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Review essay:

The reassertion of race, space, and punishment's place in urban sociology and critical criminology[†]

In *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* and *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice* Robert J Sampson and William Stuntz, respectively, highlight the intersection and reassertion—to draw upon and extend the work of Edward Soja (2011)—of race, space, and punishment's place in urban sociology, critical criminology, and postmodern geography (Massey, 2012; Sampson, 2012; Ludwig et al, 2012; Sharkey, 2013). The structural circumstances of deprivation and criminalization facing African-Americans that they both highlight, and the related racialized perceptions of criminality that are counterparts, appear to be some of the salient features that recently led to the murder of a young black teenager, Trayvon Martin, in the US state of Florida.

Florida is one of many US states with new Stand Your Ground laws which have proliferated across the country, along with a noticeable uptick in so-called 'justified homicides'. In this instance the inequalities of race and space highlighted by these two authors tragically came together as a neighborhood watch patrolman shot and killed Trayvon and shaped the lack of an initial official response, until massive protests broke out across the US against the failure of authorities to charge the assailant with a crime (Sampson, 2012; Sampson and Raudenbush, 2004). This review essay presents these two landmark books, offering an appreciation and critique of their interrelated arguments and setting them in the context of a wider literature on the evolution of spatial, social class, and racial relations right up to our contemporary present.

Sampson's book is arguably one of the greatest works of urban sociology, critical criminology, and what Soja (2011) calls "postmodern geography" in a generation, radically altering these entire fields. Highlighted here in particular is the "neighborhood effect", referring to the relationship between race, class, space, and punishment's place in the US, which with only 5% of the world's population, has 25% of its prisoners. This carceral boom is the latest, and perhaps one of the most troubling, forms of American exceptionalism, with a widening divide since the 1970s between the US and other advanced capitalist states (albeit one that has been narrowing as of late).

Sampson, to a greater extent than ever before, and with a wealth of data, maps urban inequalities at the structural neighborhood and social ecological level. More specifically he relates the "explosion in crime rates" in the major urban cities of the US starting in 1965 to White flight and urban decline and decay. The concentrated increase in crime in major urban cities, Sampson (2012, page 143) argues, comes with White flight and related resource deprivation. This decreases the neighborhood's sense of collective efficacy or social agency, thus increasing crime, racially biased perceptions of criminality among low-income communities of color, and punishment via incarceration, in what some have called a 'spiral of decay'.

Sampson shows that the actual term 'mass incarceration' is misleading. What exists instead is spatially concentrated hyperincarceration of poor Blacks with little formal education, as Loic Waquant (2010) and others have shown. While underscoring the clear link between neighborhood disadvantage and crime, Sampson goes further, showing in a study of Cook

† A review of **Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect** by Robert J Sampson; University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 2012, 552 pages, \$27.50 cloth, ISBN 9780226734569 **The Collapse of American Criminal Justice** by William Stuntz; Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2011, 432 pages, \$35.00 cloth, ISBN 97806740515751

County in Chicago that low-income neighborhoods of color, with concentrated disadvantage, have incarceration rates three times higher than neighborhoods with comparable levels of crime but without concentrated disadvantage (see also National Public Radio, 2012; PBS, 2012; Sampson and Loeffler, 2010). These arguments and powerful data represent an enormous contribution to the literature of urban sociology, critical criminology, and political geography. Yet, despite the impressive achievement this represents in a host of fields, there are some significant empirical and theoretical gaps and problems. To be sure, as Immanuel Wallerstein once said in another context (quoted in Goldfrank, 2000, page 178): "Still it would be false to emphasize the difficulties. It is the magnitude of the achievement that is impressive." Thus, the review offered here advances two entwined hypotheses that, while presenting a critique of Sampson, actually complement his overall theoretical model, rendering it even more powerful.

Specifically, in emphasizing 1965, the time when crime rates began to rise, and the corresponding White flight dramatically increased, Sampson risks unintentionally reinforcing the very idea of criminality among communities of color he is trying to critique. For it may be argued that Sampson neglects a much more important year: 1954, when in a landmark decision, Brown v. Board of Education, the Supreme Court overthrew the "separate but equal" doctrine established by the court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* of 1896, thus paying the way for school integration. It was 1954, rather than 1965, that was the key year in stimulating White flight, as Whites sought to protect their material and ideal monopolies (well-funded schools, educational credentials, and so forth) which upheld them as esteemed status-honor groups, to use Weber's term, by moving to lily-White suburbs (Arrighi et al, 2012; Wacquant, 2002; Wright, 2002). This exit through White flight by voting with their feet removed affluent White populations with their substantial resources that they invested in their community, including via school funding through property taxes. It is thus *Brown* in 1954, rather than the crime rise beginning in 1965, that more likely contributed to the very loss of efficacy and collective agency so emphasized by Sampson, as well as the corresponding increases in poverty and crime rates that Sampson highlights (see also Alexander, 2012).

Indeed, once education is brought back into this analysis, it makes Sampson's model all the more powerful. For a key aspect of collective efficacy and agency which Sampson rightly emphasizes, arguably comes from transformative educational opportunities and the many openings this provides youth. Such transformative opportunities allow their environments to "become plastic to the ends of the agent," as John Dewey argued and as was highlighted recently in the 2007 Hollywood film *Freedom Writers* and the related 2009 documentary, Voices Unbound: The Story of the Freedom Writers, based on the true story of Erin Gruwell and her students at Wilson High (quoted in Westbrook, 1991, page 43; Freedom Writers Foundation). These powerful films, which vividly contrast education that reproduces raceclass inequalities feeding into the criminal (in)justice system to education as transformation and liberation, are based on the true story of youth from the tough streets of Long Beach, California, part of the Greater Los Angeles Metropolitan Area. And as has been extensively documented in the scholarly literature, in the US the quality of schools is largely determined by the very neighborhood effect that Sampson makes so much of, wherein low-income communities of color are spatially and racially concentrated, thus radically affecting their life chances (see Duncan and Murname, 2011).

In fact, in terms of integration following *Brown*, Los Angeles was a laggard. Though some progress was made, as Soja notes in his *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010, page 132), the Los Angeles County School District, one of the nation's largest, "remained the most segregated in the country. In 1970, long after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, more than 25 percent of Mississippi schoolchildren and 45 percent of those in South Carolina had

integrated, while the figure for Los Angeles was 6 percent." Thus today, not surprisingly, with failing schools and a host of other political and economic factors, including the most powerful prison guards union in the US, California spends more on its criminal (in)justice system than any other state in the nation: some \$10 billion annually, up from \$1 billion in 1980, an increase of 900%. At the same time education is seeing savage cuts (Page, 2011; Reifer, 2012). Indeed, in California, like many other locales, there is increasingly what Lawrence Benner (2009; 2010) calls the presumption of guilt rather than that of innocence in the criminal (in)justice system. Here, the overwhelming majority of cases are plea-bargained out, resulting in a growing number of largely poor persons (especially of color), often with little formal education, going through the system, with lower standards of justice, thus ensuring many innocent convictions and massive incarceration along the way (Davis, 2007; Garrett, 2011; Stuntz, 2011).

Moreover, there is another factor that makes the hypotheses offered up here regarding the importance to Sampson's argument of *Brown* and education more generally even more significant. For a host of new research is beginning to demonstrate that what was truly exceptional about the US in the 20th century was not its underdeveloped welfare state or lack of a labor party. Of equal or possibly even greater significance, and what truly set the US apart, was its quasi-universal system of public education across lines of class and gender, albeit not across lines of race, in sharp contrast to Europe and elsewhere (Garfinkel et al, 2010). Yet the racial–spatial inequalities of schooling denied meaningful opportunities to many low-income communities of color.

Though there was some progress in integration with the passage of *Brown*, more recent decades have seen what Jonathan Kozol (2006) refers to as "the restoration of apartheid education" in his book *Shame of the Nation*. And today, now that public schools across the nation have majority populations of low-income communities of color, triply segregated by race, ethnicity, and language, with California having the most segregated school system in the country according to the UCLA-based Civil Rights Project, as well as a Latino majority in the public schools, we see a sustained attack on public education at all levels and multicultural education in particular. And this despite the vastly increased likelihood that young men without a high school or college degree will end up in prison (see Reifer, 2012).

This attack on public and culturally sensitive education culminated in recent years in the banning of the only comprehensive Mexican-American Ethnic Studies program in the US in Arizona, as the 2011 documentary film *Precious Knowledge* has shown, along with new laws criminalizing immigrants and larger communities of color, especially Latinos in Arizona and other states. The consequence of all these policies is that Latinos, though now the majority minority in the US (having surpassed Blacks some time ago) and the largest growing segment of the US population and labor force today, are at the bottom rungs in terms of educational attainment, as Patricia Gandara and Francis Contreras document in *The Latino Education Crisis: The Consequence of Failed Social Policies* (2009).

Indeed, as one of the most comprehensive studies of the US Mexican-American population, which comprises the majority of the US Latino population, concludes:

"[S]orting into the lower ranks of American society is mostly through public education. Moreover, persistently poor education over several generations-since-immigration largely accounts for the slow or interrupted assimilation of Mexican Americans in socioeconomic, cultural, residential, and other dimensions of life. Thus, poor educational opportunities, more than any other factor, exclude many Mexican Americans from successful integration into American society" (Telles and Ortiz, 2008, page 16; see also Duncan and Murnane, 2011; Sacks, 2007).

With this widening neighborhood racial—spatial divide in terms of educational opportunities, the police and other agents of social control have come to increasingly label, classify, and categorize certain areas as good or bad neighborhoods, patrolling the latter more fiercely (Bowker and Starr, 2000; see Tilly, 1997). In addition to relatively higher rates of crime in these neighborhoods, due to concentrated disadvantage, we also see the even more widespread criminalization of these communities, far beyond what crime rates alone might dictate, including through the use of gang injunctions. These gang injunctions often effectively suspend civil liberties in ghetto neighborhoods, as in Carl Schmitt's "states of exception". While originating in the gang capital of the world, Los Angeles, injunctions have today spread throughout the nation, along with a host of related improper uses of often deadly force against innocent civilians by the police. This history is brilliantly shown in the 2006 documentary film made by former Bloods gang member Cle Sloan, *Bastards of the Party*.

This concentration of policing via gang injunctions, and compounded by what scholars and officials are calling the school-to-prison pipeline, is today resulting in mass, albeit spatially concentrated, incarceration, with many poor Black neighborhoods having massive incarceration rates in stark contrast to many wealthy White neighborhoods which have virtually no-one in jail or prison. The end result of this racial—spatial divide between esteemed status-honor groups in Whiter suburbs and those dishonored racial categories of the ghetto notably poor African-American males with little formal education—is what might be called the US gulag for Blacks and the poor. It remains invisible to most of the White population. Indeed, prisoners are not counted in many statistical surveys, of unemployment, poverty, and educational achievement (Pettit, 2012). It should be said, however, that prison populations are counted for the purposes of deciding demographic numbers which help create numbers of political districts with their electoral weight. This gives certain White and often Republican suburban areas inflated numbers in terms of (nonvoting) constituents represented, similar to the days when slaves were counted as two fifths of a person in the US Constitution, then adding to what was called the Slave Power in the US, including in the US Electoral College, and which today adds to the right turn in US politics.

Meanwhile, in impoverished neighborhoods, mostly comprising poor communities of color, students drop out or get kicked out of school, are subjected to racial profiling, stop-and-frisk tactics and improper uses of force—in what scholars today refer to as the new fourth Amendment apartheid—and enter the burgeoning criminal (in)justice system. These policies—recently analyzed by Paul Butler (2011) and in a series of articles in *The New York Times*—have led to the widespread imprisonment of young Brown and Black males. Indeed, Sampson (2012, pages 41–43), in his study of Chicago and US neighborhoods, shows the extraordinary rigidity of the intersection of race, class, space, and place, with impoverished Black neighborhoods staying poor in terms of income and wealth over a period of forty or fifty years, while in stark contrast there is "the virtual absence of white low-income communities, not just in Chicago but nationwide". In many ways Sampson has mapped spatially the categorical inequalities of race that Charles Tilly so brilliantly outlined analytically—albeit largely without attention to the spatial dimension—in his pathbreaking book *Durable Inequality* (1997).

Interestingly too Sampson's analysis in *Great American City*—in terms of the rigid racial and spatial stratification of wealth and income in the US—has eerie similarities with the equivalent global mapping of the persistent divide of income and wealth between core, semiperiphery, and periphery in the capitalist world economy that world-systems analyst Giovanni Arrighi traced in his landmark *New Left Review* (1991) article "World-income inequalities and the future of socialism" and subsequent works. ⁽¹⁾ In addition, this intersection of race, class, space, and place mapped by Sampson and others has powerful

⁽¹⁾ See also Tom Reifer (2011).

analogs with similar intersections of race–class, space, and place on a global scale that came with conquest of the New World and what James Belich in his *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (2009) calls the second great divergence between the Anglo world and its rivals (see also Davis, 2006). This process of the spread of White settler states and the resulting intersection of race, class, space, and place has also been mapped brilliantly by South African sociologist Bernard Magubane in his *The Making of a Racist State* (1996).

To return to these processes in the US, also important in the burgeoning criminal (in)justice system is the role both of zero tolerance or so-called broken windows policing and of the increased use of racial profiling and actuarial risk assessment, as has been shown in a series of brilliant books by Bernard Harcourt, notably in his *Illusion of Order: The False Promise of Broken Windows Policing* (2001) and more recently in his *Against Prediction: Profiling, Policing and Punishing in an Actuarial Age* (2007), as well as in the recent landmark collection edited by Stephen K Rice and Michael D White, *Race, Ethnicity, and Policing: New and Essential Readings* (2010) (see also Harcourt, 2004; 2007a). All of these phenomena, many of which are discussed by Sampson, some quite in depth, greatly contribute to the racialized and spatialized perceptions of criminality and criminalization that Sampson so powerfully analyzes.

Here too (though this is not emphasized by Sampson), the defeat of the more progressive and radical sectors of the various civil rights movements in the 1960s, as the nation abandoned the Great Society and the War on Poverty and pursued instead the war in Vietnam, also contributed to urban decline and the rise of gangs as industrial jobs disappeared (Davis, 2006; Hayden, 2006), along with deindustrialization and the emergence of what Kenneth Nunn (2002) calls "the pool of surplus criminality". Then in recent decades, as mentioned earlier, the rise of gang injunctions, born in LA but soon spreading to other major cities in the US, including Chicago, would catch increasing numbers of youth of color—anywhere from hundreds of thousands to millions—in their net. All these factors help to explain why according to Sampson's findings incarceration rates in structurally disadvantaged Chicago neighborhoods are three times higher than in neighborhoods with comparable crime rates but without such disadvantage.

Sampson's book arguably goes farthest towards explaining the intersection of race, space, and punishment's place in terms of *where* people are arrested and become caught in the net of the US criminal (in)justice system. In so doing Sampson's work and that of his counterparts—one thinks especially of the work of Mike Davis, Loic Wacquant, and Michelle Alexander—represent an enormous achievement. Yet a question remains: where is the place of punishment, in terms of who is doing the punishing?

This is where Sampson's colleague, the late William Stuntz, comes in, Professor of Law at Harvard and one of the finest legal minds of his generation, with his equally landmark book *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice* (2011). Stuntz does what to my knowledge no one has even attempted to do before, namely examine the changes in the criminal (in)justice system in the US through time and space, from a comparative world historical perspective, looking at the period stretching from roughly the late 19th century to the present. In this work Stuntz maps the changing political sociology and geography of crime, in the context of what we might call the Great White migration of the 19th century and the Great Black migration of the 20th. In the Great White migration, part and parcel of James Belich's and Bernard Magubane's White settler colonialism of the 19th century, European immigrant groups that eventually came to be considered on the White side of the color line eventually took over much of urban governance in the US (Fishman, 1989; Fogelson, 2007; Roediger, 2005).

⁽²⁾ For a fascinating analysis of the background of the rise of criminology, see Laub and Sampson (1991).

Thus, in the Northeast and the rest of the US, White immigrant groups came to be largely policed and judged by their counterparts, who had become part of America's famed urban political machines. Here, those who judged and those who were judged were ethnically similar. The result was a relatively decentralized system of justice that was much less punitive and much less harsh, though one has to be careful not to overly romanticize conditions in the past. Nevertheless, Stuntz contrasts these trends from the late 19th and mid to late 20th century among White immigrant groups to that of the Great Black migration during the ascendance of the New Right, rising urban crime and concomitant War on Crime and War on Drugs in the late-20th and early-21st century US (Peterson, 2012; Peterson and Krivo, 2010; see also Cook et al, 2011). As the passage of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, accompanying White flight, and related rise of urban crime remade American apartheid, Black constituencies, unlike their earlier White immigrant counterparts, did not attain corresponding control over the criminal (in)justice system. Crime became a sort of political football, with elected officials—including district attorneys, prosecutors, legislatures, and governors, not to mention the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government at the national level ratcheting up punishment, with an accompanying revolution in sentencing, replete with increased rates of arrests, determinate sentencing, mandatory minimums, and 'three strikes you're out' laws (Petersilia and Reitz, 2012; Stuntz, 2011).

Part and parcel of these racial—spatial trends in the criminal (in)justice system were that political, economic, and juridical power in this era flowed to the largely

"white suburbs surrounding those cities. Both local district attorneys and trial judges are elected countywide in the United States; metropolitan counties typically include cities and close-in suburbs. The suburban share of those counties' populations rose sharply in the generation after the war—and cities share declined ... suburban votes grew more numerous, and city votes less so. White suburbanites' power over local prosecutors and trial judges grew, even as those officials focused a larger share of attention on crime in urban black communities" (Stuntz, 2011, page 192; see also Shugerman, 2012).

Revealed here is the other side of the coin to Sampson's "punishment's place". Namely, instead of the racial and spatial characteristics of the people that are punished—largely lowincome communities of color in the ghetto—the equivalent characteristics of who is making decisions about punishment and where these decisions are made are found largely in White suburbia, though many middle and upper income Blacks have joined the campaign to abandon young Black males to the criminal (in)justice system, including President Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder (Davis, 2006, pages 265–322; Reifer, 2012). So while predominantly poor communities of color—especially African-Americans and, increasingly today, Latino communities—are subject to punishment and, in the case of Latino immigrants, deportation (now numbering some 400 000 annually), it is largely White suburban populations and their elected officials that do the punishing. The result of this racial-spatial disparity has been a massive expansion of the criminal (in)justice system and prison population at all levels. And while White constituencies and politicians are largely responsible for the Wars on Crime and Drugs, when it comes to the problem of White police violence against Blacks, White police officers are often judged solely by their White counterparts in the suburbs. The consequence of the latter were vividly seen in the acquittal of the police responsible for beating Black motorist Rodney King, which led to the LA riots some twenty years ago.

The works reviewed here, like those of critical race theorists such as legendary civil rights scholar-activist Derrick Bell, serve to disrupt 'color blind' theories of the law and related narratives of progress. These theories are based on the liberal supposition that the law has no color and suppose that since President Obama and his Attorney General, Eric Holder, are both Black, there has been unilinear progress in the struggle for racial equality in the

US and the Black freedom struggle in particular (see Delgado and Stefanic, 2012). Instead, Derrick Bell in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (1992, page ix) counseled us to recognize instead that "racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society" (also Alexander, 2012).

The trajectory today is largely towards increased inequalities of wealth, power, education, and incarceration, radically stratified by race, ethnicity, social class, gender, and nation. These inequalities are today etched, as much as ever, in race, space, and punishment's place. Unequal social and racial relations—Charles Tilly's durable inequalities—are quintessentially unequal spatial relations. The emphasis in the works reviewed here—especially in the analysis of Sampson and Stuntz, whose richness has only been touched upon—has been on the intersection of race-class, space, and punishment's place in urban sociology, critical criminology, and political geography. And yet, the changing demography of the US, moving to become a majority non-White multiracial society by 2050, could provide for the remaking of the US and global system on new, enlarged, and more equitable, democratic, and multiracial social and spatial foundations (see Arrighi, 2007; 2010; Reifer, 2007; 2009). At a time when the social sciences still often ignore the entwined spatial and racial realities that are at the heart of today's increasing inequalities of wealth and power, it is up to spatially sentient scholar-activists to bring these realities to the fore, so as to better understand them and ultimately to help change them. These books offer a powerful start to pursuing this very challenge.

Thomas E Reifer

Department of Sociology, University of San Diego, 5998 Alcala Park, San Diego, CA 92110, USA

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