived. The law was found unconstitutional in 1993 due to the discriminatory results of stiffer penalties in a system that is overwhelmingly (91%) populated by Black residents (Nelson, 1/24/1993). In fact, the judge who ruled the law unconstitutional argued that the law might have even been discriminatory in its very intent, citing the fact that, in the three years that the law was in force, African Americans made up all of those this law was applied to in Cook County (Nelson, 1/23/1993). Automatic transfer laws such as this “throw...away a whole generation of children” according to one activist lawyer struggling against the 1990 IL law (Nelson 1/24/1993). Such laws allow no discretion and judges and prosecutors are required to try 15 and 16-year olds as adults, removing a limit to their detention of age 19, access to wider social services available to juveniles, and clearing of juvenile records upon reaching the age of majority (Nelson 1/24/1994). This amounted to a much harsher punishment for juveniles in public housing than those who lived elsewhere--a distinction with an unmistakeable racial character.

Although they were eventually found unconstitutional, such policies served as a strong physical and ideological disciplining of public housing residents, who are overwhelmingly black, by means of a conscious spectacle of infallible surveillance (Foucault 1995[1977]) and complete control of even the minutia of daily life through unannounced searches. Such surveillance and control were buttressed by harsher punishment than that meted out to the general public.

Beyond the elaborate system of surveillance in public housing, there is the overall movement and isolation of low-income and populations of color to facilitate city business development. No process foregrounds modern contradictions of wealth and poverty, centrality and marginality more in global

cities than gentrification. Gentrification is a spatial manifestation of neoliberal globalization in cities (Smith, 1996; 2002), and as such is a force that destroys community networks, catalyzes the demolition of affordable housing, and reorganizes urban space in accordance with new race and class priorities. It divides city spaces and disciplines and delimits certain urban communities by constantly displacing and separating populations of color from community ties and services.

What is important is the distinctly racialized and gendered nature of gentrification. The demolition of public housing developments and the displacement of tens of thousands of families through the CHA's 2000 "Plan for Transformation" was a bold declaration of war on the city's poorest African American communities: As of 1998, 79.3% of households affected by public housing closures or demolitions were in census tracts that were at least 90% Black (Rogal, 1998). In addition to being predominantly Black, many of the households were female led, leaving women as the primary recipients of pathologizing policies that dislocate families. Similarly, the "revitalization" occurring in many, predominantly Latino, communities of color is being accompanied by the displacement of scores of long-term residents. This is indicated by the fact that Latinos have increasingly been displaced from the city, culminating in the fact that, for the first time in 2005, more Latinos were living in Chicago's suburbs than within the city. These statistics point to institutional racism and sexism in cities, and gentrification is a mechanism that erases the poor and communities of color in urban space.

Gentrification is more than just a physical removal, it is a process that also destabilizes and criminalizes as a means of displacement. For instance, Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research (2000) reports on another example of state intervention into allegedly hopeless or helpless communities of color with disastrous outcomes. As buildings were demolished and people were displaced as part of the Plan for Transformation, CHA projects were subject to an increase in crime due to unprecedented mixing of gangs. In addition, measures such as Operation Clean Sweep cracked down and militarized projects against gangs and crimes. Addressing none of the underlying causes for gang participation, it simply drove gangs to "un-swept" buildings and other locations (IPR, 2000).



Media presentations typically do not address such underlying factors as CHA and HUD policy contributing to crime in low-income areas and projects, but instead report only on the ostensibly high volume of crime. The importance of this lapse is key to understanding how such inequalities are justified to higher income and White city residents. As many scholars of neoliberalism and gentrification note (Lipman, 2004; Sassen, 2006; Smith, 1996), a “common sense” of the failure and danger of certain communities point to isolation and eventual destruction as the only logic solution to the problems of poverty and violence that, according to this logic, seem to originate within the culture of the communities themselves. As heads of many households in these communities, Black women bear even more disproportionate blame for reproducing “cultures of poverty” as they are constructed by laws, policies, and media accounts.

The sense of precariousness and invisibility created by media constructions and neglect by city officials permeates all interactions and fuels the gang-related issues that communities face. Amid an atmosphere of historical neglect of housing and services, gangs struggle to mark their territory, but even more importantly, to *mark a presence*. Gangs are an extreme, and traditionally masculine,<sup>39</sup> example of efforts to establish visibility as an essential marker of belonging in a particular place or society, especially in the context of a city that has historically imposed invisibility on certain racialized populations (Hagedorn, 2006). While violence can establish one’s dominance and mark one’s presence, the unintended consequence when it results in death is that it also permanently relegates another person to invisibility. In this way, violence perpetuates invisibility even as it attempts to counteract it.

My study’s participants echoed these notions and explained that such bursts of gang violence were direct results of city interventions and reshuffling of communities:

“We had I think like four different housing complexes....and so all these different groups of kids were going to the same school. But it wasn’t ...as bad, because [kids from different projects]

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<sup>39</sup> Throughout this chapter I indicate realms that largely impact women or men in particular communities. It is important to not that this acknowledgement of gendered patterns is never meant to ignore the fact that these issues also all impact both genders. For instance, women are in prisons and all levels of engagement with the criminal justice system at much lower numbers than men, however, women are also one of the fastest growing populations in prisons. Female gangs are also a phenomenon that has its own field of study. Also, men, as members of family units, or as heads of households are also severely disciplined by CHA’s bureaucratic sanctions.

were split up into two different schools....And, I want to say '90-'91...I believe is when [another area school] closed, allowing both schools to merge. And when those two merged...we had a whole lot of different conflicts and fighting and stuff going on. Because they had took like three or four different rival gangs and put them all in the same school.”

As Ms. Casey describes, when housing projects or schools were closed, residents and students were abruptly shifted into new terrains, thereby increasing contact between rival gangs. This is not to say that there had not been gang violence previously, but she goes on to describe the hard-won understandings and truces between rival gangs that were disturbed by sweeping closures of schools or housing projects:

Whereas the two [gangs] that was here understood each other, you know what I'm saying? So they didn't do anything during school, because half, most of the leaders went to the school so, and they knew they wasn't going to allow anything to happen while they were seeking their education. And then at [another area school] they had, I mean they had like two... gangs that were like rivals, but they understood that school was like a sacred ground. You didn't, back then you didn't do anything in school. They figured if it was that serious, you know you all live around each other, you have to pass this person to go home, that stuff was taken care of outside the school limits. It didn't happen in the schools yet. But when they put all three schools together for I want to say some months, like ah, maybe half of that year, it was a lot of conflict. Every time you look up this was getting ready to jump off, that was getting ready to jump off, you know, they actually had fights, physical fights and stuff. And it wasn't you know, like weapons. The most you would be hit with was a bat or a stick, but it wasn't during school. You know, they was actually fist fighting in school, because there wasn't no weapons in school. You know, so but yeah, that was like the roughest year, because that school closed, and they had to combine both of the schools” (Ms. Casey).

In this way, city policy spurred a spike in violence in a school. This can have myriad effects, ranging from an increased risk of students becoming victims or perpetrators of violence, to diminished school performance in the context of such violence, to negative attention for the school from the central office, police, the neighborhood, or media outlets.

A December 1987 editorial in the *Urban Tech Today* school newspaper captures the tone such re-shuffling set for students:

“The gang problem at Urban Tech has been the major issue this year. Gang activity has made Urban Tech a miserable place at times. The gang members thrive on the fear of others and they seek power and protection which either leads them to death or prison...The gangs showed no mercy when they ruined Homecoming activities by fighting during the Pep Assembly amking threats so that no dance could be held...For the future, let us deal in reality. Let us stop wishing that the problem will go away. Let us all stay in our classes, keep coming to school everyday and show gang members that we will not be intimidated or discouraged from getting an education” (Student, 1987).

Another participant described the distinct uptick in violence in and around the school in the period after it became a feeder school for other, nearby schools that were closing and had rival gangs:

“Yeah, now that was a little difficult for that. I mean it made it harder on the lunch room peoples because 5 seconds after they get in the lunch room, you see food flying, trays flying, kids getting hurt” (Ms. Smith).

In such conditions of violence orchestrated by city policy, many young people opt out. One research participant described students she met while teaching at a GED classroom at a nearby housing project:

“some of the kids that come in there, you know, we had kids 14, 15 years old, and I’m like ‘why are you even in a GED program?’ You know, ‘I couldn’t make it, I wasn’t going to school.’ ‘Why aren’t you going to school?’ ‘Well, you know my mom didn’t have car fare,’ or you know, ‘I, I just couldn’t go, I didn’t have clean clothes.’ I’m like, ‘but what happened since then that now you can come over here? Because this is still a school, you have to come here to learn. So you know, what are you going to do here that you couldn’t do there?’ And a lot of them would be saying, you know, some of the boys would say ‘well you know, I get into it...over there, these boys over there don’t like our boys from over here’...” (Ms. Casey)

When Ms. Casey explores why a school-age child would choose a GED program over a traditional school setting, the underlying answer after many other excuses often revolved around fear of violence. When the tenuous balances that communities have struck in hard economic conditions are reshuffled, such students choose not to face the increased violence, turf-crossing, and the accompanying police attention. In addition, as another participant (Ms. Smith) points out, school policies ensure that the few public schools that serve a significant white population or students from families of higher socioeconomic class are protected from such effects of school closings by designating them as selective enrollment schools, such that, even if they are a closer option, students from non-selective schools that are being closed are not automatically eligible to attend.

What is lost in gentrification is the idea that a community, however poor or challenged with issues of gangs or violence, best governs itself through human connections. One participant described this community self governance in this way: “you were scared to let any of them [in the neighborhood] hear you curse...or see you someplace you didn’t have no business, cause everybody basically knew everybody...and everybody knew everybody’s kids, or everybody’s grandmother” (Ms. Casey). Another participant (Ms. Smith) referred to “the triangle” of home, community, and the school as the balance

necessary for youth to thrive. Such ideas of community reciprocity and co-responsibility, even in the face of great hardship, are replaced, during the process of gentrification, with a general suspicion and accompanying need to keep an eye on deficient communities. Notably, Ms. Casey's and other participants' comments centered around matriarchal structures ("everybody's grandmother"), again reinforcing the gendered component of state interventions into communities and families as an indictment of feminized organization patterns in communities constructed as deviant or deficient. Neither individuals nor communities are empowered and given resources to take ownership of their own problems around crime, poverty and education, in fact quite the contrary. Instead, policies, laws, and ordinances are passed from without and complete community implementation and adherence is expected. Indeed, these disciplinary measures on whole communities are billed as humanitarian, or in the best interests of communities due to the cycles of violence, poverty, and failure that they purportedly address.

#### Media Interventions into the Public Identity of Schools

Examining the increased scrutiny and repression to which poor families of color are subjected leads to the question of how this bold inequality is legitimated. The public identities or representations of people, their communities, and the communities' institutions constructed in media and other spaces play a key role in this legitimation. As the opening words of a 1992 School Improvement Plan for Urban Tech indicate, negative public identities stigmatize this school and those in it as in need of reform or removal:

"The enrollment of Urban Tech High School has been declining for the last ten years. Much of this decline has been due to a shifting population base, the lack of confidence by parents in the safety of the community, and a perceived negative image of Urban Tech High School. The image Urban Tech has earned during the past twenty-five years has been created by the news media seeking negative material, staff and community with their own hidden agenda, and unfortunate incidents not uncommon to any of the Chicago Public High Schools. The reduction in enrollment has caused a reduction in staff which is now responsible for the elimination of educational programs offered at the school. With the reduced educational offerings and the negative image in the community, Urban Tech is caught in a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. This prophecy must be reversed for the school to survive" (School Improvement Plan, 1992).

The “self-fulfilling prophecy” of negative public identities feeding under-enrollment, cutting the teaching staff, and decimating educational offerings fits neatly into city policies that close and “reconstitute” public institutions, often into semi- or fully privatized systems exemplified by Daley’s 1995 school reform, the CHA Plan for Transformation, and the later Renaissance 2010, discussed in my conclusion.

Throughout my interviews, participants referred to various incidents where neighborhood violence was linked with the school through the media. For instance, one participant described: “...TV stuff like the incident...where the kid was shot ‘on the steps of [this school].’ It’s funny that the steps...extended a block and a half away. It’s things like that. Like one year there was a kid that was shot over at McDonald’s but yet he was shot at [this school].’ It’s two blocks away” (Mr. Harrison). Participants such as Mr. Harrison were frustrated that the onus for community violence was placed on the schools, often when such violence did not even occur on school grounds. Such conflation of community violence with school violence pathologized the school, and could therefore potentially lead to sanctions, or closure. Mr. Harrison went on to remark that strong associations between community violence and the school are made when reporters repeatedly emphasize perpetrators’ or victims’ identities as students at this school, even when “It’s not the most important thing.” This participant argued that this relationship with the media was made worse by a direct relationship between a teacher at the school and the press:

“There were times especially during the early 80s when...we had a teacher here who would find it necessary to leak to the press anything and everything that went on in the school...you know some things need to be kept within the walls. Every little thing that happened in the school...this guy was [telling]... either the newspapers or...and that had the biggest negative effect” (Mr. Harrison).

Nearly all participants had an initially suspicious reaction to the mention of media. Another person related it this way when asked if the media ever portrayed the school in a negative light:

“All the time. They never brags on nothing the school has to offer. But any time anything bad happens, we see helicopters. We see different stations come running. Like one year not too long ago -- he was a student [here] But he got killed up on [a nearby street]. Well when the newspapers got through with it, he got killed in [this] High School. Knowing that it’s after school, two rival gangs. I don’t know what had happened. One boy got beat with a golf club that put him in critical.

And the other boy got shot. They decorated the fence and everything up there.... But they [the media] put the students in it. ‘He was a [Urban Prep] student.’” (Ms. Smith).

Another participant captured the importance of this negative media spin when she directly connected this trend in media to gentrification, referring to the “area...being re-built up:”

“Yeah. The media, the media can blow something out of proportion in a minute. And this school particularly is in a good area that’s being like re-built up...and the least little thing they are out there; and we know the stuff that goes on in other schools is not even reported: They could have a whole riot and lock up 300 kids, and we could have a fight with...two kids get locked up, and we’ll end up on the front page. And, and they are – they’re looking for, for more than actions that’s happening sometimes. And once it hits the newspaper or the news, it’s like a whole different story than what has actually happened. And you sitting like and you saying, but I was there, this did not go on” (Ms. Grey).

Ms. Grey’s narrative also complicated the role that other participants suggested media played-- often hyper-scrutinizing negative events in the community and implied false linkages with the school—when she also suggests that the media could under-expose extreme state force that was applied to the same communities:

“And then they hide a lot of stuff. There was one time when they had a whole bit of shooting. They had SWAT teams out there with rifles and uniforms but they had none of that on the television. It was all Chicago police. You know, they didn’t show how they just came out like it was a all-out riot...which it wasn’t. But it wasn’t even at the school. It was down the street” (Ms. Grey).

Ms. Grey described another potential mis-representation by media, but in this case editing out potentially overblown shows of force, which thereby both protect the image of the city as making sober, appropriate responses, and simultaneously reinforce the image of communities of color as dangerous and pathologized, rather than as victims of state repression.

Another participant hints at the unspoken, but assumed, racialized nature of this media coverage by referring to other nearby schools with disproportionately high White and Asian populations:<sup>40</sup>

And [the principal] doesn’t want the media. Because they always so... And they will use their one time about the young man that got killed down the street here. Every time something happened at the school they would always put our school up there. ‘Make us look bad. And then that’s why the enrollment went down... Because once the media get a hold of this stuff and they take it and they just shred it apart. And evidence that are not true. And of course, you can’t always believe what you read. So, and people are going to do that. And then when people say ‘what high school do you work at’ and I say [this one], they say ‘oh my god..., are you scared for

<sup>40</sup> for instance one school Ms. Stinson refers to is 30% Black, 30% White, and the remainder nearly evenly divided between Asian and Hispanic students. Whereas the school system overall is 45% Black, 41% Latino, and only 9% White and 3.6% Pacific Islander, while the school I am studying has ranged from 95% to nearly 100% Black

your life?’ NO. It could be any high school. Down the street [a selective enrollment high school with many more white and Asian students], a lot of stuff that’s happening at these good schools, they don’t tell you about what’s going on. I bet you didn’t know that [another selective enrollment school] had ten different gangs inside their schools” (Ms. Stinson).

Participants such as Ms. Grey and Ms. Stinson are referring to the ability of the media to construct public identities, that act as “interpretive filters” (Hancock, 2004, 2) for other people to understand what is going on around them. Hancock explains that “one’s public identity is conditioned not simply by one’s own speech and action but also by others’ perception, interpretation, *and* manipulation—particularly for those citizens who lack political equality” (4).

So what were the public identities constructed in the media in the ‘80s and ‘90s of Urban Tech and its surrounding community? In my search of local media from 1985-1995, I found various articles referring to Urban Tech. Using the search terms outlined in Chapter Two, nine articles emerged from the Chicago Tribune, 32 from the Chicago Sun-Times. Of the Tribune articles, six made specific mention of Urban Tech. Of this group, five emphasized failures, truancy, and lack of safety; half centered around police involvement in schools.<sup>41</sup> Of the 32 Sun-Times articles coded, 19 mentioned or were specifically about Urban Tech. Twelve of these 19 revolve around two debates: 1) placing a social service agency within the school and 2) merging Urban Tech with another school. The seven articles that didn’t deal with these issues included two that argued that the surrounding community did not value academic achievement, and in fact stigmatized it. Two other short articles attempted to counteract extremely negative media representations, many of which had emerged during the two preceding debates mentioned above. Finally, three other articles that are largely negative address high dropout rates, increased police patrols in schools, and abysmal graduation rates. In short, the articles that in any way dealt directly with Urban Tech were largely negative, however, even articles meant to “emphasize the positive” perpetuated negative scripts and helped to (re)construct damaging public identities.

There were two articles (one in each paper) directly about Urban Tech framed around ambition and successes. The Tribune article leads with several paragraphs describing Urban Tech’s high dropout

rates and test scores that are some of the city's worst, arguing that any successes must be measured as "rise above circumstance." The Sun-Times article leaves such negative indicators out and asks the reader not to believe "the hype" of Urban Tech's brand-name linkage to the image of what is wrong with Chicago's schools. Both articles describe the "circumstance" students must rise above partially as public perceptions or "easy fictions" of the school as a diseased space full of violence. The narrative in the Sun-Times piece is one of relative normalcy in spite of certain unfavorable realities, whereas the Tribune paints a picture of valiant students working that much harder to overcome their problematic home lives. The two mentions of parents in the Tribune piece are of a mother of six who works two jobs and lives in the projects and fathers who have not lived at home for years.

While the Sun-Times piece is much less pathologizing, it's interesting that even a purportedly positive piece, which is structured as laudatory and at least acknowledges issues of poverty, negative stigma, etc., can contribute, in the case of the Tribune article, to the bulk of negative media attention and advertising of negative indicators about Urban Tech. But, perhaps more odiously, this article also reiterated popular perceptions of pathology in poor, urban, Black communities by repeating the familiar tropes of single mother, dead-beat dad. The Tribune article fits well into the majority of other articles that are less positive and may not specifically address Urban Tech, but engage such tropes less gently, citing experts who argue that "As communities get more pathological and poorer and there is more social disorganization, discipline becomes a greater problem" (Sulski, 1990). Other professionals cite drug culture and television as factors driving student failures, both issues that are not independent from the quality of a home environment and its surrounding culture.

Of the remaining articles from the Chicago Tribune and Sun-Times that directly refer to Urban Tech generally (outside of any specific debate) most open with the shock-value of the most brazen indicators of Urban Tech's failure--rates of student failure, truancy, low test scores, dropout, low graduation and enrollment rates, police involvement, and safety issues. The one article that opens

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<sup>41</sup> In order to protect the identity of the school under study, I've avoided direct quotes and have attempted to paraphrase



differently is a Tribune article that paints a graphic multi-paragraph visual image of a “hopeless case”-- a depressing and dingy housing project filled with various, unidentifiable, drab characters sprawled around the living room, TV blaring, truant teenager obviously asleep and unresponsive to the threats and well-intentioned prodding of a truancy officer. A less sympathetic presentation of life in extreme poverty could not be imagined, and in case the onus for blame for student failures is at all in question, this article emphasizes the city’s new strategy in 1990 of convicting parents of truants to shatter the “indifference” in some of the city’s “grimmest” areas.

This last article stood out in particular for its incredibly dehumanizing and insensitive adjectives and descriptions of students, their families, and their homes: despair, decay, dingy, drab, unmotivated, dark, smelly, grimy, sad, tired, heavy, and inert were all used. But such word choices combined to form several of the harmful tropes outlined in the preceding chapter that shape public identities of people, and therefore the types of services and policies to which they should be subject. In the descriptions of the four homes entered by the truant officer, babies having babies, promiscuous teenaged girls, lazy women, and welfare-dependent women with many children and grandchildren are all presented. This piece, in particular, highlights the gendered nature of such media portrayals. Perhaps men, in their absence, are secondarily implicated, however, in this article, the pathological behaviors of Black women are framed as the basis for student truancy.

Far from relating any positive steps or movements in schools and their communities or foregrounding structural factors at play in the situations described, emphasis instead is placed on huge prison-like public schools full of concrete and plexiglas that mirror their surrounding blighted urban communities, thereby implicating the larger community in the problems in schools. In fact, an administrator at another public school likens his school to a teenage version of a notoriously dangerous and crime-ridden public housing project in the city, reasserting the pathology of the school as an extension of the pathology of the community, and underlining popular classed and raced assumptions

about who the students are and where they come from. Hallway sweeps and lockdowns in schools also maintain this continuity in treatment and perceptions of youth in some public schools and public housing.

Troubling discursive slippage also echoed of areas such as military and industrial models in many of the quotes used in the articles I coded. One article referred to the perception that a SWAT-like response was possible in school hallways based on the introduction of walkie-talkies among security personnel. At another point, educators are compared to troop commanders and drill instructors. Another article compared students to defective products produced by a business. Yet another referred to truancy officers as bounty hunters. All of these words and concepts borrowed from public housing, military, criminal, and factory settings belie the overlapping institutional forces infiltrating the common sense of our educational system.

While media doesn't dictate school policy directly, the comments by my study's participants and the media data suggest that, in the case of Urban Tech, the media does play a role in manipulating and interpreting the public identity of the school and neighborhood, thereby limiting the imaginable realm of "solutions" to the "problem" of this school. When police and policy makers rely on these master narratives to dictate policy and enforcement, they often serve to criminalize the youth that attend such "problematic" schools, initiating higher levels of contact with police, which the evidence suggests leads to increased chances of further criminal legal contact and eventual incarceration (Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Skiba et al., 2003; Casella 2003). In this way, media representations serve as the popular ideological underpinnings of the school prison nexus.

One participant links media representations with the way educational policy is made or reformed:

"I think the restructuring of public education is not something that the media's done... They use that as... justifications but I mean half of what's said in the media is not worth listening to. They know how to use it to their benefit and it's politics" (Mr. Harrison).

As Mr. Harrison describes, media doesn't make policy, but it shapes public opinion in ways that make some reforms seem logical, and others not. As Hancock (2004) explains, the media is one force that establishes "political facts" that form an underlying, unquestioned consensus informing policy debates and limiting the realm of imaginable possibilities. In the case of this school, the public identities that are constructed are often wrangled by policy makers to further stigmatize the school and justify more state oversight and interventions. It is my contention that these interventions are the part of fabric of the school-prison nexus.

#### Understanding the School-Prison Nexus as an Outcome of Racialized State Surveillance

As this chapter has argued, the state conducts surveillance disproportionately on poor communities of color, using various agencies and institutions, including the police, courts, public housing, public aid, and child protective services. This disproportionate intervention by the state is justified in the public imagination by public identities that are created and reinforced in the media and elsewhere. Women tend to bear the brunt of the negative public identities as well as the bureaucratic surveillance that relies on these harmful narratives for its justification. One could view the connections between public housing, gentrification, public aid, and schools as limited to individuals students who have to deal with a variety of these institutions. But what happens in schools that helps propel certain students toward contact with the criminal legal system is a logical extension of both the state's surveillance across modern institutions and an extension of the state's legacy or genealogy of racialized and gendered surveillance and intervention into communities of color. As Jean Anyon (2005) argues, "failing public schools in cities are...a logical consequence of the U.S. macro-economy—and the federal and regional policies that support it" (2).

Furthermore, the media constructs public identities that become sedimented and are used to justify and legitimate the disproportionate surveillance, as well as the increasingly harsh punishments, and racially skewed outcomes. In fact, these ideological codes about groups of people are so strong that the monitoring and paternalistic "care" by the state is even framed in humanitarian (Lipman, 2004)

terms, as saving people, as saving children from themselves and the bad situations of their own creation. It is the very powerful force of these public identities that necessitated an intersectional framework for this project, interested not only in schools, but foregrounding systems of oppression that are a modern part of a long trajectory of discrimination against the poor, women, people of color, and other groups. This research also seeks to engage in the larger project of broadening the definition of what counts as educational policy (cf Meiners, 2007; Anyon, 2005). This chapter proceeds under Anyon's (2005) assumption that, "policies that maintain high levels of urban poverty and segregation should be part of the educational policy panoply as well—for these have consequences for urban education at least as profound as curriculum and pedagogy" (3). Foregrounding the convergence of law, economy, and media as integral parts of education policy, this chapter has shown that the panoptic surveillance of the state establishes and fortifies the connective tissue of the school-prison nexus. In the next chapter I will explore an arm of the state performing gendered and racialized surveillance that emerged unexpectedly from interviews: the Department of Children and Family Services.

## V. INTERVENTIONS INTO FAMILIES

The policies of the Chicago Housing Authority suggest a deep institutional mistrust of the ability of people of color to maintain employment, pay bills, choose who can enter their homes, act legally, keep their homes clean, and decide which drugs, legal or otherwise to use. As mentioned previously, many of the CHA policies and judgments disproportionately impact women of color, both because they are frequently heads of households, and because they are associated with feminized work, such as housekeeping and hygiene of children. Other state institutions extend this regimen of surveillance to include how people have sex or reproduce and how they parent (Roberts, 1997).

Roberts (1997) argues that there is a traceable genealogy (Foucault, 1982) whereby the state has explicitly curtailed the right of women of color to have babies (Roberts, 1997). The thread of continuity stretches back to slavery with the regulation of black women's reproduction through rape and other sexual violence. Forced sterilization affiliated with eugenics (1890s-1980s) became the scientifically justified and state sanctioned means of controlling the sexuality of women of color after slavery. Just as civil rights struggle and scientific evidence began to shake the hold of the eugenicists, the Moynihan Report (1965)<sup>42</sup> catapulted the Black family into the national spotlight as the cause of the "tangle of pathology" that plagued the African American community. Particularly problematic, according to the report, was the preponderance of female-headed households weakening the ability of Black men to function as authority figures within families. The Moynihan Report became very influential, and placed the power and actions of Black women at the center of the "dysfunction" of Black families. The continuity of policing black women's reproduction, sexuality, and patriarchy continues through to modern day welfare policies that mandate surgically implanted birth control. Angela Davis (2002) describes this history of state interventions as predicated on a construction of women of color as "procreators of crime and poverty" (61).

For this study, the genealogy of state interventions into Black women's lives provides important context and continuity in terms of the ways that institutions peripheral to schools impact the criminalization of youth and their families. One complicated theme that emerged again and again as I spoke to participants was the changes in rules and ideas about child abuse and corporal punishment in schools, --the institutional implications of which are perhaps best understood in terms of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). When asking institutional actors at schools about discipline and criminalizing youth, I did not expect to hear numerous responses referring to DCFS and the effect that changes in DCFS regulation had on school discipline. When this topic did repeatedly surface, it made me uncomfortable because, as a parent and a product of a family that disapproved of it, I did not like finding myself sympathetic to people arguing for corporal punishment. Several participants expressed variations on desires for a return to corporal punishment:

“I hate to say this, but I would bring back some form, some form of corporal punishment. Not...[implies physical hitting] but stand in the corner, or stand in front of the class, something, some type of embarrassment tactic, not just pat you on the hand and tell you to sit down and shutup, especially when you're disrupting a class” (JP).

Comments such as this one from JP definitely represented a place of interrogation of myself as a researcher and the cultural and ideological differences I had with some of my participants.

Aside from my own personal history and current choices as a parent that make me uncomfortable with hitting children, I am also aware that there is ample research demonstrating that, historically, the poorer and darker, the more foreign or “other” the population, the more likely they have been to experience repressive disciplinary practices and curricula in schools (cf. Spring, 2005; Anyon, 1980). The scholars who document such differences generally refer to deculturation and other detrimental effects of such approaches. Despite this, many of my participants nostalgically recalled very strict discipline in their homes and in schools by parents and also teachers:

“Everybody now is protected by that little thing called child abuse. Years ago back when I was growing up, that was child abuse what my mom did to me. These kids don't know nothing about

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm>

child abuse. I mean, my mom could whip you with a dish towel. You know? You do something you ain't got no business doing, you say something and she happens to have been in the kitchen, the dish towel would be it. Or if she happened to have been sweeping the floor and you did something out of pocket, the broom became it. You know?... [my daughter] is thirty-some years old. If you ask her right now, she'll tell you 'mama never sung no song,' I didn't. If I told you once, I didn't say it no more. But I turned out to be like my mama. I didn't like my mama, cuz it seemed like she had two faces. It seemed like when you do stuff behind her back, she'll know you did it. And when she promised you something, she gave it to you. She didn't -- she didn't save whoopings. You got it right then and there. And I kept saying growing up, 'I ain't never be like her, I ain't gonna never be whooping my kids all the time. I will never be fussing my kids all the time.' And I turned out just like her. I have four successful kids" (Ms. Smith).

In this narrative, Ms. Smith recalls her mother's no-nonsense, strict discipline that involved corporal punishment. She further acknowledges that, in spite of her dislike of the treatment when she was young, she now agrees with her mother's approach and even equates her own childrens' success to such discipline. This represents a link, in this participant's understanding, between being physically disciplined and achieving success. This familial control within the household also used to be able to extend into the school:

"...back then it wasn't a whole lot of issues...you know, back then your mom could come to school and beat your tail...stop from having those kind of issues...you were scared of your mom, your dad, your grandmother...if you didn't [get it at first], by the time you got through getting beat at home, by your mom, maybe your dad, *and* your grandmom, you know, it, it wasn't worth it" (Ms. Casey).

The prevailing feeling among the participants was that parents, and even extended families, as Ms. Casey points out, used to be key partners in school discipline. Most participants expressed a sense that changes in DCFS rules or enforcement had circumscribed this role for families. Here Ms. Casey elaborates on her mother's sense of ownership of the role of primary disciplinarian of her daughter, whether in school or out:

"I think that... DCFS has changed a lot too. Because you know, back in the day, you, I think a lot of people had a lot of fear for their parents, because my mom used to tell us all the time, I brought you in this world, I'm gonna take you out of this world. You do whatever you want to do, but can't nobody tell me how to discipline you. You know, if I feel you did something you ain't got no business doing, whatever you did, that's what you're going to get disciplined for. So you know, parents, you know hey, kids had fear in their heart for their parents. You knew you wasn't gonna do this, you knew you wasn't gonna do that. I'm, I didn't get a whole lot of whippings. It didn't take much for me to understand you were serious" (Ms. Casey).

These excerpts from interviews represent the popular sentiment among participants that the school community had experienced a loss as discipline, in the form of corporal punishment, as it was controlled

generally and then forbidden, at least in classrooms and by school personnel. Upon further thought and questioning, what emerged as more important than anyone's judgments about the use of corporal punishment, was the underlying issue that the repeated references pointed to: participants were telling me that the adults directly in charge of the students, particularly parents, but also teachers, *themselves* felt disempowered, surveilled and punished by the state within their own families and communities. This points to the importance of unpacking a term like "discipline." What does discipline mean? Does it mean corporal punishment, structure, scheduling, consequences, accountability, classroom management, academic rigor, room for autonomous decision-making, or expectations of independent work? What does discipline look like? Does it take the form of in-class punishments, the use of embarrassment or fear to teach lessons, zero tolerance policies, police presence, uniforms, orderly hallways, or does it look like athletics, community work, peer juries, chess clubs, self-guided curricula? Finally, who does disciplining and who is disciplined? Do teachers or disciplinarians do all the disciplining or can the community and media influence and limit the expected behaviors of and in schools? Is discipline reserved for students or does it extend to the behaviors of teachers, administrators, parents? One participant touched on these complications this way:

"So now these kids they got this law protecting them. So they think that they can say what they want, to who they want, and do whatever they want. And never pay no consequences because they'll investigate it as an abuse situation. And that's the only thing that's different that I don't like...just what my mama used to say: spare the rod and spoil the child" (Ms. Smith).

Ms. Smith expressed her understanding that the people who had been disempowered were not the youth at all, but the adults most directly in charge of them. In fact, she, along with other participants feels that changes in DCFS laws and enforcement have perhaps over-empowered youth:

You know, when they gave kids that much right, that many rights, they tied a lot of parents' hands...I know when we was coming up, we didn't have any rights. We had the right to go to school, or the right to die, that was it. My mama told us all the time...you, don't say you gotta go to college, but you're going to work or go to school. You're going to do one or the other, you ain't gonna just sit here. We didn't have a lot of rights, and I think that's what's messing up the kids these days" (Ms. Casey).

Both participants argue that this perceived power for the students is to their own detriment, such that the adults that should be guiding them are unable to act.



This pervasive sense of powerlessness toward one's own children is troubling on its own, but one participant, Ms. Casey, goes on to make the deeper point about the assumptions implied by such intervention by the state into Black families.

“I think because they figure that we're, you know, we're basically illiterate and don't, I ain't going to say illiterate to the fact that, you know, we don't know what kind of rights we have as parents and as, you know, ah, as parents” (Ms. Casey).

Her discussion of subverting the rights of parents on the grounds that they are “illiterate” in their parenting reveals a fundamental sense of the state pathologizing their parenting, legally tying the parents' hands, and then intervening with larger punitive structures into families. This finding directly contradicted some of my own research questions regarding the ways that students were being criminalized, surveilled and punished by institutions. In short, instead of finding only that students were being criminalized, increased rights or protections for children were collapsed with more punitive intervention from the state against the parents and communities, such that a complicated sentiment emerged among parents and community members, who see the children themselves as instigating or initiating these interventions:

“But you know, these days, kids want to holler, ‘I wish my mama would, I'd call the police on her.’ So it's like, that, whenever they passed that law about you know, you can't do any kind of corporal punishment, I think they call it corporal punishment to your kids, I think they gave a lot of kids a lot of leeway, and tied parent's hands. Because if I can't discipline you here, then how else are you supposed to be disciplined?” (Ms. Casey)

Ms. Casey's comments indicate an interesting “divide and conquer” dynamic that emerges such that the children and parents are pitted against each other in an odd disciplinary power struggle. This positions the state as a neutral entity, written out of the power equation, relegating either the mothers or the children again to familiar negative labels of lazy manipulators:

“Because a lot of parents were saying you know, you call the parent's houses, you know, this kid has been out, you know, with the kid sitting right here. How are you letting the kid sit at home when the kid's supposed to be at school? ‘Well, he didn't want to go to school, and I'm tired of this, and I ain't got time for no police to be coming up in my house.’ It's like wow. I wish the kid no matter what, they're going to stick it out, but you know, it's just, you know, the way I was raised, you know, if my mom figured it worked for her mom, it worked for my mom, so it's going to work for me and mine” (Ms. Casey).

Although I did not directly ask her if she viewed this as a product of some larger systemic problem of racism, differential policies, or any other imbalance in enforcement, Ms. Casey's narrative mentions the state (police) intervening in the context of lazy children or inadequate parents. The individualizing focus of culpability on youth, and, by extension, their parents, serves to pathologize Black families to the general public, and even to members of the same community. Most of the pathology associated with parenting falls to women; men—in their absence from the narratives or physical absence—are secondarily implicated, however, in most cases, the pathological behaviors of Black women are framed as the basis for student truancy and other problems at school.

The shift in DCFS policies or enforcement that participants perceived during my period of study was not related to any recent change in CPS policy, which had prohibited corporal punishment since 1905 (O'Conner, 1977). Still, far from a clear-cut issue, corporal punishment in Illinois public schools outside of Chicago, was allowed for nearly another 90 years.<sup>43</sup> Instead of a reaction to some recent change in law, the sense expressed by participants of an increased intervention from the state into families may in fact be related to the creation and popularization of the child abuse hotline. A hotline run out of Springfield, IL, the child abuse hotline has trained operators who can provide information, advice, or, if actions constituting abuse or neglect under Illinois law are reported, generate a formal report. In those cases where formal reports are taken, a Child Protective Services worker begins an investigation within 24 hours or sooner, depending on the gravity of the risk or harm. Between 1985-1995, the number of reports of abuse or neglect more than doubled, going from 69,671 in 1985 to 139,720 in 1995. This increase suggests that participants, such as Ms. Casey, correctly noted the increased attention from DCFS and Child Protective Services and the increased awareness of the hotline:

My son tell me all the time, 'mama, you know they got [a child abuse hotline]' I say, 'I'm gonna tell you like my mama told me, by the time they get here, you gonna be a well-whipped kid, and you're going to be hoping they go back out the door,' I said, 'so you call whoever you want to call.' And he said, 'no, I ain't, I'm just saying my friends are talking about this.' I say, 'yeah, okay, you call whoever you want to call. But I'll tell you one thing, by the time they catch you, you can't come back here'" (Ms. Casey).

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.illinoislegalaid.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.dsp\\_content&contentID=2596](http://www.illinoislegalaid.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.dsp_content&contentID=2596) accessed 10/21/11

Perhaps in contrast to participants' apparent tendency to blame their children, the DCFS also now states that 65% of the reports they receive come from professionals who are mandated by law to report suspected cases of abuse.<sup>44</sup> This means that only 35% of reports come from lay people who suspect abuse. While the percentage of reports from the alleged victims themselves is not available, it may be assumed to be a relatively small proportion of the 35%, due to factors such as intimidation and fear of reprisal on the part of the abused, lack of free access to telephones, time away from adult supervision for phone calls, and the hotline number itself. In other words, while the exact number or frequency of instances of children calling the hotline to report abuse remains unknown, it seems likely that participants' placement of the onus for increased DCFS presence on children may be questionable.

Despite this apparent mis-assignment of blame to the children as primarily contacting DCFS, the participants' overall sense that Child Protective Services became more present in their lives during this period seems well-founded. Even more importantly, one participants' assessment of the impacts of this increased scrutiny went far beyond individual DCFS case files to a systemic connection between state surveillance and increased incarceration:

“So there’s like, kids just doing whatever they want to until the system gets them, and then they want to discipline them the way they want to discipline them. But then they tell you you can’t discipline them, so, I think that had a lot to do with it... And if you can’t, you know, discipline your kids the way you figure is needed to help them do what you need them to do, then, you know, it becomes a big problem. Because not only is it a problem for you, it becomes a problem for the school, then eventually the state, because now they’re doing stuff and they get incarcerated, and now we’re building more jails than schools. So it becomes a bigger problem for everyone” (Ms. Casey).

Ms. Casey expresses a very clear cyclical link between state interference in families' and communities' ability to discipline their children and more serious entanglement with punitive arms of the state, including prisons. Another participant remarked that when family, community, and school procedures for dealing with discipline are circumvented by the state, “I see more kids going out the door in handcuffs” (Ms. Smith).

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<sup>44</sup> Accessed 2/18/11 from <http://www.state.il.us/dcf/child/index.shtml>

The direct linkages in participants' narratives between schools and the criminal legal system indicate a deeper issue than the use of corporal punishment. In the context of the long genealogy of disproportionate state intervention into families and communities of color--usually through control of women of color (cf Roberts, 1997)-- the state surveillance occurring in and around the school in my study is, in one sense, merely a modern iteration. As discussed in the preceding chapter, such control and policing of Black women and their families is legitimated through repeated media tropes such as the welfare queen, the gangbanger/drug dealer, the crack baby, the pregnant teen, the "good girl," babies having babies. As Alexander (2010) argues, modern surveillance and disciplining of communities of color and the resulting unprecedented levels of incarceration since the 1980s amount to a new Jim Crow system. In this system, the school-prison nexus emerges as a sort of institutional ligament that is often hidden from the public eye.



## VI. CONCLUSION

As outlined in the Introduction, the Prison-Industrial Complex (PIC) is represented by the boom in prison-building, the unprecedented rates of incarceration and numbers of people living lives in secure detention or under the purview of the US criminal justice system. It is a racialized, gendered phenomenon that is so formidable that it has come to shape many other aspects of our society: mental health care, education, housing, laws and enforcement strategies, planning and design of urban space, and employment practices, to name just a few. This thesis sought to explore to what extent non-educational and even non-juvenile justice institutions— media, federal and local law, and urban economies—are involved in the school-prison nexus.

It is my contention in this thesis that the surveillance and interventions of the state, across various institutions, form the connective tissue of the school prison nexus. By applying a convergent framework that considers factors and actors not typically considered in educational policy discourse, I reveal an organizing logic across state systems that, while not always working obviously in collusion, combine to criminalize, isolate, and repress poor youth of color in some urban schools. The convergent framework I propose (Chapter 3) considers the impact of law/enforcement, the political economy of urban spaces and the media.

The ethnographic data revealed the importance of considering institutions outside of schools or ones that work directly with schools. The participants repeatedly surfaced the impacts of non-educational institutions on students' paths away from mainstream educational environments, and toward criminal legal contact. In particular, in the narratives I heard, such non-educational institutions served to further discipline, surveil, and criminalize certain young people and nearly all aspects of their lives: their bodies, their homes, their families.

While the panoptic eye lands on us all, it particularly favors the poor, who are more reliant on state services, and can afford fewer protections for their privacy. Hence, particular sectors of the

population are disciplined, creating a very conscious and permanent sense of visibility to assure automatic functioning of power through perceived infallible surveillance (Foucault, 1995 [1977]). The class and raced aspects of surveillance are further complicated by gender, as women of color are controlled largely through a version of control whose origins are hidden by multiple levels of bureaucracy, less easily confronted and contested than the more overt application of force applied more frequently to men of color (Heiner and Mangual, 2002). This differentiation of control based on gender, while frequently most violent toward men, also represents a dual control on poor women of color: the bureaucratic state surveillance/discipline, and the positioning of their repression by the state as secondary, more hidden, and therefore perhaps less dire than that of men of color (c.f. Richie, 1995).

Local changes continue to be shaped by the large, institution level forces outlined in this thesis, and I argue that they can only begin to be understood and resisted with such convergent, intersectional frameworks. In March of 2002, shortly after the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was reauthorized as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), one of the Act's co-authors, U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy, visited two Chicago public schools to talk up the Act and to fight reductions in the President's budget for elementary and secondary education. Kennedy toured a Chicago preschool center and high school to learn about their programs, which he said he hoped to use to help schools nationwide, including small school models and "advanced curriculum."<sup>45</sup>

NCLB is an accountability framework based almost exclusively on standardized test performance. Almost immediately critiqued as an unfunded mandate, it ignored pre-existing inequities and placed punitive sanctions on struggling schools without providing enough funding and other resources to actually improve performance. As one joint position paper (Advancement Project, et al., 2010) explains, "NCLB had the effect of encouraging low-performing schools to meet benchmarks by narrowing curriculum and instruction and de-prioritizing the educational opportunities of many students."

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<sup>45</sup> [http://schakowsky.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2324&Itemid=17](http://schakowsky.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2324&Itemid=17) accessed 9/23/11

Many thought it was no accident that NCLB was being publicized and pushed by its creators in Chicago Public Schools, as the Chicago system had been and continued to be a sort of testing ground for neoliberal educational reforms. In 1995, then-Mayor Daley restructured Chicago's school board, modeling it after a corporate structure and stripping much of the local powers fought for in the previous school reform of the late 1980s. Later, a parallel arm of the accountability- and efficiency-modeled, neoliberal style of school reform exemplified in NCLB also played out in Chicago's public schools. The Renaissance 2010 initiative, announced in June 2004 by the Chicago Public Schools and the City of Chicago, called for 100 new schools by 2010. These schools would have 5-year contracts, meant to ensure accountability, while stimulating market-like competition and innovation.<sup>46</sup>

While publicizing R2010, Mayor Daley of Chicago spoke of the “business of education” (Renaissance 2010 website). One critic went as far as to describe the school district management titles as more akin to “those of a Fortune 500 Corporation than an urban public school system” (Shipps 1997, 73). Renaissance 2010 (R2010) was a comprehensive plan for Chicago's education that typified neoliberal trends of competitiveness, deregulation, and privatization and was the product of a report developed by the Commercial Club of Chicago (CCC).<sup>47</sup> Daley, in partnership with the members of that group, reformed CPS into a more privatized system. Two-thirds<sup>48</sup> of the Renaissance schools were planned as partially private. Opponents of the plan believe that the role business took was inappropriate for public education:

So the question I am asking the School Board, which is entrusted with public education in the city, is: Who will decide what kind of education our children should have, the Commercial Club of Chicago, mayor Daley, and the big developers? Or parents, communities and teachers? (Lipman 2004b).

While R2010 shared certain aspects with NCLB, it had the power to effect the local geography of the city beyond the purview of such a large federal policy. For instance, the Kenwood Oakland Local School Alliance charged that the Mid South Plan section of R2010 was motivated by a design to displace low-income students of color (Kenwood Oakland Local School Council Alliance, ND) . This

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<sup>46</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance\\_2010](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_2010) Accessed 4/8/11

<sup>47</sup> For further review of the CCC report, see “Left Behind” (2000).



plan proposed to close 20 out of 25 schools in a largely Black, 3-square-mile area of the city where several public housing high-rises had recently been torn down and where CPS had already closed a handful of schools (Woestehoff and Neill, 2007). More recently, there has been an intense struggle over a new round of school closings and “turnarounds” proposed for the 2012-13 school year, many in the same historically divested areas.<sup>49</sup> To date, despite public outcry, the closings and turnarounds have been approved by the board.

These policies that emerged in the period immediately following my study are relevant because this thesis has looked at schools through a “genealogical” lens that seeks to connect modern occurrences like NCLB and its local interpretation, R2010 in Chicago, with various interlocking, historically continuous systems. I situated this study in a historical period that I found particularly useful to expose lineages and help build a contextualized vocabulary with which to deconstruct today’s educational policies. Indeed, paralleling my discussion of the legal tone of the 1980s and 1990s, NCLB has been explicitly critiqued as a “get-tough” accountability act that “has led to more students being left even further behind, thus feeding the dropout crisis and the School-to-Prison Pipeline” (Advancement Project, et al., 2010, 1). In short, this thesis had argued that simply looking at Urban Tech as a “failing school” misses the fact that schools such as Urban Tech may in fact be rather successfully serving a hidden purpose that ties back to slavery, Jim Crow, colonialism, and imperialism. The broader white supremacist purpose of “getting tough on,” disciplining, monitoring, and isolating Black and Latino/a communities and feeding their youth to low-wage service sector employment, the military, and the PIC.

The literature exploring connections between schools and prisons forces us to question the purposes of public schooling, particularly in urban settings. This thesis continues in this vein, arguing that an “expanded education policy paradigm” (Anyon, 2005, 13) implicates many primarily non-educational institutional realms in what happens in urban schools that largely serve poor communities of color. I began this research by attempting to explore the connections between schools and prisons in

light of other societal systems such as law and enforcement, the political economy, and the representations of information systems such as media. What emerged was the fact that the school-prison nexus is but one outcome of our era of punitive social control (Rios, 2011).

This thesis consisted of two parts: First, I have followed Critical Race Theory's "intersectionality" to propose a reframed approach to analyzing multi-dimensional educational issues, which draws from the concepts of neoliberalism and a systemic understanding of the Prison Industrial Complex. The broader frames of neoliberal ideology and the PIC helped to expose the interplay between our educational system and various other systems, including our legal system, information systems, and the political economy. I argued that the legal and law enforcement context undergirds and codifies the school-prison nexus, while the urban political economy structures the city landscape so as to continue to punish and surveil certain communities. Finally, the media reifies harmful, racially and gender-loaded public identities that provide ideological legitimization of the harsh legal and politico-economic policies described.

The second project of this thesis is a two-part institutional ethnography, informed by Critical Race Theory and radical feminist methods, that acknowledged both actors' meaning-making around institutions disciplining students (interviews) as well as public meaning-making that is heavily influenced by media (re)produced public identities (document analysis). The ethnography was both shaped by the emerging convergent framework outlined in Chapter 3, but also revealed aspects of the convergence that went beyond any expectations I had from the literature. My data forced me to further expand my understanding of the school-prison nexus to include arms of the state I had not fully considered previously, including public housing and urban development policy, public aid, and child protective services. The inclusion of this series of state interventions into lower income families of color also foregrounded the gendered nature of state repression: policing and disciplining women primarily

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/notebook/2012/02/22/19869/despite-opposition-cps-moves-ahead-closings-turnarounds>

through invasive and punitive family agencies and policies, and policing and disciplining men through more overt, violent arms of the state--policing, brutality, imprisonment, and execution.

I have shown that the surveillance and interventions of the state, across various institutions, including legal/enforcement, housing, public aid, and children and family services form the connective tissue of the school prison nexus. These forms of surveillance and disciplining form an organizing logic across state systems that, while not always working in collusion, combine to criminalize, isolate, and repress poor youth of color in some urban schools. This “youth control complex” that Victor Rios (2011) describes, is premised upon the public identities that are used to legitimate it: the gang banger, drug dealer, lazy welfare queen, single mother, deadbeat dad, teen parent, blighted communities, etc. In short, the school-prison nexus emerges from the collision of state surveillance, institutional racism and sexism, and the narratives that serve to legitimate and undergird repressive policies.

### Resistance and Future Research

Rios (2011) argues that the youth control complex must be supplanted by a “youth support complex” that involves a different kind of framing for “at promise” (10) youth and a “pipeline of opportunities” (xii) rather than a prison pipeline. Erica Meiners (2007) outlines “horizons of abolition,” including current struggles to dismantle repressive connections between our society’s institutions and build a broad non-punitive social support complex. This also includes the ideas of reframing youth violence based on the acknowledgement that individual crimes are also a response to the current historical context, in which young people’s lives are regulated by multiple processes of violence against them. Activists continue to follow Angela Davis’ prompt to develop a public vocabulary that reveals the structural and historical nature of the problem and deemphasizes individual deviancy. One way this is being done is by groups exploring the theories of harm reduction and restorative justice to build new concepts and procedures to handle harms done by young people. In Chicago, the Community Justice for Youth Institute developed Community Panels for Youth,<sup>50</sup> which aims to disrupt school-prison

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<sup>50</sup> <http://cjyi.org/about-us>

connections by developing the capacity of communities to resolve youth crime without the criminal legal system. Organizations such as this are springing up around the country and respond to the “get-tough” rhetoric that has dominated discipline and juvenile justice since the 1980s. More broadly, organizations like Critical Resistance<sup>51</sup> have built an anti-prison movement seeking to dismantle the myriad complex connections that form the school-prison nexus and the larger Prison Industrial Complex.

A social or youth support complex is based on the active resistance of youth themselves to punitive social control. Youth-led resistance to the school-prison nexus and other repressive social structures have exciting potential and continue to represent an important topic for future research and activism. Other areas for future research include a more in-depth exploration of issues that relate to the two fastest growing populations in US prisons, women and Latinos. Research questions could foreground the specificities of Latino experiences or the gendered nature of punishment and discipline in schools and in various tendrils of the school-prison nexus. More research is needed about the over- or under-designation of special education categories and the impact on school-prison connections for students of color. Additionally, intersectional research on the variety of “pipelines” diverting students away from successful educational achievement and opportunities should be explored. For instance, how do the military and prison pipelines interact or relate? Also, how do programs such as Job Corps or military tracks provide seeming opportunities, while also siphoning certain populations of students away from mainstream educational attainment? Finally, what prison-to-school pipelines and other “pipelines of opportunity” exist, and how can we create many more? It is my hope that exploring and complicating phenomenon such as the school-prison nexus will not just stun and overwhelm us, but will prod us to act on a variety of fronts to imagine and forge new ways of thinking about discipline in our society and particularly, in our schools.

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<sup>51</sup> <http://crwp.live.radicaldesigns.org>

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## Appendix A: Interview Schedule

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

(After reading and signing the informed consent document)

“My name is Karen Reyes and I am a PhD candidate from University of Illinois at Chicago. I am conducting a historical study of a high school attended by students who were later incarcerated and went on to attain a high school diploma at an adult high school after their incarceration. You have been invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as someone who may have expertise relating to a high school during the period (1985-1995) of this study or in a related policy area. This approximately one to one and one half hour long, audio-taped interview is completely voluntary and you may skip questions or terminate the interview at any time. If possible, I may ask for a follow-up interview of equal or lesser duration. Your identity will be kept confidential at all times, and I ask that you use a false first name when describing any specific individuals in disciplinary cases. Thank you very much for your participation.”

### I. Professional Information (5 minutes)

*Suggested probes:*

1. What was your job Category/Title
2. How many years did you have that position?

### II. Organizational Information (20 minutes)

*Suggested probes:*

1. What people were in charge of school discipline during the period from 1985 to 1995? What were their titles and roles?
2. What forms of technology, if any, were used in school discipline? This could include video cameras, metal detectors, computer records of discipline problems, special uniform requirements, etc.
3. In your position, what disciplinary problems did you face most often and what sets of rules/regulations did you use the most? Where did these come from?
4. How would you characterize the school climate back then, in terms of discipline?

### III. Methodology/Disciplinary Action (20 minutes)

*Suggested probes:*

1. Please describe a typical disciplinary action. What were the general steps?
2. Does the school work with other facilities, institutions, or groups that help with school discipline issues? How?

### IV. External Factors (20 minutes)

*Suggested probes:*

1. Describe an instance when the media became involved in a school disciplinary action?
2. How did the gang anti-loitering law in effect in Chicago from 1992-95; or the increased penalties for drug crimes during this period affect school discipline?
3. How did Harold Washington's (1988) and Daley's (1995) school reforms affect school discipline?
4. Describe any resistance to disciplinary policies? From whom?

### V. Conclusion (5 minutes)

*Suggested probes:*

1. If you could go back, how might you have changed the discipline policy if you could have?
2. Is there anything else I should have asked?

3. Do you mind giving some personal information? You can skip any or all questions:

Gender identity

Age range

Racial/ethnic background

First language learned

Birthplace

Salary range

Favorite food, movie, music

Thank you very much!!!

## **Appendix B**

### **Documentary Discourse Analysis**

All documents collected will be reviewed for the following:

1. Descriptions of disciplinary policies/practices
2. Gender, age, race, sexuality or other types of representations (are these mentioned? Omitted?)
3. Description of technologies used in discipline
4. Law enforcement in schools
5. City and federal education and crime policies
6. Accessibility of language used (readability, grade level)



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 Phone (312) 719-7594  
 Email [kreyes78@gmail.com](mailto:kreyes78@gmail.com)

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## EDUCATION

- 2004-2011* PhD Candidate, University of Illinois at Chicago  
 Urban Educational Policy Studies  
 Dissertation Title: *An Institutional Ethnography of the School-Prison Nexus in a Chicago Public High School*  
 Graduation scheduled May 2012
- 2002-2004* MA, University of Illinois at Chicago  
 Linguistics TESOL
- 1996-1999* BA, University of California at Santa Cruz  
 Latin American and Latino Studies
- 1999* Semester Abroad towards BA, UNAM (*Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico*)  
 Taxco, MX
- 1996* Six-week Intensive Spanish Language Program, Cemanahuac School  
 Cuernavaca, MX

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

### Administrative

- Present* Executive Director, *ArtReach at Lillstreet*  
 Directs not-for-profit bringing arts experiences to under-served populations throughout Chicago.

### University Teaching

- Fall 2011* Adjunct Professor, *St. Augustine University*  
 Instructor for College Writing course
- 2008-2009* Instructor, *University of Illinois at Chicago*  
 Instructor for graduate/undergraduate courses:  
     ☐ Spring 2008- *Gender, Sexuality and Education* (Policy Studies and Gender Studies Departments)  
     ☐ Spring 2009- *Education and Social Justice II: Race in Education* (Honors College)
- 1997-1999* Research Assistant, *University of California*

Conducted library and web research for the publication of “Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala’s Peace Process” as well as for class syllabus planning.

- 1997-1999* Teaching Assistant, *University of California*  
Led discussion sections in Latin American Studies class, planned, implemented, and graded assignments, wrote evaluations and final grades.
- K-12 and Adult Teaching
- 2005-2009* Teacher, *St. Leonard’s Adult High School*, Chicago  
Co-teach high school basic math course for approximately 12-15 students.
- 2007-2008* Teacher, *Literacy Works*, Chicago  
Taught monthly seminar on Adult Basic Education to groups ranging from 5-20 educators from a variety of local member organizations.
- 2005-2007* Reading/Writing, Math, and Art tutor, *St. Leonard’s Academy*, Chicago  
Volunteer position. Plan and conduct two-hour pre-high school tutoring classes twice weekly for 3-6 students preparing for high school program for formerly incarcerated students.
- 2004-5* Writing tutor and assessment panelist, *Young Women’s Leadership Charter School*, Chicago  
Volunteer position. Assisted graduating seniors with writing for final culminating project. Judged senior final presentations as part of assessment panel.
- 2004-5* Classroom setup, *National Teachers Academy*, Chicago  
Volunteer position. Assisted in kindergarten and second grade classroom setup, organization, field trips, and projects.
- 2003* ESL Intern, *Roberto Clemente High School*, Chicago  
Taught two double period grades 9-12 ESL 2 classes. Developed, adapted, and piloted curriculum. Graded. Organized field trips.
- 1999-2000* Director of Aftercare Program, *St. Mary of the Woods*, Chicago  
Coordinated childcare activities, managed financial records.
- 1999* ESL Teacher, *UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico)*  
Volunteer position. Taught low intermediate level ESL class.
- 1999* Tutor, *UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico)*  
Volunteer position. Weekly tutor to beginning level student.

### University Programming Experience

- Oct. 2006* Organized national conference at University of Illinois at Chicago: *Behind Bars: Latinos and Prisons*
- Summer 2006* Co-coordinated and implemented *UIC Women's Summer Film Festival in the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center*
- Volunteer position. Plan and conduct five programs including film showings and art projects for girls in JTDC. Documented in UIC NEWS (Wednesday, October 4, 2006).

### **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

#### Peer-reviewed Publications:

- Forthcoming* Reyes, K. B. (Forthcoming) Review of Victor Rios' *Punished: Policing the lives of Black and Latino boys*. In *Latino Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Forthcoming* Reyes, K. B. and E. B. Reyes (Forthcoming) Latinos and the School-to-Prison Pipeline. In *Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press
2008. Meiners, E. and K. B. Reyes. (2008) Re-making the incarceration-nation: Naming the participation of schools in our prison industrial complex. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education* 5(2) [www.urbanedjournal.org/](http://www.urbanedjournal.org/)
2007. Morales, E., E. Adams, K. B. Reyes, L. Traylor, L. Schaffner. (2007) Teaching, transgressing: Film studies in juvenile detention. *AREA Chicago* 4(April)  
<http://www.areachicago.org/p/issues/issue-4/film-studies-juvenile-detention/>
2005. Biegel, K. B. (2005) Review of *Issues in Latino Education: Race, School Culture, and the Politics of Academic Success*. *Latino Studies* 3(2): 301-304.

#### Editorial Experience

- 2002-2007 &  
2009-2011 Managing Editor, *Latino Studies*
- Assess and edit manuscripts for international peer-reviewed journal. Manage editorial and publication production process. Attend national conferences to select and solicit submissions. Plan and hold board meetings and international conferences.

#### Peer-reviewed Conference Presentations:

- Nov. 2011 *Rupturing Pipelines: Latinos and Educational, Military, and Prison Industrial Complexes*. Panel presentation at NAME (National Association of Multicultural Education) Annual Conference, Chicago, IL.
- Nov. 2011 Chicago School and Community Tours- *Justice, Education, and Incarceration: Community and Conversations at the Hull House Museum*. NAME Annual Conference, Chicago, IL.
- Nov. 2009 Panel presentation accepted at AESA, Pittsburgh, PA.
- Jan. 14, 2007 *Reframing Law and Order: Making Prison Expansion an Educational Issue*. Paper presented with Erica Meiners at Conference on Teacher Education and Social Justice, Chicago, IL.
- Apr. 13, 2007 *Gentrification in Process: Neoliberal Education in Chicago*. Paper presented with Heather Horsley at AERA Annual Meeting.
- Feb. 2006 Presented paper at annual Graduate Students in Education (GSE) conference, UIC.
- Oct. 2005 *Black-Latino Coalitions for Education in Harold Washington's Chicago*. Paper presented at annual Midwest History of Education (MHES) conference, Chicago, IL.

## AWARDS

- Fall 2010 Awarded *Department of Educational Policy Studies Capstone/Dissertation Grant*. Value:\$500
- 2005 Journal *Latino Studies* wins runner-up for Best New Journal awarded by the Council of Editors of Learned Journals.
- Fall 2004 Awarded College of Education Tuition Waiver:  
Semester tuition award by department on the basis of merit. Valued at approximately \$4000.00

## PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- 2011 NAME (National Association of Multicultural Education)
- 2005-2007 AERA (*American Educational Research Association*)
- 2003-2007&

<i>2009-2011</i>	LASA (Latin American Studies Association)
<i>2004-2007</i>	NSSE (National Society for the Study of Education)
<i>2003-2004</i>	IL TESOL BE (Illinois Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages and Bilingual Education)

## **LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE**

Near-fluent in Spanish

High intermediate proficiency in French